

## Concept of Influence and Bhagavat Gita on Ralph Waldo Emerson

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### Abstract

This paper is on the concept of influence and its impact on individuals and believers. This paper will analyze in detail, supported by evidence and examples and consequent results from the Individual. In this paper, I will deliberate on the influence of the Bhagavad Gita on Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American Poet, Essayist, and Journalist.

**Keywords:** Ralph Waldo Emerson- Journals-Essays- Plato-Bhagavat Gita-Influencing trait- a product of Influence-Brahma.

### Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Emerson was born on May 25, 1803, in Boston, Massachusetts, the son of Ruth Haskins and Reverend William Emerson, pastor of Boston's First Church. He was named after his mother's brother Ralph and his father's great-grandmother Rebecca Waldo.

Emerson lost his father at the budding age of 8. Fatherless Emerson and other children had to be under the care of his aunt Mary Moody Emerson. She was everything to Emerson. She was the natural model for Emerson. During his

school days, he learned Latin and Greek from Boston Latin School. The next stage of his education was at Harvard College commenced at the age of 14 in 1817. He earned while learning by providing private tuition for needy students.

Though Emerson had become a qualified preacher in 1826, his ill health compelled his ordainment to second church Boston till 1829. He married Ellen Louisa Tucker in 1829 and was knowingly a tuberculosis patient. Their married life was short-lived, and she passed away in 1831.

Emerson had developed his own belief in the Miracles of Christianity. 'Indeed, his sermons had divested Christianity of all external or historical supports and made its basis one's private intuition of the universal moral law and its test life of virtuous accomplishment. Unitarianism had little appeal to him by now, and in 1832 he resigned from the ministry'<sup>1</sup> Now Emerson continued his Nature, and by 1833, he became a popular and influential lecturer. Emerson had given an estimated 1500 lectures and, in 1865, 77 and excelling by three more in 1867 to 80 at Kansas.<sup>2</sup>

In 1838 Emerson delivered the most famous and controversial Divinity school address at his alma mater,

Harvard. He suggested traditions should give way to the divinity of the Individual. The protestant population treated it as outrageous, and it took 30 long years for Emerson to step again into Harvard again.

Emerson had to take up the editorship of Dial. Essays: Second Series was published in October of 1844

Emerson had been a lover of freedom and against man's inhumanity to man at any point in time or walk of life in 1845. He refused to entertain a mass that refused to entertain black people. In 1867 his health started declining, and by 1879 Emerson withdrew himself from public appearance.

On April 21, 1882, Emerson was diagnosed with pneumonia. He died six days later in Concord on April 27, 1882, at the age of 78. He was buried at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, close to the graves of his dear friends and many great figures of American literature.

Emerson's lifetime events are chronologically tabled in Annexure 1 from page no.130

“For a while, Emerson’s reputation as an assimilator of Oriental thought was still in play. The American Oriental Society honored Emerson, who had become a Corporate member in 1860 and had passed away the month before, at their May 24, 1882, meeting, noting, “We were permitted and called upon to bear our part, along with all America and the whole civilized world, in homage to the genius and illustrious character Emerson.”<sup>3</sup>

**"Men of worthiness and unworthiness are judged by their residuals "** <sup>4</sup> This sage of Concord Has left behind him 11450 pages of his works (Essays -84-1472 pages, Poems 173 in 316 pages, Letters in eight volumes 3902 pages Journals 10-5412 pages and Dial 548 pages) apart from these 1500 lectures two volumes of his sermons, critical analysis of his works and train of disciples and orientalist. Though a champion of the Bhagavad Gita, he did not attempt a translation of his own but absorbed its content and philosophy and came out with an American garb in all his writings.

#### **Maha Bharata: Bhagavad Gita**

Maha Bharata, also known as the Panama Veda, is a veritable encyclopedia of Hindu religion and culture. The claim of the Suta Ugrasravas that “anything anywhere is an echo of what is here and what is not here is nowhere” is no exaggeration.

The standard edition published contains 95,826 slokas or verses in 18 caravans or books with 107 sub-caravans and 2111 chapters in all, including the appendix, Harivamsa. This is eight times as big as Homer's Illiad and Odyssey put together. Maha Bharata speaks about every aspect of Dharma, viz. Raja Dharma (statecraft) Apad Dharma (conduct permitted during dire calamities.) Dana Dharma (Liberality) or Moksha Dharma (Conduct pertaining to emancipation.). The very purpose of Mahabharata is to expound Dharma in all its dimensions.

**Baghavat Gita- Salient features**

Baghavat Gita (Song of God) is popularly known as Gita. It is the most outstanding religious classic in the world. The teacher of the Gita is Lord Krishna himself. It was in the pitch battlefield of Kurukshetra that this Gita was delivered. Though there are Twenty Gitas in Mahabharatha, Baghavat Gita is the center of attraction. In all, there are seven hundred slokas considered to be Gita. We see in Gita a dejected Arjuna, the warrior refusing to fight with Pandus to restore the lost glory of his own people. Lord Krishna, the preceptor, uses his profound potential as a preceptor and brings an influenced warrior back on the saddle to fight for his right.

**Emersonian concept of 'Influence' and its impact**

Emerson admits they are more than 'talent and ambition.' He advocates the need for a 'leader; we want a friend whom we have not seen in the Company and fired by the example of a god, these faculties that dream and toss in their sleep would wake. Where is the Genius that shall marshal us the way that we were going?'

Emerson asserts, 'Far the best part, I repeat, of every mind is not that which he knows, but that which hovers in gleams, suggestions, tantalizing, unpossessed, before him. His firm-recorded knowledge soon loses all interest in him. But this dancing chorus of thoughts and hopes is the quarry of his future,

is his possibility, and teaches him that his man's life is of ridiculous brevity and meanness but that it is his first age and trial only of his young wings, but that vast revolutions, migrations, and gyres on gyres in the celestial societies invite him.'

**"On Influence"** in his (J.7 p.137-138), he corroborates influence as an inevitable asset "There are sublime merits, persons who are not actors, not speakers but influences. (J. 4. P.451) and acknowledges the specific influence of "Bhagavat Geeta and the Vishnu Purana." (J. X. p.276.)

The para supra is the essence of the Bhagavad Gita, and the Arjuna is the character who, with the hovering mind, was taught the way to celestial societies. This is the epitome of Emerson's acknowledgment of the Bhagavad Gita as his "Great."

A close study of Emerson and Plato, whom he loved more than anybody on the earth, will prove Bhagavad Gita could invent an inventoried zone of human existence.

**Plato and Emerson**

The most striking veneration and influence of Bhagavad Gita are found in him when Emerson compares Plato and Baghavat Gita.

Close reading and analysis of his works in Journals and Representative Men make us clear in our stand.

Emerson is acquainted with Plato from the age of 21. There are about 68 references made by him in his journals,

including an Essay in The Representative Men. ( Age 42 the year 1845 Representative Man)

### **Emerson's Plato**

Emerson's essay on Plato also exhibits the influence of an intellectual orientation typical of European Orientalists generally, most notably in his inclination to essentialize "Eastern" thought in general terms and then to juxtapose it in abstract terms with the civilizations of "the West." Here perhaps, is the most conspicuous instance of this tendency: "The country of Unity, of immovable institutions, the seat of a philosophy delighting in abstractions, of men faithful in doctrine and in practice to the idea of a deaf, unemployable, immense Fate, is Asia; and it realizes this faith in the social institution of caste. On the other side, the Genius of Europe is active and creative: it resists caste by culture: its philosophy was a discipline: and it is a land of arts, inventions, trade, and freedom. If the East loved infinity, the West delighted in boundaries". CEW.478 Plato, the philosopher

For him, Aristotle and Plato safely came down As if God brought them into his hands. (J.3 528). Phenomenal speaking Plato (J.3 485) Great Genius (J.4 P.145) Plato is a terrific motive power. He touches things and spins: the solar system is fast becoming a fine transparency. (J.7. 28) Plato's Jove-like soul-(J.7. 29) That soul within Plato in Phaedrus likes to feel its wings. (J.7. 35) The sea shore; sea seen from shore, shore seen from the sea must explain the charm

of Plato. (J .7 . 104). Plato is a poet (J.7. 119). Apprehensive, gentle, and imaginative Plato. (J.7. 95)

### **Emerson's Debt to Plato:**

My debt to Plato is a certain number of sentences like to Aristotle. (J.4 p.24) under the name of Plato, and I get there by a vocabulary for my ideas. I get no idea. ( J.4. p.256). I get ethics from Plato without cant. (J.4 .p.266). I am struck by the Splendor of the sentences I meet in books, especially in Plutarch, taken from Pindar, Plato, and Heraclitus these three. (J.4 p.267). To sit upon the merits of Plato of Voltaire, Shakespeare, and simply judge from our station seems very easy when it is done, and as fast as the author names his subjects, it is half done. (J.5.57) Plato or Shakespeare -natural majesty ( J.5.p.113) Consistency of Plato and Jesus (J. 5. P.272). It is only known to Plato that we can do without him. (J.5.p.309).

Plato and Pythagoras may travel, for they carry the world with them and are always at home. (J.5. 394) I may not read Plato; my soul knows better than Plato. (J.6.12) Objections made to Plato's Republic are shallow. "Each passion and action should keep its origin" (J.7 .55). For Plato, it would be pedantry to catalog his philosophy. (J.7. 62)

### **Reading Plato:**

Easy to sit in the shade if we have Plato's republic teeming in the brain,

which will presently be born for the joy and illumination of men. (J.7.45) No man says I was reading Plato and therefore could not come (J.7. 48 I) have read Plato's dialogue the politician in Cousin. He seems to make me as before to owe his fame to the fact that he is a great average man. (J.5.369) The best reader of Plato is the least able to receive the totality at first -Plato is grand. (J.7.96) Carlyle found Plato very unsatisfactory reading, very tedious. The use of intellect not to know that it was these but to do something with it (J.7. 440). It is easy to read Plato but difficult to read his commentators. J.7. 56 There is no age to intellect. Read Plato at 20 to 60 years. The impression is about equality. (J.10.456)

### **Boundless plato**

He admires Plato's reverence for Men and not individuals "where there is sense, reflection, courage admit it to the same honor." (J.2 507); his truth, Plato would say, is truer than history. (J.3.255). God is in everyone (J.3.324) no like for lecture (J.3 386) In the purple light of Plato which shines yet into all ages and it is a test of the sublimest intellects ( J.3.418) Plato to have a secret doctrine. (J.3. 468) "He shall be as a God to me," said Plato, "who can rightly define and divide ( J.3 p.529) Athenian (J.4 p.5) Republic II Guardians shall not handle Gold( J.7. 2) To Plato we owe all vocabulary. ( J.7. 70) Nothing but God can give invention; everything else, one would say, the study of Plato gives. ( J.6. 84 )Plato suggested after Pythagoras

through culture. (J.8.14) When schools and colleges drop them, let Plato take them up, and life would no longer be forlorn. (J.8.15) Kepler and Plato only have united geometry with the poetic spirit. (J.8 .32) There are three degrees in philosophy. Plato came with geometry; that was one degree. ( J.8 .37) Plato's fame does not stand on a syllogism or on any specimen of Socratic augmentation. He is much more than an expert (J.8. 43) Plato's solution is not illimitable, but it is not self-limited by its own zone obliquity or by fogs and walls which its own voices create. Plato is to mankind what Paris or London is to Europe (J.8.44 ). Plato codifies, catalogs, and distributes (J.8.45). Proceed with the truth to being - Plato is like a tamer. (J.8.54) Four authors have given things Plato has. (J.8.127) The great words of the world, such as analogy: - what step mankind can't look when Plato first spoke that word. (J.8.27) I delight in the votaries of the Genius of Plato because this clear love does not consist of self-conceit. (J.9.187). Memorabilia of philosophy are: Plato's doctrine of reminiscence, Berkeley's Ideal World, and Socrates' interpretation of the Delphian oracles (J.9.282)

We know all things as in a dream and again ignorant of them according to the vigilant perception Plato in Sophist (J.10.123). The remedy of this political mischief should be to train a youth in poverty to a noble style of manners than any place can show him by Plato and Plutarch (J.10.132)

For Emerson, Plato is a perennial life guide, and yet he finds

"Plato is no Athenian. It transcends.... It transcends sectional lines, the great humane Plato, **but we read impatiently, still wishing the chapter or the dialogue at its close, {A transnational book again is the Bhagavad Gita } (J.7 .86).**"

"We say then of a Jove-like soul, like Plato's, that he at once shows the evanescence and the centrality of things. Things are in flood and fixed as adamant: The Bhagavat Geeta adduces the illustration of the sphered, mutable, yet centered air or ether". (J.7. 29 1845) Writing With Fire.

This is the same opinion about England also:

" In England the understanding rules, and materialistic truth; the becoming, the fit, the discreet, the brave, the advantageous; but they could not produce such a book as the **Bhagavat Geeta**. " (J.7 1848 p.401 )

Emerson finds a solution for materialism in the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita and those who have not understood the same as 'Children and not learned.'

"Children only, and not the learned, speak of the speculative and the practical doctrines, as two. They are but one, for both obtain the self-same end, and the place which is gained by the followers of the one is gained by the followers of the other. That man seeth who seeth that the speculative doctrines and the practical are one." — **Bhagavat Geeta, Ch. V 4-5** <sup>5</sup> (J.7.p 68)

**Charles Johnston translates as under:**

"Children, not wise men, speak of Sankhya and Yoga as different; ' he who has perfectly mastered one finds the fruit of both. The goal that is gained by the Sankhyas is also reached by the followers of Yoga, who see Sankhya and Yoga as one; he indeed " sees! ( B.G Ch.V.4-5) <sup>6</sup>. For him, Bhagavad Gita did not satiate him but always gave him a magnificent day.

"Books are like rainbows, to be thankfully received in their first impression and not examined and surveyed by theodolite and chain as if they were part of the railroad. Perhaps it would be good in the tuition of an emperor. He should never read the same book twice. I owed — my friend and I owed — a magnificent **day to the Bhagavat Geeta**.— It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spake to us(thing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us. Let us not now go back and apply a minute criticism to it, but cherish the venerable oracle."( J.7 p.86 )

Emerson finds godliness in human beings, and pure intelligence is the feeling of God in all beings.

"The intellectual power is not the gift, but the presence of God. Nor do we reason to the Being of God, but God goes with us into Nature when we go or think

at all. Truth is always new and wild as the wild air and is alive. . . . " This world is no place for the man who doth not worship, and where, O Arjoon ! is there another?" — Bhagavat Geeta. Wilkins GEETA Lecture IV 30-31( J.10 p 186)

Aldous Huxley explained that he looked to Indian philosophy with great enthusiasm because he saw in texts like the Bhagavad Gita an eloquent articulation of this perennial philosophy that could be extremely useful for Americans if properly reframed and updated for the present.<sup>7</sup>

The Gita, as a Perennial Philosophy, justifies that just are the ways of God and justifiable to mankind. The philosophy of the Upanishads is retold with enrichment.

“All philosophy of east and west has the same centerpiece,” he surmised in his 1850 essay “Plato; Or, The Philosopher”: “In all nations, there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental Unity. **The raptures of prayer and ecstasy of devotion lose all beings in one Being. This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East and chiefly in the Indian Scriptures, in the Vedas, the Bhagavat Geeta, and the Vishnu Purana. Those writings contain little else than this idea, and they rise to pure and sublime strains in celebrating it.**”(CEW.Emerson, “Plato; Or, The Philosopher,” CEW 476.)

According to Robert Gordon, for Emerson, “the philosophical arguments which lie at the heart of ‘Plato’ were derived entirely from Indian philosophy.”<sup>8</sup>

The Indian teaching, through its cloud of legends, has yet a simple and grand religion like a queenly countenance seen through a rich veil. It teaches us to speak the truth, loves others as you, and despise trifles. The East is grand and makes sure Europe appears as the land of trifles. (J.7 p.29 1845 age 41)

Emerson always held that 'originality' is a misnomer, arguing that a mind recognizes the wisdom in the works of others and rightly appropriates it.<sup>9</sup>

Conclusion: The Influence of the Bhagavad Gita on Emerson is amply visible in his masterpiece of Poems BRAHMA. The schematic analysis of the views expressed by the veterans and critics suggests the oriental impact and influence of Bhagavad Gita as the guardian source and influence to pen this great Poem, Brahma. Lord Krishna uses 45 slokas in Bhagavad Gita to explain Brahman. Emerson employs 48 slokas from Bhagavad Gita to explain his Brahman in his poem Brahma( Ch.2-10 slokas, Ch.3—1.Ch4-5, Ch.7-1, Ch.8-1, Ch.9-6, Ch.10-8, Ch12,-1, Ch.13-3, Ch.16-10, Ch.18-2).

#### Foot Notes

A. The Complete Essays and other writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson-Modern Library College Edition The Modern Library New York Copy right

- 1950 here afterward expressed as  
–(CEW)
- B.. Journals Of Ralph Waldo Emerson  
with annotations edited by  
Edward Waldo Emerson And  
Waldo Emerson Forbes Constable  
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Last Updated: September 20,  
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