

INFLUENCE OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA ON R.W.EMERSON'S ESSAY CONDUCT OF LIFE: ILLUSIONS (THE CONDUCT OF LIFE, 1860, REV.1876)

Shivadurga,
Asst. Professor,
English Department,
Institute of Applied Sciences and Humanities,
GLA University,
Mathura. U.P. India

R.W Emerson says *“He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that, and whose movement and doings he must obey: he fancies himself poor, orphaned, insignificant. The mad crowd drives hither and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now that. What is he that he should resist their will, and think or act for himself? Every moment, new changes, and new showers of deceptions, to baffle and distract him”*. In Maya the ‘young mortal’ (conditioned Soul) becomes deceived, distracted, baffled and misguided. We see this in the Bhagavat Gita Chapter 2 in the case of Arjun. Due to Maya he becomes deceived and deluded. Subsequently through receiving knowledge of Dharm and the Yogas from Krishna he reaches correct Dharmic state of thinking. Now he is able to ‘think’ and ‘act for himself’ by following ‘own nature’ and ‘own work’ concepts of the Bhagavad Gita. This is Swadharm concept of the Bhagavad Gita. Now he realizes that all is governed by Law of Karm that includes cause and effect as per BG 13.22. Brahman has become all as shown above. Brahman has become the material world and all life and the laws governing them. Hence *‘There is no chance, and no anarchy, in the universe. All is system and gradation’*. He realizes all have to always follow Dharm and the Yogas in order to overcome Maya. Through gaining knowledge of Dharm and Yogas *‘by and by, for an instant, the air clears, and the cloud lifts a little’* this is Maya lifted and the conditioned soul (‘young mortal’) again sees *‘they alone with him alone’*. This is also because due to the Law of Karm a person or ‘mortal’ is himself responsible for his condition as seen in ‘Compensation’ and ‘Fate’. This is further because on successful following of Dharm and the Yogas one reaches an eternal relation with Sagun Brahman. This is as per Vishitadvat or Dvait philosophies of the Vedas. Or one realizes impersonal Brahman and transcends identity. This is as per Advait philosophy of the Vedas. This is achieved through following Dharm and the Yogas. Hence too *‘they alone with him alone’*.

R.W.Emerson states, *“We fancy that our civilization has got on far, but we still come back to our primers”*. We have seen these ‘primers’ to be Dharmic, also as Dharm is applicable for all time. R.W. Emerson states, *“We live by our imaginations, by our admirations, by our sentiments.”* This is because as per BG 13.22 *“The living entity in material nature thus follows the ways of life, enjoying the three modes of nature. (This is due to his association with that material nature.) Thus he meets with good and evil among various species.”* As per BG 3.5, Maya controls all within Nature (Prakriti). As per BG 7.14 *“The Maya which consists of the three modes of nature is difficult to overcome, except to those who realize Brahman (those following Dharm and the Yogas) hence “The world rolls, the din of life is never hushed.”* We

see in 'Self Reliance', 'Compensation', 'Circles', 'Worship' and 'Beauty' that R.W. Emerson's '*moral sentiments*' are as per the Bhagavad Gita and Vedic Dharm.

R.W.Emerson states, "*I find men victims of illusion in all parts of life. Children, youths, adults, and old men, all are led by one bawble or another. Yoganidra, the goddess of illusion, Proteus, or Momus, or Gylfi's Mocking, — for the Power has many names, — is stronger than the Titans, stronger than Apollo. Few have overheard the gods, or surprised their secret.*" This is as per BG 7.13. "Deluded by the modes of Nature, the whole world does not know Brahman which is above the modes of Nature and inexhaustible." Thus they are in illusion or Maya. This is also as per R.W.Emerson's observations in 'Experience' Pg 222. '*Life itself is a bubble and skepticism, and a sleep within a sleep*'. '*Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion*'. And in 'Experience' Pg.224. '*Life is a succession of lessons*' we have seen these to be '*lessons*' of Dharm and Yog '*which must be lived to be understood.*" Life is to be used to practice these Yogas of Karm, Gyan and Bhakti and thus '*lived*'. R.W.Emerson here discerns Vedic influence of Maya in other cultures. This is as Vedic Culture has the oldest books which have influenced other cultures. This is also the thought of Swami Vivekanand. "You cannot bring another book that is as old as the Vedas. Everything else it was all copied after that".². R.W.Emerson has understood the concept of Vedic illusions or Maya correctly. This is seen through the explanation the Vedic Saint, Sri Ramakrishna on the subject. "There exist in God both Vidya and Avidya Maya...God has become everything."³ As per BG 3.5, 7.13-14, Maya controls all within Nature and Prakriti. Vidya Maya is explained in BG 13.8-12, it leads to Brahman. These slokas are widely considered to point to Dharm and the Yogas of the Bhagavad Gita. I have shown these present in Emerson's works. Avidya Maya is not following these and hence moving away from Brahman realization. As per BG 13.25 knowledge or Vidya Maya leads us to perceive Brahman. The teachings of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita are Vidya Maya, not following it constitutes Avidya Maya and deludes and binds one more firmly to material manifestation.

R.W.Emerson states, "*The intellectual man requires a fine bait; the sots are easily amused. But everybody is drugged with his own frenzy, and the pageant marches at all hours, with music and banner and badge*". This is the concept of 'own nature' seen in 'Self Reliance'. Additionally all are controlled by the modes of Nature and Maya as seen above and in BG 13.21-22, 14.19.

R.W.Emerson states, "*I own I enter into Nature's game*". As per the above '*Nature's game*' is Maya. R.W.Emerson correctly following the Yogas is able to see this, '*I own I enter*' unlike the vast majority of persons. Thus Emerson has reached the spiritual state of Brahman realization as per BG 13.24-25 and the spiritual nature of Brahman as per BG 14.19 which states "When one properly sees that in all activities no other performer is at work than these modes of nature (this is Maya as per BG 7.13-14) and he knows Brahman, who is transcendental to all these modes, he attains My spiritual nature". Modes of Nature are explained thus. BG 14.17 states "From Sattva real knowledge of Dharm develops, from Rajas greed develops and from Tamas develops ignorance and delusion". As per BG 18.30-32, Sattva understands Dharm correctly, Rajas is unable to distinguish between Dharm and Adharm, Tamas understands Dharm wrongly and consequently falling into delusion.

R.W.Emerson states, "*But the mighty Mother*' Worship of Brahman as Mother Goddess is the epitome and pinnacle of Tantra. It is also an integral part of Vedas. We see here that Emerson had realized this and was adept in it. '*who had been so sly with us, as if she felt that she owed us some indemnity, insinuates into the Pandora-box of marriage*'. Marriage is the concept

of Vidya maya and thus Dharm. *‘Some deep and serious benefits, and some great joys. We find a delight in the beauty and happiness of children that makes the heart too big for the body’*. The joy of family life and children is Dharmic as per Vedic thought. Thus it gives us Dharmic love making *‘the heart too big for the body’*. This is because one transcends thus physical sense gratification and physical limits of the body. *“In the worst-assorted connections there is ever some mixture of true marriage”*. Here R.W.Emerson refers to Vidya maya as *‘true marriage’* in context of Dharm. Through following Vidya Maya, which is present in material manifestation *‘the worst-assorted connections’* can be overcome and one can proceed towards Brahman. This also means that even in the worst situation there is still some benefit put by *‘mighty Mother’*, this benefit is an aspect of the situation which enables us to follow Dharm and the Yogas. This is demonstrated by the actions of Yudhistir who practiced Dharm under *‘the worst-assorted connections’*. He could achieve this due to *‘some mixture of true marriage’* This refers to *‘some deep and serious benefits, and some great joys’*. This is his application of his intelligence to follow Dharm, his ability to appreciate the advice of Krishna and spiritual saints which helped him correct action. This is as per BG 4.34. This also has another meaning. We see in the Mahabharat that though Duryodhan was overcome by hatred and jealousy but still he was a brave warrior and to this extent he was Dharmic. This is also meant by the above statement. Though the persons fighting on the side of Duryodhan were following a wrong cause but still to the extent of their intelligence and bravery in Kshatriya dharm, they were Dharmic just like those fighting for the right cause under the Pandavs. This is as per BG 2.32. As per this the soldiers fighting and particularly those who died on both sides of the Civil War are honoured and a source of inspiration to all due to their following Kshatriya dharm.

R.W.Emerson states, *“Since our tuition Material knowledge is governed by methodity or principles as seen in ‘Nature’ and BG Chapter 7,13. Hence ‘tuition’ ‘is through emblems and indirections, ‘tis well to know that there is method in it, a fixed scale, and rank above rank in the phantasms”*.

R.W.Emerson states, *“Is not our faith in the impenetrability of matter more sedative than narcotics? You play with jackstraws, balls, bowls, horse and gun, estates and politics; but there are finer games before you. Is not time’* Time is the manifestation of God like Prakriti as per BG 10.30, .33, 11.32. *‘a pretty toy?’* Time can be used to pursue Dharm which is the same as *‘moral sentiment’* of Emerson. Hence one will transcend the material as per BG 14.19 and realize that matter is not impenetrable and loose one’s faith in this temporary concept which deludes the masses hence *‘more sedative than narcotics?’*. Hence Emerson calls time *‘a pretty toy’*.

R.W.Emerson states, *“What if you shall come to discern that the play and playground of all this pompous history are radiations from yourself, and that the sun borrows his beams?”* This is Advaita Gyan of Sri Adi Sankaracharya which describes impersonal Brahman. This is also stated in BG 12.3-4, 14.27. This is also called the knowledge of the self and explained by Sri Adi Sankaracharya thus *“No doubts can be raised about the self, for the act of doubting implies at least the doubter”*. As per Advait philosophy one realizes his nature as the all encompassing Brahman. As per BG Chapter 7 and 13, the material world and all life has emanated from Brahman. This includes *“Earth, water, fire, air, mind, intelligence and identity.”* Nirgun Brahman is beyond space and time as per the above quoted BG shlokas.

R.W.Emerson states, *“The intellect sees that every atom carries the whole of Nature”*- This is as per BG 13.16, 15.15 and is an aspect of Brahman. *‘that the mind opens to omnipotence’* -this is through the relation of conditioned soul to Brahman reached through Dharm and the Yogas seen in *‘Self Reliance’* and *‘Over Soul’*, this is as per BG 12.2-4. *“that, in the*

endless striving and ascents, every person (conditioned soul) is expected to strive continuously in Dharm and the Yogas, the metamorphosis is entire, so that the soul doth not know itself in its own act, when that act is perfected.” On realizing Nirgun Brahman all duality falls away, this includes identity hence “*the metamorphosis is entire, so that the soul doth not know itself in its own act, when that act is perfected*”.

R.W.Emerson states, “*The permanent interest of every man is, never to be in a false position, but to have the weight of Nature to back him in all that he does. Riches and poverty are a thick or thin costume; and our life — the life of all of us — identical*’. We have seen the futility of aspiring to be rich or insignificance of being either rich or poor in ‘Nature’. A person should get beyond the desire for wealth as per BG 6.8, 14.24. On reaching Nirgun Brahman all become identical. *‘For we transcend the circumstance continually, and taste the real quality of existence; as in our employments*’, On attaining Brahman realization through Dharm and the Yogas, one ‘*transcends*’ the material world, hence ‘*circumstance*’. “*which only differ in the manipulations, but express the same laws; or in our thoughts, which wear no silks, and taste no ice-creams. We see God face to face every hour, and know the savor of Nature*”. This is achieved through practising Dharm and the Yogas as seen in earlier subheads. This is also seen in the lives of incarnate Vedic Saints such as Sri Adi Sankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, Sri Chaitanya Prabhu, Sri Rama Krishna and their disciples and devotees. Through the statements of these saints we come to know of the state of Brahman realization where “*We see God face to face every hour, and know the savor of Nature*”. This is as per BG 12.2-4, 14.19, 14.26-..27

R.W.Emerson states, “*The early Greek philosophers Heraclitus and Xenophanes measured their force on this problem of identity. Diogenes of Apollonia said, that unless the atoms were made of one stuff, they could never blend and act with one another. But the Hindoos, in their sacred writings, express the liveliest feeling, both of the essential identity, and of that illusion which they conceive variety to be. “The notions, ‘I am,’ and ‘This is mine,’ which influence mankind, are but delusions*”. Emerson’s statement “*The notions, ‘I am,’ and ‘This is mine,’ which influence mankind, are but delusions of the mother of the world*”. This is a concept of the Bhagavad Gita. BG 12.13 states that “*Ideas of identity, ‘I am’ and proprietorship, ‘this is mine,’ are an illusion and delusion*”. BG 14.19 states “*When one sees that there is no doer (or no ‘I am and this is mine’) in all activities but these modes of Nature, he knows the supreme Lord, who is transcendent to these modes, he attains to Brahman Nature*”. This is also implied in BG 7.12, .14. Sri Rama Krishna states “*I and mine that is ignorance*”.⁴ This is also because Brahman has become everything and pervades everything. This is as per BG 10.39, 9.7, 13.16, 15.15, .17, .18. The wise and the enlightened thus have this view of R.W.Emerson. This is as per BG 13.31, 13.32. *‘of the mother of the world’*. This shows that Emerson had deep knowledge of the Tantric concept of considering and worshiping Brahman as *‘the Mother of the World’*. This is in fact the highest method of Worship in Tantra. Tantra itself is a part of Vedas and Vedic thought. Mother worship is also extolled in the Puranas, which are a part of Vedic concepts. Mother worship is extolled in the Vedas themselves. Sri Durga Saptshati is a part of the Puranas. It describes Sakti as the Universal Omnipotent and Omnipresent Mother Goddess and Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna states “*That which is Brahman is Sakti and that again is the Mother. He it is, says Ram Prasad that I approach as mother.*”⁵ *‘the Mother of the world’* is thus Sagun Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna states “*I worshipped Shorasi (sixteen year old maiden) as my mother...the attitude of regarding God as Mother is the last word in Sadana (according to Tantra, Purana and Vedas). “There are both vidya and avidya in this world of Maya who may be called a Paramahamsa?...He who, like an ant, can take the sugar from a mixture of sugar and sand,*

leaving aside the sand”.⁶ Sri Ramakrishna states “Pray to the Divine Mother with the longing heart. Her vision dries up all craving for the world and completely destroys all attachment.”⁷ Mother worship is also connected to the Bhagavad Gita. Yog Maya, the elder sister of Krishna, was an incarnation of Shakti or Mother Goddess. Sri Ramakrishna states ‘The path of Tantra is efficacious.... That which is Brahman is also Sakti, Kali.... It is mentioned in the Chandi that Brahman alone is the primal energy. Brahman is identical with Sakti.’⁸ Sri Ramakrishna states “This Universe is created out of Maha Maya (illusion) of God. Mahamaya consists of both vidya maya, illusion of knowledge, and avidya maya, the illusion of ignorance. Through the help of Vidya Maya one cultivates such virtues as the taste for holy company, knowledge, devotion, love and renunciation. Avidya maya consists of the five elements and the objects of the senses ...these make one forget God”.⁹ Emerson states “*Dispel, O Lord of all creatures! the conceit of knowledge which proceeds from ignorance. And the beatitude of man they hold to lie in being freed from fascination*”. Emerson states this in context of ‘I am’ and ‘This is mine’. The reasons these have to be dispelled are explained above. As per Swami Vivekanand “This is one of the highest points to understand of Advaita Vedanta, this idea of Maya”.¹⁰ I have clearly shown here that Emerson has accomplished this.

R.W.Emerson states, “*The intellect is stimulated by the statement of truth in a trope, and the will by clothing the laws of life in illusions*’. This is Maya. ‘*But the unities of Truth and of Right are not broken by the disguise*”. We have seen in ‘Self Reliance’ R.W.Emerson’s concept of ‘truth’ is not just objective and fact but also a method of living, this is following Dharm and Yogas. Emerson concept of ‘truth’ also means Brahman realization and this is a concept of the Bhagavad Gita. Similarly as seen in ‘Compensation’ right or virtue is path to Brahman and thus not affected by illusion. Brahman being unity, ‘truth and right’ can be addressed also as ‘unity’, being path to Brahman.

R.W.Emerson states “*There is no chance, and no anarchy, in the universe. All is system and gradation. Every god is there sitting in his sphere. The young mortal enters the hall of the firmament: there is he alone with them alone, they pouring on him benedictions and gifts, and beckoning him up to their thrones. On the instant, and incessantly, fall snow-storms of illusions. He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that, and whose movement and doings he must obey: he fancies himself in a vast crowd which always this way and that, and whose movement and doings he must obey: he fancies himself poor, orphaned insignificant. The mad crowd drives hither and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now that. What is he that he should resist their will, and think or act for himself? Every moment, new changes, and new showers of deceptions, to baffle and distract him. And when, by and by, for an instant, the air clears, and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting around him on their thrones,- they alone with him alone.*” The ‘young mortal’ is the conditioned soul of the Bhagavad Gita, he is encouraged by ‘nature’, ‘God within’, ‘moments of reason’ (seen in ‘Self Reliance’ Pg. 41.), ‘Great souls’ and the wise to follow Dharm and Yogas. I have shown this in ‘Self Reliance’, ‘Circles’, ‘Over Soul’ and above. This has to be followed in the ‘hall of firmament’ (this is Prakriti or material manifestation explained in BG. 7 and 13). To the extent the ‘young mortal’ follows these, ‘they’ (Dharm and the Yogas) “*pouring on him benedictions and gifts, and beckoning him up to their thrones*”. This is the gift of progress in Dharm and the yogas. ‘beckoning him up to their thrones’ since on attaining Brahman realization one attains unity with Brahman through Advait, Vishadvait and Dvait philosophies, thus also ‘*there is he alone with them alone*’. ‘*On the instant, and incessantly, fall snow storms of illusions*’, this is Maya. “*He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that, and whose movement*

and doings he must obey: he fancies himself poor, orphaned, insignificant. The mad crowd drives hither and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now that. What is he that he should resist their will, and think or act for himself? Every moment, new changes, and new showers of deceptions, to baffle and distract him". In Maya the 'young mortal' (conditioned Soul) becomes deceived, distracted, baffled and misguided. We see this in BG Chapter 2 in the case of Arjun. Due to Maya he becomes deceived and deluded. Subsequently through receiving knowledge of Dharm and the Yogas from Krishna he reaches correct Dharmic state of thinking. Now he is able to 'think' and 'act for himself' by following 'own nature' and 'own work' concepts of the Bhagavad Gita. This is Swadharm concept of the Bhagavad Gita. This is explained in 'Self Reliance'. Now he realizes that all is governed by Law of Karm that includes cause and effect as per BG 13.22. Brahman has become all as shown above. Brahman has become the material world and all life and the laws governing them. Hence 'There is no chance, and no anarchy, in the universe. All is system and gradation". He realizes all have to always follow Dharm and the Yogas in order to overcome Maya. Through gaining knowledge of Dharm and Yogas 'by and by, for an instant, the air clears, and the cloud lifts a little' this is Maya lifted and the conditioned soul ('young mortal') again sees 'they alone with him alone'. This is also because due to the Law of Karm a person or 'mortal' is himself responsible for his condition as seen in 'Compensation' and 'Fate'. This is further because on successful following of Dharm and the Yogas one reaches an eternal relation with Sagun Brahman. This is as per Vishitadvat or Dvait philosophies of the Vedas. Or one realizes impersonal Brahman and transcends identity. This is as per Advait philosophy of the Vedas. I have explained these philosophies in 'Self Reliance', 'Over Soul', 'Circles' and elsewhere. This is achieved through following Dharm and the Yogas. Hence too 'they alone with him alone'.

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