

## Thoreau's India - An Outsider's View

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Henry David Thoreau came in contact with India through Emerson's library of erudite books. He influenced Thoreau with a certain enthusiasm for the Wisdom of India. During his stay in 1838 with Emerson's brother, Thoreau had unrestricted access to Emerson's library which contained the great works of India such as The Vedas, The Laws of Manu, the Hitopadesha of Vishnu Sharma, the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. Thoreau read the Hindu scriptures with delight and with each reading; he was raised into a rare region of thought.

Thoreau not only read books on Indian Philosophy from Emerson's library but also from his borrowings from the Harvard College Library during 1849-1854. On 11 September, 1849, he borrowed '**Mahabharata, Hariwamsa, On Historic de la famille**', and Garcin de Tassy's '**Histoire de la literature Hindoui**'. In 1850, from January 28th to April, he read Wilson's translation of the '**Vishnu Purana**', Icvara Krsna's '**The Sankhya Karika**', '**The Samveda Samhita**' translated by Stevenson, Rammohan Roy's Translation of passages of the Veda; and vol.IX of the works of Sir William Jones. (This volume contains '**Sacontala, or, the Fatal Ring**' and Sir Jones' translation of Kalidasa's '**Abhijana Sakuntalam**,' Charles Wilkins' translation of the Bhagavad-Gita - '**Bhagvat-geeta, or, Dialogue of Kreeshna and Arjoon**' was borrowed by Thoreau on 9th October, 1854<sup>1</sup>.

His steadily growing interest in Indian philosophy led him to study Colebrooke's '**Essays**', and Burnouf's '**Introduction a "histoire du Buddhisme Indien"**'. An article, '**The Preaching of Buddha**', based on his study of Burnouf's book, selections from '**The Laws of Manu**', and selections from the Oriental scriptures, were also contributed by Thoreau to the '**Dial**'. In the Prefaces to the selections, Orientalists like Colebrooke, Hodgson and Wilkins are frequently cited by Thoreau. All this shows his interest in India. In January 1843, Thoreau published selected passages from the Laws of Manu from a French version of the Sanskrit Harivansa in **The Dial**, Thoreau also translated a story, "**The Transmigration of seven Brahmans**", and in **The Dial** of January 1844, he published excerpts from Buddhist Scriptures under the title "**The preaching of Buddha**". Hindu scripture tells us that the central core of one's self (antaratman) is identifiable with the cosmic whole (Brahman). The Upanishads state : "The self within you, the respondent, immortal person is the internal self of all things and is the universal Brahman". Concepts similar to this cardinal

doctrine of vedanta appear in the writings of the Transcendentalists. But there are many ideological similarities among Oriental literature, the neoplatonic doctrines, Christian mysticism, and the philosophy of the German idealists such as Kant and Schilling. And, since the Transcendentalists were acquainted with all of these writings, it is not always possible to identify specific influences. Nevertheless, the striking parallels between Transcendentalist writing and Oriental thought make it clear that there was a spiritual kinship.

When Thoreau began his intensive study of Hindu scriptures, he wrote in his journal, "I cannot read a sentence in the book of the Hindu's without being elevated upon the table land of the Ghauts ..... The impression which those sublime sentences made on me last night has awakened me before Cock-crowing ..... The simple life herein described confers on us a degree of freedom even in perusal ..... wants so easily and gracefully satisfied that they seem like a more refined pleasure, repleteness". Later, in his first book, he said any moral philosophy is exceedingly rare. This of Manu addresses our privacy more than most. It is a more private and familiar and at the same time a more public and universal work, than is spoken of in parlour or pulpits nowadays. As our domestic fowls are said to have their original in the will pleasant of India, so our domestic thoughts have their prototypes in the thoughts of her philosophers ..... Most books belong to the house and street only and in the fields their leaves feel very thin ..... But this, as it proceeds from, so it addresses, what is deepest and most abiding in man. It belongs to the noontide of the day, the midsummer of the year and after the snows have melted, and the waters evaporated in the spring, still its truth speaks freshly to our experience.....".

Thoreau sought throughout his life to live a life of meaning - a life in which he would understand the truths of his own nature, his relationship with other men and his relationship with Nature and with the Universe. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Thoreau found clues for his quest which he transposed into his Journals : "The man who, having abandoned all lusts of the flesh, Walketh without inordinate desires, unassuming, and free from pride, obtaineth happiness. The wise man.... seeketh for that which is homogenous to his own nature".

We too know that Thoreau's reading led him to an interest in yoga. He wrote in a letter to a friend : "Free in this world as the buds in the air, disengaged from every kind of chains, those who have practiced the yoga gather in Brahma the certain fruit of their works ..... The yogi, absorbed in contemplation, contributes in his degree to creation ..... Divine forms traverse him .... and united to the nature which is proper to him, he goes, he acts as animating original

matter....

Thoreau, Emerson and few others were the men who believed in high thinking and simple living and they were called the Transcendentalist and this group of thinkers and writers came to be called the 'Concord Brahmins'. Thoreau had "in himself a vein of intellectual independence which resisted doctrinal or dogmatic conformity to any given religious tradition<sup>2</sup>".

Thoreau was "too non-conformist to adhere to any given Christian Church. It is this non-conformity that allowed him in all matters to strike out an independent line of thought and a distinctive way of life which was his own"<sup>3</sup>.

Thoreau was not able to keep pace with the existing social milieu. This was only an instance of his social non-conformity. Because of such a frame of mind he was open to all the fresh influences. He had an open mind and was able to accept doctrines from all spheres of the world. He considered the preachings of Chinese philosophers like Confucius and Lao-tze as a gospel of life. He had an inquiring mind and was drawn towards Indian Philosophy, in his striving for a fuller and more natural localization of self. The lessons he learnt from India became "the warp and woof of his earthy being"<sup>4</sup>.

Thoreau read nature books. His observations of nature as depicted in Walden are like that of the Rishis of India. Rishis of India learnt nature not only to exploit or conquer her but also to be in constant communion with Nature. They discovered completeness in Nature. The vedic seers called this Rita. Rita in Nature is the moral order in the heart of man. The feeling of reverence they exhibited towards Nature was similar to the feeling of reverence that Kant had. He said : "There are two things that strike me with awe and reverence. One is the starry heavens above and the other is the moral law within. The cosmic law that governed the starry heavens was Rita. The moral law that governed the world of man was Satya"<sup>5</sup>.

Thoreau read books that gave him a knowledge and insight into Nature and this helped him build a philosophy of life. He acquired this knowledge of Indian Philosophy, from extensive reading of the English sources. In 1855, Thoreau's friend Thomas Cholmondeley sent him "a handsome library of Oriental literature which included the First and Second Ashtaka of Rigveda Samhita, Gaurapada's commentary on the Sankhya Karika, select specimen of the Theatre of the Hindus, Vishnu Purana translated by H.H. Wilson, Colebrooke's translation of the Sankhya Karika, and Treatise on the Hindu Law of Inheritance and

Miscellaneous Essays, Sri William Jones translation of Menu Roer's translation of the Upanishads in Vol.XV of the Bibliothria Indica, Milman's Nala and Damayanti and M.E. Burnoff's Lotus de la Bonne. Thoreau received his gift with great enthusiasm. In a letter to his friend Blatu, Thoreau says, "They are in English, French, Latin, Greek and Sanskrit. One is splendidly bound and illustrated..... I am familiar with many of them and know how to prize them"<sup>6</sup>.

Thoreau also read Oriental Poems, Preachings of Buddha and selections from The Laws of Manu. All these reflect his interest in India. Twentieth Century Discovery tells that Thoreau's translation of Harwansa entitled "**The Transmigration of the Seven Brahmins : a translation from the Harwansa of danglois**" is found in Widener Library, Harvard University.

Thoreau's reflections on his reading of Indian philosophy find expression in all his works; and the influences of Indian philosophy can be seen from references he makes in his writings.

After he read the "**Laws of Manu**" he confided in his Journal.

I cannot read a sentence in the book of the Hindoos without being elevated as upon the table land of the ghauts. It has such a rhythm as the winds of desert, such a tide as the Ganges and seems as superior to criticism as the Himmaleh mounts. Even at this later hour unworn by time, with a native and inherent dignity it wears the English dress as indifferently as the Sanskrit. The great tone is of such fibre and such severe tension that no time nor accident can relax it (Journal 1-P.266).

"A week on the Merrimack River's" contains echoes of **The Laws of Manu**. Thoreau says in A Week :One of the most attractive of those ancient books that I have met with, is **The Laws of Manu**". The book acquires a divine character and invokes nothing but unquestioning admiration. "The `Laws' appear to Thoreau as intensely private and yet public and universal. They are beyond refutation. They are above criticism. The only reason, why the book should have so profoundly impressed Thoreau seems to be, its absolute impersonality. The stability of society, like the stability of the earth itself, is of supreme importance and individual sufferings sink into insignificance. There is an element of inescapability from the Law of being and every individual must accept his station in life with an uncomplaining obedience and strive for excellence for the social good; for a man's station in life is determined by his own actions in the past life or lives"<sup>7</sup>.

Thoreau was influenced by the reading of Laws of Manu and it is clear from his statement "I love my fate to the very core and vind". Thoreau surrendered to nature and established a complete union with nature. He discovered harmony in nature. Thoreau says "The birds with their plumage and their notes are in harmony with the flowers." This "is a feeling similar to the one which the vedic Rishi expressed in the beautiful Rig Vedic hymn to Ushas or the Dawn Ushas of the vedic hymn is Aurora, the greek Eos to whose "blushes" Thoreau refers to. Thoreau discovered this at-one-ment with nature in Kalidasa, when he said : `Even in Kalidasa's Drama of Sacontala, we read of "rills dyed yellow with the golden dust of the Lotus". `Let us first be simple and well as nature ourselves, dispel clouds that hangover our brows and take up a little more life into our pores". To Thoreau every nuance of nature was familiar. Every change in nature thrilled him. He was so attuned to it "All change", he said, "is a miracle to contemplate, but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant"<sup>8</sup>.

Thoreau was also influenced by the Bhagavad Gita. He was introduced to Gita in Emerson's library. He looked upon the Gita as the greatest discovery of the age. Thoreau says "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial".

Comparing the Gita with the Holy Bible, "Thoreau finds the New Testament remarkable for its pure morality, the best of the Hindu scripture, for its pure intellectuality. The reader is nowhere raised into and sustained in a higher, purer or rarer region of thought than in the Bhagavad Gita. "Thoreau calls it one of the noblest and most sacred scriptures which have come down to us". For Thoreau, the Gita is more colossal than any other masterpiece of the East. Thoreau speaks of "the sanity and sublimity" of the Gita, which has impressed the minds even of soldiers and merchants and tells American contemporaries to study it with reverence, for it is a part of man's common heritage: `I would say to the readers of scriptures, if they wish for a good book to read the Bhagavad Gita ..... known to have been written ..... more than four thousand years ago ..... it matters not whether three or four or when ..... it deserves to be read with reverence even by Yankees, as a part of the sacred writings of a devout people"<sup>9</sup>.

These references reflect Thoreau's debt to India. Thoreau makes references to the Bhagawad Gita in his work "**Walden** and also in **A week on the Concord and Merrimack rivers**". He talks of the philosophy "contained in it as the `cosmogonal philosophy' into which he bathed his intellect every morning"

(Writings II-P.328).

Biographers say that Thoreau went to the Walden Pond to write his first book "**A week on the Concord and Merimack Rivers,**" but at the same time his journey to the woods is that of a Hindu Yogi to practice some sort of penance. Thoreau says, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to face only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived and Thoreau confesses to Harrison Blake in 1849 that "to some extent and at rare intervals even I am a Yogi" (Writings VI-P.175) and this statement of Thoreau can be compared to the sayings of the Gita.

Unswerving devotion to Me in Yoga of non-separation, resort to sequestered places, distaste for the society of men (Bhagavad Gita XIII-10).

The Mind in its entirety must be dedicated to the Lord, with the strong conviction that there is nothing else worthy of interest. The way of the devotee is never to divide and distract his mind between the Real and the Unreal. His constant absorption is and ought to be in the Lord.

A place endowed with natural beauty, pleasing and elevating to the mind and quite healthy and free from disturbance by wild animals is to be selected by the Sadhaka for his residence. The company of the holy ones at the initial stage and reverence from them too at the advanced stage is a spiritual necessity to the Sadhaka progressing in the path to perfection

And the statement of Thoreau reminds one of Sri Ramakrishna the renowned Indian philosopher's, statement.

"The moth abandons darkness and rushes to the light of the lamp. The ant would rather give up its life than sever contact with juice. Even so the devotee is ever intent on the Lord and he has no other concern in life".

Thoreau made sincere efforts at moulding his life according to the dictates of the wisdom of India. To some extent Thoreau was a Yogi. In writing to a friend, Thoreau confessed : "I would fain practice yoga faithfully. To some extent and at rare intervals I am a yogi".

He was a yogi, a yogi who represented not an escape from life but an escape into it, who, both by example and precept, told a nation that what matters

is not the impressiveness of the external trappings one covers oneself with; it is the individual that is invaluable, that it shall be a miserable bargain if by losing his soul, man possesses the whole world"<sup>10</sup>.

Yoga is the effort of a man to unite him with the deeper element. The word 'yoga' bears philosophical relations to the English word 'yoke', the Latin 'jungo', and the German 'joch'. The underlying idea of all these terms is 'linking'. Yoga is getting to the Supreme, touching the Absolute. It is 'yoking' all the forces of heart, mind and will to the Supreme or God. We must discipline the emotions and realize the Supreme. Renunciation of worldly activities is a prerequisite to self-discipline. Self-discipline is essential to all activities of a yogi, if complete identity is to be sought with the object contemplated.

Thoreau advocates the life of simplicity, a lesson which he had taught himself at Walden Pond and which he tried to teach others. Simplify - Simplify the outward circumstances of your life, simplify your needs, your ambition and learn to delight in the simple pleasure which the world of Nature affords. It also meant scorn public opinion, refuse to accept the common definitions of success and refuse to be moved by the judgment of others.

Thoreau not only advocated simplicity, but also put them into practice. Thoreau says in Walden "Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five and reduce other things in proportion" (Walden, 173).

Thoreau says in his Journal "Every part of nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another. The Oak dies down to the ground, leaving within its rind a rich virgin mould, which will impart a vigorous life to an infant forest" (Journal 1. P.3). This is an echo of the verse in the Bhagavad Gita.

Death is certain of that which is born; birth is certain of that which is dead. You should not therefore lament over the inevitable (Bhagavat Gita Chapter II Verse 27).

When a body fails to function properly it disintegrates and undergoes the modification called death. But other bodies crop up from the same modified matter. They contain an inherent propelling force called desire, which drives them on to the activities of life. Birth and death are thus a matter of course.

In the Chapter 'Sound' of Walden, there is a delightful picture of Thoreau at rest, sitting in the sunny doorway of his cabin from sunrise to noon, in reverie; and Thoreau says, "I realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation where the divine absorbs the human. In fact, the Orient became an integral part of his life, thought and expression, particularly towards the close of his life. It enhanced his knowledge of understanding the mysterious creation of the world. It enriched and complemented his natural tendencies and conviction. Thoreau valued most "the calm of mind, all passion spent". He appreciated the sense of resignation in Hindu thinkers. The calmness with which he accepted the approach of death actually sprang from his feeling that it was "a release of the vital force, a return to Nature"<sup>11</sup>.

Thoreau was influenced by the Hindu Philosophy, and the concepts of Indian thought and this is seen in his writings. His writings show his wide acquaintance with the Indian scripture particularly the Bhagavad Gita.

For the Indian Philosopher, philosophy was everything. It was not an intellectual past time but a Bible to living. Thoreau had the same quality of that of an Indian philosopher. Thoreau says in Walden, "There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was admirable to live" (Walden P.116). To Thoreau, "The Philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life. He is not fed, sheltered, clothed, and warmed, like his contemporaries'. Thoreau says, "How can a man be a philosopher and not maintain his vital heat by better methods than other men? (Walden P.116).

"To be a Philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom, to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically but practically".

Thoreau not only preached but practiced simplicity and voluntary poverty and was impressed by the ideal of the philosopher. Thoreau says in Walden, "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrance to the elevation of mankind "and adds that with respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than the poor" (Walden - Economy 115). Thoreau says further, in Walden that the ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian and Greek were a class among whom "none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward". We know not much about them none can be an impartial or wise

observer of human life but from the vantage ground of what we should call voluntary poverty" (Walden Pg.115). The yogi or the Sanyasi of India appealed to Thoreau. Thoreau states "I lay down the book and go to my well for water and lo! There I meet the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master and our buckets as it were get together in the same well"<sup>12</sup>.

His affinity with Indian thought is true from his words Thoreau says, "I believe that every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetical faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food and from much food of any kind". He also says "It was fit that I should live on rice maintaining how well he loved the philosophy of India"<sup>13</sup>.

According to the Indian scripture, the body is the temple of God and should be looked upon as such: "Deho devalayah Proktah". Thoreau too speaks of the body in a similar thought. Thoreau says, "Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the God he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any boldness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sexuality to imbrue them"<sup>14</sup>.

Thoreau not only talks of the presence of God in man but also of the consciousness of an animal in us, He says, "We are conscious of an animal in us which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sexual and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled, like the worms which even in life and health occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature. I fear that it may enjoy a certain health of its own that we may be well, but not pure"<sup>15</sup>.

Thoreau says "From exertion come wisdom and purity : from sloth ignorance and sexuality. "In these words, one can discern the influence of Indian thought. The Upanishads says that liberation is not the result of the knowledge of Atman, but that man becomes imbued with knowledge since he lives in such a way that "ordinary minds cannot understand his actions, life or movements, any more than a dreaming man can see the world of those who are awake" and Thoreau believed that living is far more important than itself. In this regard, Thoreau agreed with all mystics. Thoreau's life was a quest for self-realization.

In **Walden**, Thoreau says that the mystic gives up "power, strength, wealth, beauty and science because he has found something better, a vision of truth, surpassing anything that temporal life has to offer".

Thoreau is a mystical genius. A mystical genius feels dissatisfied with the world, as it appears and perceives that there is a better world, which can be apprehended. For one to entertain this belief is the beginning of a mystical life.

Thoreau believed in the concept of the Indian idea of Maya. He says in **The Dial**; "Whatever is on earth is the resemblance and shadow of something that is in the sphere. While the resplendent thing remaineth in good condition it is well also with its shadow. When that resplendent thing removeth far from its shadow, life removeth to a distance..... The perfect state is unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity"<sup>16</sup>.

Thoreau discovered harmony in nature and he established a complete union with nature. "The whole course of Nature its beauty evoked his worship and admiration of the creator. In his theology of nature God was always present and this is apt for Thoreau who tried to reach the goal of spiritual reality"<sup>17</sup>.

Thoreau, like the Indian philosophers attaches importance to the role of Brahmacharya. He says "If you would be chaste, you must be temperate". In speaking of Brahmacharya, "Thoreau wants to shed prudery" as Indian Dharma Sastra writers did. Dharma Sastra are books on Hindu law and custom. The important Dharma Sastras were written by Manu, Yajnavalkya, Parashara and Narada.

The Dharma - Sastras as a class of literature represent the efforts of successive generations to adjust human behaviour to a just and valid norm. Dharma stands for the self sufficient principle of ordinary harmony. The term signifies that it `upholds' and `sustains' humanity in all its coherence. It is saturated with the notion of truth and righteousness. By reason of its integrating civil, moral and spiritual values, it supplies the basic impetus for human development towards higher and higher possibilities. Dharma as a content of the Dharma-Sastras involves the things of the body, mind, intellect and soul in myriads of interests and values, and there is an inevitable mixing up of the secular and empirical matters with those that are purely ethical and spiritual.

According to Indian belief, human good consists in Dharma which is the geyser of the sustenance and forward tending force of life. It induces a strong conviction that man, abiding by its tenets, conforms to the most efficient ways of `right doing' and `right living'. The ordering of human relations, according to this view, assumes momentous significance in terms of `duty'. It registers a sense of

`must' for the development of one's potentiality. Duty is not a tyrant, but a symbol of dignity to be discharged with joy.

Thoreau admires the frankness of the Dharma Sastra writers. He says, "We discourse freely without shame of one form of sexuality and are silent about another. We are so degraded that we cannot speak or simplify the necessary functions of human nature. In earlier ages, in some centuries, every function was reverently spoken of and regulated by law. Nothing was too trivial for the Hindoo law giver, however offensive it may be to modern taste. He teaches how to eat, drink, cohabit, void excrement and urine, and the like, elevating what is mean, and does not falsely excuse himself by calling these things trifles". Thoreau is referring here to Manu and his Dharma Sastra"<sup>18</sup>.

Thoreau says, "Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open. By turns our purity inspires and our impurity casts us down. He is blessed who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day and the divine being established" and this is a clear testimony to the deep influence of Indian thought on the mind of Thoreau.

Vedanta Philosophy of India emphasizes the distinction between appearance and reality, man as he appears and man as he is. He feels the lack of a clear distinction between the two is responsible for the mean life. To quote Thoreau, he says "I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that is which appears to be".

It is the lack of self-realization that is responsible for the manners and petitions of life. Self-realization is the realization of the true self in man. Thoreau was fascinated by the self-discovery parable of a young prince who loses his way in the woods, is brought up by a forester, grows up without knowing that he is prince and later made aware of this fact and Thoreau says: "I have read in a Hindoo book, that there was a king's son who, being expelled in infancy from his native city, was brought up by a forester, and growing up to maturity in that state, imagined himself to belong to the barbarous race with which he lived. One of his father's ministers having discovered him, revealed to him what he was, and the misconception of his character was removed, and he knew himself to be a prince. So the soul continues the Hindoo philosopher, mistakes its own character, until the truth is revealed to it by some holy teacher and thence it knows itself to be Brahma"<sup>19</sup>.

Thoreau has expressed his reverence for ancient Hindu Philosophers in his book **Walden**. He says, "The ancient philosopher, Hindu, Persian and Greek were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward." (Walden 115).

Thoreau identified himself with Nature in his cabin at Walden Pond and thus linked himself into the Hindu. He was thinking of living a life of character in which man and god are close to each other. In such a life, man embraces the association of natural forms of life. He found nature serene and satisfied, without any question on her lips. Quoting Harivansa, Thoreau writes: "Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask. She has long ago taken her resolution. `O Prince, our eyes contemplate with admiration and transmit to the soul the wonderful and varied spectacle of this universe. The night veils without doubt a part of this glorious creation; but day comes to reveal to us this great work, which extends from earth even into the plains of the ether. As he busied himself in his daily routine, Thoreau realized that "Heaven is under our feet as well as above our heads. In Hindu thought, the mystic ideal is stated to be the realization of the Divine in its immanence and transcendence, the Divine in man and Nature, and the Divine beyond and above them. Thoreau too has understood the reality of Nature<sup>20</sup>.

There are many references to Hindu thought and literature in **Walden**. Thoreau says in the chapter entitled "Where I lived, and what I lived for," "The Vedas say, "All Intelligences awake with the morning" (Walden Page 172). Thoreau says in his concluding chapter of Walden, "They pretend, as I hear, "that the verses of Kabir have four different senses, illusion, spirit, intellect and the exoteric doctrine of the Vedas". But in this part of the world it is considered a ground for complaint if a man's writings admit of more than one interpretation. (Walden p. 344). In the same book Thoreau observes: "Nevertheless I am far from regarding myself as one of those privileged ones to whom the Veda refers when it says that `he who has true faith in the Omnipresent Supreme Being may eat all that exists' that is, not bound to unique what is his food, or who prepares it; and even in their case it is to be observed, as a Hindoo commentator has remarked, that the Vedanta limits this privilege to the time of distress'. Thoreau also quotes from the Vishnu Purana saying: "The householder is to remain at eventide in his count yard as long as it takes to milk a cow, or longer, if he pleases to await the arrival of a guest". Thoreau makes references the practices of the Yogi by saying,

"What I have heard of Brahmins sitting exposed to four fires and looking in the face of the sun; or hanging suspended, with their heads downward, over

flames; or looking at the heavens over their shoulders until it becomes impossible for them to resume their natural position, while from the twist of the neck nothing but liquids can pass into the stomach, or dwelling, changed for life, at the foot of a tree; or measuring with their bodies, like caterpillars, the breadth of vast empires; or standing on one leg on the tops of pillars,.....

Thoreau calls the Bhagavadgita "one of the noblest and most sacred scriptures which have come down to us" also compares it with the Bible and finds it "the New Testament remarkable for its pine morality; the best of the Hindu scripture, for its pure intellectuality. The reader is nowhere raised into and sustained in a higher, purer or rare, region of thought than in the Bhagavad gita". "He speaks of its" sanity and sublimity" and recalls with great pleasure the hours spent with `the stupendous and cosmoginal philosophy of Bhagavad gita, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seems puny and trivial, and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from one conceptions"<sup>21</sup>.

Thoreau believed in the Indian theory of rebirth. According to this Indian theory, life does not begin at birth and ends at death but the soul is born hundreds and thousands of times. One's birth depends on ones action in the previous existences. And if one wants a complete release from this cycle of births and rebirths, it can be attained only by a life of duty, devotion and knowledge. Thoreau was totally impressed by this idea and it is evident from his choice of the episode of the "transmigration of seven Brahmins which is narrated in the Harivansa Purana, an appendage of the Mahabharata, which he translated from the French of Langloi's : The story tells of the deeds of seven Brahmin students who, tortured by hunger, kill the cow. Kapila, belonging to their preceptor Garga and eat it. As a saving grace, they purify the meat by sacrificial incantations offering the meat to the manes, but on their return they tell a blatant lie to their preceptor that the cow was eaten up by wild beasts. They succeed in deceiving their preceptor but the inexorable law of existence punishes them by sending them to a hunter's family. By their devotion and faith in God they acquired the knowledge of their previous birth and so they died by fasting and were born as deer on the mountain Kalanjara. But since they knew their previous lives they died by stopping the drinking of water and were reborn as chakravaka. Here also they died by fasting on the bank of river and were reborn as swans in the Manas lake. And finally in 7th birth one of them who had suggested that the manes he offered the meat of Kapila in a sacrifice was born as the sons of Anuh and grandson of vibhraj and was named Brahmadata, who became the king of

Kampilya. The other two were born as sons of ministers and served Brahmadata while the remaining form were born in other Brahmin house holds"<sup>22</sup>.

Thoreau was conversant with the Indian idea of Maya, and this is evident from the passage in The Dial:

"Whatever is on earth is the resemblance and shadow of something that is in the sphere. While the resplendent thing remaineth in good condition, it is well also with its shadow. When that resplendent thing removeth far from its shadow, life removeth to a distance. The perfect seeth unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity".

Thoreau had a spiritual awareness of Nature. In his theology of nature, God was always present. "The apparent world of shadow, an integral part of being, was not to be neglected while attempting to perceive the real world of reality:

Both a conscious and unconscious life are good. Neither is good exclusively, for both have the same source.. Indeed it is obeying the suggestions of a higher light within you that you escape from yourself and in the transit, as it were, see with the unworn side of your eye, travel totally new paths."<sup>23</sup>.

Thoreau reached the goal of spiritual reality.

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh one of India's great mystics says; "To become ourselves is the one thing to be done; but the true ourselves is that which is within us, and to exceed our outer self of today, life and mind is the condition for this highest being, which is our true and divine being"<sup>24</sup>.

Thoreau's understanding of the creativity of man and the world was his interest in the spiritual and the wild, Thoreau says in **Walden**,

The wildest scenes had become unaccountably familiar. I found in myself and still find an instinct toward a higher or as it is named, spiritual life as do most men and another towards a primitive rank and savage one and I reverence them both.

Thoreau compares spiritual life with the wild life. Wild life is not wild by ordinary standards, but it is pure and innocent like that of spiritual life which is pure and innocent.

"I love my fate to the very core and rind", says Henry David Thoreau. And this attitude towards creations reflects the Indian principle of Anand (Bliss) that is the delight in existence.

Thoreau "gave a lucid view of the oneness he experienced when he wrote, "In some fortunate moment, the voice of eternal wisdom reaches me, in the strain of the sparrow, and liberates me, whets and classifies my senses, makes me a competent witness". From this, it is clear that Thoreau experienced an expansion of being, an ecstasy which led to a vision of "eternal wisdom", all from classified senses"<sup>25</sup>.

The ecstasies of Sri Aurobindo, the Indian mystic, are similar to those of Thoreau's experiences. Sri Aurobindo is a seer-poet and Indian nationalist who originated the philosophy of cosmic salvation through spiritual evolution.

According to Aurobindo's theory of cosmic salvation, the paths to union with Brahman are two way streets or channels: Enlightenment comes from above (thesis) while the spiritual mind (supermind) strives through yogic illumination to reach upward from below (antithesis). When these two forces blend, agnostic individual is created (synthesis). This yogic illumination transcends both reason and intuition and eventually leads to the freeing of the individual from the bonds of individuality and by extension. All mankind will eventually achieve mukti (liberation). Aurobindo created a dielectric mode of salvation not only for the individual but also for all mankind.

Sri Aurobindo say's those who entered the power of a more dynamic life experienced "an enlargement, a rush of new experience, a great vision."

Thoreau was very sensitive to sound. His sense of hearing had the power of intensifying his mystical perception. Hearing, also had the power to change time to eternal morning, the poet's hour. Sound was not the ultimate experience for mystical perception, for it acted as a hand maiden to silence. Silence is when we hear inwardly, soundis when we hear outwardly.

Thoreau says;

"These simple sounds relate us to the star... How can I go on.... suddenly old time winked at me... Ah, you know me, you rogue... and news has come that it was well. That ancient universe is in such capital health, I think undoubtedly it

will never die.

Sri Aurobindo in his work *The Life Divine* says "The worlds beyond exist: they have their universal rhythm, their grand lines and foundations, their self-existent laws and mighty energies - their just and luminous means of knowledge". From this it is clear Thoreau's ideas of universal rhythm were not unique.

Thoreau says "I would say to the readers of the scriptures, if they wish for a good book, read the Bhagavat geeta, an episode to the Mahabharata... translated by Charles Wilkins. It deserves to be read with reverence even by Yankees, as a part of the sacred writings of a devout people; and the intelligent Hebrew will rejoice to find in it a moral grandeur and sublimity akin to those of his own scriptures"(writings 1 p. 148).

Thoreau appreciates the philosophy of action without attachment in the Bhagavat geeta. Thoreau says in "the week "But they, who are unconcerned about the consequences of their actions, are not therefore, unconcerned about their actions".

Geeta preaches action or Karma, it preaches renunciation or Sanyasa and it also preaches wisdom or jnana and since all there are too lofty to be attained by ordinary mortals, torn by suspicion and indecision, in addition, preaches the path of devotion or Bhakti which means complete and unquestioning surrender to the Supreme Being. "The path of wisdom however is deemed the highest, because ultimately it is wisdom which shows us what is right action as also the spirit in which the action is to be performed. It is for this reason that the Gita calls "wisdom the purest thing in creation" (writing 1 - p. 144).

### **END NOTES**

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