

# Universal Harmony in the Literature of East and West



**Shruti Srivastava**

Senior Assistant Professor,  
Dept. of English,  
D.A-V. College,  
Kanpur, India

## Abstract

It is really amazing to know how cosmic vibrations travel worldwide to equip divine solution to the common problems mankind is facing or will face in future. We have seen tremendous growth in our materialistic life but we are not giving nourishment to our soul. As a result we are suffering from problems like unrest, disharmony, tension, anxiety, depression, breakdown of family life, Cut throat competition, feeling of hatred, lack of adjustment, intolerance, terrorism and what not. Interpersonal relationship is the need of hour .At this juncture celebrating 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Chicago address and imbibing the principles of practical Vedant and American transcendentalism for creating global harmony has its own value. The focus of my paper is to bring into light the universal message of cosmic unity propounded by the illumined writers of East and West. The transcendental writers of America have paved the mental soil of materialistic West for the divine ascent of Swami Vivekananda and for the coming Chicago convention. The Transcendental writers Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman remained absorbed in establishing communion with the Supreme Being to feel the cosmic energy present in each and every particle of the universe. It was in that fertile ground that Swami Vivekananda has sown the seeds of the universal message of his Master Sri Ramkrishna and imparted an awakening impulse to the spiritual consciousness of Americans. The Vedantic thought that we are parts of the huge tree and no tree can survive without receiving succor from the roots of the tree has been cherished by the writers worldwide. Our life must adopt this grand confluence in the fullest degree only then we can be a part of the world in which universal love, peace and bliss is a reality and in which all the aspirations of life are harmonized into a cohesive society. This kind of analysis will provide a ray of hope to the puzzled and exhausted man who is in search of spiritual energizer to get joy and peace back in his life.

**Keywords:** Over Soul, Transcendentalism, Self Realization, Vedant, Cosmic Unity, Peace, Bliss, Universal Harmony.

## Introduction

This paper has been designed with a view to explore the affinity between the axiological, still and spiritual East and the pragmatic, dynamic and rational West thereby opening up a fresh dialogue of spiritual confluence of the East and the West. Deeper penetrations into the literature of these two streams make me reflect that their origin may be different but they dissolve in the same ocean of spiritual wisdom. This paper has two thrust areas i.e. Transcendentalism of America and practical Vedant of India.

## Review of Literature

This paper originates from an intensive study of my research project sanctioned by UGC, New Delhi in which I tried to explore that the literature of East and West may be from different lands and time periods but depicts the central theme of universal oneness of all human beings. With this backdrop in my mind I have designed and drafted this paper.

## Aim of the Study

The Aim of this paper is to establish a healthy dialogue between the literature of East and West which convey the message of harmony, peace and bliss. The ultimate objective of this paper is to give message of universal harmony to the world. This will be my real contribution to the society.

The writers dealt with in this paper are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau as representative transcendentalists and Swami Vivekanand as chief propagator of practical Vedant. Each has brought about significant changes in the thought and culture of their own country and has delivered a message of universal significance for which they can be entitled a teacher and a prophet of humanity. These writers have become exemplary figures who created a new moral affirmation of life and a new way of spiritual integration.

There is one connecting string binding us all together not only at the physical, social, or psychological levels but more importantly at the spiritual level. Sri Krishna states in '*The Bhagvad Gita*':

"Mattah parataram nanyat kincidasti dhananjaya;

Mayi sarvamidam protam sutre manigana iva-

"('Beyond me, O Dhananjaya ((Arjun), there is nothing higher. All this is strung in Me, like a row of pearls on a thread.')

Whenever spirituality declines in the society, spiritual reformers, pure and illumined souls emerge on the scene to save the world. God fulfils his own duties by sending His messengers i.e. incarnated souls on earth to protect the world. The Americans are tired of their materialistic approach. They are looking to the ancient culture of the East for remedies. The eyes of the West have been turned towards India for spiritual diet and India is ready to provide it for all the races willingly and happily. India has always put the highest emphasis on self- realization. It has put the world away as an illusion and has regarded the soul as the sole reality. The West has concentrated more and more increasingly on the material world. The spiritual attitude has saved India from destruction. The East has always had in its temperament a greater nearness to the spiritual truth. The West, on the other hand, has a more questing eye. The spiritual wisdom of India had come to the United States through Americans who travelled to India during the colonial period, fascinated by the lure of the Orient which has earlier fired the imagination of men like Marco Polo and Columbus. The ancient system of philosophy known as Vedanta first reached the shores of America in the early decades of the nineteenth century and influenced some of the greatest writers the country ever produced e.g. Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. To the American poets of the nineteenth century, the only *Gita* available in their language was the rendering of Wilkins. The 'New England Brahmins' were interested in the scriptures of India .It has been held that the crisis which confronts the western man today is the result of his excessive misuse of nature and keeping himself away from the roots of religion. Emerson suggests: "To be pure, we must live in god, radiant & flowing, constituting the health and conservation of the universe".<sup>2</sup>

Of all the writers I have discussed in the paper, Thoreau has probably attained the most abiding equanimity. His writings perfume our mind with peace. If we wish to attain peace and stability we

must understand that poise of the soul is the essential element of inner peace. Thoreau has expressed in his journal flatly: 'I am a mystic.... the wood path and the boats are my studio, where I maintain a sacred solitude.' Walt Whitman, 'the sanyasi of America'[as called by Swami Vivekanand], became a pivotal figure for transcendentalism and his 'Leaves Of Grass' 'claimed to be the voice of the universe. Walt Whitman's mystic revelations uplift all of us from the mundane existence to the spiritual realm of soul. His 'Leaves of Grass' is called 'The New Bible' to be read by everyone for every season of the year. Whitman's 'Song of the Open Road' has an expression of his firm optimism about transforming the world. He prays the universal God to give him the power tossing the universal thought:

"Give me, O God to sing that thought,  
Give me, give him or her I love, this

Quenchless faith.

In thy Ensemble, whatever else withheld  
Withhold not from us.

Belief in plan and Thee enclosed in  
Time and space,

Health, peace, salvation, universal".<sup>3</sup>

Walt Whitman's spiritual experience reveals his cosmic love. It is the treasure of divine love that makes the spiritual seekers richer in spiritual life. We find this experience in all these writers on which this paper has been focused. Whitman wrote:

"Swiftly arose and spread around me/  
the peace and knowledge that pass/all arguments of the earth".<sup>4</sup>

In these lines Whitman referred to an experience that brought about a tremendous change in his life and art. For centuries, this state has also been the source of the spring of spiritual literature. Whatever the land, whatever the age, this awakened eye of these writers discovers the oneness of all creation and the presence of one element that permeates everywhere. Concord not discord, love not hatred, integrity not fragmentation-this is the clarion call of the writers of East and West.

With this backdrop, I have attempted to trace out the common thread of divine wisdom binding them together and making this spiritual band of writers a powerful spiritual dynamo which generates never-ending spiritual current in our whole being.

The transcendental movement was like a great new force in the lives of the young people in concord.As formulated by Emerson it became a trumpet call to action exhorting young men to follow the God within.The spiritually powerful orator and minister Channing sermonized on the divinity of the world and on God's presence within man. In 1836 Emerson wrote an essay, 'Nature', which is referred to as his 'Transcendentalist manifesto'. The belief he expressed about the self at Harvard was very similar to Vedantic's concept of Atman Brahman. The west wind had indeed driven Shelley's thoughts over the universe, and nowhere did they more truly quicken a new birth than in Concord. Emerson was another such noble and pious soul whose ideas overturn society. He asked in the very first paragraph of 'Nature': "Why should not we have a poetry and

philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?"<sup>5</sup>

Thoreau went to Walden pond on the anniversary of America's declared independence from Britain – July 4, 1845, declaring his own independence from a society that is 'commonly too cheap'. Emerson's description of unity in the poems 'The Celestial Love' and 'Wood-Notes' reflects the description of the immanence of the supreme being as mentioned in the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The essays and journals are liberally sprinkled with gems from the Vedanta teachings that appealed to him. Emerson's poem 'Brahma' reached the highest level of *Vedantism*. The sun of Vedanta in Emerson found youthful manifestation in Thoreau. Both Thoreau and Emerson loved nature as a manifestation of the 'Over- Soul'. Thoreau dipped his entire being into the Vedantic thoughts. Thoreau in his most famous book 'Walden' often spoke of his very great debt to Vedic thought, as did other members of the movement. He wrote in the sixteenth chapter how the pure water of Walden Pond was being exported to the world: "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophies of the Bhagvat Geeta since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial".<sup>6</sup>

Malcolm Cowley and others express their views, that Whitman was absorbed in the transcendental philosophy of *Vedanta* that had penetrated American Literature in the 1840's and 1850's. After reviewing Emerson's essay 'Spiritual Laws' in 1847, Walt Whitman experienced a profound transformation. Whitman acknowledged his debt to Emerson, his spiritual 'guru': "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil." In a moment of divine bliss he says: "Bathe me o God in thee, mounting to thee, / I and my soul to range in the range of thee".<sup>7</sup>

This is a prayer that the heart in tune with the infinite alone can tell. There is a significant resemblance between Whitman's thoughts in 'Leaves of Grass' and the *Upanishads* with regard to the concept of the cosmic God. Turning to the East for inspiration has been a repeating pattern in the chronicle of religious life in America. Emerson also finds a spiritual and contemplative attitude in the East as opposed to a preoccupation with materialism in the West.

The spiritual teachings of Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau represent a creative fusion of the ancient wisdom of the East with the Humanistic individualism of the West. Planting the seeds of spirituality the transcendentalists prophesied that they would germinate a new kind of human being and a new kind of human culture. Transcendentalism continued to have an impact well into the twentieth century. Transcendentalism is usually spoken of as a philosophy or as a way of life. It is more justly regarded as a gospel as it explains how to live in the realm of soul so as to have God-realization here and now. Emerson prepares his readers to travel on the path of illumination. I have attempted thus far to

demonstrate how well the sublime teachings of these writers are suited to meet the challenges of future. I find it most appropriate to conclude by quoting an illuminating passage from Emerson:

"We also can bask in the great morning which rises forever out of the eastern sea, and be ourselves the children of the light. I stand here to say. Let us worship the mighty and transcendental soul".<sup>8</sup>

A process of give and take has been going on all the time. These writers exhibit how to live in the light of the soul. This spiritualization of earthly life, of which Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau from the West and Vivekanand from the East talk about, interweaves the best of ancient and modern wisdom to create the basic belief at its spiritual heart. There is always an urge in mankind for unification. I have considered it more appropriate to delve into the literary ocean of writers like Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman & Vivekanand with a keen approach and synchronize myself fully with their vibes to get some jewels from their unparalleled classic writings. Walt Whitman's grasp of universal philosophy is intuitive. The vigorous West is turning to its 'Elder Brother' i.e. East for spiritual help. The scientific discoveries which have penetrated all parts of the Earth are making the world one on the physical ground. The compassion of Whitman has encompassed the whole earth. A new era of the marriage of continents, climates and oceans has begun and the poet has a noble vision of one world:

"Europe to Asia, Africa joined, and the new world, The lands, geographies dancing before you holding a festival/As brides and bridegroom hand in hand".

Finally shall come the poet worthy of that name / The true son of god shall come singing his songs / Nature and man shall be disjoined no more / The true son of god shall absolutely fuse them".<sup>10</sup>

The present time of rapid globalization, which is emitting both its good and its evil consequences has committed me to indulge into this kind of discussion that attempts to find the bridge between East and West. The inspiring writings of transcendentalists have influenced millions of people for a long period of time. 'Great minds think alike', this famous proverb is appropriate enough in this comparative study of literature of East and West. It has been a fruitful study for me to explore two different streams of literature flowing from different places and directions, as how they join together on cosmic level to become an ocean of spiritual wisdom and to guide mankind in centuries to come. From this paper it is clear, that the *Vedantic* thoughts are not confined to India only, but has flowed out to the West also to show that cosmic vibes are free from geographical and social boundaries, it may travel anywhere to recreate and rejuvenate the life of modern man. They have prepared the ground for a vast new movement. It was in that fertile ground that Swami Vivekananda has sown the seeds of the universal message of his master *Sri Ramakrishna* and imparted an awakening impulse to the dormant spiritual consciousness of Americans. When *Sri Ramakrishna* said that all religions lead to the same

E: ISSN NO.: 2455-0817

## Remarking An Analisation

goal, what he meant was that the spiritual paths of all religions lead to the same ultimate goal. We see that the world is aligning itself anew under a great cosmic energy. The old things and dogmas are passing away and the new things are ready to come into being. The spiritual unification of mankind is under way. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race. India's spirituality is entering West in an ever increasing manner. The spiritual energy propelling from India to the world has already taken the momentum. Moral and spiritual way of life is becoming popular among the present generation of youth in the East as well as in the West. As a matter of fact a paradigm shift is now taking place in management philosophy. Earlier we thought that spiritual development is contradictory to material development and the twain can never meet. Now the approach of management Guru's have been changed, they have realized that for a sustainable materialistic growth, spirituality has to act as the foundation of all goals. Today we are saying: "East is East and West is West, but the twain can and must meet". As Western philosophy of organizational development and materialistic approach towards life are penetrating and pouring its roots into our country, whether we will like them or not, so Indian Philosophy and spirituality are deluging, the lands of the West. Greater aspects of Eastern thinking are entering into Western management style. Industrialization, unfavourable living conditions, break down of family life, cut throat competition, demanding jobs, hectic work schedules and several other factors have made the lives of modern people very stressful. India's greatest saints & sages have emphasized interpersonal relationships but the modern man, a slave to machines, seems to have forgotten these values. Now the modern management has also realized that for sustainable growth model, interpersonal relationships are a must. To achieve this goal, every organization is focusing more and more on human resource development.

### Conclusion

However we can see a brighter world of positive forces emerging out of the chaos and we can see the golden rays of new dawn breaking upon the horizons of the present world. What the world now need is a message of universal harmony. As far as spiritual consciousness is concerned there is no discrimination between East and West. There is now an upsurge of interest in spirituality everywhere. Millions of people have taken to yoga meditation, Zen vipassana and other spiritual practices. Meditation rooms have come up in western airports and other public places. Millions of people have taken up spiritual life as a regular way of life. Today in U.S.A millions of people meditate everyday on Om. East and West are intermingled. What is needed is a change in consciousness, an inner revolution, and a change in heart. In recent years of globalization, world-wide education, the internet, rapid mode of transportation and other factors are bringing the two cultures closer together. The foundations of a new society, the spiritual society, are being laid. Aided by science and technology humanity is now poised for an evolutionary leap, the spiritual transformation of collective human consciousness. The process of communion of the

human soul with the divine soul is becoming once more a subject of thought and practice. Humanity has moved from agricultural society through industrial society to knowledge society and is now poised to take an existential leap to spiritually awakened society. The rise of spirituality has been hailed in the west as a 'spiritual revolution'. The spiritual writings of world's great writers are being read and discussed by the youths all over world with keen interest. The unity of science and spirituality, matter and spirit, East and West would be one of the most notable features of the golden age as visualized by Swami Vivekananda, who perceived spiritual consciousness as the ultimate ground of all diversity to convert into unity. In raising India it was his aim that India has to play a leading role to raise the world spiritually. There cannot be complete progress without the whole following in the wake. Materialism and spiritualism are bound to meet. East and West will shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends. This will be the future religion. East & West confluence is a planned creation of Supreme Consciousness to create a society, which has imbibed spiritual values and is well aware of the modern science. The present paper may be taken to be a contribution to the moral, philosophical, religious & spiritual questions of the world today. How to create a successful & balanced life embedded with the features of peace, progress and bliss - this we can learn from these writers. This topic is relevant even today because it illumines our soul and is a nourishment for the soul of one and all. This paper fulfils a greater purpose in providing the solutions to the toughest problems & worries of today and of tomorrow. Let us value the higher and noble ideas of these enlightened writers and put into practice whatever we've learnt from them. Our life must adopt this grand confluence in the fullest degree only then we can be a part of the world in which universal peace and brotherhood is a reality and in which all the aspirations of life are harmonized into a cohesive society, as visualized by these profound writers. The confluence of East and West is not merely an academic issue to be discussed among intellectuals in the academic corridors. It must be our special concern to breathe and live this idea in our daily life, which will certainly fulfill the objective of this paper.

### References

- Atkinson (1964). Brooks ed. *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. New York: The Modern Library, P.3
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo (1903). *The Complete Works of Emerson*. Concord ed. W. I. Boston: Houghton Mifflin., P.221
- Gilman, William H. (1962- 1982) et al. ed. *The Journal and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 16 Vols. Cambridge: Harvard UP., P.37
- Kumar, S.K.( 1962.) ed. *Leaves of Grass*. By Walt Whitman. New Delhi: Euracia Publishing House (P) Ltd., P.184
- Kumar, S.K.( 1962.) ed. *Leaves of Grass*. By Walt Whitman. New Delhi: Euracia Publishing House (P) Ltd., P.27

**P: ISSN NO.: 2394-0344**

**RNI No.UPBIL/2016/67980**

**VOL-3\* ISSUE-12\* (Part-1) March- 2019**

**E: ISSN NO.: 2455-0817**

## *Remarking An Analisation*

*Kumar, S.K.{ 1962.) ed. Leaves of Grass. By Walt Whitman. New Delhi: Euracia Publishing House (P) Ltd., P.327*

*Kumar, S.K.{ 1962.) ed. Leaves of Grass. By Walt Whitman. New Delhi: Euracia Publishing House (P) Ltd., P.325*

*Kumar, S.K.{ 1962.) ed. Leaves of Grass. By Walt Whitman. New Delhi: Euracia Publishing House (P) Ltd., P.324*

*Ranganathananda, Swami.( 2007) Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita. Vol. 2. Kolkota: Advait Ashrama,. P.224*

*Thoreau, Henry David(1964). Walden. Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, P.264*