



**Indian Influence on American English Literature** (In Special Reference to Herman Melville)

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**Abstract**

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*Indian Mythology is universally appreciated for its depth of thought and profundity of ideologies. Intellectuals, seers, prophets and literary stalwarts have always taken inspiration from Indian deities, myths, references, allusions and legends. They have not only enriched their lives and activities but also sharpened their vision and enlightened their attitudes to life and its problems. Many an English poet and philosopher like T.S. Eliot has taken a great inspiration from Indian mythology.*

*This impact has imparted a unique touch to his creations. The American poets, novelists and philosophers, like Emerson, Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Melville etc. have also been profoundly influenced by it. Herman Melville has studied, explored and employed the Indic lore and mythological references in his novels, stories and poems in order to give a better and sharper view of life. Herman Melville was gifted person with a vision He was inspired and stimulated by Indian thought and philosophy.*

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**Keywords:** Mythology, Deities, Novelists, Allusians.



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**DISCUSSION:**

Herman Melville was not a very significant person of his time, however, he was gifted person with a vision He was inspired and stimulated by Indian thought and philosophy. It sharpened his genius by giving him a broader and keener conception of life: "Having become a friend of Emerson, who opened spiritual door for him, and a member of The Transcendentalist Club, he read and re-read that year the Bhagavad Gita. In his Journal, he records 'Read the Bhagavad Gita' to a large audience in the evening, with lively discussion etc." It is a fact that he got Eastern knowledge through translations

and other secondary sources. He could have the knowledge of the Vedas and other scriptures like the Vishnu Purana etc. “But whatever, he did know of Eastern philosophy, he popularized through his conversations, lectures and later in his life, through his activities as Head of the Concord School of Philosophy.”<sup>1</sup>

Whittier also understood the principle of the ‘inner life’ at an early stage and enlightened his approach life: “As early as 1852, Emerson lent to him a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a work which appears to have stirred him deeply.” As a poet, he wrote his well-known poems like ‘The Over-Heart,’ ‘The Cypres Tree of Celyon and ‘the Dead Feast of the Kul-Folk, ‘The Khan’s Davil’ etc., they were highly colored with Indian thought and mythology. They also symbolized the impact of Indian culture on American intellectuals, philosophers and seers.

Whitman being a mystic poet and a profound visionary, was highly inspired by Indian myths and mythology. He developed his approach to life with references to Indian thought and culture.<sup>2</sup> Actually, his thinking was highly influenced by Hindu Vedantic philosophy, differently intellectuals and critics could appreciate it: “The Leaves of Grass is to be studied and understood rather as a body of mythical verse comparable to the apocalyptic utterances of the Upanishads and the Gita than as a finished work of art...”<sup>3</sup> Indian intellectuals and philosophers like Tagore and Dr. Radha Krishnan etc, had a great appreciation for him for his love of the East. Dr. Radha Krishnan observed: “Whitman turns to the East in his anxiety to escape from the complexities of civilization and the bewilderment of a baffled intellectualism.”

S.M. Pandaya one of the eminent Indian scholars of English literature critically studied and logically analysed the Epiphany of the universe in the Bhagavad Gita with reference to Whitman and his ‘Song of Myself’: “The philosophical assumption of whitman’s poetry expressed in reflection, confession, assumption, are very similar to some of the ancient Hindu poems before writing Leaves fo Grass.” The poet followed the teachings of the Gita profoundly; the ‘song of Myself’ symbolizes them and confirms the faith of Indian that God is all in all. He also presented both Goodness and Evil Passion as well as Darkness through Nature like and Indian mystic: “Whatever good or evil acts are

performed by an individual affect the future of the self.” He realized the Vedantic philosophy that the soul was to be dominated by the self, the mind by the soul and the senses by the mind for perfect integration and emancipation. “the essence of integration is detachment and renunciation.”

Whitman believed in the divine unity of the universe. He frankly observed: “My spirit has biased in compassion and determination the whole earth, I have looked for equals and lovers and found them ready for me in all lands, I think some divine support has equalized me with them.” He symbolized Indian ideals of religion and philosophy, he believed in mysticism, grandeur and spiritual enlightenment. At the same time, he was aware for the importance of human body. “If I worship one thing more than another, it shall be the spread of my own body or any part of it.” The ideology of Walt Whitman was appreciated by Asselinean Roger “The Man’s body is sacred and the Woman’s body is sacred A divine nimbus exhales from it, from head to foot.” Roger observed again: I hear and behold God in every object. Whitman believed in the transmigration of soul and transcendentalism.

Melville was conscious of both good and evil pervading the universe without claiming to give any solutions, he presented the picture of life artistically and aesthetically. His well-known phrase ‘dark Hindoo half of nature’ signifies both the beauty and ugliness of the universe. “The Hindu world as imagined by Melville is a world consisting of a bright half presided over by Vishnu and a dark half over which Siva rules.” According to Hinduism also, both good and evil spring from God, hence acceptable. “The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita repeatedly assert that there is nothing in the World which does not proceed from God.”

Melville showed his excellence and spontaneity as an artist in his masterpiece, and epic novel ‘Moby dick, ‘the background of India mythology further enriched its artistic grandeur and poetic depth. “He had mastered the art that Hawthorne’s experiments had taught him, because he had the fluidity of spirit to allay his book finally to write itself.”As an artist, Melville aimed at imparting depth to his novels and other writings, ‘Moby Dick’ got the greatest success in this respect with its Indian

background/”Whatever the literal subject of his writings, Melville’s interest is this ‘base-ment of indefinite depth.’ Under social man, solitary and gregarious and under the corporate activities-law, state-craft, commerce –which the American intellect most assiduously pursued.”

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