



Influence of India on Ralph Waldo Emerson and Transcendentalism

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63345/ijrhs.net.v13.i4.1>

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1800s, Ralph Waldo Emerson emerged as a prominent figure who led Transcendentalism as its main advocate. In early 19th century America, the movement of Transcendentalism embraced self-reliance and spiritual links between people and nature through instinctive understanding (Chopra a137). In his works **Self-Reliance** and **The Over-Soul**, Emerson shows that people possess inherent divinity and their experiences connect to all being which matches ancient Indian philosophy. His interest in Hindu texts led him to bring Vedantic concepts like Brahman to Americans, including Eastern spiritual wisdom into Western intellectual life (Chopra a137). The evaluation of Emerson's text encounters reveals how Indian metaphysical ideas formed his ideas about the soul, spiritual insights, and cosmic understanding.

The research will determine the level at which Indian philosophy shaped Emerson's writings. This research will base its findings on studying the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and

Emerson's own essays while consulting Transcendentalism and Eastern philosophy information from secondary sources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research by scholars analyzes all major philosophical and literary influences on Ralph Waldo Emerson's thoughts. Studies show that Ralph Waldo Emerson joined German Idealism, Romanticism, and Neoplatonism studies after discovering Eastern texts, especially Indian philosophy (Tomizuka 2). During the 19th century, American thinkers sought knowledge from Hindu texts as part of an intellectual movement.

Researchers have discovered similar concepts between Vedantic philosophy and the fundamental principles of Transcendentalism. Emerson's thoughts about the Over-Soul show similarities to Brahman in Hindu teachings through their understanding of universal interconnected spiritual forces (Sahoo, E11). Transcendentalist writers Emerson and Thoreau found their ideas in Hindu and Buddhist texts. Some important studies analyze Emerson's relationship to Indian philosophical traditions. In American Veda (2010), Philip Goldberg studies

the spiritual impact that Emerson's text study of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads had upon him (Luhr, 61). Emerson's transcendentalist views, as he combined Eastern and Western knowledge to form his spiritual American philosophy.

Emerson's Philosophical Influences

Ralph Waldo Emerson developed his philosophical thinking through mystical and metaphysical studies that guided his intellectual path. He explored the true nature of God and the human soul because his interest in spiritual realities brought him to study beyond traditional religion (Arif and Tariq 319). During his childhood Emerson studied Unitarianism but later changed to an individual exploration of personal spirituality (Shade 9). He found spiritual connections between religious traditions worldwide because of his belief in souls connecting with universal truth.

German Idealism had a major effect on Emerson's thinking through the works of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schelling. Through his work, Kant's understanding of universal thought matched Schelling's Absolute spiritual insights, which Emerson adopted (Campana 3). The Romantic movement influenced Emerson by showing him how to connect with nature through intuition and experience the sublime. The romantic writings of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge made Emerson see nature as a sacred revelation which matches both Transcendentalism and Vedantic teachings.

Emerson pursued Hindu spiritual texts because they supported his studies of metaphysical ideas. Through European scholars such as Friedrich Max Müller and Charles Wilkins, he discovered Indian philosophy which deeply impressed him about the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads texts. Through Hindu texts like the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads, Emerson learned that his self (Atman) is connected to the ultimate reality (Brahman), which guided his thoughts about the Over-Soul uniting all living things (Chopra a139). The essays Self-Reliance and The Over-Soul showcase his understanding of

Vedantic teachings about personal exploration and spiritual nature alongside the unreal aspects of physical life (Chopra a138). Emerson merged German Idealism, Romanticism and Indian philosophy to create a spiritual system that guided Transcendentalism in America and changed literary and intellectual traditions across the USA.

Emerson's Engagement with Indian Philosophy

Ralph Waldo Emerson began his study of Indian philosophy by reading the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads as presented in English translations. Early texts about Vedanta philosophy deeply shaped his understanding of reality and his future thoughts. Emerson embraced essential Indian teachings about Brahman, Atman, and Maya since they matched his Transcendentalist views. In his essay The Over-Soul Emerson talks about a spiritual energy that joins every living thing, which matches the Hindu belief that Brahman acts as the single highest spirit (Chopra a138). The concept of Atman in Vedanta matches Self-Reliance by showing how the human soul works independently of any external influence to discover its sacred truth. Through his work, Emerson studied Maya and described how people should look past material illusions to recognize spiritual truth. Emerson brought together Eastern and Western thinking by adding Hindu principles to Transcendentalism (Sahoo E11). Through his writing, he brought Indian spiritual teachings into US intellectual discussions while creating a foundation for future thinkers to understand multiple philosophical perspectives.

Women Empowerment

Emerson made a major step toward empowering women by seeing all minds as equal. In his essay, The American Scholar he asked readers to abandon old ways of thinking and he wanted men and women both to develop their own thinking abilities (Eiseley 2). He supported early feminist goals when his thoughts about education and leadership aligned with what women wanted. He often praised talented female friends and

had regular interactions with Margaret Fuller, who made history as the first woman editor of *The Dial* (de Galzain 18). In her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* Fuller built on Emersonian concepts by demanding equal rights for women and their freedom to make personal decisions.

His talks and writings made quiet moves against traditional male rule. He opposed traditional social roles and helped people create their own personal identity path. His thoughts influenced feminist leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, who taught women to become self-reliant and control their own decisions (Felder 22). Emerson's ideas helped create an intellectual environment that let women's rights activists develop their movement even though he himself did not work for women's voting rights. His transcendentalist teachings on personal growth enabled women to fight against social barriers, which created paths for future advocates of gender equality.

Comparative Analysis: Emerson and Indian Thought

Emerson's Transcendentalism and Vedanta share striking similarities, particularly in their emphasis on the unity of all existence, the divinity of the self, and the pursuit of higher wisdom. The fundamental truth lies beyond physical reality, according to Vedanta and Emerson, since people access it through their own mental connection to reality (Chopra 137). Vedanta Atman possesses a divine essence that links it to Brahman, and Emerson teaches people to listen to inner guidance by rejecting conventional social standards. Emerson discarded conventional religious practices to pursue spiritual wisdom because of his exposure to Indian spiritual teachings. In his perspective, nature displays divine attributes much as Hinduism recognizes Brahman as part of natural existence (Bhagavan and Prabhakar 202). These two schools show clear differences in how they teach their spiritual practices. Vedanta demands deep spiritual practices, including meditation and religious worship yet Emerson preferred personal instinct and Western ideas of personal freedom. He embraced Eastern teachings by changing them into Transcendentalist ideas

through his Western way of studying. Through his studies, Emerson helped bring Vedantic ideas to Western thought despite their separate methods of spiritual understanding.

Impact of Indian Thought on Western Philosophy

Ralph Waldo Emerson made the first bridge between Indian philosophy and Western intellectual ideas. He presented Hindu ideas from the Gita and Upanishads to American readers in his talks and writings which helped many discover Eastern spiritual teachings. Through his work, he introduced Indian spiritual techniques to Western beliefs that allowed people to leave organized religion and trust their own spiritual nature.

His exploration of Indian ideas had a substantial impact on his peers, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. Thoreau in *Walden* expressed Vedantic teachings when he recommended a nature-based life of silence and reflection as Hindu ascetics practice. Whitman's poetry in *Leaves of Grass* shows his ideas about the self being unlimited and connecting with the universe both in Emersonian and Vedantic ways (Sahoo E11). After Huxley and the Beat Generation writers embraced Indian religious traditions, they continued spreading Eastern spirituality practices into American society during the twentieth century. Emerson's ideas continue to connect Eastern and Western philosophies. Through his Indian philosophy work he both changed American transcendentalism and built a path for philosophers to exchange East-West spiritual knowledge going forward.

CONCLUSION

Ralph Waldo Emerson studied Indian philosophy, which modified his Transcendentalist writings about self-dependence and spiritual growth while showing how existence operates. He combined Vedantic insights on Brahman, Atman and Maya to teach that multiple wisdom systems make intellectual learning stronger. Through his lessons about Hinduism Emerson shaped global thinking and stimulated Thoreau and Whitman to create

their work. His research links Eastern and Western spiritual teachings by showing that Indian knowledge remains vital for current study of Literature, Philosophy, and Theology. Waldo's starting lines in the famous poem *Brahma* highlights the unifying perspective that Indian wisdom provides as it unites the action-doer and the action-bearer by immersing them in the Brahma (Hinduism believes in the world being a reflection of a ultimate reality). Transcendentalism is relevant in the modern world as it provides a path that can nourish spiritually and materialistically.

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