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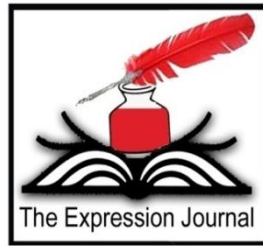
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## **A RE-READING OF “THE GREAT ODE” IN THE LIGHT OF *THE BHAGAVADGITA***

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### **Abstract**

The paper undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the spiritual dimensions inherent in William Wordsworth's "The Great Ode" through a comparative lens with the Bhagavad Gita. Employing a meticulous analysis, it elucidates the stages of the poet's spiritual odyssey, drawing parallels with Arjuna's quest for truth in the Hindu scripture. By delving into the Romantic elements of Wordsworth's poem, the study unveils the profound convergence between his poetic philosophy and Hindu metaphysical concepts. Through a methodical examination of textual evidence and scholarly discourse, the paper highlights five transformative phases within Wordsworth's ode, reflecting Arjuna's spiritual metamorphosis in the Gita. It underscores the universal pursuit of spiritual enlightenment manifested in both works, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries. Grounded in comparative literature methodologies, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between diverse literary and philosophical traditions. It underscores the shared human aspiration for spiritual transcendence, resonating across geographical and ideological divides. Additionally, the paper critically engages with scholarly insights from renowned literary critics and spiritual scholars, enriching the discourse on the intersection of literature and spirituality. Through its interdisciplinary approach, this study not only illuminates the inherent spiritual themes in Wordsworth's oeuvre but also underscores the enduring relevance of ancient philosophical texts like the Bhagavad Gita in contemporary literary discourse. Ultimately, it seeks to foster a nuanced appreciation of the profound spiritual insights embedded within these literary masterpieces, inviting readers to embark on a transformative journey of introspection and enlightenment.

### **Keywords**

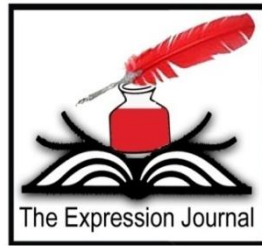
Bhagavad Gita, Hindu Philosophy, Gunas, Bhishmaparva, Dharmakshetra, Samkhyayoga, Prakrti, Sattva, Rajas, Thamas, Trigunatita.

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## **A RE-READING OF “THE GREAT ODE” IN THE LIGHT OF *THE BHAGAVADGITA***

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The paper attempts to re-read the spiritual undertones of “The Great Ode” hailed by Professor Wilson Knight as ‘Wordsworth’s most finally satisfying human work, to trace a similitude with the universal and transcendental characteristics of spiritual reality portrayed in the Bhagavad Gita through the Analogy method of Comparative approach (The Starlit Dome 37). In Name and Nature of Comparative Literature, Rene Wellek opines that Comparative Literature is a discipline that “will study all literature from an international perspective with a consciousness of the unity of all literary creation and experience” (19).

The eighteen chapters of Bhagavad Gita are included in the BhishmaParva, the sixth of the eighteen books that constitute India’s great epic poem, the Mahabharata. Lord Krishna shows his disciple Arjuna the way to transcend from the phenomenal world to the transcendental realm in the verses encapsulated from the twenty-three to forty chapters of the Bhishma – Canto of the Mahabharata.

The “Ode on Intimations of Immortality” is a celebrated Romantic poem that manifests the prime qualities of Romanticism, namely: spontaneity, spirituality, subjective experience, and an innate love for a nature-centric life of spiritual sublimation. The poem promotes a mystical approach towards nature and opens the door to experiencing a unique blend of sensuous and spiritual experiences leading to complete surrender in nature.

The term ‘Spirituality’ is defined in The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality as “conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence towards the ultimate value one perceives” (Footnote 1). Sandra M. Schneiders, Professor Emerita of New Testament Studies, defines the term as: “absorption into God” and explains further; This state of absorption must be reached through withdrawal from the physical world and from active work of individuals on the path to this type of union, must reject self-absorption and absorption in material things to reach a state of contemplation of God to the exclusion of all else (82).

According to W.H. Hudson, profound religious feeling is the most specific and personal quality of Wordsworth’s nature poetry. He finds in Wordsworth’s poetry a deep communion between man and nature: nature was for him the embodiment of the Divine spirit; and when he insists on this fundamental principle in his philosophy, that nature is the greatest of all

teachers, he means that between the indwelling soul of the universe and the soul of man, which is akin to it, spiritual communion is possible through which we may gain constantly in power, peace, and happiness (A Short History of English Literature in the Nineteenth Century 191).

The 'Ode' in eleven stanzas unveils the spiritual trajectory of the poet from a state of dereliction to enlightenment and spiritual rupture through five transformative phases of inner realization. Stanzas I to IV reveal the angst and melancholic state of Wordsworth in the midst of joyous sights of May-day. The last line of the first stanza: "The things which I have seen I now can see no more" expresses the sense of loss experienced by the poet. The poignant feeling is elaborated in the last line of the second stanza: "But yet I know, where'er I go, / That there hath passed away a glory from the earth." The poet seems to analyze his own thought patterns to figure out the reason for his inner turbulence. The lines in the third stanza of the Ode "To me alone there came a thought of grief: / A timely utterance gave that thought relief / And I again am strong" echo the mournful expressions of Wordsworth in his sonnet "London, 1802": "We are selfish men; / Oh! raise us up, return to us again; / And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power" where the poet addresses John Milton and invokes him to rejuvenate his countrymen from spiritual stagnation. The sonnet "The World is Too Much with Us" sheds light on a similar state of existential angst of the poet with greater clarity in the lines as he longs to be a pagan as an antidote to his spiritual malady: "The world is too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers / Little we see in Nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!". The last lines of the fourth stanza of the "Ode": "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" resonate with the sense of despondency of the poet and his debilitating inner conflict due to the loss of spiritual equilibrium similar to the perturbed state of Arjuna referred to in the Gita's first chapter 'Visada-yoga'.

Swami Chinmayananda in The Bhagavadgeeta elaborates the analogy between the dilemma of Arjuna in the physical battlefield of Kurukshetra and the eternal conflict in the mind of a seeker of truth. Chinmayananda considers Dharmakshetra as the spiritual field of self-development where an incessant battle is fought between the lower instincts and the higher ideals in the mind of man. The Bhagavad Gita portrays Arjuna, the Indian prince, as a true seeker of truth under the guidance of his divine discriminating intellect. At the moment of his introspective meditation, the egoistic entity within him feels deep desperation and doubt regarding the possibility of his success in the spiritual battle (38). The attempt made by Arjuna to bring consolation to himself through his own intellectual discrimination is reflected in these lines: "I do not see what will drive away this sorrow which dries up my senses even if I should attain a rich and unrivaled kingdom on earth or even the sovereignty of the gods" (The Bhagavad Gita II. 8).

Stanza V describes the second movement of the "Ode" which describes the poet's inability to derive joy due to the loss of his 'visionary gleam' or one's own spiritual self. Indian Vedic philosophy derives its origin from the teachings of the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita. Vedanta teaches the concepts of the soul known as atman and its affinity with the supreme God known as Brahman. Vedanta philosophy teaches that an individual's goal in life is to manifest one's divine destiny. The crisis of the poet is his inability to feel joy and manifest his inner grace. Wordsworth suggests the theory of the pre-existence of the human soul as 'our life's star' which sets in heaven as it rises on earth.

K.G. Srivastava opines that the line: “The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star / Hath had elsewhere its setting, / And cometh from afar:” clearly implies the Hindu doctrine of Metempsychosis expounded through the cosmic principle of karma which believes in 8400000 of yonis or embodied existences. In his perspective, the celebrated lines ‘But trailing clouds of glory do we come’ / From God, who is our home”: suggests that long passage of several births” (Bhagavad-Gita and the English Romantic Movement A Study in Influence 171).

Stanza V of the “Ode” can be termed as the Ode’s Samkhyayoga or discourse on knowledge divine as it stresses the need for close communion with God to retain one’s innate inner grace. Spirituality is the inner grace that enables one to discover the source of human grace and discard all ignorance that deludes the mind. Its objective is to utilize all the present faculties to realize the divine within. Therefore, spiritual quest is an inherent quest in all men to know the supreme power and the desire to improve the present state of existence.

The Samkhya Yoga condenses the whole philosophy of the Gita since it teaches Arjuna to know the Absolute and one’s own imperishable self: “He whose mind is untroubled in the midst of sorrows and who is free from eager desire amidst pleasures, he from whom passion, fear, and rage have passed away- he is called a sage of settled intelligence” (The Bhagavad Gita II. 56).

The third movement of the “Ode” is reflected in Stanza VI where Wordsworth experiences an Epiphany moment as he connects his own mental delusions with the strength he derives from his spiritual intuition: “Though nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower: / We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind; / In the primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be; / In the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering; / In the faith that looks through death.” These lines reflect Wordsworth’s perception of a divine power residing in the forms of nature which enriches his inner self and awakens a divine light that dispels all darkness. The line: “In the primal sympathy” is reminiscent of the divine guidance of Krishna to Arjuna to utilize his inner sense of perception to regain his lost faith.

Swami Ranganathananda in his book *The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita* elaborates on the conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna on how to overcome despondency and mental depression through cultivating an integrated personality through self-development (98). Stanza VII and VIII depict the resolution of the poet’s crisis of faith and subsequent spiritual sublimation. The lines in Stanza VII: “O joy! That in our embers / Is something that doth live, / That nature yet remembers / What was so fugitive!” suggest Wordsworth’s realization of the joy of oneness with nature through a process of spiritual recollection.

According to Wordsworth, nature with all its myriad manifestations is instrumental in developing man’s spiritual essence and for its revelation. The realization dawns upon the poet when he establishes a spiritual communion with nature as described in the line: “Thanks to the human heart by which we live, / Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears” which clearly elucidates Wordsworth’s belief that a spiritual awakening is possible only through a transcendental perception of a Universal Spirit which is synonymous with an invisible divine entity.

C. Radhakrishnan explains in *The Peepal Leaf* that the world of sensory experiences cannot provide man with lasting peace and eternal joy. He opines that the ultimate goal of man is to attain the vision of unity that imparts a sense of divine order and infallible harmony (85). Stanza IX and X of the “Ode” delineate the final movement which unveils the poet’s

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reestablished faith and hope in his belief in the immortality of the soul as expressed in the line: "In years that bring the philosophic mind."

Radhakrishnan explains that a transformation from the phenomenal to the transcendental realm is possible only when one perceives the one spirit in all animate and inanimate objects in the universe (97). Stanza XI concludes with the poet's affirmations of his spiritual attainments and his ultimate transformation through a mystical perception of nature. The triumphant closing lines of the Ode: "To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears" convey a sublime feeling of spirituality and of attaining a state of transcendental reality which is beyond temporal limitations.

Therefore, "The Great Ode" is an eloquent testimony of Wordsworth's own spiritual development from a state of depression and loss of faith to an affirmation of faith and final enlightenment. Wordsworth's constant return to nature for peace and inspiration reveals the spiritual themes in the "Ode" and his vision of a harmonious relationship between man and nature. The essence of the "Ode" rests on a divine transformation within oneself through the process of transcendence from the phenomenal to the spiritual realm of reality similar to Arjuna's quest for the ultimate reality in the Bhagavad Gita.

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