

# Indi Religious Symbolism and Postulates of Vedic Philosophy in Relation to Whitman's Poetic Miliu

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## Abstract

*Walt Whitman, renowned as one of America's greatest poets, captivated readers with his groundbreaking works that celebrated the individual, embraced the diversity of human experience, and explored the interconnectedness of all existence. This study delves into the profound influence of Vedic philosophy on Whitman's poetry, shedding light on the parallels between his poetic vision and the timeless wisdom of ancient Indian scriptures. The research begins by examining key tenets of Vedic philosophy, including the concept of universal consciousness (Brahman), the interconnectedness of all beings (Atman), and the pursuit of self-realization through transcendental knowledge (Jnana). Drawing upon Whitman's poetic oeuvre, spanning from "Leaves of Grass" to his later works, the study elucidates how these themes manifest in his verse and illuminate his philosophical worldview.*

**Keywords—** Whitman's, Poetic, Hindu, Religious and Vedic Philosophy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman's concentration on the complete uniqueness of his poetry sometimes led him to ignore or obfuscate the intellectual and literary influences that influenced his work. As soon as he released the first edition of Leaves of Grass in 1855, he started spreading the illusion that he was a "natural" poet of America. He did this by promoting the idea that he invented the term. Whitman, for example, states that he "makes no allusions to books or writers; their spirits do not seem to have touched him" in a review of his own book that was published in September of 1855. This review was written by an unknown author. 778 is the number of the poem "Leaves of Grass: A Volume of Poems Just Published."

The persistent declarations made by Whitman that his poems were the product of pure inspiration have presented critics with the task of determining the true influences that were responsible for shaping the poet's artistic style. In several cases, it has been shown that Walt Whitman took the ideas and language of others without properly recognising his obligation. One

example of this is when he used Jules Michelet's L'Oiseau in the composition of "To the Man-of-War Bird" (Allen, "Walt Whitman and Jules Michelet" 230-231). Nevertheless, finding Whitman's more general ideological allegiances during the many cross-currents that can be discovered in his poetry has sometimes proven to be a challenging effort. This is a challenge that is suitable in the case of a poet who gladly claimed to "contain multitudes."

According to Bucke, the only original Hindu source that we are certain Whitman had at this period is characterized in a vague manner as "leaves torn from a book on 'The Heetopades of Veeshnoo Sarma'" (Complete Writings 10: part V). It is possible that Rajasekhara is referring to the piece titled "Extracts from the Heetopades of Veeshnoo Sarma," which was published in the issue of The Dial (84) that was published in July of 1842. If this is, in fact, the accurate attribution, we can draw the conclusion that Whitman could have gotten almost no understanding of Hinduism from this tiny collection of aphorisms. Rajasekharaiah acknowledges that "this little item is not of very great

significance for Whitman's knowledge of Indian thought" (84). Some of the choices, actually, go against the grain of Whitman's most deeply held convictions. For example, one of the choices asserts that "the difference between the body and the qualities is infinite; the body is a thing to be destroyed in a moment, while the qualities endure to the end of the creation" (82-83). It is very improbable that Whitman's spiritualization of the flesh was triggered by the dualistic and anti-physical emotion expressed in this paragraph.

All things considered; the aphorisms do not include any of the Hindu language that was there in the first publication of *Leaves of Grass*. The fact that Whitman was familiar with Indian ideas prior to the year 1855 may be more readily explained by the fact that he read via secondary sources. Following the elimination of the several potential sources that Rajasekharaiah identified, we are left with just two different things that he unquestionably read. Both items are magazine pieces that were kept among his files (75). One of them was an essay written by J. D. Whelpley and titled "Laws of Menu," which was published in the issue of *The Whig Review* that was dated May 1845. A review of translations of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*, titled "Indian Epic Poetry," was published in the October 1848 issue of *The Westminster Review*. This article was written by an unknown author. While Whitman was interested in Hinduism, it is clear from the titles of these essays that he was also interested in Indian literature and politics.

Notably, the two books are responsible for all the Sanskrit terms that were included in the version of *Leaves of Grass* that was published in 1855. The literary genre known as "Indian Epic Poetry" includes the phrases "Brahmins," "Brahma," and "Vedas." "Laws of Menu" includes the words "Brahmins," "Brahma," and "shastra," which Whitman most likely misspells as "shastas" in the first poem of the collection. Based on this, it is not necessary for us to assume that Whitman's readings extended farther than these pieces.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Asim, Sarmad et al. (2020).** The notion of self has immense importance in both religion and philosophy. Because people have always been confused about their own worth, this has always been a thought that people have pondered. The spiritual self rules over the material body and encompasses the universe at large. Its strength has no bounds and roams freely across the cosmos. There is spiritual, intellectual, and poetical convergence

in the writings of Walt Whitman and Allama Iqbal, despite the fact that they are connected with distinct cultural and religious origins. Their diverse perspectives on the self are the most resonant shared feature in their poetry. As a symbol of enlightenment and spirituality, both make use of the self. Each work by Iqbal and Whitman, *Secret of Self* and *Song of Myself*, uniquely portrays the religious, cultural, political, and spiritual transformations that their respective countries were experiencing at the time. In order to demonstrate the similarities and differences in their views on self, this research paper will analyze the poetry of Iqbal and Whitman.

**Canayong, Niña Jen. (2019).** Focusing on (1) imagery in content signification and (2) symbolic transaction for universal freedom, this qualitative study examines the poetics in a selection of poems from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. This study utilizes a qualitative technique based on pure descriptive discourse analysis to examine the poetic language utilized in the selected poems. The research shows that (1) visual, tactile, gustatory, and auditory perceptions all contribute to the poetic imagery, and (2) the muffled man in these poems is a champion for the rights of the downtrodden and of all people everywhere. Also, the sensuous images of sight, touch, sound, and taste that Whitman uses to figuratively expand the notion of universal freedom are abundant in the *Leaves of Grass* poems that he chooses to include. Additionally, this poetry book is a compilation of odes to the natural world, the human spirit, independence, and the universal bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood. According to the research, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* poems show how symbols and images in the book's content convey ideas about freedom for all people.

**Kumar, Shailendra et al. (2020).** The Vedic literature contains some of the most basic ideas on human rights and is the central text in Sanskrit literature. The goal of this work is to uncover the human rights principles that are hidden in the Vedic scriptures. In addition, it takes a look at human rights through the lenses of ancient Vedic literature and tries to draw a link between the two. Though the components of human rights presuppose several cultural forms and are present in other civilizations, including one from the Vedic tradition, the notion itself has a clearly western origin. It would be unreasonable to expect much from writings that are 3,500 to 4,000 years old, thus it is understandable that the Vedic rights are not comparable to contemporary human rights. There isn't always a bed of roses when it comes to the connection between human rights and

Vedic literature, even if the two do have a lot in common. The discrepancies between human rights and Vedic literature are the central focus of this text.

**Pokhrel, Kabi. (2022).** This paper's overarching goal is to trace the Hindu religion back to its foundational text, the Vedas. In this qualitative research, we look at how the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads may be applied to several areas, including scientific advancements, technological spread and innovation, social and cultural progress, and religious enlightenment. The research proves beyond a reasonable doubt that the Vedas and Upanishads are the foundational texts of global scientific and spiritual understanding. Humans, according to the Upanishads, are destined to experience reincarnation until they achieve moksha, or ultimate escape from the cycle of birth, death, and ignorance. Hindu principles, which are founded on the Bhagavad-Gita, encourage ordinary people to strive for virtuousness and enlightenment as a means to a spiritual life's ultimate goal.

**Srivastava, Prem. (2017).** This study examines the intellectual and psychological underpinnings of spiritual education as it relates to Vedic philosophy. This study expands on the concept of spiritual education by exploring how Vedic philosophy has shaped many people's worldviews. The study continues by discussing the aesthetic, moral, ethical, pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and philosophical frameworks that comprise spiritual education. The purpose of this work is to make an effort to identify, investigate, assess, and critically review the main elements that have strengthened spiritual education in Vedic philosophy. The paper defines "Spiritual Education" as "the education which helps to fulfill the potentialities of the individuals through the virtues of control of mind, control of senses, celibacy, Purity, meditation, non-violence, self-knowledge, thinking, Wisdom, self-study based on Vedic philosophy and to prepare them to solve the everyday problems for life creatively and constructively in the new situation of the socio-psycho-physical environment for attaining the highest values and ideas of education, if the teachers enable to modify such kind of behavior patterns of individuals,-this is spiritual education." Spiritual education based on Vedic philosophy, however, will benefit both current and future teacher educators and society as large, according to the current research.

### III. WHITMAN'S POETIC MILIEU AND HIS CONVERSANCE WITH HINDU RELIGIOUS

## IDEOLOGIES

Throughout history, religion has grappled with the mystery of creation. Nevertheless, the concept of the triangle connection between the creator, created, and creature remains a perplexing mystery for all of humanity. Intellectuals and philosophers have attempted to 3 urrent 313 this theory via their own unique approaches throughout many nations and historical epochs. Science and philosophy provide solutions to the enigmas of this trio. Whitman, along with other great writers, has also explored this issue. However, the enigma of creation remains just as inscrutable and concealed today as it was during the Vedic era. In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman employs terms such as 'maya' ("Are you the New persuii Drawn to me" 123, 8-9), 'sudra' ("Chanting the Square Deific" 444, 29), 'Vedas and shatras' ("Song of Myself" , 78, 1104), 'Brahma' ("Song of Myself, 75, 1030), Brahmins ("Song of Myself" , 78, 1102), 'Ganges falling over the high rim of Saukara' (Shankara) ("Salut au Monde!" 141, 92) 'avatar', 'gymnosophist' ("Song of Myself" 78, 1113) and others. Upon seeing the presence of phrases related to Hindu Religion, it was inevitable for the researcher to be attracted to his works.

As a topic that encompasses timeless and widespread principles, this subject motivated him to contemplate and delve into the profoundness of Whitman's poetry. Upon thorough examination of a significant amount, it became evident that four substantial components are the commendable causes for the influence of Hindu religious ideals on his poetry. The topics discussed include the transportation of Hindu literature to America, the impact of this literature on the contemporary literary scene, Whitman's close relationship with Emerson who was knowledgeable about such literature, and Whitman's extensive knowledge and familiarity with Hindu literature. The chapter has addressed four subthemes. In order to achieve the intended impact, the viewpoints of researchers and critics from the academic community have been included into this chapter. Whitman's poetic prowess enabled him to effectively 3urrent3 Hindu religious ideologies. The Civil War in America, together with the political situation, revealed his inherent compassion for the impoverished, injured, and fleeing individuals. Throughout his dedicated phase of serving mankind, Whitman would often carry a copy of *The Bhagavadgita* (Narasingha, B.G, gosal.com).

The central focus of this research is on the element of Whitman's poetry that prominently displays the abstract concepts of human nature and fate in relation

to the timeless structure of the universe. Across many cultural contexts, humans universally adopt similar ideas and beliefs about nature and the ultimate origin and purpose of all things, both in metaphysical and material terms. Whitman asserts that religion holds the utmost significance, as evidenced by the subsequent lines: I, like many others, both leading and being led, establish a religion. I enter the fray, (It is possible that I am fated to proclaim the most resounding cries there, the victorious exultations, who can truly say? They have the potential to ascend from me and elevate above everything, each entity is not just for its own purpose, I assert that the whole planet and all celestial bodies in the heavens exist for the sake of religion.

Whitman's poem 'Starting from Paumanok' demonstrates his deep preoccupation with the religious elements of his poetic topics. The poem exhibits several subjects, with religious philosophy being a prominent feature. Whitman possessed an insatiable appetite for reading and possessed extensive knowledge of ancient religious doctrines, such as Confucianism, Brahmanism, Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the philosophy of the Middle Ages. The primary objective of this research is to examine the strong connections between Walt Whitman's poetry and the philosophies found in Hindu Scriptures. Religious ideologies in this context include the many religious and philosophical ideas derived from Hindu writings such as the Vedas, Brahmasutras (particularly the Bhagavadgita), and legendary texts like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. These texts contain the fundamental elements of Hindu philosophy.

An4 urrent 4l44n of Walt Whitman's poems indicates a strong connection between his religious beliefs and the ideas of Hinduism. This raises the question of whether Whitman was familiar with or had studied the religious and philosophical writings of the Orient. To accomplish the stated goals, certain religious ideologies and 'isms' such as 'monism' and 'pantheism' have been included within the scope of the thesis. According to Gay Wilson Alien, it remains uncertain if Whitman had any exposure to Oriental literature, despite extensive efforts by historians to investigate this matter (Gay Wilson Alien, 141). To address inquiries, the academics' perspectives and an evaluation of his poems will be enough. Many future reviewers likewise have the same perspectives as Gay Wilson Alien. Nevertheless, these perspectives are not 4 urrent 4l4 as an established consensus.

A first rationale that dispels the perplexity of these western authors is that the author must have had a deep understanding of concepts such as Maya, Brahma, and

Sudra in order to use them accurately. Furthermore, he was deeply influenced by Emerson, who had a thorough understanding of Hindu mythology and religion. Whitman himself 4urrent4l4 this influence, stating, "I was gradually building up my ideas, but it was Emerson who ignited my passion and enthusiasm" (L.G. 920). Thus yet, prominent academics have not definitively addressed the wide range of perspectives. Except for a few pieces, there has been no comprehensive research conducted on the issue for almost forty-five years. In 1964, Dr. Chari undertook research focused on Vedantic mysticism. It is noteworthy that while the translations of the Upanishads were not widely accessible until 1879, Leaves of Grass was published in 1855. In the current research, only the four Upanishads — Katha, Kena, Isa, and Mundak — that were translated and published in the final edition of Leaves of Grass have been referred to. Although further versions of Leaves of Grass were issued, the alterations mostly were to the book's structure and language rather than its underlying themes and content. The topic of Chari's thesis does not completely align with Vedantic views. Hence, there is a want for more investigation on this topic.

In his article "Hindu Mysticism and Whitman's 'Song of Myself,'" Malcolm Cowley, who previously rejected the idea that Hindu scriptures influenced Whitman, provides evidence of Whitman's discernible influence from several essays found in English and American periodicals of that era. These essays contained a significant amount of Hindu religious material. The poetry of Whitman (L.G. 919) shows a significant influence from the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads, Christopher Smart's poem "Jubilate Agno", The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, and The Philosophies of Indian by Heinrich Zimmer. Setting aside the opinions of experts momentarily, if we turn to Whitman's own works, we see that he openly acknowledges his familiarity with Hindu poetry. In "A Backward Glance over Travell'd Roads" in Leaves of Grass, I extensively studied and assimilated the Old and New Testaments, as well as various literary works such as Homer, Eschylus, Sophocles, the old German Nibelungan, the ancient Hindoo poems, and Dante's masterpieces. This endeavour proved to be more beneficial to me than mere literacy or being confined indoors, as the way one reads has a significant impact.

While "Song of Myself" is often regarded as a prime illustration of the influence of Hindu religious doctrines on his poetry, Whitman also demonstrates adherence to Hindu religious philosophy in his shorter works. In his poem "To thee Old Cause," the author establishes a

connection between cause and its subsequent repercussions. In his discourse, he refers to "Cause" as the simmering 'principle', 'latent seed', and 'centre'. Malcolm Cowley asserts that "Song of Myself" exhibits a doctrinal framework that leans towards Eastern philosophy rather than Western, including concepts like as metempsychosis and karma. To strengthen the argument of Whitman's familiarity with Hindu religious literature, the perspectives of highly esteemed academics from throughout the globe are necessary. To achieve this objective, the following pages will provide a presentation of the excerpts or a rephrasing of them. Knut Hamsun also states that Whitman has characteristics of an Indian, both in terms of language and feelings. Consequently, Whitman glorifies many natural elements such as the sea, air, soil, grass, mountains, and rivers. He consistently refers to Long Island, his place of origin, as Paumanok, its indigenous name. Additionally, he often used the indigenous term maize instead of the English word corn.

Whitman, like to Bacon, embraced the concept of encompassing "all knowledge for his province," but he may have interpreted the phrase with a somewhat different connotation. Regardless, his objective was to acquire extensive knowledge of all available information (Bucke, 38). Now the next intriguing question that arises is: Did Whitman had knowledge of the Indian religion? Richard Maurice Bucke has presented some important pieces that were previously omitted and retrieved from Whitman's home, together with the subsequent section from his manuscript, which was subsequently revised and would adequately address the requirements of our response.

I am a Russian Arctic mariner who navigates the Kara Sea. I go in a lightweight sledge pulled by dogs, known as a Kamaskatken.

The ancient Hindostanee with his gods. The mighty ancient Empire of India; that of Persia with its expeditions and conquests. The Sanskrit language encompasses old poetry and rules that have been preserved for almost three thousand years, passed down from poets of the past (Bucke, 39). Furthermore, he also himself as. I am a glance — mystic — in a trance — exaltation. (Bucke 40)

The problem of mystic and mysticism will be explained later. This chapter solely focuses on justifying the topic of the subject, demonstrating its merit for further investigation. A selection of opinions from experts throughout the globe has been chosen to advance the

chapter towards its objective. One could wonder why, despite his extensive knowledge of Indian ideas, religion, and literature, he did not provide any specific references. Whitman's own perspectives on creating poetry are enough to address the subject. Below is a citation from Bucke:

Avoid using direct quotes and refrain from mentioning other authors. Lumber the text with nothing — let it go as — lightly as a bird flying in the air — or a fish swimming in the water. Exercise caution in not excessively moderating your behaviour.

The second portion of Bucke's Notes and Fragments is titled "Notes on the Meaning and Intension of Leaves of Grass". Section 43 of the text includes a compilation of Whitman's Poems, which is referred to as "Whitman's Poems summed up" (66). Only a few sentences from this rather lengthy portion are offered here for observation:

The body and the soul are inseparable, and inside the soul lies the immortality of the body. Thus, the fundamental foundation and the features of all Whitman's work are a tremendous feeling of physical perfection, health, strength, beauty, with immense amateness, adhesiveness, a delightfully buoyant joyousness of spirit, and of immortality, not as an intellection — but as a pervasive instinct. (Bucke 66)

The author's thoughts, which occurred before writing, demonstrate not only the unity of body and spirit, but also the unity of individuals from diverse nations and regions. An exemplary illustration of this may be seen here: Subsequently, the residents of India and the progeny of the Keltic and Teutonic countries are all part of a same lineage and must have all relocated from a common homeland. The specific nation, whether it is Persia, Cashmir, or another country in the eastern region, is difficult to ascertain. However, it seems that the Whitman of Europe and the tawny man of India have a same lineage (Bucke, 78).

This section of the book offers more proof of his familiarity with eastern literature. Here, we see it as a manifestation of Whitman's extensive knowledge:

The first stages of poetry, characterised by ornate and opulent language, may be seen in works such as oriental poems, the Bible, Arabian Nights, Tales of the Genii, Ossian, and the writings of Native American Indians (such as Logan). The primordial poets exhibit a complete assimilation of their subject matter and style. The ancient poetry of the Hebrew prophets, Ossian, the Hindu singer and ecstatic, the Greeks, the American aborigines, the old Persians and



Chinese, and the Scandinavian sagas, all exhibit similarities.

Cited above is a brief sampling of his extensive breadth of reading. If you have got hundred books in your study room it is likely that you may not have read fifty out of them but if you have got newspaper cuttings it is sure you must have read them because if you like anything in the paper you cut and preserve it securely with you. One cannot write about a topic without having some understanding of it, and Walt Whitman often references India in his poetry, particularly in relation to its preliminary study, contemplation, and ideas. India embodies the practice of meditation, the exotic beauty of the East, a calm and contemplative nature, and the ancient teachings of wise principles. It also marks the origins of feudalism, with the establishment of the relationship between the lord and the serf. Many aspects of the refined and sophisticated behaviour of aristocrats may be traced back to the influence of Hindustan.

#### IV. POSTULATES OF VEDIC PHILOSOPHY

A literary study encompasses the examination of sub-themes such as the social, political, or religious conditions of a country or society. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a comprehensive understanding of other disciplines, establish suitable criteria, and construct an objective framework for evaluating the direction of the study. This is the most logical and sensible approach for development of the inquiry following the introductory chapter. This chapter aims to provide a summary of the theological and philosophical views that are prominently featured in various poems by Walt Whitman. Initially, the definitions and connotations of the term “ideology” have been succinctly explained. Furthermore, it has been implied that religion and philosophy are intricately interconnected and inseparable from each other. Furthermore, a concise summary of the six traditional schools of Indian philosophy is provided. Simultaneously, Whitman’s embrace of ideology taken from various ideas is evident at suitable junctures. Hence, there is a need to get an understanding of Whitman’s poems, especially those that are intricately linked to certain beliefs. Finally, the final section of this chapter mostly consists of discussions about the often-mentioned mysticism in Whitman’s writings. Here, we have consolidated many descriptions of the characteristics of a mystic and applied them to the extracts from Leaves of Grass.

When discussing the parallels between Whitman’s

religious beliefs and Hindu religious beliefs, it is crucial to understand the etymology and definition of the term “ideologies.” As per an online definition, ideology refers to a comprehensive set of concepts that elucidates and validates the acts and beliefs of a social, religious, political, or corporate body (businessdictionary.com). Another source states that Marx and Engels used the word “ideology” to denote what they referred to as “idealist current,” which pertains to the prevailing mode of thinking among those who are compensated for generating abstract ideas (123HelpMe.com). Another definition of ideology, obtained from a database associated with dictionary services, is as follows: “the comprehensive set of principles, myths, beliefs, and doctrines that provide guidance to an individual, social movement, institution, class, or large group” (dictionary.reference.com). The term “ideology” was introduced by Destutt de Tracy in 1796, combining the elements “idea” (in a similar meaning to Locke’s) and “-logy”. He used it to refer to one component of his “science of ideas”. He contends that ideology is the most encompassing word among these characteristics, since the field of ideas encompasses the examination of their presentation and deduction as well. Before going, it is necessary to briefly address the tight connection between religion and philosophy, since we are focusing on religious ideas. Emmet Kennedy in his book *Ideologic und Utopie*, references Destutt de Tracy in the second footnote in the chapter *The issue of “false consciousness”*:

Both being the types of belief system, religion and philosophy intersect in various areas — especially in the study of metaphysics and cosmology. In instance, a separate set of religious beliefs will typically involve a distinctive metaphysics and cosmology. That is, a religion will typically have answers to philosophical and cosmological issues regarding the nature of existence, of the cosmos, mankind, and the divine. Humans use several methodologies in their pursuit to address basic inquiries about the essence of the universe and our position within it, often known as cosmology. Religion serves as a singular approach to addressing one or more inquiries. Additional approaches include philosophy, metaphysics, astrology, esotericism, mysticism, and many manifestations of shamanism.

In his poem “*Salut Au Monde!*”, after detailing so many things from all around the globe in the final part of “*What do you hear Walt Whitman?*”, Whitman ends that as a climax to all the previously heard things. He hears— “the Hindu teaching his favourite pupil the loves, wars/adages, transmitted safety to this day from poets

who wrote three thousand years ago,”

He explicitly alludes to the old Hindu religious doctrines and philosophies outlined in the Six Orthodox Systems, Vedas, and Upanishads. Prior to the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, only four Upanishads — Ishopnishad, Kath, Kena, and Munduk Upanishads — were translated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Therefore, in this study, only these four Upanishads have been discussed, while the others have been referred to and used as supporting material. To draw parallels between Hindu religious ideals and the poetry of Walt Whitman, it is essential to possess a fundamental understanding of the Hindu scriptures.

## V. CONCLUSION

Poetry and other forms of literature from all over the world, regardless of their origin, continue to resonate with people all around the world because they capture the essence of human experience and convey timeless concepts about human nature and our place in the universe. Plenty of academics have looked into Whitman's religious themes since he was an early player in this field. All of his religious studies lead him to the core concepts that underpin his poetry, but his familiarity with Hinduism was particularly extensive. A number of important Hindu religious concepts are absent from Whitman's inculcation of Hindu religious ideologies, including the concept of Guru, the significance of the cow, the pativrata (a devout wife who is fully committed to her husband), the four ashrams (a life divided into four sections, each with its own 25-year focus on a different goal), yajnyas (the ritual of offering sacrifices to fire for the gods), and others. Those significant tenets of Hinduism have not been alluded to by Whitman.

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