ARTICLE

Hindu Presence in Canadian Modernism: Lawren Harris and the Bhagavad Gītā

Kayla Radhika Miller

Kayla Radhika Miller is an independent scholar, yoga teacher, and artist currently based in Victoria, BC. She holds an MA in Art History from Carleton University.
—hello@kaylaradhika.ca

Cet article reconsidère les œuvres abstraites réalisées par Lawren Harris au milieu et en fin de carrière, en soutenant que la philosophie yogique hindou et plus particulièrement les enseignements de la Bhagavad Gītā ont exercé une influence significative et directe sur sa pratique. S'inscrivant dans les débats actuels sur la pensée sud-asiatique au sein du modernisme occidental, cet essai propose une étude de cas canadienne ciblée, fondée sur une analyse visuelle et des recherches archivistiques de première main. En établissant des corrélations entre son exemplaire annoté du commentaire de William Q. Judge sur la Bhagavad-gītā (conservé au Musée des beaux-arts du Canada), et les carnets de notes, les essais et les peintures de Harris, l'autrice démontre comment les enseignements de la Gītā ont influencé à la fois les objectifs et les méthodes de Harris. Sans nier ses autres influences théosophiques et modernistes, cette étude identifie une source primaire longtemps négligée dans les travaux consacrés au peintre en même temps qu'elle recadre ses abstractions comme un engagement concret dans la pratique yogique.

Lawren Harris acquired fame as a leading member of the Canadian Group of Seven and was most praised for his landscape paintings from the years 1918 to 1930 (see, for example, *Montreal River*, 1920, fig. 1). After the last Group of Seven exhibition in 1931, Harris continued exploring the land as a subject of interest but spent much of his later life developing increasingly abstract works. In a study of Harris's late-career paintings, Dennis Reid noted that there is great ignorance about thirty-five years of work, half a lifetime of one of Canada's greatest artists.[1] Harris's movement from recognizable forms to an attempt at revealing their unifying and underlying essence is often associated with the painter's interest in Theosophy. In this essay, I argue that Harris's abstractions not only served his spiritual vision of art more fully but also attest to the presence of Hindu philosophy in Canadian modernism.

fig. 1 Lawren S. Harris, *Montreal River*, 1920. Oil on paperboard, 27 × 34.7 cm. Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

A widespread curiosity with Eastern traditions arose during the first half of the twentieth century, as many Western artists grew keen to explore their inner world through themes of spirituality. While connections between modernism and spirituality have been noted by many scholars,[2] research into the specificities and significance of these interactions is still in its infancy. In his critique of the "groundbreaking" and "comprehensive"[3] *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Partha Mitter explores the assumptions of Western hegemonic universality and argues for a need to archive and explore moments of intercultural exchange in the context of Modernism.[4] More recently, explorations of encounters between the European avant-garde and Asian religious practices have demonstrated that there are "important traces of Hindu and Buddhist thought in Western Modernism."[5] Examples cited include Henri Matisse's *La pose hindoue* (1923), with its use of yogic postures inspired by Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* (1896), an important text on modern transnational yoga, as well as Paul Gauguin's *Femme Caraïbe* (1889), with its incorporation of Buddhist mudras based on photographs from the Borobudur temple friezes.

In the case of Lawren Harris, his curiosity around inner life and spiritual wisdom was largely sparked and nurtured through the Theosophical Society, which was founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky. The Society was a foundational movement in disseminating spiritual teachings from the East through the Upanishads, Vedas, and Buddhist texts, as well as those of Zen and Islam (including Sufism), which were then interwoven with occultism, esotericism, science, and the neo-spirituality of the West. Blavatsky was one of the atypical Westerners of the time who did not view Eastern religions and spiritual traditions as primitive but celebrated their valuable wisdom.[6] Kalpana Sahni has demonstrated that "the complexity of these interactions and their outcomes needs to be explored further for a better understanding of Modernism."[7] This paper is an exploration of one such interaction: the influence of the Hindu epic *The Bhagavad Gītā* on the philosophy and paintings of Lawren Harris.

The facts of Harris's engagement with Theosophy are well established in the literature. In brief, he came into contact with its teachings as early as 1909, associated with the Society in 1920, and served as a formal member of the Toronto Lodge of the International Theosophical Society in 1924.[8] While there has been an abundance of research into Harris's relationship with the Theosophical Society as a whole,[9] Theosophy cast a wide net, with influences spanning global, cultural, and temporal zones, and Harris's specific and direct influences particularly with the *Gītā*, as a unique text within the Theosophical net, is an area of research that has been largely overlooked. Harris himself wrote in a letter to Emily Carr around 1933 that, "The whole Theosophical paraphernalia is so immense and intricate and various that all we can do is to take what at the time suits us."[10] As we will see, Indian spirituality and Hindu thought, as expressed in the *Bhagavad Gītā,* and the Theosophical commentary surrounding it, specifically suited Harris.

It is known that Harris read, daily, a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā* by Irish-American Theosophist and lawyer William Quan Judge (1851–1896), whom Harris considered a hero.[11] In fact, in a 1982 CBC interview with violinist Harry Adaskin, who was a friend of Harris's, Adaskin recalls Harris claiming: "You know I've always felt that I was a reincarnation of Judge."[12] While Harris was born in 1885, eleven years before Judge passed in 1896, the statement nonetheless demonstrates the strong resonance Harris felt with Judge's perspective and writing. Harris's second wife, Bess Housser Harris, with whom he would practice yoga and meditation in the mornings,[13] went so far as to claim that the ancient philosophies of the East were a motivating power in Harris's work and contained a spirit which he "imbibed" as he created his canvases.[14] An annotated copy of Judge's commentary on the *Gītā* from Harris's personal library is now located in the library collection of the National Gallery of Canada (fig. 2), yet has remained, until now, sidelined in the Harris literature.

fig. 2 William Quan Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad*-Gita, SCS1 HARR J83 N68 1918. Library of Lawren S. Harris, National Gallery of Canada Library Collection, Ottawa. Photo: author.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ AND JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

The *Bhagavad Gītā,* thought to have been written some time between 500 and 200 BC, also called "The Song of God," is an episode in the larger Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*. The *Gītā* takes the form of a dialogue between Arjuna, who is a warrior, and his charioteer Krishna, who represents God or the Supreme Self.[15] The dialogue is set on a battlefield in Kurukshetra[16] where Krishna provides spiritual guidance to Arjuna as he is overcome with despair upon the recognition that he is having to wage war against his own family. There are two commonly established interpretations of the text. The first is the orthodox Hindu viewpoint that condones war for the warrior class, as it is their moral duty to fight for a just cause.[17] The second, more common interpretation is from the mystic perspective and views the text as an allegorical battle in which Arjuna must fight not his worldly family but his own lower self, bounded by attachment and personal identification.[18] These two interpretations, however, are not inherently opposed to one another. Krishna does not dismiss the reality of an external battle; rather, he reveals to Arjuna that his role is part of a much larger picture, that action is inevitable, and that the true question is not whether to act but how to act from a place of deep understanding, devotion, and selfless service.

The popularity of the text is in large part due to Krishna's spiritual guidance being offered not to a monk or a spiritual recluse but to a warrior living in the world. Unlike other spiritual traditions in the Theosophical web, such as Buddhism, which can often promote disengagement from the world as a path to the Divine, the *Gītā* offers a path to the Divine through action.

Judge, who, like all Theosophists, was interested in the thread of Truth that he believed was woven through all great traditions, held the *Bhagavad Gītā* in particularly high regard. He published a magazine titled *The Path* from April 1886 to March 1896, with the intention of sharing explorations of various Theosophical topics. Articles were published monthly, with epigraphs frequently citing the *Gītā*.[19] In March of 1887, Judge published *A Year on the Path*—an article which, reflecting on the first year of publication, names the *Gītā* specifically with high esteem amidst the range of philosophies and religions explored under the umbrella of Theosophy:

> Theosophists have many different views of how the path should be followed, but none of them disagree with the statement that there must be one Truth, and that no religion can be called higher than Truth. We therefore have pursued, as far as possible, a course which is the result of the belief that the prevalence of similar doctrines in the writings and traditions of all peoples points to the fact that the true religion is that one which will find the basic ideas common to all philosophies and religions. We turned most readily and frequently to the simple declarations found in the ancient books of India, esteeming most highly that wonderful epic poem—the Bhagavad-Gita.[20]

It was in the following year, 1888, that Judge first published, across multiple articles, his commentary on the first seven chapters of the *Gītā*. In 1918, this commentary would be published as a book, with the remaining chapters completed by one of Judge's students. It is this publication of the commentary that lives in Harris's library archive.

When it comes to the lens of Judge's commentary, he aligns most strongly with the mystic reading of the text, as he advises readers to apply the teachings of the text to their lives: "We see that the fight is to be fought by every human being, whether he lives in India, or not, for it is raging on the sacred plain of our body. Each one of us, then, is Arjuna."[21] On another occasion, he writes, "All of us are brought to this study by our own request made to our Higher Self, who is Krishna."[22] However, as Judge writes in the opening of his commentary, the *Gītā* is not an epic of conventional morality but of deeper Self-realization, alluding to the somewhat difficult-to-face reality of the orthodox reading:

> We are face to face with ourselves. The weak man, or he who does not care for Truth no matter where it leads, had better shut the book now. Unless he can go on reading the poem with the fixed intention of applying it to himself, it will do him no good whatever.... It is indeed the book of the great mystery; but that problem was never solved *for* anyone; it must be settled and solved *by* each one *for himself*.[23]

To be clear, Krishna is not promoting violence, rather He is guiding Arjuna to recognize that, being born a warrior, his role in the battle is part of a greater cosmic order which operates beyond human conceptions of right and wrong. He is leading Arjuna through the battle against his limited, personal identification *and* teaching him how to approach his role of restoring balance in the world with true Self-knowledge, devotion, and service to the greater cosmic law. Harris clearly understood this dual project when he reflected directly on Arjuna's early doubt and despondency in his 1933 essay "Theosophy and Art": "In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, when Krishna addresses Arjuna, when Arjuna is despondent and cannot face the struggle with the powers of darkness; he encourages Arjuna to be up and about his task, because such despondency was wholly inappropriate to the unconquerable Self that would fight within him."[24]

This passage makes clear not only that Harris was familiar with the *Gītā*, but also that he was engaging with and contemplating its teachings. The *Gītā* does not advocate for withdrawal from the world or the forces of nature, which Harris recognized (as I will explain), but instead teaches all readers how to engage with the realities of life from a place of clarity and recognition of a deeper, Eternal Self. As Eknath Easwaran writes in the introduction of a modern translation of the text, it is "a handbook for Self-realization and a guide to action."[25]

As the traditional chapter titles put it, the *Gītā* is *brahma-vidyayam yogashastra*—a textbook on the supreme science of yoga.[26] The kind of yoga[27] taught in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and worked through in Judge's commentary is outlined in terms of three primary paths, or *mārga-s,* which derive from Hindu Vedantic

fig. 3 Lawren S. Harris, *Abstract (War Painting)*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 107 × 77 cm. Hart House Collection HH1949.001, University of Toronto. Gift of the artist, 1949. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid. Courtesy of Art Museum at the University of Toronto.

practice: Jñāna Yoga (the Yoga of Knowledge), Bhaktī Yoga (The Yoga of Love), and Karma Yoga (The Yoga of Selfless Service). Drawing from the *Bhagavad Gītā* itself, Judge's commentary from Harris's library, Harris's personal notebooks, essays, and his 1943 canvas *War Painting* (fig. 3), I argue that Harris's artistic philosophy was inspired by these yogic principles—especially those of devoted and selfless action in service of the Eternal. As Harris himself affirms, "You cannot sever the philosophy of the artist from his work.... Without the philosophy, or in other words the man, in the work of any great artist, you have nothing."[28] This study will thus add an illuminating Canadian perspective to current conversations around the convergence of Indian spirituality and Western Modernism.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING HARRIS'S COPY OF THE COMMENTARY

The presence of a copy of Judge's commentary, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gītā,* in Harris's personal library raises important questions that merit acknowledgment. The inscription records the copy as being a gift from Harris to Fred and Bess Housser in 1921, suggesting Harris was already sufficiently familiar with and fond of the text by that point to share it with close friends. That fact that Fred Housser did not retain the book, as it was eventually returned to Harris and Bess's possession, most likely around the time of their marriage in 1934, suggests that the deeper resonance with the text belonged to Lawren and Bess rather than Fred. It is also worth noting that this is the 1918 publication of Judge's commentary, and that Judge himself authored only the first seven chapters with the remaining eleven completed by a close student. The annotations do not appear to reflect any clear shift in engagement across these two sections.

The poor physical condition of the book is consistent with Larisey's claim that Harris read it daily. Throughout the text there are numerous annotations—underlines, stars, arrows, and a few marginal notes—rendered in both pen and pencil, suggesting multiple readers and likely more than one period of active engagement. Inside the back cover, page references have been noted for specific themes such as meditation and the nature of the Perceiver, indicating the book was used as an active devotional and intellectual reference rather than a passive read. The annotations throughout the commentary cluster around key thematic concerns that are directly traceable to Harris's published and unpublished writings: the eternal Self as distinct from personal identity, the necessity of selfless action and devotion, the dangers of material attachment, and the resistance to mere intellectual engagement with spiritual teachings. Examples will be drawn in detail throughout the paper in direct relation to Harris's own writing, where the parallels between the most heavily marked passages and his documented philosophical and artistic sentiments are undeniable. While Harris rarely names the *Gītā* explicitly in his published writings, it does not diminish this evidence—a case which rests on correspondence and known engagement rather than direct citation.

THE SEARCH: HARRIS'S EARLY YEARS OF SUFFERING AND SPIRITUAL EXPLORATION

Given the 1921 gifting date of the commentary to Fred and Bess, Harris likely would have been reading Judge's commentary on the *Gītā* and contemplating its teachings as early as 1918.[29] Harris's journals from the years of 1910–14 reflect a yearning for spiritual understanding and transformation which he would reap from Judge's commentary on the *Gītā* for decades to come. He clearly outlines his intention for integrated spiritual study when he writes in his journal: "I am here now to seek the truth and teach it; love the good and do it; imagine the beautiful and become it."[30] At this point in his life, Harris felt bound, longing for Truth, yet aware of what he felt to be an "illusory" perspective, he nevertheless encouraged himself: "unhasting, unresting, follow the quest—force through the enchanted forests of illusion, tear away the bias of personal desire which keep you back."[31]

Harris was certainly no stranger to suffering. In 1918, he experienced a nervous breakdown for reasons which are not known for certain, but for which Peter Larisey offers three likely causes: military service, two major deaths, and dissatisfaction with his art.[32] From 1916 to 1918, Harris worked as a member of the army, taking on tasks such as that of a gunnery instructor with the role of designing shooting targets. In 1917, his close friend Tom Thomson was mysteriously killed while paddling in Algonquin Park and in 1918 his brother Howard was killed overseas in the war. The turmoil of these events, paired with artistic confusion of the time, left Harris in a state of "terrified tossing" and "a victim of moods."[33] In Judge's commentary on the *Gītā*, he tells readers that:

> The *Gītā* teaches that the causes of misery do not lie in conditions or circumstances, but in the mistaken ideas and actions of the man himself.... A better knowledge of the nature of man and the purpose of life is needed; as this is acquired, the causes of misery are gradually eliminated. No greater charity can be bestowed upon suffering humanity that right knowledge that leads to right action.[34]

At a time when Harris felt himself to be a terrified victim of circumstance, the possibility of acquiring right knowledge which could dispel his misery ignited a one-pointed search for the Eternal and unshakable within him, for, in the context of the *Gītā*, Krishna.

Judge continues in his commentary: "The possessor of this knowledge will be filled with divine sympathy for all sufferers [and having] no thought of

reward will simply do all that he can and the best he knows how to do to raise the sufferer to a higher plane of thought and action."[35]

In the following sections of this paper, I address how "right knowledge" as taught in the *Gītā* shaped Harris's life and led to "right action." To do so, I offer an introductory analysis of Jñana and Bhaktī Yoga as a parallel with Harris's personal journey, followed by a more in-depth look at the *Gītā's* teachings and Harris's implementation of Karma Yoga with an emphasis on the decade surrounding the Second World War, during which he moved from Sante Fe, New Mexico to Vancouver due to the financial regulations of the war preventing the transfer of funds across the border. Where the First World War contributed to Harris's nervous breakdown, he approached the Second World War with a steady inner assurance and a strong sense of purpose. By focusing on his written and painted work around the years of the Second World War, I demonstrate how Harris's ability to approach the storms of life with "right knowledge" and "right action" reveals not only his reading of the *Gītā*, but his living of the *Gītā*, as Judge recommended.

JÑĀNA & BHAKTĪ YOGA: KNOWLEDGE AND DEVOTION

The "right knowledge," which Judge refers to as having the power to eliminate misery, is not a knowledge that can be learned or acquired in the same way as mathematics or history. Rather, the knowledge referred to by Judge (and Krishna) is knowledge of the eternal Self, which is recognized through inquiry into one's deepest nature, and the path of Jñana Yoga centres this inquiry. In Harris' personal copy of the *Gītā* commentary, annotations (by Harris or his wife Bess)[36] emphasize where Judge quotes Krishna explaining the eternal Self directly:

> Know this, that that by which all this universe is created is indestructible.... As one abandons worn-out clothes and acquires new ones, so when the body is worn out, a new one is acquired by the Self, who lives within. The Self cannot be pierced by weapons or burned by fire; water cannot wet it, nor can the wind dry it. It is everlasting and infinite, standing on the motionless foundations of eternity.[37]

This recognition of an eternal Self within and behind the changing forms of the world is a persistent thread in Harris's notebooks, paintings, and writings. In 1945, after coming into deeper lived experience of this insight, he wrote: "Visible nature is but a distorted reflection of a perfect world and the creative individual viewing her is inspired to perceive within and behind her many garments that which is timeless and entirely beautiful."[38] Krishna outlines a method of practice to attain such a realization, guiding Arjuna to "Seek Me alone,[39] attain singleness of purpose.... When your mind has overcome the confusion of duality, you will attain the state of holy indifference."[40] Harris abided by this practical guidance, writing to himself again in 1945: "By transcending the personal, attain this greater Self which alone can give us vision into the whole. Meditation and thought on the greater Self is the avenue of approach to the high impersonal great soul of man."[41] Drawing on this understanding, Harris wrote extensive contemplations on both the importance of seeking and knowing the eternal Self, and the dangers and sorrows faced when caught up in the temporary costume of personality, its selfish desires, and the allure of material pleasures alone. There is an emphasis, in his annotations on Judge's commentary, on statements like, "Personality is always an illusion, a false picture hiding the reality inside,"[42] and, "The outer self cannot succeed in the battle."[43] Through meditative inquiry and application of the *Gītā* to his lived experience, Harris sought to move through the obstructed perspective of the lower self to contact the eternal Self—Krishna. This pursuit helped Harris shape his ideas of beauty, which he expressed in his 1933 essay "Theosophy and Art" with the essential argument that we don't understand

fig. 4 Theosophical Key to the Meanings of Colours, from Annie Besant and C.W. (Charles Webster) Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms,* abridged ed. (Wheaton, IL: Theosophy Pub. House, 1901; repr., 1975), frontispiece.

anything if beauty, the Self, is not part of the equation.[44] For Harris, beauty *is itself* "the underlying, informing spirit of the universe [...] a unifying power," and that with a real experience of beauty, an impulse to devotion arises.[45] Devotion to and love of the Eternal is at the heart of the Bhaktī Yoga path which, as we will see, shaped Harris' use of colour and form.

Harris's engagement with Jńana Yoga (Knowledge) as well as Bhaktī Yoga (Devotion)—via a deeper understanding of the pitfalls of a selfish identification, the presence of the Eternal, and material versus spiritual devotion—is visually expressed in his appropriately titled *War Painting* of 1943. Michael Stoeber, Professor of Theology at the University of Toronto, has linked Harris's colour palette to the colour chart outlined in *Thought-Forms* (fig. 4),[46] a 1901 Theosophical text written by Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, which explains the correspondence between certain colours and shapes and the thoughts and feelings they engender. Like Harris, Besant, who headed the Theosophical Society after Blavatsky, had an affinity with Indian spirituality. She travelled extensively to India, studied Sanskrit, and offered books, talks, and translations of important texts to a twentieth-century Anglophone audience after building meaningful connections with the Brahmin elite.[47] Additionally, Besant and Leadbeater were both esteemed clairvoyants, and their collaboration on *Thought-Forms* would eventually be referred to as "a Theosophical artist's manual."[48]

War Painting, a geometric abstraction painted five years after Harris co-founded the Transcendental Painting Group in 1938—a group dedicated to a more spiritual vision of abstraction—features a sphere, half hidden by layers of towering angular forms. Harris's palette is largely dominated by a foreground of burnt browns, deep oranges, and dull yellows with harsh flashes of bold red. Of these colours, Besant and Leadbeater write: "Clear brown (almost burnt sienna) shows avarice.... Hard dull brown-grey is a sign of selfishness—a colour which is indeed painfully common.... Deep orange imports pride of ambition, and the [...] dull yellow ochre implying the direction of such faculty to selfish purposes. Anger will show as flashes of lurid red from dark brown clouds."[49] While Stoeber has linked Harris's abstract palette to the *Thought-Forms* colour chart, I would add that it was the *Gītā's* teachings which ultimately guided his decision on *how* to use it. Selfish desire and anger, for example, arise in the dialogue of the *Gītā* when Arjuna asks Krishna by what force one is bound to selfish deeds, by what force one is moved as the lower self. Krishna's response is none other than selfish desire and anger.[50]

While these colours and corresponding feelings dominate the majority of Harris's *War Painting* and may allude to the material and personal drive of the lower self which Arjuna is at war with, we also see a stark contrast in the pale purple-white of a sphere, which suggests a deeper presence. According to Besant and Leadbeater, "A mixture of affection and devotion is manifested by a tint of violet, and the more delicate shades of this invariably show the capacity of absorbing and responding to a high and beautiful ideal."[51] A primary practice in the path of Jñana Yoga is called Atma Vichara, often translated as "Self-Inquiry." This practice, which Harris referred to as meditation or thought on the

greater Self,[52] is an inquiry into this deeper spiritual presence, a sense of one's immutable existence beyond the ephemeral nature of personality and selfish desire. The sphere in *War Painting* may then be understood as the high and beautiful ideal (Krishna) laying behind the garments of lower pride and ambition—which Krishna is encouraging Arjuna to recognize. Among the thematic page references recorded on the back cover of Harris's copy of Judge's commentary is "The Perceiver (p. 150)"[53]—a passage in which Judge quotes Krishna describing the Self as "indivisible, indestructible, and of a different nature from the visible," which Judge clarifies as "the Divine Spark of Spirit, Life, and Consciousness."[54] The sphere at the centre of *War Painting* can be read as a direct visual counterpart to this concept: the still, pervading presence behind and within the turbulent forms of the lower self's battle. Additionally, *Thought-Forms* explains that the vibrancy of the colours is typically a measure of the strength of the feeling. The subtlety of the purple and the saturation of browns and yellows therefore send the message that while the eternal Self, the refuge and solution to Arjuna's personal trouble, is ever-present, the battle rages on when one's focus is on material possession and power. In 1933, Harris explained that his paintings are "a high training of the soul."[55] They offer a way of freeing one from such-material limitations and a way of prompting, through the impacts of thought-forms, recognition of and refuge in the higher Self.

In addition to Harris's use of colour, form also plays a key role in serving this liberating intention. In the 1930s, he began transitioning from representational painting toward abstraction. As he moved deeper into Theosophy and Yogic practice, he shed the "garments of nature" and began visually pursuing, more explicitly, "right knowledge" of the essence behind them. One recurring

fig. 5 Lawren S. Harris, *Mount Lefroy*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 133.5 × 153.5 cm. Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

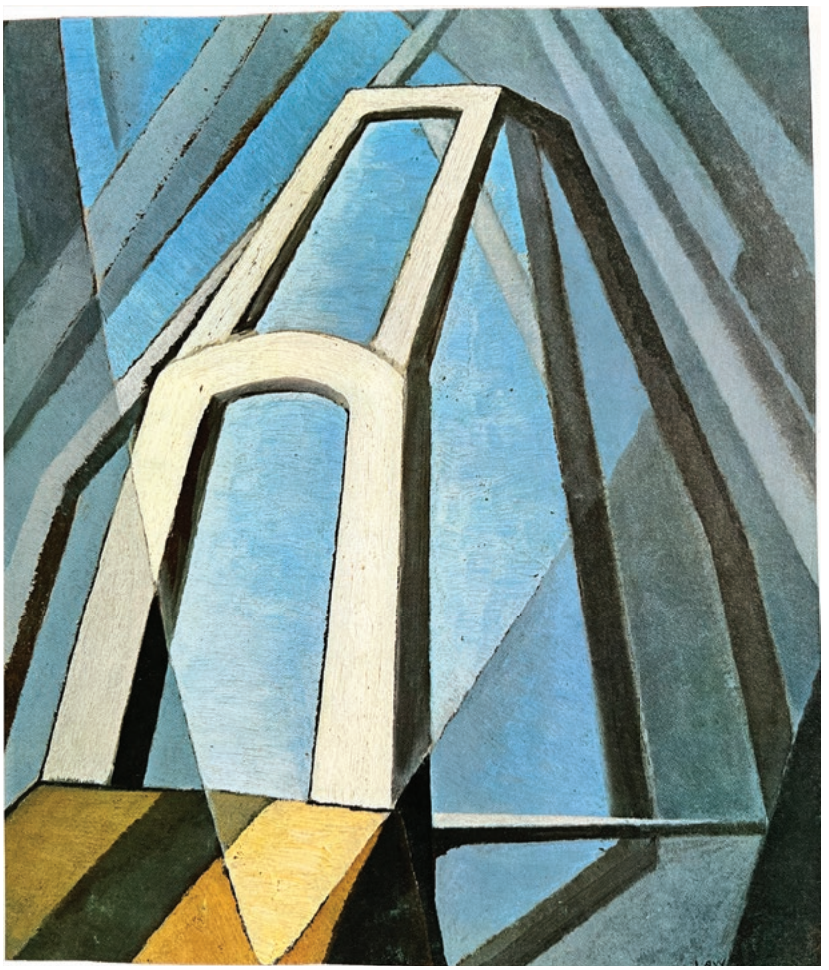
fig. 6 (left)
Lawren S. Harris, *Painting No. 4 (Abstraction 94)*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 129.5 × 93 cm. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

fig. 7 (above)
Upward Rush of Devotion, from Besant and Leadbetter, *Thought-Forms*.

motif in Harris's work is the upward-facing triangle. In the 1930s, this triangle often appeared as the simplified form of mountain peaks or icebergs, as seen in *Mount Lefroy* of 1930 (fig. 5). In his abstract works, the blue triangle softens its tie to the material world; it becomes loftier in its character, as seen in *Painting No. 4 (Abstraction 94)* of 1938 (fig. 6). As outlined in *Thought-Forms*, an upward-facing blue-white triangle, seen in *Upward Rush of Devotion* (fig. 7), represents altruistic human devotion.[56] For Harris, this would be a one-pointed, selfless devotion toward Spirit, a practice of Bhaktī Yoga, as explained in chapter twelve of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, "The Way of Love." Krishna says: "Living beyond the reach of 'I' and 'mine' and of pleasure and pain…firm in faith, with all their heart and all their mind given to me—with such as these I am in love." This passage suggests that, for those who practice Bhaktī Yoga and devote their energy and attention to the universal pervading spirit of all, the presence of Divine Love is felt with them, as them. This call and response of devotion can be seen in Harris's 1937 *The Bridge* (fig. 8), which also employs the upward-facing, blue-white triangle. Here, it emerges from the dull yellow tone in the bottom left of the canvas; it functions as a transition from personal and selfish identification toward altruistic human

devotion. *The Bridge* also contains a downward-facing blue-white triangle, which descends from the highest point of the canvas as if to pierce the "personal." This reversed-triangle motif strongly resembles the visual description of *Response to Devotion* found in *Thought-Forms* (fig. 9). *The Bridge*, therefore, is "bridging" the personal and the Eternal through the call and response of spiritual devotion to bring about a sense of union, which is the essence of the word "Yoga." Harris writes that the arts are themselves "a bridge between the possessive, acquisitive, profit-making instincts of mankind and the free realm of the spirit."[57] He thus further emphasizes art's role in the spiritual evolution so central to his life.

Michael Stoeber, in his analysis of the relation between Harris's work and the Theosophical interpretations derived from *Thought Forms*, has made the persuasive observation that in Harris's 1943 *War Painting*, not only are the upward-facing triangles *coloured* with selfishness, but the tips of the triangles are cut off to indicate a "twisted or broken sense of devotion."[58] In 1945, Harris warned that, "To be wholly immersed in the mailings of men, in the vociferous shambles of earth life, to hear only its cries and slogans, kills out for the time all possibility of apprehending that which is eternal."[59] *War Painting* therefore offers a warning against the fallacy of material devotion, against the upholding of selfish ideals and personal will, and also functions as a reminder of and guidance toward another option: the remembrance of the eternal Self softly dwelling at the centre. While this twisted sense of devotion dominates the foreground of the painting, an upward-facing, blue-white triangle emanates from the central sphere, as if made of light itself. In the annotation of Judge's commentary, a strong emphasis was



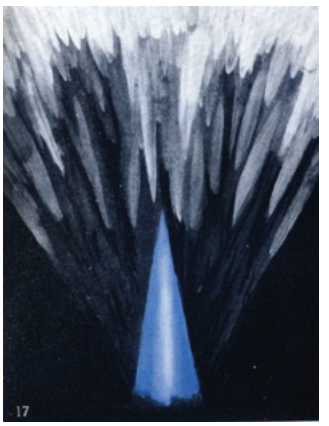
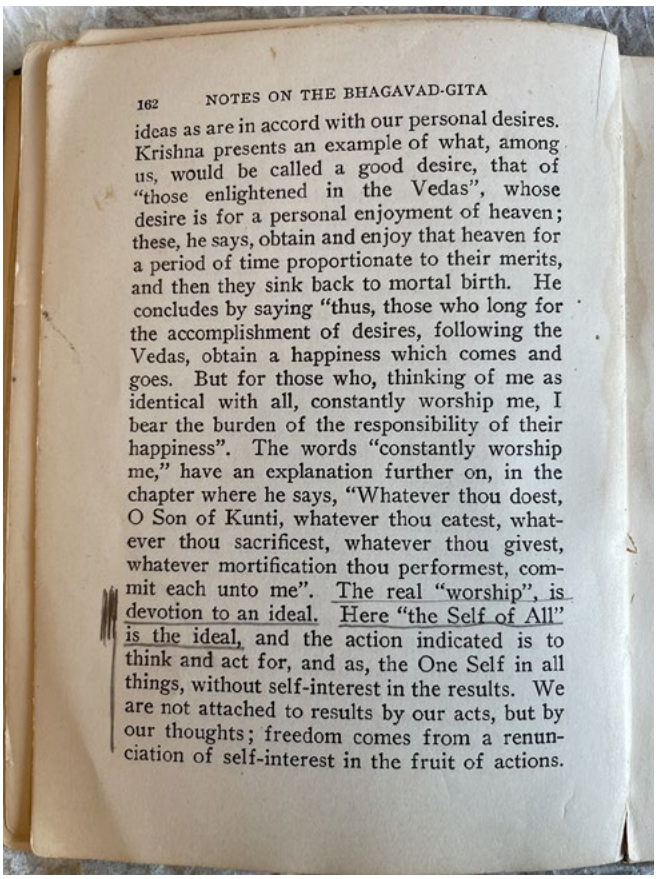


fig. 8 (left)
Lawren S. Harris, *The Bridge*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 38 × 30.5 cm. R.G.P. Colgrove Collection. From *Lawren Harris*, ed. Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969), 5. Photo: author.

fig. 9 (above)
Response to Devotion, from Besant and Leadbetter, *Thought-Forms*.



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ideas as are in accord with our personal desires. Krishna presents an example of what, among us, would be called a good desire, that of "those enlightened in the Vedas", whose desire is for a personal enjoyment of heaven; these, he says, obtain and enjoy that heaven for a period of time proportionate to their merits, and then they sink back to mortal birth. He concludes by saying "thus, those who long for the accomplishment of desires, following the Vedas, obtain a happiness which comes and goes. But for those who, thinking of me as identical with all, constantly worship me, I bear the burden of the responsibility of their happiness". The words "constantly worship me," have an explanation further on, in the chapter where he says, "Whatever thou doest, O Son of Kunti, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou sacrificest, whatever thou givest, whatever mortification thou performest, commit each unto me". The real "worship", is devotion to an ideal. Here "the Self of All" is the ideal, and the action indicated is to think and act for, and as, the One Self in all things, without self-interest in the results. We are not attached to results by our acts, but by our thoughts; freedom comes from a renunciation of self-interest in the fruit of actions.

fig. 10 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 162. Photo: author.

added to a statement which attests to the necessity of this altruistic and spiritual devotion: "The *real* [emphasis added] worship is devotion to an ideal. Here, the Self of All is the ideal, and the action indicated is to think and act for, and as, the One Self in all things, without self-interest in the results"[60] (fig. 10). Selfless service and offering one's actions to the Divine, while relinquishing attachment to the results, is taught in the *Gītā* as the practice of Karma Yoga.

KARMA YOGA: SELFLESS SERVICE AND THE ARTIST'S ROLE IN WARTIME

One of the core values of Hindu spirituality that is less emphasized in many other traditions explored within the Theosophical web is the significance and practice of service. Service or "right action" is at the forefront of both the *Gītā's* teachings and Harris's understanding of the highest purpose of art. In an undated essay, "Love and Art," he cautions his reader about the use of the term "service," because in twentieth-century Canadian culture it is often misunderstood as merely helping the less fortunate.[61] If service is understood this way, there is, for Harris, "no harmony, no fundamental understanding of life at all. It is merely a gesture."[62] In contrast, selfless service in the practice of Karma Yoga does not refer to any specific outward action but rather to inner orientation. True selfless service means acting in alignment with the highest, over one's selfish desires, without attachment to results. Harris echoes this sentiment when he writes that his paintings are concerned with "the source of action rather than the action itself."[63] As Krishna instructs Arjuna in the path of Karma Yoga, He emphasizes that one must act in accordance with their dharma (duty, role, or responsibility) within the larger cosmic order. For Arjuna, this means fulfilling his duty as a warrior, not out of personal desire but as an upholding of the order of the universe, offering intention and outcome to the Divine. It is worth reiterating here that Arjuna's battle is one waged to restore order and justice rather than to glorify violence—and Harris's known pacifist sensibility may reflect his attunement to this distinction rather than a departure from his engagement with the text.

Harris, in his own dharmic way, engaged in devoted action aligned with his roles as painter, writer, and teacher of the spiritual in art. For Harris, art was a means to battle the limitations of the lower self, to bridge the perceived gap between the lower and higher forces within, not just in his own life but in the lives of those who viewed his works as well. He contemplated this practice of service when he wrote: "The service of high art...works by identification with that which is highest and most enduring."[64] He was thus suggesting that art aligns with yoga's power to "yoke" the lower self with the Eternal.

In his essay "Spirituality and Art," Harris further clarifies the selfless and devotional nature of genuine artistic service: "Works that are spiritual

communicate and with *no strings attached* to whatever they give. They are *beyond reward or indulgence* they are like the true lover who constantly gives back to the beloved his or her entire being disclosed and enhanced by love."[65] He painted with the intention to serve the Divine, to uphold his role in the cosmic order, without aim or reward. While Harris was prolifically painting pure abstractions for the last four decades of his life, they were (and still are) largely misunderstood. By the time he passed away in 1970, only ten of his abstract canvases were in Canadian art collections.[66] Of those ten, eight of them were gifts, which evidences an intention beyond the reaches of fame, pride, or personal gain. It also suggests that, despite the deeper truth Harris felt his abstractions were offering, he was still being defined by the success of his early-career representational artworks.

Contributing as well to the misunderstanding of Harris's deeply spiritual paintings, which sought to pierce the material, was the strong emphasis on materiality by his contemporaries. In the early 1940s, when Harris was exploring art as a high training for the soul, critic Clement Greenberg was writing that modern art, distilled to its basic elements, had no *spiritual* life in itself; that art was only of service through its materiality. Greenberg claimed there was no spiritual source, underlying truth, or divine manifestation that could take place in a work of art beyond mere aesthetics.[67] Scott Shields writes in his essay about the Transcendental Painting Group, which Harris co-founded in 1938, that their transcendental art "diverged from formally focused abstraction in its rejection of pictorial 'self-sufficiency,'" and that their art was "not a destination but a passage,"[68] communicating something far greater than materiality and even the subjectivity of personal emotion.

Through his engagement with texts like the *Gītā*, Harris brought a deeper mystical experience to Canadian modernism. He felt spiritual paintings were not only inspired *by* spiritual transformation but could actually *evoke* the experience of spiritual transformation. In the last year of his life, he wrote in a notebook about the power and potential of artworks to serve as a catalyst for expanding consciousness when viewed through the lens of meditative contemplation as opposed to mere intellectual analysis:

> Really, the pertinent question is not "what does it mean?" but "what experience does it contain?" For a real work of art exists to engender a certain kind of life within us. Its power is to evoke, to enhance, to develop depths and heights of experience we have not had, or to develop those experiences we have already had to greater depths of understanding. Its function is to enlarge our consciousness, to sharpen, intensify and deepen our awareness, and to increase our range of experience.[69]

Harris is here suggesting the potential of spiritual art to free the viewer from a limited sense of self and the bondage of worldly attachment. He also makes his intention clear in "Spirituality and Art," writing: "The entire function of art that is spiritual is to extricate the responsive onlooker from the limitations of time and place and the delusions of earth and thus free him to adventure in spirit, and to enlarge and clarify his inner consciousness, until conviction of the reality of the spiritual world is disclosed within him."[70]

Harris recognized that artwork could serve the needs of humanity through the expansion of consciousness toward a state of liberation. In Judge's commentary, annotations emphasize the line: "If we expect to have His help, we must apply ourselves to the work of helping humanity—to the extent of our ability."[71] Harris did just that through his paintings as well as his work as an advocate, writer, and spokesperson for the spiritual life of art. Harris, encouraged by Judge's commentary, applied the teachings from the *Gītā* to his life on and beyond the canvas. In his own words: "Inseparable from the recognition of pure

beauty as the underlying, informing spirit of the universe, goes also the recognition of that beauty as a power at work."[72]

Beauty, the Self, is not a distanced and isolated experience, but a living force whose nature is to sublimate into itself via the expansion of consciousness. The artist's role in this process, as Harris understood it, was that of a transmitter:

> His chief difficulty as an artist, as a transmitter of what for us may be a transcendent experience, is in creating an equivalent in terms of his art to embody however faintly his vision. For his vision which exists outside of cause and effect or the processes of time, has to be embodied or expressed in the realm of cause and effect in such a way that the receptive onlooker may be lead from tangible and analyzable facts and relationships toward the intangible and abstract source of his communication.[73]

This understanding of the role of the artist suggests that his paintings are not the end, but the means which hold the power for expansion of consciousness from the material to the spiritual. Harris's ideas are clearly opposed to Greenberg's modernism, according to which avant-garde painters "derive their chief inspiration from the medium they work in."[74] Harris, by contrast, suggests that colour and form extend beyond mere representation or existence on their own terms and operate as a vehicle for the power of Beauty in order to bring a more embodied spiritual life to modern Western painting. What Harris is "transmitting" is that which has been taught in the *Gītā*. His means, however, derive in large part through his engagement with the Theosophical text *Thought-Forms*, and other contemporary spiritual artists such as Kandinsky. The result is an amalgamation of Hindu spirituality and Western modernism.

How Harris's works function as a "transmitter" of "transcendent experience" also follows from the ideas put forward in Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms.* They write that each person has an astral body, which is coloured by their thoughts and feelings, and which is subject to alteration in the presence of waves of emotion brought in by another person or object. While these modifications are, for the most part, brief and temporary, "every such rush of feeling produces a permanent effect: it always adds a little of its hue to the normal colouring of the astral body."[75] In other words, each time someone is exposed to a certain thought-form, its vibration becomes stronger and has a more lasting impact as the astral body "is getting into the habit of vibrating at that especial rate."[76] Abstraction lent a particular potency to Harris's attempts to transmit and evoke this living vibration because of its unique ability to churn and uplift one's inner experience, as opposed to simply representing something for the mind to intellectualize. In his 1954 disquisition on abstract painting, he clarifies the difference between representation and evocation with the example of saintliness:

> The old masters denoted saintliness by the nimbus and adoration by upraised eyes and the upright palms of the hands held together and raised in front of the breast; whereas if any abstract artist today were capable of doing so, he would embody the very spirit and quality of saintliness or devotion throughout the whole painting by the way in which he would use lines, colours, shapes and form, and serene, all-encompassing light. The result would not be a convention, a description, but an evocation, an all-over-embodied experience.[77]

While he emphasizes the potency of colour and form themselves, their materiality is not his chief inspiration, but a tool for a much larger purpose. The evocation is an inner experience of expansion within the hearts and minds of the viewer and does not remain bound by the edges of a canvas or even the emotional world of a personal identity.

Looking more deeply through this lens of Harris's daily reading and implementation of Judge's commentary on the *Gītā* and his engagement and application of the Theosophical artists manual that is *Thought-Forms*, I argue that *War Painting* was not painted to simply tell of the battle between lower and higher forces but actually was Harris's attempt to evoke the experience of the lower being sublimated in the ecstasy of the Higher. *War Painting* is particularly powerful because it is not explicitly evoking altruistic devotion; it is not "wholly Divine" and because of this it offers the experience of transformation through its inclusion of lower and higher forces. "The recovery of our spiritual consciousness, which not only includes all lesser phases of consciousness but also relates and harmonizes them within itself," Harris writes, "is the prime necessity of life and should be the purpose of art."[78] *War Painting* includes the lesser phases of consciousness against which Arjuna battles in the *Gītā*, as well as the presence of the Higher (Krishna) which harmonizes, or "yokes," into itself. "Krishna points out," Judge writes, "that the lower self is to be raised up by the help of the higher."[79] Harris's canvas is the battlefield where the viewer is invited into the expansion of consciousness, if they engage with it openly.

To be visually engaged with these works does not mean to analyze them intellectually but rather to be in the presence of the painting with an availability—an open-heartedness. Harris believed that intellectually analyzing spiritual artworks is like trying to find Consciousness by dissecting the body[80] it does not work. He writes that the spiritual intelligence of aesthetics is "of the soul as distinct from that of the person" and it is an "attitude which discloses the Divine in us. It is indefinable and can only be known when it is lived in terms of direct experience."[81]

While this reading of Harris's influences and application can be applied to other works throughout his post–Group of Seven career, such as *The Bridge,* he felt that *War Painting* was especially significant. In 1947, Harris was approached

fig. 11 *Lawren Harris: Paintings 1910–*1948, exh. cat., 1948. Published by the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario). Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada Collection. Photo: author.

by the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) about mounting the first-ever retrospective exhibition of his work, and Harris requested that *War Painting* be the cover of the exhibition catalogue (fig. 11).[82] While certainly not his most popular work, *War Painting* was clearly a piece of great importance to him. It embodied the *Gītā*'s teachings, in which Harris was engaging daily, not only for inner spiritual expansion but for service in facing times of external conflict, specifically during the Second World War.

Like Arjuna in the *Gītā*, whose duty compelled him to act with greater insight and detachment, Harris confronted the realities of the Second World War through his art by anchoring his vision in service to the Divine. Judge writes in his commentary that Arjuna was born, by the law of nature, exactly where he should be to have the experiences needed for his expansion of consciousness. He also reminds readers that equal-mindedness "can only be acquired through right performance of duty, and not by selecting the duties and environments that please us," another phrase underlined in Judge's commentary.[83] From the terrified tossing and oscillating moods that tormented Harris back in 1918 to the unshakable inner presence of his experience later in life, the *Gītā*'s teachings and Judge's commentary put him in touch with right knowledge and right action.

Harris writes on this practice of right performance of duty in the context of his incarnation as an artist during the war in an essay titled "The Artist's Role in Wartime": "The artist will render his greatest service not by ceasing his creative activity but by fulfilling it."[84] This fulfillment of duty is also reminiscent of Harris's earlier writing, which addressed Arjuna's despondency at the beginning of the *Gītā* as wholly inappropriate to the Spirit that would act within him. The artist, too, is not to give up in the face of conflict, but to engage in right action at all times, especially in war. Art creates, says Harris, "the necessary spiritual background to give meaning to our daily affairs" and "is one of the greatest agents we have to reunify the mind and heart."[85] His late-career abstractions are grounded in his vision of a greater cosmic order and testify to his faith in the experience of Beauty as a power at work to instigate more just and true worldly action regardless of the battles one may be facing: allegorically, literally, or both.

Additionally, Harris's writings on the artist's role in wartime address his ultimate intention for a national art's borders to disintegrate at the feet of the universal. This perspective challenges the popular narrative of his "nationalist" identity (which denies the complete fruition of his career in his later work) and brings a deeper spiritual tone to Canadian modernism. He writes:

> A national art of any kind as a power at work in our midst, works two ways. Firstly, it increases national consciousness and unity and it brings us an understanding of the harmonizing power of the spirit of the arts and [secondly] this National art, if it is to perform its function fully must be a doorway into the art of all other countries and ages. For the real secret of the great and enduring power of the arts is that at their highest they are universal and timeless. They thus make for the ultimate unity of all mankind.[86]

Harris felt this Eternal presence in his art to function so fully that he could hardly call his late-career works "Canadian," at least when it came to the experience they contained. When asked in 1945 by fellow artist Isabel McLaughlin if his earlier works could be placed beside his abstractions, he said: "No, I would not feel that my present stuff could be included in a collection of Canadian paintings. The present work is not Canadian in subject matter."[87] This shift is artistically expressed in his 1950 canvas titled *In Memoriam to a Canadian Artist* (fig. 12), which, especially when considering the title, can be read as a fiery memorial to the nationalist badge he had worn during the formative years of his career and as a potent symbol of his later immersion in the universal.

fig. 12 Lawren S. Harris, *In Memoriam to a Canadian Artist*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 101.6 × 101.6 cm. R.G.P. Colgrove Collection. From *Lawren Harris*, ed. Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969), 42. Photo: author.

As potent as Harris felt his work (and all work that is spiritual in nature) to be, he also felt that true spiritual expression in the arts will always, inherently, fall short. In his essay "The Arts and Divine Discontent," he wrote: "The real basis and urge of the arts is divine discontent—which simply means that there is no possibility of achieving absolute satisfaction—for the arts *at their best* contain no more than the possibility of a reflection of the divine creative spirit."[88] Therefore, he did not wish his works to be considered static representations of enlightenment, transformation, or spiritual values, but glimpses of something which must be followed beyond the confines of the canvas and felt in one's direct experience.

CONCLUSION

Examining the influence of Hindu spirituality on the life and work of Lawren Harris—through the lenses of Jñāna, Bhaktī, and Karma Yoga, as outlined in the *Bhagavad Gītā*—does not negate his broader engagement with Theosophy. Where existing scholarship has tended to frame Harris's spiritual life broadly under the banner of Theosophy, this study demonstrates the value of looking more closely at the specific texts and teachings that animated his practice within that wider framework. Theosophy as a movement was expansive and syncretic—it

does not point to a single source, practice, or philosophical lineage, but draws from many. To understand Harris simply as a Theosophist is to see him through a lens too wide to bring his individual vision and inspirations into focus. It is in the particulars of his engagement with a specific text—which he engaged with daily, annotated, and gifted to those closest to him—and the specific philosophical framework it offered, that the deeper sources of his creative vision become legible.

This study does not claim the *Gītā* was the singular or exclusive driver of Harris's vision. Theosophy's vast web of influences was genuinely formative, and Harris drew from many sources throughout his life. What it does claim is that the *Gītā*, via Judge's commentary, was demonstrably one of those sources, and a significant one at that. An artist need not cite a text frequently for it to shape the deepest currents of their thought and practice. The density of Harris's engagement with this particular set of teachings, his strong resonance with Judge, and the remarkable correspondence between the commentary's most heavily marked passages and Harris's own documented preoccupations make it a source that Harris scholarship can no longer afford to overlook—and one that adds a distinctly Canadian chapter to the growing body of scholarship tracing the influence of Indian philosophy and aesthetics on Western modernism.

Naman P. Ahuja clarifies that "not all abstraction is derived from spirituality; and, when present, not all spirituality is Indian"[89] to underscore the importance of studying direct influences over generalized connections where they are present. This study answers the call by Almqvist and Belfrage to re-examine Indian influences on modernism by offering not only a closer reading of one Canadian artist's engagement with Hindu thought, but also a more meditative method of perception necessary to understanding Harris's late career works and the spiritual presence he invested in them. For Harris, the purpose of spiritual artworks is "to extricate us from personal considerations and [enlarge] our vision so they may lead us to deal with pressing problems in a more just and true light,"[90] an orientation whose timelessness permeates his body of work and extends beyond his immediate context in twentieth century Canada.

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ENDNOTES

1 Dennis R. Reid, *Atma Buddhi Manas: The Later Work of Lawren S. Harris* (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985), 10.
2 For example, see Maurice Tuchman, ed., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985*, exh. cat (Los Angeles County Museum of Art/Abbeville Press, 1986).
3 "Art Since 1900: Modernism · Antimodernism · Postmodernism," *Thames & Hudson*, accessed March 30, 2025, https://thamesandhudson.com/art-since-1900-9780500239537.
4 Partha Mitter, "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531–48.
5 Naman P. Ahuja and Louise Belfrage, "Preface," in *A Mediated Magic: The Indian Presence in Modernism 1880–1930*, ed. Naman P. Ahuja and Louise Belfrage (Mumbai: Márg, 2019), 7.
6 Isaac Lubelsky, "Theosophy as Mediator," in *A Mediated Magic: The Indian Presence in Modernism 1880–1930*, ed. Naman P. Ahuja and Louise Belfrage (Mumbai: Márg, 2019), 75.
7 Kalpana Sahni, "Modernism: Some Left-Out Narratives," in *A Mediated Magic: The Indian Presence in Modernism 1880–1930*, ed. Naman P. Ahuja and Louise Belfrage (Mumbai: Márg, 2019), 68.
8 Michael Stoeber, "Theosophical Influences on the Painting and Writing of Lawren Harris: Re-Imagining Theosophy through Canadian Art," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 28, no. 1 (2012): 82.
9 See James King, *Inward Journey: The Life of Lawren Harris* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2012); Peter Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land: Lawren Harris's Life and Work* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993); Reid, *Atma Buddhi Manas*; and Stoeber, "Theosophical Influences."
10 Reid, *Atma Buddhi Manas*, 26.
11 Lora Senechal Carney, "Lawren Stewart Harris, Europe, and the Bodhisattva in the Next Room," *Canadian Painters in a Modern World, 1925–1955: Writings and Reconsiderations* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 5.

12 Harry Adaskin, interview by Nancy Ryly, CBC, 1982, quoted in Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land*, 186n22.
13 King, *Inward Journey*, 245.
14 Lawren S. Harris, (1969) mock-up, 1969, MG 30 D208 Volume 13, File 3, Lawren S. Harris fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
15 "Self," in this context, refers to the higher Self, beyond individual manifestation or personal identity. Lowercase "self" refers to the individual incarnation.
16 A strip of land near Delhi, between the Indus, the Ganges, and the Himalayan mountains.
17 *The Bhagavad Gita*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Eknath Easwaran (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 75.
18 Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 75.
19 As an example, in 1888, January, February, March, April, June, and August publications all featured passages from the *Bhagavad Gītā* in their epigraphs.
20 William Quan Judge, "A Year on the Path," *The Path* 1, no. 12 (March 1887): 354, https://Theosophy.world/sites/default/files/Theosophical%20Publications/The%20Path/1887/the_path_v1_n12_march_1887.pdf.
21 William Quan Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita* (Los Angeles: The Magazine Theosophy, 1918), 17, SCS1 HARR J83 N68 1918. Copy from the Library of Lawren S. Harris, National Gallery of Canada Library Collection, Ottawa.
22 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 19.
23 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 28–29.
24 Lawren Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14, no. 6 (1933): 165.
25 Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 48.
26 Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 48.
27 The Sanskrit word "Yoga" derives from the verb root "yuj" which translate as "to yoke, conjoin" and refers to a practice and state which unifies the individual with the universal.
28 Lawren Harris, *Lawren Harris*, ed. Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969), 10.
29 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, inscription "Fred + Bess / Housser / from Lawren / May 1/21." Harris's personal copy, published in 1918, was shared with Fred & Bess in 1921 suggesting early engagement with the text, before making it back to his personal library from which it was gifted to the National Gallery Library by his daughter Margaret Knox in 1993.
30 Lawren S. Harris, notebook, n.d. (ca. 1910–14), MG30-D208 Volume 2, File 6, Lawren S. Harris fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
31 Harris, notebook, n.d. (c. 1910–14).
32 Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land*, 35–36.
33 Harris in a note to Macdonald, quoted in Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land*, 34.
34 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 221.
35 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 221–22.
36 Harris and his second wife Bess were often reading and practicing together, so it is likely that annotations vary between the both of them, emphasizing points they would be discussing, contemplating, and implementing.
37 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 43–44.
38 Lawren S. Harris, The Federation of Canadian Artists, notebook, 1945, Lawren S. Harris fonds, MG 30 D208 Volume 2, Folder 1, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
39 Judge's commentary emphasizes that the personal pronouns spoken by Krishna such as "Me" and "I" are referencing the eternal Self of All and are not to be mistaken as relating to one individual.
40 Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 95.
41 Harris, The Federation of Canadian Artists, notebook.
42 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 109.
43 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 129.
44 Lawren S. Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14, no. 5 (1933).
45 Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14, no. 5 (1933): 131.
46 Stoeber, "Theosophical Influences," 89.
47 Lubelsky, "Theosophy as Mediator," 76.
48 King, *Inward Journey*, 55.
49 Annie Besant and C.W. (Charles Webster) Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, abridged ed. (Wheaton, IL: Theosophy Pub. House, 1901; repr., 1975), 22–23.
50 Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 109.
51 Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 24.
52 Harris, The Federation of Canadian Artists, notebook.
53 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, back cover.
54 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 150.
55 Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14, no. 5 (1933): 129–30.
56 Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 36.
57 *Lawren Harris*, ed. Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove, 4.
58 Stoeber, "Theosophical Influences," 93.
59 Harris, The Federation of Canadian Artists, notebook.
60 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 162.
61 Lawren S. Harris, "Love and Art," n.d., MG30-D208, Volume 6, File 13, Lawren S. Harris fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. This essay was likely written between 1930 and 1950, given its level of spiritual maturity and relationship to dated publications exploring similar themes. The file contains what appear to be a few drafts of the same idea, yet also a continuous flow of a central idea. For this reason, the page numbers in the file repeat and do not follow a chronological order. I have left them out to avoid confusion.
62 Harris, "Love and Art."
63 Lawren S. Harris, "Spirituality and Art," n.d., MG30-D208 Volume 6, Folder 27, Lawren S. Harris fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
64 Harris, "Love and Art."
65 Harris, "Spirituality and Art." Emphases mine.
66 Reid, *Atma Buddhi Manas*, 10.
67 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 9.
68 Scott A. Shields, "The Transcendental Painting Group: And Significant Abstraction," in *Another World: The Transcendental Painting Group*, ed. Michael Duncan (DelMonico Books, 2021), 29–31.
69 Harris, (1969) mock-up.
70 Harris, "Spirituality and Art."
71 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 125.
72 Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14, no. 5 (1933): 130.
73 Harris, "Spirituality and Art," 7.
74 Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 9.
75 Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 11–12.
76 Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 11–12.
77 Lawren Harris, *Abstract Painting: A Disquisition* (Toronto: Rous and Mann, 1954), 15.
78 "Spirituality and Art," Lawren Harris Archive, 15.
79 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 129.
80 Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14, no. 6 (1933): 162.
81 Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14, no. 6 (1933): 161.
82 King, *Inward Journey*, 294.
83 Judge, *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, 131.
84 Lawren S. Harris, "The Artist's Role in Wartime," n.d., MG30-D208 Volume 4, File 19, Lawren S. Harris fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. While undated, this essay was likely written some time around 1940, as Harris mentions being back in Canada (after living in New Mexico).
85 Harris, "The Artist's Role in Wartime."
86 Harris, "The Artist's Role in Wartime."
87 King, *Inward Journey*, 293.
88 Lawren S. Harris, "The Arts and Divine Discontent," n.d., MG30-D208 Volume 4, File 20, Lawren S. Harris fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Emphasis added.
89 Naman P. Ahuja, "Modernism's Muse," in *A Mediated Magic: The Indian Presence in Modernism 1880–1930*, ed. Naman P. Ahuja and Louise Belfrage (Mumbai: Márg, 2019), 24.
90 Harris, "Spirituality and Art," 14–15.