

Spiritualism in the Poetry of Walt Whitman

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Abstract: *Walt Whitman poem 'Song of Myself' is the National Epic of the United States. A number of influences operated upon him and went into the making of his genius. A faith in the dignity of the individual and inequality and fraternity are the very life blood of his poetry. He was possibly the first known American poet who read the Hindu scripture and philosophies very keenly. In the poetry of Whitman, death remains a primary concern. He has a very deep and penetrating understanding of death. Walt Whitman, the great American poet attained the spiritual communion by meditation. Walt Whitman the grew American mystic after his spiritual quest undergoes a mystic trance realization of his self with the communion of his own individual self with the cosmic self.*

Keywords: Quakers, Brahmin, Death, Yoga, Cosmic-Self.

Walt Whitman lived during a crucial period in the history of his country. His country, like him was endeavoring to find its identity. There was a kind of relations between them that makes the poem 'Song of Myself the National Epic of the United States'. A number of influences operated upon him and went into the making of his genius. It gave a shape and direction to his poetic mission. His parents influenced him first and foremost. His mother was from a family of quakers whose main teaching is that in each person there is an inner light which is his duty to heed. His father was a free thinker with radical democratic ideas. His future radical democratic convictions and mother's Quakerism left an indelible impression went a long way towards making him a demo erotic poet. A faith in the dignity of the individual and inequality and fraternity is the very life blood of his poetry.

Emerson had a tremendous influence upon Whitman. It would be a greatest tribute to Emerson to consider him as the 'Spiritual Guide or Guru' to Whitman. No doubt Emerson led Whitman to the oriental world

for high spiritual quest. The term -spiritual quest implies for the search for divine knowledge which is possible only through religion. Each religion has its own way to lead the same eternal destination union of one's own individual soul with the divine. According to Vedas "spiritual quest pertains to the realization to the individuals soul identity with the Brahm." This realization is only possible through the conquest of senses that is physical appetites and worldly dresses. Knowledge of one's own self is indispensable in spiritual progress.

He was possibly the first known American writer who read the Hindu scriptures and philosophies very keenly. He inspired Thoreau and from his library he supplied him the required material about the Hindus and the Asians people. Emerson and Hinduism exerted a profound influence on Whitman. During Whitman's early days there was in America especially in New England, a great yearn for Indian religious ideals. The Hindu doctrines of Maya, Karma and the immortality of the soul are frequently alluded to in Emerson's writings and these doctrines contributed

greatly in making Whitman a great "Oriental American Transcendentalist."

The doctrine of Maya gets its due in the poetry of Walt Whitman. The word Maya denotes a kind of magical power and is initially used in the *Rigveda*. It is widespread belief in India, the god of rain and head of all the demi gods, assured different forms through the help of Maya. Maya according to Vedantists is the inexplicable power of the supreme Lord or Paramasakti by which is produced the illusion of the creation, presentation and dissolution of the universe. But there is no Maya from the stand point of Brahman which is all light and knowledge. One identified with Brahman does not see even a trace of Maya. Like the Hindu mystics Whitman felt that the external appearance of objects is not reality. The reality is the essential soul the Brahman that only matters. Whitman asks: "Where is lie that fears off the husks for you and for me? Where is he that undoes stratagems and envelops for you and me?" (Walt Witman, Scented Herbage of my Breast 10-15). A true mystic only can rend the veil of Maya who is in the search of utmost reality.

Rabindranath Tagore the veteran Indian poet and mystic, harmonizes the opposition between illusion and truth. Though he manifests himself in the myriad forms of nature and in man but God is one and inseparable. "Thou set test a barrier in the own being then calmest they served self in myriad notes" (SHMB 47).

Man is made out of the severed fast of God Himself. And this very man himself casts coloured shadows on the white radiance of eternity. "That I should make much of myself and turn it on all sides thus casting coloured shadows on thy radiance such is thy Maya" (SHMB 47).

Through the tears, sorrows and sufferings of his creations, His great grief is expressed in this self-separation, "The poignant song is echoed through all the sky in many coloured fears and evils alarma and hopes" (SHMB 48). This creation is Maya and like veil, it comes in between the created man and the creator God. It obstructs the spotless radiance of God from the eyes of man. Infinite like a circle God is mysterious and his seat is behind the veil of creation: "This screen that thou Bast raised is painted with the brush of the night and the day. Behind it seal is woven in wondrous mysteries casting of cusses away all barren lines of straightness". (SHMB 48).

The multi-coloured creation this pageant of various forms conceals the divine, the maker from the eyes of man. Man has searched for God through countless ages and sought for reunion. Ages pass, days come and goes on Man's search for the infinite and this erasing for union with him are never ending. The great pagent of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant and all ages pass with the hiding and seeing of thee and me. (SHMB 48)

In the poetry of Whitman, death remains a primary concern. He has a very deep and penetrating under-standing of death. He was haunted by the mystery of death even as a boy and always looked forward to solve the mystery of death. According to him life and death are like the day and night. The cycle of life and death is a perpetual as that of Day and Night. It is like a cradle rocking to and fro, similar to the waves of the sea which represent the eternal phenomena of life and death. "Day comes white or night comes black" (199).

For Whitman death is continuity and a gateway to eternal life. After death the soul enters into the realm of immortal beauty. The

Gita also emphasizes this view that life and death all intimately related. If there is life there is death and vice-versa. "Of that which is born death is certain of that which is death birth is certain. Over the unavoidable therefore, though test not to grieve" (SHMB 99).

Death as a 'dark mother' and a "strong deliverer" signifies rebirth and renewal and freedom into spirituality. Death was used to be a cruel depriver of life just now it is so a deliverer into spiritual life. Death is not an un-logical fact for Whitman but a passage or a way towards reunion with the cosmic energy yet you are beautiful to me you faint tinged roots, you make me think of death. Death is beautiful from you (What indeed is finally beautiful except death and love?) O, I think it not for life I am chanting here. A chat of lovers, I think it must be for death for how calm how solemn it grows to ascend to the atmosphere of lovers, Death or life I am then indifferent my soul declines to prefer". (SHMB 199).

Everything was regarded beautiful including death by Whitman. Death is not the end of life but a renewal of it. Human soul is eternal and immortal. Human body can easily be broken as it is like a glass vessel God fills the vessel which is in the form of human body again and human life is constantly renewed. After death man takes birth in another shape : "Thou host made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again and fillets it over with fresh" (SHMB 203).

The path towards the communion is beset with many difficulties, but the poet feels confident that fearlessly he will overcome all dangers and difficulties. Death leads to the mystic union with the believed God. In the end he will reach his spiritual destination which the divine home of God and sweet

music will welcome him there. This will be his homecoming and reunion with his master, God. In Whitman's poems, we see the reflections of Hindu theory of Karma. This theory is based on the upnishodic teaching that the soul assumes new body after death and that the law of Karma governs this rebirth. "When at birth this person takes on a body, he becomes united with bad things, and when at death he leaves it behind, he gets rid of those bad things". (SHMB 97).

The previous life actions or Karma of mortals bear an imprint on their characters and then their destiny is governed in their successive births. The theory of Karma revolves the concept we reap what we sow. After death a good man enjoys the bliss of heaven and gets the fruit for his humanity and good deeds. But if a man has bad deeds in his account he will be doomed to the hell and will be given bitter rotten fruits for his deeds. Every action has its impact on the character. One must try to get rid of these Karmas and attain Moksha so that one can break the cycle of life and death which means birth, death and rebirth.

The Hindu Karmic theory has been used in a wider perspective by Whitman. He feels that all human beings are responsible for their deeds whether good or bad. And one day these deeds return to them. Even if a bad man does something good one day surely that good deed will repay him. God is the dispenser of justice and in his court good is rewarded with good and evil with evil. Every man is different if we talk of sanskaras but still there pervades unity all through. All souls are divine and march to the higher destination therefore arriving. "To know the universe itself as a road as Man) roads as roads for the traveling souls all parts away for the progress of souls all religion, all solid things, arts

government all that was or is appropriate it upon this globe or any globe, falls into niches and corners before the procession of souls along the grand roads of the universe". (SHMB 57)

According to the Karmic theory one can attain imperishable Brahma with greater possibilities by the power of yoga. Union of human soul with Eternal is possible when soul is purified of all such unholy desires. These creepy desires put out the lamp of reason and wisdom. Only by giving up these desires pride, anger, lust and fear one can attain the wisdom of Brahman. Eternal peace and inexplicable bliss aviates for such a man. Yoga defines the methods by which man's union with God is made possible. Walt Whitman, the great American poet attained the spiritual communion by meditation and yoga. There are four types of yoga viz. Karma Yoga (Selfless action), Raja Yoga (meditation and Japa), Jnana Yoga (discrimination and dispassion) and Bhakti Yoga (devotion to the ideal) mentioned in the Gita: The goal of all yogas is to liberate the soul from the shackles of the evil. The following sloka says :

The wise possessed of this everness of mind abandoning the fruits of their actions, freed for ever from fetter of birth go to that state which is beyond all evil. (SHMB 67)

The Gita says that one should perform his duties well in this world where battle prevails everywhere every time without the attachment to the fruits to achieve the highest goal of life. This is the dominant theme of Gita. In the battle field of Kurukshetra Lord Shri Krishna gives updesha to conquer his enemies to win his kingdom back. Allegorically Kurukshetra represents battle in the mind where passions and delusions must be conquered to attain selfhood i.e. kingdom. Lord Krishna has

delivered a universal message in the teachings of Karma Yoga.

One who wants to get united with God must possess tranquility and peace which is possible through meditation only. The Gita emphasizes upon the practice of meditation known as Raja yoga. Raja Yoga as an eight fold path consists of yama (moral disciplines), niyama (Religious disciplines), asana (posture), pranayama/releasing the mind from the control of the senses), dharna (Concentration), dhayana (meditation) and smadhi (the super conscious state). Primarily Raja Yoga focuses on restraining the restless and wandering mind and becoming absorbed in the consciousness of the divine self. The more this power of concentration the more knowledge is acquired. Walt Whitman greatly elaborated on the concept of Kundilini Yoga 'which is based on Raja Yoga. Kundili is described as a psycho-physical energy present in every individual. Physical sensations include pain, pleasure, warmth chill etc. Whitman experiences a result of this Kundilini sensation a mesmeric power. 'Song of Myself' consists of references to the mysterious power of attraction residing in the human body. Using the body electric stresses the physical aspect of this attraction. Jnana Yoga means the path of union through knowledge. For immediate realization and understanding of the self, Jnana Yoga advocates that reasoning about God the followed by certain disciplines. Firstly the philosopher must learn to discriminate the real and the unreal. God is life an irresistible and indestructible force. This is realized by Whitman through Bhakti Yoga. This Godly force is pulsing through the universe, immanent even in apparently non living materials. God is an abstract universal whole the Samashti and what we see is the particular that is the universe. To clove the particular which means the universe, one has

to love the abstract universe that is God. And universal love is possible only by way of loving the God, the Samashti. So the central idea is if you love everyone everything, we love God. To make this infinite universal love possible according to Shri Chaitanya one must practice Sadhna Bhakti by chanting the name of God. This constant intense, all absorbing love for God results in perfect self absorption which deepens the conviction that whatever happens is for our good. This attachment of close to God is indeed one that does not kind the soul effectively breaks all its bondages and redeems it serenely. Such spiritual love leads to the attainment of Para-Bhakti.

When Whitman realizes this "Self", he becomes a Para Bhakt and realizes that love is a main uniting force among all the creations of the universe. The entire universe now is in his embrace. All souls are equal whether low or high, poor or rich men and Women of various walk and are produced from the one and the same matter: "And I know that the hand of god is the promise of my own.

And is know that the spirit of God is the eldest {Pother of my own. And that all men ever born are also my brother and the women also my sisters and lover and that a Kelson of the creation is love. Bhakti Yoga preaches 'all-embracing love' for maintained for 'Love is God and God is Love.'" (SHMB 125-126).

When Whitman attained Para-Bhakti all separate identities appear to coverage into and become part of his transcendent self. In a variety of human relations, the state of absorption of the soul in God is described by Whitman. The union of man and woman, the younger brother melting in the arms of the elder brother, the love of comrades and as a father to his father going. According to Shri Chaitanya to manifest this infinite love one

must practice Whana Bhakti. It has five stages, corresponding to various expressions of love. The first is Santa the peaceful stage where one finds joy in thought of God and attains poise and trans-equality. In 'section 1', of "Song of Myself" Walt Whitman is in the state of tranquillity as he hampers himself for his mystical journey towards union with the Absolute or Divine. The second is Dasya the servant stage, in it one feels that God is his master the protector, his father. In "Prayer of Columbus" Columbus regards God as his master Columbus like a humble servant has been having a message from the Heaven's whispering to him even in his sleep. " A message from the Heavens whispering to me even in sleep. These spend me on. By me and these the work so far accomplished" (SHMB 330). The third stage is of friendship that is Sakhya. In this stage God acts like a friend or playmate. He is more near and this power and grandeur is forgotten. He is now a cherished friend. The fourth stage is Vatsalya, the child stage. The situation is reversed now: Krishna, God of Love is a child now and the devote must take care of him.

The fifth and the last stage is Madhura, the relationship between the lover and the beloved, the sweetest of relationships. The strongest of humanities between Man and God, in which God is the beloved and in which all the elements of love — admiration, service, comradeship, communion are present. As soon as Walt Whitman realizes his own self he achieves this state. State where Whitman identifies his own self with other selves. With God he achieve, communion. Whitman as the result of this Yogic experience celebrates the awakening of the 'Self' and because in all men and women there is the same self, he celebrates all mankind. Whitman undergoes a transfiguring in section 50 to 52. Now the poet has realized his self and his mystic

voyage as over. Whitman now sees order in the universe after self realization. Everything in this universe has a order, there is no, "chaos or death." In the following lines Whitman's optimism is reflected. "It is not chaos or death it is a union plan, it is eternal life' it is happiness." "God is in the heaven. All is right with the world."; (SHMB 92)

Since he has united with divine he is no longer afraid of death. The poet invites the reader to join him to derive wisdom out of his mystic insight in the sections 51 and 52 of "Song of Myself." That God is omniscient. The idea of Bhagvadgita is emphasized by Whitman: I see thee of boundless form on every side with manifest arms, stomachs mouth and eyes, neither the end nor the middle nor also the beginning of thee I do see O Lord of the Universe, O Universal from". (SHMB 94)

His philosophy runs parallel to Tagore. God is everywhere and in everyone. In one's body mind heart, action man should try to keep avoid all evil so that his body may be the temple of God. One can illuminate his mind with the light of truth and wisdom and can gain true knowledge. God is love and he will fill your heart with love where there will be no place for hate, anger and evil passions. For attainment of divinity, self- purification is essential. Like Whitman few other also express their faith in the divine order.

Walt Whitman the great American mystic after his spiritual quest undergoes a mystic trance-realization of his self with the communication of his own individual self with the cosmic self. He has now gained the wisdom and vision of Brahman.

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