

EXPLORATION OF THE CONCEPT OF “I” IN WALT WHITMAN’S *SONG OF MYSELF*

Aurang Zeb,

Lecturer in English,
Govt. College University,
Faisalabad.

Khamsa Qasim,

Lecturer in English,
Govt. College University,
Faisalabad.

ABSTRACT: *This research is an attempt to study the concept of “I” in Walt Whitman’s Song of Myself. His Song of Myself offers an insight into Whitman’s quest for the self-discovery. According to Whitman, it is nothing else but the other name of a journey that is interpreted as a movement from “intrapersonal” to “interpersonal” and finally leading to “transpersonal”. For Whitman, it is not something static rather an ongoing process. It is a universal phenomenon extended to the whole humanity. I have tried to classify this journey of selfhood into four stages. In the first stage, he becomes conscious of his self; in the second stage, his concept of the self develops to include the souls of all men; in the third stage, it embraces God and in the fourth stage, the entire universe. Walt Whitman seems to be toiling extremely hard to make his readers, his companions. So that they can experience exactly what Whitman has experienced, so that the difference between “I” and “you” could be blurred. Walt Whitman, in fact, invites others to the journey of selfhood. “Song of Myself” envisions the “I” enraptured by senses, embracing all people and places from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. More central to his transpersonal flight is the view of the poem as a means of expressing his “self” in universal terms. A cosmic consciousness manifests and Whitman’s imagination is finally attuned with the infinite. And when the depth of this realization is achieved, there is an onset of fervent understanding.*

KEYWORDS: Self, Spiritual, Quest, self-discovery,

EXPLORATION OF THE CONCEPT OF “I” IN WALT WHITMAN’S *SONG OF MYSELF*

Walt Whitman appeared on the American literary scene when the Americans were trying to solidify a national identity. Whitman’s discovery of himself is the discovery of America. Whitman loved the world and the people in it and enjoyed traveling about America, singing the praises of its natural beauty and wealth, the vitality of its people, the pioneer spirit and the excitement of building a new nation on a new principle of individual freedom and vision. The discovery of potential in American continent goes along with the discovery of the potential within his self and vice versa. The sense of independence, exploration, individuality, and democracy equates

Whitman and America. Whitman's poetry may certainly be read at the surface level but even a casual reading of Whitman's verse informs that there is much more to what its author says than a simple literal cataloguing of observation and experience. Within the system of his dynamic meditation, he perceives the radiance of body and soul, of subject and object, of life and death and above all love. His *Leaves of Grass* though severely condemned because of its openness and so called homoeroticism reveals the depth of his insight and wideness of his outlook. His "Song of Myself" offers an insight into Whitman's quest for the self-discovery.

In my investigation of Whitman's "Song of Myself", along with sketching Whitman's commitment to dynamics of Sufism, I attempt a new angle oriented around the transpersonal standpoint. Regarded as the fourth force in contemporary psychology, the transpersonal field recognizes the non-ordinary state of consciousness to be identified. The psychological paradigm that encapsulates these moments of intense union with the Divine is "transpersonal" because it acknowledges their existence. Otherwise, relegation of such experiences is regularly employed by contesting interpretations in the three other fields of psychology.

The process of growth of the selfhood in "Song of Myself" stands as a confession and testament not only for Whitman's self but for all selves. His self refers to whole humanity. The poem is not about a self-idolizing author who claims enlightenment just for himself; instead he is playing a symphony that encompasses the whole humanity as its individual notes. Whitman's experience is the experience of all alike because it has universal considerations. Whitman's journey of the selfhood can be classified into four stages. In the first stage, he becomes conscious of his self; in the second his concept of the self develops to include the souls of all men; in the third it embraces God and in the fourth the entire universe.

From the very beginning, Whitman invites the readers become his companions in the voyage of self-discovery while creating a primary atomic connection:

I celebrate myself and sing myself

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belong to you (LG: SOM: Section 1, Lines 1-3, P. 28)

In the journey of the selfhood the distinction between "I" and "you" blurs to become one. Whitman is optimistic about the mystical and divine potential of every man. It is not the prerogative of the few but can be discovered by all by expanding their self to "the other, another and then to God" (Eliot 200). Whitman addresses the world upon a pedestal, inviting all to stand and explore with him the unknown---What is unknown is the realization of the selfhood. James Miller states in *Walt Whitman* in this regard: "His self-celebration is to serve as signal for each man to discover his own selfhood" (J. Miller 79). In Whitman's view, everyone is capable of self-realization. In his domain of the self, the "average" becomes the "divine average" because of its potential for self-realization. Whitman himself suggested in one of his anonymous reviews of the 1885 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, his motive for focusing attention on the self in his poetry:

Other poets celebrate great events, persons, romances, wars, love, passions, the victories and power of their country, or some real of imagined incident---and polish their work and come to

conclusions, and satisfy the reader. This poet (Whitman) celebrates natural propensities in himself and that is the way he celebrates all (J. Miller 67).

“Song of Myself” envisions the “I” enraptured by senses, embracing all people and places from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. More central to his transpersonal flight is the view of the poem as a means of expressing his “self” in universal terms. In essence Whitman’s goal is to erase or ignore all boundaries, geographical and temporal, in an effort to bring forth the true spirit of humanity. Whitman’s individual being is recognized as the centre of entire universe. A cosmic consciousness manifests and the individual of Whitman’s imagination is finally attuned with the infinite. And when the depth of this realization is achieved, there is an onset of fervent understanding. It seems that the phrase *God is Love* is no more than a wishful positive thinking; from the perspective of mystical consciousness, love, in all the senses of the word, imbibes everything.

In the first stage of its growth, the self enters into a kind of mystical state to be conscious of itself. It is through his physical contact with the external world that Whitman makes his entry into that state:

I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass

(*LG: SOM: Section 1, Lines 4-5, P. 28*)

The poet loafs on the grass and invites his soul to appear. The use of the words “loaf” and “lean” implies the possibility of such an experience for each and every individual while the “ease” epitomizes his serene, relaxed and casual mood of festivity at the sight of a single spear of the summer grass. Here spear of the summer grass is symbolic of the fact that the mysteries of existence are not contained in farfetched objects but in the common and familiar. The contact with the spear initiates the mystical journey of the poet. The soul is the beloved that is invited to lie and loaf on the grass and loaf with the lover, the body. Whitman bids the soul remember their first union:

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning---

(*LG: SOM: Section 5, Lines 87-90, P.33*)

Here the erotic imagery of laying together is a metaphor for the mystical copulation of the soul with the body that lends spirituality to the self. Whitman employs natural elements as means of revealing his mystical ideas. It is the physical that leads him to the metaphysical world. He uses nature to knowledge and understand God through self-knowledge. Through physical (sexual) energy, Whitman identifies himself with the fundamental generative forces in nature, the life force that unites all into one creative whole. Whitman expresses the joy he feels through his senses. He is enthralled by the ecstasy of his physical sensations. In words of David Daiches:

Sensation for Whitman was not merely a bridge between the self and the external world; it was a method of learning to know the external world from inside, so that it ceases to be external and becomes part of one’s self (Daiches 65).

With this entry into the mystical state, the self starts asserting its identity, declares its separateness from civilization and its closeness to nature:

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes

(*LG: SOM: Section 2, Line 13, P.29*)

Here perfumes are symbols of other individual selves; but outdoors, the earth's atmosphere denotes the Universal Self. He is over enthusiastic to the point of madness to be in contact with the Universal Soul. He wants to be in touch with it by shedding all guises. In fact, the poet sees a kind of spiritual undressing pre-requisite for getting attuned to this Universal Self:

I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked;

I am mad for it to be in contact with me

(*LG: SOM: Section 2, Lines 19-20, P. 29*)

The union of the soul with the body leads to an experience bestowing the seeker with an intuitive knowledge. Whitman uses a great deal of sexual imagery to describe his identification and eventual ecstatic union with his soul and then the Universal Soul. It is interesting that "Song of Myself" begins with "I" and ends with "you". It is as if he found that the secret of overcoming the duality in his life was to merge with the unity that underlies all creation. The soul and the body in unity can have mystical experience so they are not to be segregated. Together they can have a vision of God. The unity that Whitman talks about here is the unity of body and soul. Hence the role of sex is clearly metaphoric here; a union of the body and the soul. Held in the trance like grip of the soul he declares emphatically:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that

Pass all the argument of the earth;

And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own;

And that all the men ever born are also my brother, and the women my sister and lovers,

And the Kelson of creation is love

(*LG: SOM: Section 5, Lines 91-97, P. 33*)

The poet has a feeling of fraternity and oneness with God and all his fellowmen that has led him to his wider communion with the divine, human and natural orders. Rather than losing touch with the external reality, "he sees clearly the limitless array of leaves, brown ants, wells, mossy scabs, heaped stones, and plants. He sees that event the humblest of objects contains the infinite universe" (Woodress 263).

And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the field

And brown ants in little wells beneath them,

And mossy scabs of the worm fence and heaped stones----

(*LG: SOM: Section 5, Lines 96-98, P. 32*)

This entry into the mystical state acquaints the self with a revelation of and a participation in the larger dynamics of the cosmos. Like the gravity that pulls all together, the self is pulled into union with others through the miraculous power of love. He believes that the external expression is the key to understanding the inner world by evolving mechanism of love, as Rumi interprets that the universe and its evolution arises from the process of love. In fact "love" becomes the only article of transformation.

The smallest sprout shows there is really no death
All goes onward and outward nothing collapses

(LG: SOM: Section 6, Lines 126, 129, P. 34)

Grass represents an image of God, a language that reveals secret. It is the secret of man's relationship with the Divine. With this kind of awakening of the self, the seeker can easily discover life in all creatures:

He may perceive that the very life essence has changed from inorganic to organic, the organic substance to living animals, to man; he then perceives new form of life beyond this form---the seeker then experiences a unity in diversity of forms and longs for intimacy (Arasteh 77).

Awakening of the self gives rise to its continual expansion with a declaration:

I----- am not contained between my hat and boots

(LG: SOM: Section 7, Line 133, P. 35)

Whitman's self carries universal dimension that sees all and condemns nothing. This, for Whitman is the dynamic of becoming human. The self goes forth to unite with the other as a part of its own identity. Through his bipolar movement the macrocosm becomes personalized and a microcosm self is enriched. Through the experience of becoming many, the richness of one is increased; through diversity one paradoxically finds its unity as Whitman affirms:

I resist anything better than my own diversity,
Breathe the air but leave plenty after me,
And am not stuck up, and am in my place-----

(LG: SOM: Section 16, Lines 349-51, P. 45)

Hence the self has ability to recognize its place within the larger order but at the same time it conforms itself to the whole of that order. He exclaims:

In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as
forward sluing,
To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object missing,
Absorbing all to myself and for this song.

(LG: SOM: Section 13, Lines 232-35, P. 40)

As a caresser of life, Whitman aligns himself with every bit of creation and finds divinity permeating through all objects. As David Daiches has observed: "Whitman's vision is essentially cosmic, its identifying gaze moves ever outward from the self, and the observing and imagining self moves progressively across American and across the world" (Daiches 74).

Whitman's mystic vision includes identifying with things, becoming the things. Hence for him, the drama of self-identification is to be completed by experiencing both the world within and the world without. Here again Whitman departs from the Indian mysticism that considers the material world as an illusion. In Whitman's mysticism, it is a medium to attain the selfhood in its Sufi context.

Whitman's belief in the equality and union of all things in creation does not exclude his awareness of man's capability and potential. Man is always the perfection that forever exceeds all other perfections in creation. Whitman often moves towards understanding of his own place in the order of things:

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest is Me,
Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns,

(LG: SOM: Section 14, Lines 259, 260, P. 41)

The human's role in evolution is to love nature, to elevate it and to carry the earth proceed forward as Whitman affirms in 1872 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*:

We see, as in the universe of the material kosmos, after meteorological vegetable and animal cycles, man at last arises, born through them, to prove them, concentrate them, to turn upon them with wonder and love---to command them, adorn them and carry them upwards in superior realms (Bradley 745).

The long catalogue, of all the seeker sees, conveys a feeling of infinite extension. It combines the irreconcilable opposites of Whitman's experience of cosmic consciousness; mortal body and immortal soul; finite matter and unbounded mystical consciousness. The catalogue shows seeker's movement from "the singular to the cosmic, from loafing individual to active spirit" (Cady 181) from knowing the self to The Self. And reaching the climax of the self---awakening, he utters emphatically:

Of every hue and cast I am of every rank and religion,
A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker,
Prisoner, fancy man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest,

(LG: SOM: Section 16, Lines 346-48, P. 45)

Hence the awakening of the self originates an intense feeling of joy and exaltation as Underhill elucidates in *Mysticism*: "--- The awakening of the self is to a new and more active plane of being, new and more personal relations with Reality; hence to a new and more real work which it must do" (Underhill 192).

The process of purification of the self starts with the awakening and expansion of the self into all inclusive consciousness. It is a cleansing stage that begins with self-examination. In case of Whitman, purification involves acceptance of body . The acceptance reflects his goal to achieve mystical experience through physical reality. This is in opposition to the traditional mystical concept of the realization of the self through mortification of the self and instead there is an assertion.

In traditional mystical experience, the purgation involves detachment from the things of the world including material and physical desires and mortification. "The death of selfhood in its narrow individualistic sense is then, the primary object of mortification" (Underhill 221). In Whitman's case, this process of purgation is transfiguration and an assertion of the self-sufficient self :

I exist as I am that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content
One world is aware and by far the largest to me that is,
Myself

(LG: SOM: Section 20, Lines 413-16, P. 48)

He calls himself "Cosmos" meaning a universal self who loves all---a representative of all humanity, the voices of diverse people speak through him---voices of men, animals and even instincts:

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves----

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veiled and I remove the veil,

Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured.

(LG: SOM: Section: 24, Lines 508, 516-18, P. 52-53)

He speaks of lust and the flesh also. Each part of the body is a miracle because of the divinity of the soul residing in it. So body is extolled in excitement:

I believe in the flesh and the appetites,
Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles and each part and tag of me,
is a miracle,

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer
This head more than churches, bibles and all the creeds,

(LG: SOM: Section 24, Lines 522-28, P. 53)

Hence Whitman speaks in confident tone asserting his divinity that is the outcome of the process of purification.

In the process of purification, Whitman is in a quest for an affirmation of his body's sensory awareness. The sense of touch also brings him the joy. He is overwhelmed by it and he asks:

Is this the touch? Quivering me to a new identity,
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins-----
-----on all sides,

Prurient provokes stiffening my limb,
Straining the udder of my heart for its with held drip.

(LG: SOM: Section 28, Lines 616-20, P. 57)

Human sensuality thus becomes the conduit that bridges the spirit and the flesh:

Apparently, "the prurient provokers" who threaten to rob the "rudder" of the Whitman's heart of its "withheld drip" have failed; he has retained enough of his semen to "super think". Perhaps the person was only fantasizing the sensation of sexual energy while conversing the flow of his blood in order to conjure up the "full-sized" and "golden" (Cady 286).

The union of the spirit with the body thus becomes a natural, common pathway to divinity. The emphasis is on his search for individuality, an aspect of his evolving self.

His self-assertion and self appraisal is one of the key-note of his realization of the selfhood:

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan, the son,

(LG: SOM: Section 24, Line 1, P. 52)

Thus awareness of the universe, or cosmic consciousness is expressed when he calls himself a "Kosmos". He accepts all life naked or bare, noble or ignoble, refined and crude, beautiful and ugly, painful and ecstatic; both are aspects of his vision, which has the organic unity like the unity of the body and the soul.

Whitman realizes that physical and spiritual both are the epitome of divinity rather the physical leads to the spiritual. His self is a microcosm for the macrocosmic Self:

His well-known description of himself emphasizes the paradox: in being most himself, his complete bodily self without repression, he becomes the proper equal to others and can, by the exercise of the sympathetic imagination, identify himself with them---. To be capable of the proper kind of imaginative expansion, the self must not deny any of its aspects. All human functions, all human capabilities are sacred, and the fulfilled personality who is at once most himself and most capable of entering into the lives of others---denies none (Daiches 66).

Whitman is an earthbound mystic in a sense that he beholds no visions of visible things in heaven or hell unseen to other men. He rather sees with extraordinary precision the realities of our earth but he sees them in a mystic mood as symbols of the impalpable and spiritual. They are hieroglyphs most clear cut, most brilliant and still expressive of something unforeseen. All phenomena are texts that reveal the unity and holiness of and the interrelationship between the soul and the body, the mind and the matter, each and all.

Now the seeker of the selfhood becomes receptive to the multitude of sounds and sights that betokens humility. In an ecstatic mood having “acquired a sort of microscopic vision” (Woodress 265), he gains a sense of the wonder even of the smallest being:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the
egg of the wren--- (LG: SOM: Section 31, Lines 662-64, P. 59).

Here Whitman celebrates the minutest wonders of nature. He compares the importance of the leaf of grass to the celestial bodies. He gives extreme significance to everything---every minute detail in the great scheme of things. So he has an overwhelming sense with all things.....with the entire universe. In the simplest terms, the message here is to take time to smell the roses, to notice the beauty of “little things” and to realize the wonders and miracles of life.

At this point, the purification stage bleeds over into the illumination stage in which the self begins to experience inner voices and visions. The self is illuminated with genuine truths, the truths that cannot be found in conventional or rational ways. In such a mood of illumination, Whitman declares:

All truths wait in all things,
They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,
They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon,
The insignificant is as big to me as any---
Logic and sermons never convince,
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

(LG: SOM: Section 30, Lines 648-54, P. 58)

The evident truth is the immanence of God in His creation if only the self is attuned to it. The word “wait” suggests that the self must be receptive to truths otherwise they remain undiscovered, for they do not “hasten their delivery”. No “hidden guides” are required to find these truths; they stand ready for anyone willing to see. Those who rely on “philosopher’s logic” or “minister’s sermons” to reveal the “hidden truths” are missing the point, for these truths are self-evident when the perception reaches to a heightened level. Underhill explains it in these words:

The self perceives an added significance and reality in all natural things: is often convinced that it knows at last “the secret of the world”. In Blake’s words “the doors of perception are cleaned” so that “everything appears to man as it is infinite (Underhill 240).

The self experiences a spiritual illumination to finally achieve perfection. Now he understands the power of his vision which ranges everywhere:

Space and Time! Now I see it is true, what I guessed at,

What I guessed when I loaf on the grass-----
I skirt sierras, my palm covers continents,
I am afoot with my vision.

(LG: SOM: Section 33, Lines 710-15, P. 61)

This vision includes all times and all modes of life, it is a journey of intense optimism in which the poet identifies himself with the mankind. He seems to be transcending the borders of space and time:

His secret of power is identification. Since everything emanates from the universal soul, and since his own soul is of the same essence, he can identify himself with every object and with every person living or dead, heroic or criminal. Thus he is massacred with the Texans at Goliad, he dies on the cross and rises again (Bazalgette 117).

Everything appears to be:

Replenished with supreme power,
One of an average unending procession

(LG: SOM: Section 38, Lines 969-70, P. 72)

The catalogue of people and places extending over to five sections from 33 to 38 is an attempt to encompass the totality. Ordinary life becomes permeated with mystical significance. Whitman identifies himself with every being and every object and his identification forms an integral part of what "I am":

I take part; I see and hear the whole

(LG: SOM: Section 33, Line 864, P. 67)

The process of identification arises out of belief that his self is a part of the Universal Self:

He does not draw aside, like the ascetics, to contemplate his own self. More and more he consorts to his friends, the people---stage drivers, boatmen, travelers, men of street. There is something intensified, more fervent, in the affection drawing him to them (Bazalgette 117).

Whitman's embrace life, even the presence of suffering and evil did not diminish his love for existence. The horizon of his love and compassion is large. The mystical knowledge makes him realize the pain and stark realities of life:

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels,
I myself become the wounded person

(LG: SOM: Section 33, Lines 843-45, P. 67)

And

Askers embody themselves in me and I am embodied in them
I project my hat, sit sham-faced and beg

(LG: SOM: Section 37, Lines 959-60, P. 720)

In fact, the realization of his own self brings him to the realization of other selves as well. It acquaints him with the pain and suffering of others.

The illumination of the self leads to the ultimate goal of the mystic---the unmediated union with God. This point at which the soul attains oneness with God is the mystical ecstasy in which all barriers seem to sweep away and a new insight is imparted to the seeker. This moment of the self is the moment of getting in tuned with the infinite. The self, purified of all its grossness, comprehends the Divine Reality. The inspired and examined self venerates The Self. The result is

a beatitude and joy inexplicable. The self is conscious of its newly acquired, holy and superhuman power resulting from the union of the self with the Divine. In a state of spiritual absorption and mergence, it is endowed with divine and superhuman powers. Whitman assumes the role of the prophet of new religion, incorporating all religions. He has achieved almost god like perceptions and this has also been identified as one of the higher dimension of the mystical experience. This is what Whitman declares emphatically:

Magnifying and apply come I ----

Taking myself the exact dimension of Jehovah,
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson,
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,
In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on leaf, the
crucifix engraved

(LG: SOM: Section 41, Lines 1026-32, P. 75)

He is the healer, comforter and a lover of humanity who merges with all other identities.

He practices all religions as precursor of spiritual democracy:

I do not despise you priests; all time the world over,
My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,
Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern,

(LG: SOM: Section 43, Lines 1096-99, P. 78)

The mergence of the self with The Self and yet retaining and being conscious of its individuality is the key-note of Whitman's mystical experience and the realization of the selfhood. It aligns him with the Sufi consciousness of Rumi and Iqbal. The self that can expand to include the diversity of space can also expand to include the diversity of the ages that went before:

I am an acme of things accomplished, and I am enclose of things,
---to be

All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me,
No on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

(LG: SOM: Section 44, Lines 1148, 49, P. 81)

The self is conscious of its confrontation with limitless time and space and this insight makes it ask fundamental questions of existence:

The clock indicates the moment---but what does eternity indicate,

(LG: SOM: Section 45, Line 1136, P. 80)

And

I open my scuttle at night and see the far sprinkled systems

(LG: SOM: Section 46, Line 1184, P. 82)

And these questions lead him to and intuitive belief:

I know I have the best of time and space and was never measured,
And never will be measured

(LG: SOM: Section 46, Lines 1201, 1202, P. 83)

Towards the end of this journey of the evolution of the self, the seeker beholds the Divine Beloved:

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,

The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,

The greatest Comerado, the lover true for whom I pine, will be there,

(LG: SOM: Section 45, Lines 1197-1200)

The moment of acquaintance of the self with The Self is the moment of revelation and inspiration. It directs the self to the reality of immortality and closeness of creative essence---God. It enters the climax of its being and sees God immanent everywhere so he is not curious about Him. He clearly chants his vision of God:

And I say to mankind, be not curious about God,
I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least
Nor no I understand and who there can be more wonderful than myself
Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty four and each moment then,
In the faces of men and women, I see God, and in my own face in the glass

(LG: SOM: Section 48, Lines 1277-85, P. 86-87)

Here, one may say that Whitman like a Sufi reaches to the "Shahud" one of the Sufi stages, where he can see the Absolute. He knows that the Divine essential nature is not fully comprehensible to humankind however it brings his self to such a level that it can experience its divine nature by being in love with Him----the love that makes the self eternal and immortal:

And as to you Death and you bitter hug of mortality,
It is idle to try to alarm me

(LG: SOM: Section 49, Lines 1288, 1289, P. 87)

He is not afraid of death because death, too, is a creation of God and through it one can reach God. Hence this moment of union with the Divine is the climax of the growth of the selfhood that attunes it with the infinite. As a result, the self becomes a part of eternal life process. Eternity is endless and so is the self. Hence it is in a constant flux-----evolving every moment. The culmination of the poet's mystical experience is revealed in his vision of eternal life. Life is neither chaotic nor finite; it is harmonious, reflecting the union of the poet's individual soul with the Divine Soul.

In the last two sections of "Song of Myself", the journey and quest for the selfhood have now come full circle. He began by describing a loaf on the grass and ends by:

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

(LG: SOM: Section 52, Lines 1346, 1347, P. 89)

Now it is the time of emergence from mystical trance with an invitation to the readers to launch their own mystical journey:

I stop somewhere waiting for you

(LG: SOM: Section 52, Line 1364, P. 89)

"Somewhere waiting" implies that the poet's own journey has also not ended. Zweig notes "the grass will continue to grow, the singer will be waiting for you; the cycles of death and resurrection, like the cycle of day and night, will continue. The poem's end will not be a true ending, merely an articulation of endless" (Zweig 261). The last word, according to E. H. Miller will probably never be found, for, as he claims, "Whitman himself saw to that!" The poem, like the poet, will always be waiting for us. As Miller beautifully notes, "The sound of the poet's voice fades into a very faint but most seductive pianissimo, a whisper that itches at our ears" (E. H. Miller 139). The emergence from the mystical trance does not stop the process of evolution of the self and it continues eternally.

The mystical experiences of all the seekers are ineffable and so is that of Whitman: "It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to

others-----no one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists” (W. James 371). Whitman also finds him at a loss to describe the real nature of his experience:

I do not know it---it is without name---it is a word unsaid;
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, and symbol.

(*LG: SOM: Section 50, Lines 1314, 1315, P. 88*)

Like all other mystic poets, Whitman also comes across the problem of expressing the unsubstantial impalpable reality in language. So this unsubstantial is suggested through images as “the unseen is proved by the seen” (*LG: SOM: Section 3, Line 54*). Whitman’s metaphoric symbolic language is designated to impart new knowledge (mystical knowledge) that cannot be expressed through literal language. His revelation is the result of mystical experience, an experience characterized by its ineffability. So the language plays the substitutive function and also imparts a new vision of reality.

There is no language that can really embody his experience but one thing he knows is:

It is not chaos or death---it is form, union, plan---it is eternal
Life ---it is Happiness

(*LG: SOM: Section 50, Lines 1321, 1322, P. 88*)

Realizing the ineffability, obscurity and paradoxical nature of his experience, he declares emphatically:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
I am large, I contain multitudes

(*LG: SOM: Section 51, Lines 24-26*)

Whitman has discarded all pretensions. Awakened, Whitman sees fullness he contains and recognizes his own godliness and vastness of multitudes. This knowing happens in a moment, a moment precious and eternal in which all things are interconnected, alive and infinite. The contradictions are the outcome of the diversity that he contains. For Carlisle, Whitman not only accepts that he is simply a poet and not a philosopher here, but he also “accepts the illogicalities and contradictions in reality in order to find that new way of dealing with the multiplicity and crises of existence” (Carlisle 204). What makes him contain multitude is his identification with the cosmic and life forces more than ever:

He soars in space until his elbows rest in sea-gaps and his palm cover continents. Yet far or near looking down at the grass or up at the stars, he is reminded of “perpetual transfers and promotions” of the soul in its endless journey. This finally is the meaning of self a link in the great chain of life (*Allen Walt Whitman 7*).

So his mystical experience results in an embrace of life in all its diversity rather than negate it. This embraciveness makes him assert his self rather than renounce it as is the case with traditional mystics.

The poem begins in the self, returns repeatedly to the self and at the end comes around again to the self, a circle of circles. The final line epitomizes the fact that his experience of unbounded selfhood is not eccentric, but universal. It is not just his song but the song of all. In the first section he told the reader to assume what he assumed and in the last section “he stops somewhere waiting” he promises that the reader too will one day discover the unbounded self.

Whitman's mystical journey can be interpreted as a movement from "intrapersonal" (a union of the body and the soul) to "interpersonal" (a sense of oneness and embraciveness with the humanity) finally leading him to "transpersonal" (having a vision of the Higher Reality). Throughout the poem, the self constantly expands, as Whitman draws and re-draws and re-draws the boundary of "myself" in greater and greater circles, encompassing people, creatures, time, space, and God.

Being accomplished of carrying the entire world within him, he can create an elaborate analogy about the spiritual democracy which would, like the self, be capable of containing the whole world. This gives a freedom to the self to manifest itself. Freedom celebrated in the poem is also reflected in the freedom of his verse. Whitman with his bold, free verse pattern rejects the system of regularity. So his great long irregular lines rumble on and on, every verse declaring its independence from those old restrictive systems. The freedom of the verse is only one sign of how seriously Whitman takes the project of freedom at large with the promise that all living things are created free and equal. This is the spirit of true democracy.

For Whitman the self is a process as all life and experience, reality itself is a process----a ceaseless, continuous and all-embracing flow. What more than anything else appeals about Whitman's self is its continuity. To Whitman, life appeared to be an endless procession. He could find no end to this eternal march, no port where the ship of his self would come to final rest. The process of the self-discovery is to be perceived as constant and this exploration never ceases.

REFERENCES

- Allen, G. W. (1969). *Walt Whitman*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press.
- Allen, G. W. (1975). *Walt Whitman and the world*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Anderson, W. T. (1997). *The future of the self: Investigating the postmodern person*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.
- Arasteh, A. R. (1980). *Growth to selfhood: The sufi contribution*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bazalgette, L. (1970). *Walt Whitman: The man and his works*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers.
- Blasing, M. K. (1987). *American poetry: The rhetoric of its form*. New Heaven & London: Yale University Press.
- Bloom, H. (1985). In: *Walt Whitman*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Ford, B. (1988). In: *The new pelican guide to American literature*. London: Penguin.
- Bradley, S. (1986). In: *A norton critical edition: Leaves of grass*. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India.
- Cady, E. H. (1973). In: *On Whitman*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Carlisle, E. F. (1973). *The uncertain self: Whitman's drama of identity*. Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press.
- Cunliffe, M. (1954). *The literature of United States*. London: Penguin Books.
- Daiches, D. (1956). *Literary essays*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Descartes, R. (1931). *Metaphysical meditations: Meditations II*. (The Philosophical Works of Descartes) trans E. Haldane and G. Ross. Cambridge University Press.

- Ehrenpreis I. In: (1965). American poetry. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.
- Gray, R. (1990). American poetry of the twentieth Century. London: Longman Group.
- Greenspan, E. (1995). In: The Cambridge companion to Walt Whitman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Happold, F. C. (1988). Mysticism: A study and anthology. London: Penguin Books.
- Hegel G. W. F. (1977). The phenomenology of spirit. trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford University Press.
- Hepburn, R. W. (1972). Mysticism: Nature and assessment of encyclopedia of philosophy, Vol. 5.
- Hindus, M. (1971) In: Walt Whitman: The critical heritage. London: Rout ledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hook, A. (1983). American literature in context, III. London: Methun & Co.
- Hume, D. (1951). A treatise of human nature. Oxford University Press.
- Kaplan, J. (1982) In: Walt Whitman: Complete poetry and collected Prose. New York: The Library of America.
- Kenneth, J. G. (1990). The saturated self: Dilemma of identity in contemporary life. New York: Basic Books.
- Miller, E. H. (1969). In: A century of Whitman's criticism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Miller, J. E; JR. (1955). A critical guide to leaves of grass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Miller, J. E; JR. (1962). Walt Whitman. Boston: Twayne Publishers.