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Literature and Consciousness: An Observation of Divine Consciousness in Walt Whitman's Poetry

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Abstract:

There have always been discourses on Literature and Consciousness, about the role of consciousness in shaping literature as literature is called the mirror of consciousness in a society. Literature is a recorded history of the development and expression of consciousness in a civilization through a particular language, but the question arises here 'is consciousness mere outer, mental and physical? Or only a term for levels of mind, i.e. conscious, unconscious and sub-conscious as presented by Freud and others on psychological ground? Is man only a mental or physical being or is there any other reality of existence of mankind? No, man is not mere a physical or mental entity but a Psychic being (Chaitya Purusha in Sanskrit), having a divine spark in form of human soul. In America, Emerson showed the seed of vedantic principles in materialistic American soil which afterwards was cultivated by Walt Whitman. The whole bulk of Whitman's poetry gives expression of the realization of this divine consciousness and cosmic unity.

This paper is a short presentation and small endeavor to highlight some points of this higher realm of consciousness from Whitman's vast ocean of realizations.

Keywords: Soul, Supreme Soul, Human Existence, Cosmic Unity, Consciousness, Realization.

Literature is a blazing light to give direction to human mind and aspirations. It is an expression process of human consciousness as a powerful means for elevation from the lower level to upper brighter level of existence. The enlightened writers always try to uplift the humanity from the earthly and mundane levels of consciousness. They present their higher realization beautifully in form of literature to enlighten the generations for years to come. There has always been a motivating force and power in great literature which rejuvenates human consciousness. The writers are like prophets and sons of God who write to uplift and awaken the common mind about their supreme goal of life. As famous American transcendentalist poet Walt Whitman declares:

*Finally, shall come the poet worthy of that name,
The true son of God shall come singing His songs. [401]*

The present scenario of the world is replete with materialism and utilitarianism and the entire humanity has been degraded to mundane level of consciousness. The sole purpose of literature is not to discuss which is already known; rather its work is to elevate the human mind from this physical existence of consciousness to the higher spiritual ground of consciousness. The man is not merely a physical body or a mind but a psychic being, a part of the divine being, the supernal soul. The Soul is the part of the Supreme Soul and every one is the offspring of the same divine presence. The primordial energy is the source of all that exist in the world. So the entire cosmos is bound in a chain of cosmic unity of oneness, different in forms. This true realization of unified form of the whole cosmos that even every single leaf is a part of it, is in accord with cosmic consciousness. The true realization about the creation and existence of this entire universe and sphere, human life, its aim and the truth behind death and birth, lead to have a sense of cosmic consciousness. The great authors treat literature as an instrument to bring the higher truth in picture and break the ice of illusion [maya] into peoples' mind. Whitman, in the preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), propounds the poet's job as "*Folks expect of the poet to indicate more than beauty and dignity which always attaches to dumb real objects...they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls.*"

The literature of the enlightened minds who have realized the eternal truth, have the purpose to transfer these realizations to the people not aware of it. The following lines by Whitman indicate towards the actual purpose of literature in '*Song of Myself*':

*It is time to explain myself...
What is known I strip away,
I launch all men and women forward with me into the unknown. [346]*

Ancient Indian literature, the scriptures are recorded experiences of the enlightened souls, the Rishies of the Aryavarta. These scriptures, written or formed thousands of years back, are always a source for generations to elevate the gross mind to subtle level of existence by the realization of eternal truth that each and every man is potentially divine and the aim of this life is to be one with God. They are full with the knowledge of God consciousness and suggest the path to attain divine union. In form of translation these invulnerable eternal treasures and ever lightening lamps of the ancient Indian learning, reached in the hands of Emerson, the sage of concord and the pioneer of transcendental movement in America in 19th century. Emerson, a great literary figure, felt their worth and expressed these realizations in his literature. Emerson's writings as a great literature, brought an innovative perception to American soil of divine consciousness, running towards only materialistic objects of life and stimulated many others to go through these insights. In *American Scholar*, he distinctly points

out that America has made enough external, materialistic advancement and it should by this time move towards intellectual and spiritual liberation. In his words; “*We will walk on our own feet...each believes himself inspired by the Divine soul which also inspires all men.*”[60]

Whitman was one of the great minds, the ‘Man Thinking’, who were invigorated and inspired by Emerson and responded his call of launching out on the voyage of the ocean of eternal self. Emerson understood the subject matter of Whitman’s poetry and encouraged him with letter of praise that made him to be stable, subtle and consistent on his chosen less traveled road. Whitman himself expresses this fact in this line:

“I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought to me a boil.”[31]

Walt Whitman, a crown figure of the transcendental movement of America and a great mystic and preacher of divinity, has a prophetic vision like the Vedantists. As the pioneer of the Self and the singer of the inner being, he has felt and expressed the unification of the human mind that is free from the narrow domestic regions. He has found that the core of knowledge is not anywhere else outside but inside the human being within oneself. The soul, the higher self is the centre of the Absolute knowledge and the eternal truth as a part of the divine consciousness. The recognition of the self provides the eternal joy and bliss to Whitman and makes him aware of the universal unity and cosmic oneness. The self of Whitman establishes complete identity between himself and others after illumination that the inner essence of all is one and indivisible. He celebrates this state of consciousness in the very first line of his *Song of Myself*:

*I celebrate myself and sing of myself
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you,
I loaf and invite my soul....* [305]

The outer self of Whitman seems to be melting with his higher self. The union of the external and inner self takes off the flight of Whitman's thoughts to the higher plane where he continuously feels the association with the Supreme Being. The introduction of the self makes Whitman to go deeper and deeper in the resurgence of his true self. The urge to know the truth is described in the following lines;

*I am mad for it to be in contact with me.
The smoke of my own breath,
Echoes, ripple, buzz'd whispers....* [306]

He evangelized the innate divinity of human soul and tried to enkindle fire of divine grace in both body and soul. The poet, in the full accordance with the truth that the body is also an important instrument to go through the process of God realization, emphasis on this very fact

and considered not only body and soul equal but every object of, every being every construction and universal sphere all equal in his perception, "*I do not call one greater and smaller.*"[346]

The consciousness of the real self fills him with the firm determination and faith for the existence of the Soul within him as he explicates emphatically, "*I believe in you my soul, the other I must not abased itself to you / And you must not be abased to the other...* " [308]

He enjoys the perfect state of bliss and joy and sings the song of eternal happiness for the humanity to comprehend the truth and to attain the highest state where the mind loses its sense of duality and separation from the internal object. He asserts, "*I am satisfied - I see, dance, laugh, sing....*" [320]

Whitman as a mystic celebrates his 'Self' as a way of embracing the other, the objective world, in an inclusive conception of selfhood, like the '*cosmic form described in the Gita, and the dynamic self of the Upanishads*', stretches itself through the whole cosmos and embraces it completely;

*In all people I see myself,
None more and not one a barely corn less...
And I know I am solid and sound...
And I know I am deathless....* [310]

Self realized Whitman searches for the very source of this self and establishes a link and spiritual union with the Supernal Self, the God. He realizes that all objects and persons interrelated in a single oneness, therefore he comfortably moves from self to higher self then to God recognition. Transcending the lower ranges of mind, Whitman attains the higher realms of consciousness. He sees a kind of similarity between him and others, all kinds of discrimination disappears, only remains the realization of oneness of all, the equality and fraternity of each and all; □□□□□□□□□□

*I am the mate and companion of people,
All just as immortal and fathomless.
[They do not know how immortal, but I know.]* [325]

He emphasized on the fact that the very initial condition for the observation of the extraterrestrial vigor in oneself, is to identify with the oneness with every being. The cycle of the self awareness reaches to the next level where he starts to communicate with Supreme Being. The very sense of being related to Him fills him with the vibration of unconditional and beatific joy "*each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy.*"

The urge to know the divinity, each and every moment excite the intuition in Whitman that he feels the presence and perceive God in every single object in the sphere of the universe. He “*hear and behold god in every object, yet understand God not in the least....*” [351]

The plea of God realization takes him close to the true form the Supreme as wherever the urge or intuition arises to know Him, the recognition of the truth takes place and all kinds of illusions and discord blow apart, what remains is harmony and concord. The renowned devotional poet Kabir discusses it as;

*When I was then Hari was not, now Hari exists I am not,
All the darkness mitigated, when I saw the light within.*

The man Whitman grows up from the perceptual consciousness of animals to the illumined state of a God Seeker, which is a rare and exceptional peak in human evolution. The spirit of Whitman is metamorphosed into a spiritual divine being that starts initiating the celestial light all around him. He asserts this event in the following words;

*Divine I am inside and out...
And I make a hold whatever I touch or I am touch'd from.
The scent of these arm pits is aroma finer than prayer
This head more than churches, bibles and the creeds.[324]*

He distinguishes ‘*something of God each and every hour of the twenty four*’ and ‘*each moment then.*’ From this moment onwards everything becomes godly for him, he picks out God’s image ‘*in the faces of men and women*’ and in his ‘*own face in the glass*’. The empathy between him and the Almighty constantly grows and an exceptional correspondence is started as he ‘*finds letters from God*’ in his way to life, that have testimony of being divine as ‘*each one is sign’d by God’s name*’. He is assured that, as it not an earthly physical communion, the process of receiving messages from the divine will continue to him in future forever, so after captivating the motive of the letter Whitman prefers to ‘*leave them where they are*’ and he moves on. The intention is that the message passed by him will guide someone other and next generation. The purpose of God is unveiled to Whitman through these unseen letters to common eyes. As he expresses in *Passage to India*, the motive of Almighty is, to connect and inter-mingle the one end of the earth to other end for the interchange of ideas, notions, values, religion and divinity;

*Lo, Soul, seest thou not God’s purpose from the first?
The earth to be spann’d, connected by network.... [398]*

Whitman expresses the deep craving for the union of the microcosm i.e. soul with macrocosm, the Super Soul. He found it inside him, but as the attributes of the God is ineffable; he is incapable of expressing it as a dumb cannot convey his experience of sweets to others. The

experience of the realization is such sound, unfathomable and immeasurable that he composes few lines but finds it inexpressible; though comes through the very essence of it:

*There is that in me – I don't know what it is,
But I know it is in me, I don't know it.
It is without name, it is a word unsaid...
It is not chaos, nor death; it is form, union plan-
It is eternal life- it is happiness.... [352]*

Whitman's enlightened soul, after completing the whole process of attaining truth of the existence of the soul and universe, and its origination and divine alliance, impatiently urges to the Absolute to dissolve. The eagerness of merger with the supreme soul can be seen in the following lines from *Prayer of Columbus*;

*I cannot rest o God, I cannot eat or drink or sleep,
Till I put forth myself, my prayer, once more to thee,
Breathe, bathe myself once more in thee, commune with thee,
Report myself once more to thee.... [406]*

The whole bulk of Whitman's literature contains a divine message to his readers that identification of absolute Truth. He sings for the upliftment of spiritual virtues and values in mankind. Whitman has envisioned the spiritual unification and accomplishment of human soul. He unlocks the hurdles down the way and assists us to reach out in the right place where the assignation with God is just a step ahead. He has focused on the fact that when consciousness of divine within is experienced, nothing left more be to found or sought that appears from the absolute self-surrender to the Divine. Afterwards immediately the divine grace is bestowed upon the being with which the dark strip of ignorance and illusion shatters from the eyes, all kinds of misery and individuality vanishes and man is left to dive deep in the ocean of eternity. Whitman has endeavored to project the divine presence in man or the divinity of soul and thrashed out the divine consciousness in all over his works. He has explored the highest truth of human life and tried to motivate the readers to get engaged in the spiritual moods and God realization. Whitman's effort and work is a counterpart of the motto of Swami Vivekananda, that is, "*I shall inspire man everywhere, until the world shall know that is one with God.*"[226]. Whitman too is optimistic towards this idea and has visualized that perfect future, singing joyfully the state of attaining divine bliss;

*A reborn race appears—a perfect world, all joy!
Women and men in wisdom innocence and health—all joy!
Riotous laughing bacchanals fill'd with joy:
War, sorrow, suffering gone—the rank earth purged, nothing but joy left!
The ocean filled with joy-the atmosphere all joy!
Joy! Joy! In freedom, Worship, love! Joy in the ecstasy of life!*

*Enough to merely be! Enough to breathe!
Joy! Joy! All over joy!..(460)*

This is not all but seems sufficient to substantiate that Whitman lived and entertained the Superamental consciousness and wrote the songs of essential divinity of every human being to make other souls aware of the highest truth.

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