
Walt Whitman and Humanism

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Abstract

The literary firmament of American literature in the English language is marked by notable works from various literary artists, but the place Walt Whitman achieves in the American poetic world is of paramount importance. He is one of the most popular poets in America and is called the father of American poetry. Although he makes his start from a humble background, he conquers all the poetic heights. He is a well-known poet, editor, journalist, essay writer, and humanist who has great faith in the potential of human beings. His writings mark the great transitions from mysticism and transcendentalism to realism and humanism because of his love of humanity and democratic principles, which are widespread throughout his poetic works. He is called the pioneer of American poetry. There are some controversial themes that he deals with in his poetry; instead, he is beloved by all poetry lovers from all parts of the world. His works play an important role in the lives of Americans, and they have a great impact on other American poets. He not only inspired the next generation of American poets but also became a guiding force for poets all over the world. He provides different themes to poetry, which were earlier considered inappropriate for this genre. He makes the common man the subject of lyrical works. The *Grass Is Singing* is still the Bible for not only American poetry lovers but also for readers who love democracy and the common man. This work has immense importance in American literary circles. Even after One Hundred and Fifty years, this work has not lost its relevance, and the ideas expressed in these poems are still found in the works of contemporary poets. It still holds the readers' interest.

Keywords: Body, discrimination, end, equality, humanity, mysticism, philosophy, soul and union etc.

Introduction:

Walt Whitman succeeds in cementing the connection between past, present, and future by presenting such ideas in his poetic works. The philosophy he espoused is still relevant and sure not to be withered as long as there is a human race on this beautiful planet. It is because of the universality of the themes of his poetry that the poets in the 21st century also get inspiration from him and follow the precepts in letter and spirit through their works. He always places importance on humanity; his axis is the human soul as well as the body. It is the unflinching faith in one's self that makes him one of the finest American poets. Most of his poems present his ideas regarding

himself. The well-known poem *Song of Myself* provides evidence of Whitman's egotistical principles, but he also gives equal importance to the human soul as well as the body; for him, both are important for the existence of a human being. He celebrates the soul in most of his poetry, as is evident when we come across his poems like *Song of Myself*. He exclusively admits that he is a poet of body as well as that of soul, and both carry equal stature in his eyes. None is superior and inferior to each other. He believes that the human body and soul are inalienable entities to one another, as we cannot think of the human body without a soul, and in the same way, a soul loses its existence without a body.

Whitman states that there is supreme happiness if there is harmony between the human body and soul. It is the company of soul and body the poet always yearns for as he finds ecstasy in the coexistence of body and soul. So, he gives utmost importance to human beings. As he considers human beings to be the most amazing and perfect creations of the Almighty or God, he believes that helping human beings is just like worshipping the deity. So, one shouldn't ignore human beings as every man and woman has the elements of divine power, which is in heaven. So, ignoring human beings is just like humiliating the gods. Every human being, i.e., humble, poor, or rich, is the messenger of God, so they deserve respect and acknowledgment from fellow beings. Mutual respect and cooperation are the only ways that we human beings express gratitude toward God. He also states the importance of nature and its objects like woods, mountains, valleys, animals, rivers, etc. One should also revert to nature as it is also a creation of the Almighty, who has created us. He affirms that there is the finest unity between nature, God, and human beings. When a human being lives in harmony with nature and other beings, his life will be more fruitful. So there is joy and complete happiness in the life which is spent in the communion of God and nature.

Walt Whitman has great faith in the Supreme Power as he trusts it, and he feels its presence everywhere. He states that God is a mentor, guide, and supporter, as no human being feels lonely as he is always with his or her God. God is the most trusted friend and guide to every human being. It is because of his indomitable faith in the Supreme Power that he, in all his poetic works, shows reverence for human and divine relations. So, he doesn't believe in the artificial divisions that were made by the handfals. He avoids classifying human beings on the lines of race, caste, color, and nationality. So, the poet believes in equality as there is no discrimination between men and women on the grounds of gender, class, and financial position. He is compassionate and affectionate to men and women. It is this love for males and females that suggests his equal affinity to the soul as well as the body. He does not find any imperfections anywhere, be it in the world of human beings or nature. Both are lovely and melodious. The poetic excellence and genius are perceived throughout his poems when he establishes a firm connection between himself and the external world of humans as well as nature.

The poet's love for the common man can be seen in his staunch belief in democratic principles, despite all the contemporary commotion prevailing in his times, when there are critical and complex issues that pose a challenge to humanity as well as the religious beliefs of his times. The Nation was struggling with racial issues, and there was fear of a rift between the North and South on the question of the abolition of slavery. The very concept of nationhood was questioned as there was a grave challenge to American nationhood. There was a fear of the national disintegration on the slavery issue. Besides the physical crisis, religious beliefs are also challenged by the major developments in the arena of Science and Technology. The hard-earned independence faced innumerable issues in the light of the North and South conflict. New theories and lines of thought created a stir among the ecclesiastics. In the backdrop of this political, social, philosophical, and religious turmoil, Whitman succeeds in providing much-needed solace and comfort to the agonizing hearts. His views regarding transcendentalism state that divinity is omnipotent and equally exists in human beings and in nature. He also advocates romanticism and humanism. These lines of thought have made a deep impact on his mind.

It is because of the incorporation of the emerging theories and their assimilation in his works that his works become more popular and acceptable throughout the world, as there is not a single instance of rejection and ignorance towards the basic tenets of humanity that's the reason his *Grass of Singing* is considered as the new attempt of writing an ecclesiastical work and inclusive thoughts. He is considered a prophet. He respects prominent transcendental philosophers like Henry David Thoreau and Emerson Emmanuel Kant, who believe that knowledge of the reasoning process is a must for understanding the nature of reality. He admits the importance that is given to the bards by Emerson, who believes that it is the duty of the literary personalities, and especially that of the poets, to popularize the new American world as he recognizes the power of words and it is only possible to change the mind of the common man and women by familiarizing them with the new ideas and notions which are only possible through the poets. It is because of his high praise of the bards and his human ideas.

His work *Leaves of Grass* has become the religious text that is fundamental and final for the new religion that is espoused throughout his poems. The reader may find the ever-inflammable Earth for a new religion, which is best on his ideas in his works. Besides his religious views, he is a champion of the common man and advocates their problems and issues. His leaning is towards ordinary men, women, and laborers, and he also fights for them. The readers are from all walks of life. Every class, lower, middle, and higher, equally loves him and considers him as their own. He has great faith in the democratic principles. For him, democracy is as important as religion, or democracy itself becomes his religion. It is a religion that prioritizes national feelings over individual aspirations and ambitions. The human being is recognized by himself but by the name of the Nation in which he or she lives.

It is manifest. It is the Nation's first attitude of the worldwide month, which is well expressed in most of his poems. While playing the most important role in Nation and democracy, he never ignores the common man. The Nation remains an empty entity without human beings. Men and women are equally important as they are the foundation of every democratic setup and Nation. He also states that Americans cannot achieve true independence without associating democracy with prosperity, and the development of a country can never be realized only through the attainment of materialistic progress. It is done by placing equal importance on the all-round development of human beings, and the development should not be at the cost of this disintegration of nature and religion. Whitman glorifies the ultimate end, i.e., death, the ultimate truth, and every human being must welcome it when the due time comes. He categorically states that he will give a warm welcome to his death. He opines that there won't be a faint line of fear and grief on his face while welcoming death, but it has deliverance power which frees the human being from his or her self. It is a transition from one identity to another; it erases the past memory and prepares the soul for the new journey. So when should not grieve and be gloomy towards its final end? The self just changes the outfit, as the human body is not permanent. So, Whitman's perception of death is that of a mystic. The poet experiences the unity of an individual with the eternal one, and this is only possible through the medium of death. Such mystic philosophical trends can be seen in Whitman's works. He believes that the individual's union with the supreme soul is the ultimate mission of every human existence so that union with the supreme can be achieved even before and after death. So, he insists on humanity and love among human beings. The strength of human beings lies in their acceptance and embracing the final end without any protest. He also advocates the human submission to the soul. While eulogizing human existence, he also praises human independence as the poet always appreciates it; he states that every individual is different from one another, so the soul is independent of its body cover.

Whitman prophesizes;

Thou mayest time, smilest content at death

And fillest and swellest full the vastness of space

Greater than stars or suns

(Passage to India, section -8 LL210-212)

Walt Whitman admits that the world is not altogether perfect; there is evil as well as good on this planet. So the virtuous and wicked are here, and there is a purpose in its existence; nothing is without a purpose. So, it advises humanity to accept the grey side of human beings as a truth. Walt Whitman is a staunch believer, and he also asks humanity to surrender to the Almighty, but his perception regarding the supreme is not of the orthodox one; his faith is humanist, wherein he metamorphoses the conventional concept of God in his own humanistic ways. He gives the new name to God as the great Comrado and the Divine Beloved. It is this humanistic incarnation of the conventional deity that is found in most of his poems, which present the notion that an individual must have a union with the Supreme Being. He believes that God

is compassionate towards all human beings and that the whole of humanity enjoys a better and more prosperous life on Earth because of the motherly love of the Supreme Being. Every human being, irrespective of gender or race, is the beloved of the creator. So, most of his poetry is devoted to human and divine relations that celebrate love. While talking about human confidence in self, Whitman urges a strong faith in divinity. Besides human pride, we must never forget that the source of all virtues like love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness is God.

Mysticism is a profound influence in Whitman's poems. Everyone should look positively towards the divine acts of revolution, and his explication regarding the self is not in an introverted way. Rather, he moves out and eulogies the universal principles that appreciate the self. He always believes in collective welfare and states that he is not an individual but an alienable part of all humanity. The poet firmly believes in others. The self becomes more prominent when it establishes a union with others. So whenever he says I it means the whole human race and not the individual poet Walt Whitman. The self has the potential to emphasize the whole human race. This self has the power to experience different objects. It can feel the physical as well as the platonic love.

Conclusion

Walt Whitman's insistence lies in his literary endeavor, wherein he succeeds for the first time in the history of the United States by bringing varied and diverse elements under a single umbrella and providing a unique identity to the American people and the land. His perception that unified the whole human race is his all-embracing humanism, which believes in equality and mutual respect. He also focuses on the immense potential of a human being. It is because of his appreciation of human beings that placed him in the first line of renowned humanitarians. Besides his humanist approach, he is an innovator who succeeds in raising the voice of the common man against social evils. Throughout his poetic works, he protests against the discrimination of human beings on the grounds of race, caste, color, and gender. Whitman empathizes with weaker sections of society. He takes arms against the widespread exploitation of the laborers of his time. He eschews every form of subjugation of the lower class by the people who are in authority. He dreams of a world that is free from exploitation and injustice and compassionate towards the tribulations of the poor and destitute. It is a world that facilitates the development of all human beings; every creative act will be promoted, appreciated, and supported in this world. Every individual would have harmonious relations with one another; the common welfare will be the motto of all individuals. There is no place for conflict and ill will in this place, and mutual support and cooperation are basic principles of these people.

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