

Learning Language and Life Skills through Poetic Corpus of Walt Whitman

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This paper attempts to throw light on enriched language, Life-skills and ethical values in the poetic collection of great American poet Walt Whitman. In his poems Whitman gives expression to the common aspirations, expectations and faith of the people. He said he wished to express faithfully and realistically in poetic his own physical, economical, moral, emotional, intellectual and aesthetic personality in contemporary world in a transparent and comprehensive more than even before. Whitman is an original poet, very sincere but extremely revolutionary who had the fervor of a born fighter to revive from the old world. He replaced Aristocracy, superstition and tradition by modern values and modern ideals - democracy, science, mysticism, Life-skills and common sense. His poems express patriotism, mercy, transparency and humanity which seems almost vanishing from the modern world. Undoubtedly his poetic corpus includes great message to the world along with learning of modern vocabulary and marvelous poetic diction.

Whitman belonged to America which is the greatest nation today physically, intellectually and scientifically which had its origin in the countries which grew into states and were ultimately integrated into a nation, which is the spread once of the modern world. People from almost all the countries of Europe, like England, France, Germany, Spain and even Ireland immigrated into America and got merged into a nation known as the U.S.A., or the United nations of the world. Whitman was born of poor parents. Owing to financial scarcity he could not keep long at school which he had to leave at the age of eleven to earn money by doing different jobs. From his early life he had a speculative temperament. He worked as a teacher in village school for three years. He also worked for a number of newspapers till he brought out the *Leaves of Grass*. In 1848 he accepted the job of Editor, on the staff of a newspaper in New Orleans. His *Leaves of Grass* one of the most popular poems ever written by an American poet, was first published in 1855. Its second edition came in 1856 and third in 1860. It gave him wide fame and ensured him a permanent place among one of the greatest poets of America. After some time he joined the society of Bohemian in New York. When he was forty-one years, of age the civil war broke out. He did a lot of work in the civil war. He served the wounded soldiers in Washington owing to his political views

he had to forgo his job as a journalist. After the war was over Whitman wrote a brilliant poem "O Captain! My Captain!" which needs no introduction at all. Though Whitman belonged to western world but even then the humanity and Values found ample space in his persona and poetry. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln drowned him in the ocean of grief. He exclaimed:

O Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
...But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

(*"Walt Whitman"*, 219)

This poem expresses patriotism, mercy and humanity which seems almost vanishing from the modern world. The poem also shows the picture of the political world. The year 1873 was a very critical time in his life. He suffered a paralytic stroke; his mother died. Hence he left Washington and came back to his native place, and finally settled in Camedon. His *Leaves of Grass* was followed by a number of the poems like *Democratic Vistas*, *Specimen Days*, and *November Boughs* etc. In 1892 he bade good bye to the world. He brought out his *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, and was published on July 4, the Independence Day of America. Emerson wrote about *Leaves of Grass*.

"I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "Leaves of Grass". I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed."

Whitman possessed the soft heart not only for human beings but also for animals too and it is beautifully expressed in his poem "Animals":

I think I could turn and live with animals
They are so placid and self contained
...They do not sweat and whine about their conditions..."

(*"American Literature"*, 48)

These lines clear the root cause of the suffering of human beings that we people are always dissatisfied what we have and always participating enthusiastically in the blind race of materialism. So the poet felt that animals are far better than human beings and articulate his wish to live with them which apparently indicates his disinterest from the materialistic things.

When civil war broke out he visited the wounded in the hospital he told the man how he felt he said:

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

(*Walt Whitman*, 43)

He exclaimed with sorrow:

"I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep
But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,
And the yellow-blue countenances see
I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound
...The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,
These and more I dress with the impassive hand, (yet deep in my
Breast a fire, a burning flame).

(*Walt Whitman*, 247)

These lines opened the heart of the Whitman in front of the readers that how much he was moved by seeing the pain of the soldiers and simultaneously seem to give the message to the world to develop the feature of mercy and humanity in their personalities.

Though Whitman was had a soft heart but at the same time he was brave too and it is quite evident in his poem "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" He remarked:

Pioneers! O Pioneers!
...We must march my darlings; we must bear the brunt of danger,
We the youthful sinewy races, all the rest on us depend...

(*Walt Whitman*, 273)

Whitman also indicates to modern man that supreme power is God so the aim of all human beings must be the union of soul and Almighty. He writes;

O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O darling joy, but safe are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail...

(*Walt Whitman*, 43)

Whitman lived in a crucial period in his country. The country was also struggling to discover its identity. Both were in search of their souls. He craves for confidence in life, for a faith in the common goodness of mankind and for a faith in destiny. He was deeply impressed by Emerson and Thoreau. These three were making effort to reconcile the romantic imagination with the realities of American life. They believe that the spirit shines and transcends all realities of life. The poet realises that the divine aura is breathing through all forms. Such a poet lives in dreams; Whitman lives in modern, realistic dream. Thus he emphasizes the liberty and the infinite potentiality of the individual. Self-reliance finds its space in the democratic tolerance of other people. Thus the spirit of democracy creates the base of Whitman's poetic world. Walt Whitman was built by these different influences his maternal stock, his parents and the third of his birth place, his life in Brooklyn and New York, the sea and the city, the seashore and Brooklyn, solitude and the crowds. All these are responsible for the different opening of poem. As below:

"One's self I sing, a simple separate person,
yet utter the words democratic, the word En-Masse".

(*"Walt Whitman"*, 196)

Indeed, Whitman is at his best when two clashing elements, the abstract and the concrete are kept in balance and the one is not allowed to overcome the another:

Great is Liberty, great is equality...
Great is Youth-equality great is Old Age
Great is Wealth-great is Poverty-great is
Expression-great is Silence...

(*"Walt Whitman"*, 34)

Whitman believed in equality immensely and he treated all alike and this made him unique from those who made unnecessary and undesirable comparisons. He again remarked in his another poem "Song of Myself"

I celebrate myself, and sing myself
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you
I loafe and invite my soul

(*"Walt Whitman"*, 71)

He was an original poet, very sincere but intensely revolutionary who had the zeal of a born fighter to revive from the old world. Thus, he stood undaunted on at the place which divided the traditional from the modern. He entered the modern world with the weapons of kindness, equality, love, liberty and fraternity. He taught the common people and expresses his feelings and ideas both individually and collectively. A great critic has said, "Not only does he rejected the old, the traditional, and the worn out, also gives, he emphasizes the new urges and aspirations of man in an age of science and democracy".

Human mind is a complex creation while it produces something it also receives something. While it imparts a new form and momentum to the conditions in the midst of which it works, it also receives from them something which gives to a task a definite form. The human brain begins to work and the varied parcel of phenomenon begins to dominate him. Wait Whitman was not aloof from the desires, the visions, and the frustrations of the human being looking for silver lining in the clouds. He was not only a unique literary artist but a commendable worker and thinker whose preference was not personal motives but cosmopolitan. He had an excellent conduct, good common sense, cheerful personality. He was a modest person with inborn set beliefs in God and soul. Wherever he went, he worked hard. On the one hand he was sound, veteran theologian while on the other hand he loved to argue. He composed remarkable lines:

I am of the old and the young, of the foolish as much as the wise.

Regardless of others, even regardful of others,

Maternal as well as Paternal, a child as well as man...

(“Walt Whitman”, 84)

The poet seems to give message to the people of materialistic world that they should not be much affected by any situation of life. As the poet contains self assurance, he is as much of the old as of the young, as much of the foolish as of the wise. He does not bother much about what other think of him. He is regardless of others be they elderly or young, because other people are too much concerned with materialism. This point is extremely motivational for present world as in this present scenario most of the people are worried about other’s opinion for themselves.

He was an amazing poet not only in his subject matter and attitude to life, but also in his language and style, diction and versification. Whitman proudly called the *Leaves of grass* “a language experiment”. Frequently he used words from factories, ferries, farms and trades.

At other times he compounds words or freely coins new stylish words. Furthermore he imports words from other foreign languages such as the Fence and Spanish, and distorts and adapts them to his own utilization to compose poetry. Words from his readings, literary terms, much that is grandiose and affected, also survive and are used along with words borrowed from the daily usage both of the city and the countryside. His vocabulary is very powerful and its power lies in its intensity and sincerity. His words are absolutely true and full of unquestionable authority.

In the nutshell it can be said that Whitman is a fantabulous poet and skilled craftsman, Emerson once described Whitman's poetry as "a remarkable mixture of the Bhagvat Gita and the *New York Herald*," and that unique association of the scriptural and the vernacular, the transcendent and the mundane, effectively holds the features of Whitman's poems, poems that most poetry lovers find as simultaneously magical, prosaic and sublime with meaningful message for successful life.

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