

CHAPTER - VI

Whither Walt ? Summing Up

[ 1 ]

Breaking upon the American literary scene in the mid-fifties of the last century, Walt Whitman created a sensation in the poetic world by his originality, breadth, humanity, and technical innovations. The promising young man was bent upon routing the rotten customs and cramping conventions of his time. In Whitman meet the twin streams of romantic idealism in America and the scientific realism. The former stems from the eighteenth century philosophy of progress, while the latter generates from contemporary thought. He becomes the true representative of the United States by bridging the chasm made by the Civil War between the idealism of the past and the materialism of the present.

Yet Whitman was never very popular during his life time. In the passionate conflicts of a changing civilization, the advocate of harmony is liable to be suspected by all factions. So it was with him. The realist looked askance at his higher faith in humanity, and the idealist was shocked because he extolled the animalism of man. Another reason for Whitman's unpopularity is the anomalous quality of his verse. Form in

poetry, as in all arts, is an aid to the communication of thought and feeling, and the more familiar the form, the more complete the communication. A new form is a barrier between the poet and his reader until the latter learns and approves of it. Leaves of Grass was of as much importance in point of freshness and ~~supreme~~ appeal for its themes and externals as for its technical innovations. It occupies in American literature almost the same place as Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads does in English. Both Whitman and Wordsworth came forward with a poetic creed of their own, giving a new diction and dimension to poetry.

Emerson once told a friend that Leaves of Grass reminded him at once of the Bhagvat-Gita and the New York Herald.<sup>1</sup> Its style is certainly incongruous. Lyrical flights are to be found side by side with prosaic banalities, mystical effusions with the most familiar expressions from the spoken language. At times, Whitman transcribes everyday scenes with extreme simplicity and great clarity. At others he heaps up abstract words interminably with an enthusiasm which the reader does not always share. Too often one passes without transition from the loose, woolly, pretentious language of the journalist to the rapid and <sup>e</sup>precise evocation of a concrete detail. It even happens that some of his best passages are spoiled by the brusque intrusion of learned words in very simple contexts. The same jarring note is sometimes produced by the unexpected use of a slang. In this way,

1. Bliss Perry : Walt Whitman (N.Y. 1905) p. 276.

very often, the different stylistic elements, instead of being used separately and kept free from all admixture, enter into complex combinations.

The complexity and the discords of Whitman's style are not due solely to his lack of education and to his habits as a journalist; they derive also from the duality of his point of view of the world. Sometimes he places himself on the plain<sup>e</sup> of the senses and describes the visible in simple and direct terms; sometimes, as a mystic, he transcends physical appearance and tries to suggest the invisible. As he himself says in Song of Myself:

I help myself to material and immaterial.

Thus we have a beautiful blend of the descriptive and the obscure passages in Whitman's poetry. As early as in 1855, in order to evoke transcendent reality he had to be "indirect and not direct, or descriptive, or epic".<sup>2</sup> Like a symbolist, he suggests things and ideas. This may lead to a certain obscurity, but a poem must be a beginning and not an end in itself and it belongs to the reader to take up the poet's suggestions and to finish it. The most felicitous passages in Leaves of Grass are, thus, those in which Whitman has fused the diverse elements of his style, those in which he suggests rather than describes, those in which he takes flight but does not get lost in the

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2. Vide Preface to the 1855 Edition in Leaves of Grass, Reader's Edition - ed. H. W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (London, 1966) p. 712.

clouds. In this, one is reminded of Wordsworth's skylark which, unlike Shelley's, never forgets, in the midst of her wild flight, that she has left her nest on the earth. Whitman's feet remained firmly planted on the ground.

Then, gradually, a certain change came upon the poet. The loose method of writing was one of the constants of Whitman's art. For him the spirit predominated over the letter. But, by and by, he came to concentrate on form and expression. The mystic in him by slow degrees became an artist more and more, conscious of his imperfections, but incapable of remedying them. He admitted in Democratic Vistas that in his writing "everything is literally photographed. Nothing is poetized, no divergence, not a step, not an inch, nothing for beauty's sake, no euphemism, no rhyme." While in 1850 in the Preface to the Leaves of Grass, Whitman expressed his scorn for polish and ornaments, and made everything depend on the power of inspiration, in 1865 with the publication of Drum-Taps, he remarked that a good piece of writing must be "perfectly clear -- with ... no ornamental adjectives, unless they have come molten hot, and imperiously prove themselves... <sup>clearness,</sup> sanity, and health are wanted -- that is the Divine Style." Whitman knew ~~kkkk~~ it well that language was not "an abstract construction" made by the learned, but that it had arisen out of the work and needed the joys and struggles and desires of long generations of humanity, and that it had "its bases broad and low, close to the ground". Words are not arbitrary inventions, but "the product of

human events and customs, the progeny of folkways." His poems, by keeping to these facts, could thereby release "new potentialities" of expression for American character.

Whitman was a conscious artist, a poetic theorist, and a rebel against the poetic creed of the older days. He formulated his own theory of poetry. He noticed that the singers of the old world did not voice properly the hopes and aspirations, the problems and facilities of the new world. They were mainly the singers of Aristocracy, Mobility, and Feudalism and so they could not fit in with the new age of Democracy, Science, and Reality. Whitman, therefore, threw away the old ways of writing poems, and their beaten subject-matters, and forged new modes and theories for his own poetry. In one of his anonymous reviews of his poems of 1855, Whitman wrote:

The theory and practice of poets have hitherto been to select certain ideas or events or personages, and then describe them in the best manner they could, always with such ornament as the case allowed. Such are not the theory and practice of the new poet. He never presents for perusal a poem ready-made on the old modes, and ending when you come to the end of it; but every sentence and every passage tells of an interior not always seen, and exudes an impalpable something which

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3. Quoted by F.O. Matthiessen in 'Only a Language Experiment' in Whitman (20th Cent. Views) pp. 66-67.

sticks to him ~~and~~ that reads, and pervades and provokes him to tread the half-invisible road, where the poet, like an apparition, is standing fearlessly before. If Walt Whitman's premises are true, then there is a subtler range of poetry than that of the grandeur of acts and events, as in Homer, or of characters, as in Shakespeare -- poetry to which all other writing is subservient, and which confronts the very meanings of the works of nature and competes with them. It is the direct bringing of occurrences and persons and things to bear on the listener and beholder, to reappear through him or her; and it offers the best way of making them a part of him and her right aim of the greatest poet.<sup>4</sup>

Whitman insisted on the poet's faithfulness to reality, and in his century and country saw that reality was closely identified with science and democracy. He asserted that the "Construction" of science and democracy "underlies the structure of every perfect poem". They are not, thus, offered as the sole projects for the poet but rather as the appropriate, even inevitable, frame of modern reference; the poet who ignores this frame retreats to the past. Literary works of the past are not inferior but rather are enclosed and possibly limited by a different frame of reference. But while the poet's genuine material exists in his own place and time, he still has the responsibility

4. Quoted by James S. Miller : Walt Whitman : Complete Poetry and Selected Prose. Introduction (Boston, 1959) p. XXXVI.

of striking through to the infinite and eternal. The mediocre poet will mirror the surface of reality. The profound poet will discover the "interior or spiritual life." Whitman asserted over and over again the transcendent importance of what he called the "religious" element in poetry. In stressing the point that science, democracy, and religion or spirituality must underlie the structure of modern poetry, Whitman has not limited the possible subjects of poetry. He was rather defining the nineteenth century's view of the universe and itself -- a view in which the poet must be immersed if he is to be a poet of the modern, as Homer was immersed in his time in embracing Greek "mythology", and Shakespeare in his in reflecting "feudalism". The poet is not to propagandize but rather to embody or "pre-suppose" the modern myth of science, democracy, and above all, spirituality.

Whitman seemed at times to feel that if he could name the poet, find the right epithet for him, the people of his country would recognize him. In the opinion of Whitman, of all mankind the great poet is the equable man. He is the arbiter of the diverse and he is the key. He is the equalizer of his age and land. The poet is a seer. He is individual. He is complete in himself. The poet, endowed with a transcendental vision serves as the spiritual eyes of humanity. In Whitman's poetics, if the poet must be a prophet, he must also be a priest.

Through the divinity of themselves shall the new breed of poets be interpreters of men and of all events and things. In Passage of to India Whitman elevates the poet from priest to Christ :

"Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplished by the true son of God, the poet." Whitman, like Mathew Arnold, could view the poet in such high capacity because serving art in its highest is only the other name for serving God and humanity. The poet, in this view, does literally take over the significant functions of the priest.

The true poet draws his materials from Nature. He unites the past, the present, and the future in a harmonious sequence. He must get completely identified with his nation and incarnate it historically, geographically, and biologically. He is the genius of America. He must be endowed with organic health and a perfect sense of the unity of man and nature, and his personal character must be representative of the national character. It is significant that Whitman gives upon the poet a great responsibility when he says the poet must be an accomplished and perfect interpreter of everything known and unknown to the common man, that the poet must be an individual, total and complete in himself, and that only he has the capability to see that the others are as good as he himself is. The qualities of American character which Whitman names, are the qualities that predominate in his own personality.



In the opinion of Whitman, it is the function of the poet to perceive what is permanent in the flux of things and to explain the law of its development. He is the voice of liberty, the exemplar of equality, and the fulfilment of the laws of science. In him are reconciled the measureless pride of the soul, which acknowledges no lessens but its own, and the equally measureless sympathy of the soul, which gives itself freely to all. In his art he is a realist, but he knows that beauty inheres in each object, condition, combination, or process, and that he must not only reveal this beauty, but help his reader to possess it. To this end, the best style is that which is simplest, and most natural, without rhyme, metre, or other ornament. The form of the perfect poem is a free and organic growth in which each part is in harmony with the whole design. The whole purpose of the poet, in brief, is to make poems that "tally nature."

In Whitman's opinion, the poet is a mere passive agent, who should write automatically, perhaps even in trance, under the spell of some divine source. When one is caught up in the hypnotic chant of the poet, and lost in his wild abandon, the automatic writing theory seems not only relevant, but to have its finest example in Whitman. The effect of wildest abandon can be maximum achieved only through the strictest artistic control, whereas genuine lawlessness could result in nothing but bad poetry. Of equal importance is his belief that the substance of poems must be derived from the concrete materials of the world. In his obse-

ssion with "sensuous objects", not only in theory but also in practice, Whitman may readily be accepted as a forerunner of the early twentieth-century imagists. His almost child-like ecstasy in sensuous contact with things has also to be noted carefully when he says in one poem from among the inscriptions of the leaves of Grass that on seeing the least insect or animal, he falls in love with it, stops and loiters all the time to sing it ecstatic songs. Though Whitman acknowledged a further function of the poet, namely, to indicate the path between reality and their souls, he felt that first the poem, before it can exist at all, must engage vividly with the world we know through our senses.

When, in the 1855 Preface, Whitman stated that the nation "may well go half to meet ... its poets", and in By Blue Ontario's Shore that America "will in due time advance to meet them [her poets]", here is no fear of mistake," he was visualizing not a passive but an active audience participating in and indeed creating the poetic experience. In his view, the process of the reading of poetry is not a half-asleep, but, in the highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself; that he must be on the alert, and must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, the text furnishing the clue, the start, or framework.

Readers of modern poetry, and particularly the diffi-

cult stretches of Eliot, Auden, Pound, or Dylan Thomas, would instinctively understand and accept the figures as they perform mental acrobatics in order to keep up, developing agile, alert, and muscular minds to be able to experience poetic pleasure. But the struggle of the reader in his encounter with the poem is not merely an aggressive effort to understand. It is also an attempt at imaginative creation. The reader will always have his or her part to do just as much as a poet does his. In Whitman's view, the poet should seek less to state or display any theme or thought, and more to bring the reader into the atmosphere of the theme or thought -- there to pursue his own flight. The gymnastic struggle, then, is not a mere display of brute force, but an alert creativity through which the reader does indeed construct the poem. The poem ~~xxxx~~ comes to life only when read creatively. The very existence of the poem is made up of a series of such recreations, and it has, in this sense, as many lives to live as it has perceptive readers.

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Endless disputes have raged over Whitman's prosody. The truth is best ascertained by inquiring what he was trying to do and what he actually did with the English language. From his love of the common man to his plea for the use of simple, unvarnished, and homely language as a medium of poetic communication

was only an inevitable step. It is true that Emerson, the great Master, had already stressed the need of reclaiming "the language of the street". He had said:

The speech of the man in the street is invariably strong, nor can you mend it by making it what you call 'parliamentary' ... What can describe the folly and emptiness of scolding like the word 'Jawing' ? I feel, too, the force of the double negative, though clean contrary to our grammar rules ... Cut these words and they would ~~xxx~~ bleed; they are vascular and alive; they walk and run !

Some years later Whitman was to expound his own theory of language, quite similar in tone and emphasis to Emerson's but not necessarily 'derivative' in any sense of the word. The need for a simple poetic diction had also been emphasized by Wordsworth in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, and when Whitman also felt disgusted with the courtliness and insincerity of conventional language, he thought it the need of the hour as to use ordinary speech of ~~poets~~ as his linguistic medium. It can not be denied that Whitman was perhaps the most unambiguous, and eloquent of his contemporaries in advocating the cause of simple language. In his poem I Was Looking A Long While his frank statement that his poetry is all for the average man of to-day and his equally express desire in Leaves of Grass "Take my leaves America, take them South and take them North. Make

welcome for them everywhere", signifies only his heartfelt desire to send his poetry to every common man's door step. That he did not have the least pretense at having written anything very high or great is quite well understood from what he wrote in Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads:

"No one will get at my verse who insists on viewing them as a literary performance, or attempt at such performance, or as aiming mainly toward art or aestheticism."

His sole desire was to reach the very core of the hearts of his favourite en-masse just as a "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a Kosmos." There is not the slightest grain of falsehood when he ~~wrote~~ said in Song of Myself: "I am large, I contain multitudes", and it was in the language of these that he wrote his poetry. He was determined and well-fixed in his aim so as "to have the world know what I was pleased to do ... In the long run the world will do as it pleases with the book." <sup>6</sup> In a lecture entitled An American Primer, he pleaded for the revival of a vernacular full of "lasting, fierce words. Do you suppose the liberties and the brawn of these States have to do only with delicate lady-words? With gloved gentlemen words? The perfect user of words uses things -- they exude in power and beauty from him -- miracles from his hands -- miracles from his mouth."

In utter disregard of conventions and past poetic practices, Whitman chose to write free verse. He conceived of his free verse poems as 'Chants', more rhythmical than spoken discourses and corresponding, in some respects, to the recitative of operas. After starting as a quite conventional poet, Whitman slowly worked his way toward the free verse. Whitman began versifying with the simplest of forms, then made use of more difficult stanza forms; next he wrote a little blank verse; then he made private experiments with some of the very material he has to work over, through several years. When his first edition [of *Leaves of Grass*] appeared, his verse was disciplined, poise and sweeping rhythm were added, and a standard of line length was adopted which would fit the bold but delicate burden of his song. His rhythms were in a loose and free metre of his own, of an irregular length of lines, apparently lawless at first perusal, although on closer examination a certain regularity appears, like the recurrence of lesser and larger waves on the sea-shore, rolling in without intermission, and fitfully rising and falling. ❀

Whitman not only broke away from some of the conventions of versification, he also broke away from some of the conventions of style. He was distressed by "stock poetical touches" and by ornamentation as such in poetry. His dislike for what he called "drawing room poetry", led him, in general, to use, relatively simple words and to avoid an excess of figurative

language. Whitman appreciated the force of humble speech from the early days of his career, and praised such speech for growing out of human life. In his youth, he was an avid searcher after colloquial and slang phrases with life to them, and he appreciated in such language an attempt of common humanity to escape from bald literalism, and express itself illimitably. Thus, with some of his more elegant ~~xxx~~ diction, whitman intermingled the racy phrases of bus drivers, labourers, railroad men, boat men, localisms, bits of slang, common talk.

Free verse and individualistic style are a part of Whitman's newness, and achieves the fullest impact only in conjunction with other striking elements. The language of Whitman's poetry is like a breath of fresh air. As whitman broke the metrical rules, so he violated the rules of poetic diction. He imported words from all kinds of sources -- from foreign languages, science, opera, the Bible, contemporary transcendentalists, from the speech of the street, and the talk in the country. Indeed, Whitman took the entire province of language to be also the province of poetry. And when he could not find the word he wanted, he was not averse to making one up or changing an old word around a bit to suit his need. Although Whitman's diction sometimes misfires, his successful language experiments far outnumber his mistakes. And one must point to the rich, varied vocabulary of Leaves of Grass as one of its finest original features.

What whitman sought was a medium in which he could ex-

press satisfactorily the expansive soul, mind, and body of democratic man developing in a new continent and forming a new and different society. A more orthodox technician could have made the conventions of rhyming or metrical verse do this. Whitman could not, as his early verse shows. Also, his conviction that he had something new to say and describe, impelled him to break away from orthodoxy in order to get an idiom which was fresh on his tongue and so could be personal and sincere. He needed to be free and lavish like his subject-matter.

He did not, as he asserted, get rid of outworn poetic diction, though he refreshed it with the bold frankness and realism of his speech. It can be parodied and imitated, but not reproduced. It is original because it is Whitman's own. For sources, one need go no further than the flowing rhythms of the Old Testament, which, in debased form, was the emotional language of the people of Whitman's generation; and also the oratory of Shakespeare's blank verse in its more rhetorical passages. Here he got his elaborate sentence-structure; and finally, the French and Italian opera, of which he was a devotee, a mixed art, both lyric and declamatory, rhythmic in both words and music. Here he found a form for many of his finest poems, although written in long rolling lines. Rolling his lines over and over again on his tongue, until they were ready to set down, building his poems slowly with revisions, he



gradually perfected his style, the governing principle being a rhythmic pattern in his mind.

As Whitman's language seems to bubble out of a melting pot, in a sense symbolic of the all-embracing democracy he writes about, so his jaunty, sometimes cocky perspective springs from a strongly individualistic feeling in which humour plays a natural role. Although this quality of humour is elusive in the Leaves of Grass and is closely related to the language experiment, it must be identified as one of the elements contributing to the book's freshness of impact. Another element, not so elusive but just as difficult to discuss, is the sex imagery. The sex image appears not only as a natural result of the poet's determination to be the poet of procreation in the Children of Adam section, but elsewhere throughout the Leaves of Grass as a part of Whitman's pervasive theme celebrating the element and primal, the life-force that infuses man and nature. As Whitman asserted in Song of Myself:

Through me forbidden voices,  
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I re-  
move the veil,  
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd.

The sexual image becomes as natural in Whitman's pages as sexual symbolism in Freud's dreams.

Whitman may be rightly regarded as the American bard. In writing poetry, his main purpose was to give voice to the American personality which was taking a definite shape out of the diversity of races and religions. He believed that the American poets so far had not made any honest attempt to represent America in its variegated pictures, but had simply imitated the European poets. He wanted America to have a poet of its own. Finding none to come up to his expectations, he assumed the role himself. Whitman voiced the emotions and ideas of the American nation. He believed that as a poet he must be the prophet, the guide, and the philosopher to show the right way to the people. He identified himself with every moment in the political, social, and religious life of America. His poems stand as a faithful record of America and its people and the centre of his focus was always the common man.

In a true sense Whitman's style was admirably adapted to describe the immigrant and emigrant on the move, the still unshaped landscape of a new continent, the energy and romance of pioneering, the dreams of a nation sure of an illimitable future. It was also an excellent medium for his passionate nature and responded with a lift toward the sublime when he wrote of religion and of death. Whitman's poetic style must be judged by its best passages, and there it is not only as characteristic of the writer as was Shakespeare's late blank verse, but it is also a new style

and often a great one.

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The major points discussed in the earlier chapters now, by way of summing up, stand as follows:

Whitman's political philosophy may be said to stand like this -- He was the apostle of Democracy and his ideal of it was essentially pragmatic and earth-bound. On the political plane he vehemently denounces all prerogatives and vested interests, while on the social, he visualizes complete harmony between the individual and the society. But, above all, Whitman appears to be, what one may call, a spiritual democrat who saw in true democracy the possibilities of universal peace toleration, and brotherhood. No individual was to be excluded from God's grace, since all shall be admitted unto the Kingdom of Heaven regardless of any distinctions. The most authentic specimen of true humanity was the common man, 'the divine average'. The poet shall be a 'Kosmos'; marked for generosity and affection, the most celebrated apostle of equality and fraternity, having no care for riches and privileges.

Whitman was intensely patriotic in the most religious sense of the word. The United States for him, was the haven of democracy, the hope of the common mass. His object was to estab-

lish a basis for faith in democracy by showing that all human qualities, good or bad, sex or divinity, were latent in each individual. Thus, Whitman's democratic ideals and intense humanitarianism became merged into a unified and identical whole. Again, his radical humanism is an integral part of the general concept of the so-called transcendentalism. To put the matter in another way, Whitman, through his particular kind of all-equalising politico-religious view, was only saying ahead what Swami Vivekananda was to say later : 'where are you searching for God? He is present before you in multiple forms; one who loves the created beings, only worships and gets God himself'.

In other words, Whitman's political philosophy, as expounded through a host of poems, only foreshadows, unknowingly perhaps, the present-day theory of Democratic Socialism. The same idea is extended to the transcendental, spiritual, and mystical level of the essential identity between man and man in the eye of God on the one hand, and between human personality and the Divine Being on the other. Absolute equality and fraternity between human beings are common and identical points in both. <sup>of</sup> If the Divine Being is equated with the ruler of the state in material and practical political sense, Whitman was unconsciously, it must be admitted, putting forward the idea of Marxist political theory which, in principle, admits the basic and essential oneness between the ruler and the ruled. In his political concept, thus, Whitman shows himself to be the great equaliser, the

unique leveller, the mighty master, bringing all under the same aegis.

His work is usually considered to be in the tradition of mystical writings from the Vedas to Sufi poetry. Whitman's brand of mysticism or transcendentalism is more in the Indian mould than in the Christian, as it incorporates concepts such as metempsychosis and Karma. His mysticism is essentially Vedantic and can be explained in terms of the Advaita or non-dualism. Vedantic mysticism tells of the realisation of the individual soul's identity with Brahman or the Supreme Soul -- Emerson's Over-soul -- which is at once transcendent and immanent. This identity is possible by means of intuitive insight gained through a study of the scriptures and that is exactly what happens in the case of Whitman. His knowledge of and close acquaintance with the great Indian scriptural writings as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Vishnu Purana, the Bhagavad Gita influenced his poetic thoughts considerably and a scrutiny of quite a good number of well-known poems in his Leaves of Grass will show beyond doubt how strongly his transcendental or mystic philosophy was moulded by the Indian strain. He will appear to be a theistic Vedantist who considered India as the land of spiritual quest and most of his doctrines belong to the mainstream of Hindu Philosophy.

Again, his political philosophy of the democratic

equality of the human beings both socially and spiritually in God's eye, elevating or ennobling all kinds and phases of human activity, holding that no occupation is inherently ignoble, is based essentially upon the transcendental belief on the oneness and equality of the human and the Divine. This concept of identification and oneness of all in the eye of God was, in its <sup>turn</sup> twin, derived from the Indian scriptural teachings. When Whitman assumed the role of the spokesman for the masses in his poetry, he was, perhaps unknowingly, performing the rather difficult task of linking all four different matters together -- the spokesman of the masses, with his political philosophy of physical and spiritual democracy, based upon the transcendental conviction of essential human oneness in the eye of the oversoul, under the Indian concept of the Advaita. Thus, Whitman's humanism, democratic theory, mysticism, and Indianness, when placed together, form a perfect square, one inseparably linked to the other, hardly having any separate, airtight existence or entity.

There is no denying the fact that there are many conflicting and debatable opinions among the critics and scholars on Whitman. His views on politics, his attitude towards life, his spiritual, transcendental and mystical concepts, the exact range and extent of the various influences on him, his views on the literary art and role of the poet, his impact on the poets of later generations, and finally, the part played by himself in the growth and development of poetry in America -- all have come under

close critical scrutiny. It is true that at times during the last hundred years or so, his literary performance has been highly appreciated, while at others, Whitman, as a writer, has fallen upon disregard and the impact of the poet on the literary history of his country has touched the lowest ebb. But that is no matter of concern because the same fact happened with almost all the great literary artists of the world excepting only Shakespeare. Whitman's poetry will, however, be found to contain the essence of the Indian attitude towards life, showing behind them the presence of a Sthitaprana (even and balanced) personality, to whom life, in every matter and in all its phases, is 'a chiar-oscure of light and shade' -- the most admirable attitude that all writers are expected to develop and all readers are bound to accept as the ultimate inexorable Truth. Now many of us, excluding, of course, the real Yogis and Sannyasins, have got the guts to say honestly and emphatically like Whitman that all the phases and situations of our life are only like changes of garments? Rishi Aurebindo and Swami Vivekananda found in Whitman and his poetry the indelible stamp of the ageless Indian philosophy of the Vedic sages and the Bhagvad Gita. In him, we find a Grihi Sannyasin who belongs to this material earth but who is far away from it at the same time, the real Sthitadhi of the Gita, to whom everything of this life and earth merges imperceptibly into the Supreme Over soul who only holds the Key to the infinite Kingdom of the unknown.