

EXPRESSION OF SELF IN WALT WHITMAN'S SONG OF MYSELF

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ABSTRACT

Leaves of Grass, the path breaking collection of poems, by the great American poet, Walt Whitman, was first published in 1855, comprising twelve poems. The very first poem, 'Song of Myself', encompasses the poet's vision of self and life – both interrelated and inevitably a reflection of the other.

The present paper seeks to dwell upon Whitman's expression of self in the poem, as he says, it is "Song of Myself"...where he intends to "celebrate myself/and what I assume you shall assume/For every atom belonging to me as good belong to you". Here Whitman concerns himself, primarily with his idea of the self, his identification of the self with others, and finally his relationship with the elements of nature and the universe. It is intriguing to find traces of Indian philosophy in general, and specifically of the teaching of the Bhagvad Gita, and at the same time the influence of the Western philosophy of Kant, and Hegel, and of Emerson's Transcendentalism.

Primarily, the idea that seems to emerge is that of his 'self' in amalgamation with every individual that Whitman describes in the poem. He seems to blend together the forces of nature, and the American idea of democracy. Essentially, one finds that the self is conceived as a spiritual entity, which remains relatively permanent in and through the changing flux of ideas and experiences which constitute its conscious life. The self that emerges, then, comprises ideas, experiences, psychological states and spiritual insights.

The research paper would elucidate the varied hues and shades of self that emerge in different sections of the poem, which finally ends with the epochal lines, which truly crystallise the essence of the poem, "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, /If you want me again look for me under your boots."

KEYWORDS: Self, Spirituality, Democracy, Philosophy