

Impact Of Ancient Indian Classics Upon Walt Whitman's Poems

16

Sangeeta Dalal*

Many poem of Walt Whitman confirm his faith in Indian philosophy, Indian mythology and Indian civilization. As a member of the Transcendental group he tried to understand the mystery behind sun, air, water, fire, sky, earth, death etc. He studied the ancient Indian classics to know how soul is superior to body. He wanted to answer a few questions through his poems such as —What is the nature of the Infinite ? How is soul superior to body ? Is there any life before this earthly life? How is soul immortal? What is the cause of human suffering ?How to get divine light? Can common people get divine light like Buddha? What is the source of eternal joy? Why do the people ignore spiritual bliss for material pleasures? What is the shape of that 'something' which is beyond decay and death? What did the Indian saints learn through meditation? How can Indian saints guide the masses? Why does Emerson admire The Vedas , The Gita, The Puranas? Why did H.D. Thoreau retire to Walden Pond? Did he really find bliss in solitude? How to overcome fear – the source of misery? The ancient Indian Classics answered such questions and Walt Whitman accepts:

Passage to more than India!

Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flight?

O soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like those?

Disportest thou in waters such as those?

Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas?

Then have thy bent unleash'd.

Passage to you, yours shores, ye aged fierce enigmas!

Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling
problems!

You, strew'd with the wrecks of skeltons, that, living,
never reach'd you.

Passage to more than india!

O Secret of the earth and sky!

Of you O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and
rivers!

Of you O wood and fields! Of you strong mountains of
my land!

Of you O prairies! of you gray rocks!

O morning red! O clouds! O rain and snows!

O day and night, passage to you!

Passage To India , Stanza9

The Indian saints possessed wonderful knowledge about the sun, the moon and other planets. They told people about the effect of the planets upon human beings. The secrets of astronomy and astrology were known to the learned scholars and they could predict the future of man and the state. The saint told King Kansa much in advance that the son of Devki and Vasudev would kill him. In spite of his best efforts, king could not escape his fall. Still the learned scholar search the answer of their questions in The Vedas as Whitman says:

O sun and moon and all you star! Sirius and Jupiter!

Passage to you!

Passage , immediate passage! The blood burns in ,my
veins!

Away O soul! Hoist instantly the anchor!

Cut the hawsers- haul out-shake out every sail!
 Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long
 enough?
 Have we not growel'd here long enough, eating and
 drinking like mere brutes?
 Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books
 long enough?
 Sail forth –steer for the deep waters only,
 Reckless O soul, exploring , I with thee, and thou with
 me
 For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to
 go,
 And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

Passage To Indian, stanza 9.

Like R.W. Emerson, Walt Whitman accepted that there
 is no death for soul and God. God is beyond decay and
 degeneration. He is the creator of this world. Whenever evils
 reach their climax, god takes birth as Rama or Krishna to destroy
 evils. A person is wrong if he considers himself superior to divine
 forces. King Trishanku wanted to reach heaven with his body
 and lord Indra checked the efforts of saint Vishwamitra.
 Vishwamitra meditated a lot in the forest to become superior to
 saint Vashistha but his ego was his greatest enemy. As last had
 to accept the conditions of Vashishtha and only then he could
 become Brahm- Rishi.

In the poem on the beach at night Walt Whitman
 describes the victory of optimism against pessimism. A small
 child is afraid of darks feels restless due to growing darkness.
 But her father wipes her tears as he has positive vision of life.
 He knows that life is a tale of sorrows and joys, ups and downs
 and one must have self- restraint, patience and tolerance to reach

How should I think, how breathe a single breath,
 How speak, if, out of myself,
 I could not launch, to those, superior universe?
 Swiftly I shrivel as the thought of god,
 As nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
 But that I, turning, call to thee O soul, thou actual me,
 And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
 Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
 And fillest, swellest full the vastness of space
 Passage to India, stanza 8.

Many great warriors appeared on the surface of earth and boasted of their bravery, boldness, courage, leadership, zeal and vigour. For example, Aurangzeb ruled for a long time and captured many brave kings. Yet he died as a restless person. He was sad at heart as his five sons did not have any administrative skills. King Alexander wanted to be popular as a world conqueror and yet departed empty-handed from this world. A lot of Asians leaders had the same fate as Walt Whitman says:

The tale of Alexander on his warlike marches suddenly dying.

On one side china and on the other side Persia and Arabia.

To the south the great seas and the bay of Bengal,
 The flowing literature, tremendous epics, religious,
 castes,

Old occult Brahma interminably far back, the tender
 and junior Buddha,

Central and southern empires and all their belonging,
 possessors,

The wars of Tamerlane, the reign of Aurangzeb,

The traders, rulers explores, Moslems, Venetians,
Byzantium, the Arabs, Portuguese,
The first traveler famous yet, Marco polo, Batouta the
moor,
Doubts to be solve'd, the map incognita, blanks to be
fill'd
The foot of man unstay'd, the hands never at rest,
Thyself O soul that will not brook a challenge.
Passage To India, stanza 6.

The name of lord brahma is eternal and so are his powers. A lot of merchants earned money and yet became the victims of death. They are not known forever. Many people don't know anything about the adventures of Marco polo, Vasco de Gama and Columbus. There are brave people on earth with a lot of noble ambitions in their heart . There are wonderful historians and yet unknown to the masses .yet great Warriors and scientists have their own limitations and despair. Quit often people fail to understand their agonies :

As the chief historian,
Down to the footlights walks in some Scena,
Dominating the rest I see the Admiral himself,
(History 's type of courage, action, faith,)
Behold him sad from palos' leading his little Fleet,
His voyage behold, his return, his great fame,
His misfortune, calumniators, behold him a prisoner,
chain'd,
Behold his dejection, poverty, death.
Passage to india, stanza 6.

As his soul is free from all earthly greed and other considerations, he feels a lot of peace and freshness. There is

no despair and tension in his mind and hence he can offer his prayers to God freely. In other poems he says that body and soul are equally important. As a wise person he thinks of creation, reason, prudence and the beginning of new projects. No particular land is important for him as he is a citizen of the world. His voice of his intuition is reasonable and hence he is not the least worried:

Passage indeed O soul to primal thought,
 Not lands and seas alone, thy own clear freshness,
 Thy young maturity of brood and bloom,
 To realms of budding bibles.
 O soul, repressless, I with thee and thou with me,
 Thy circumnavigation of the world begin,
 Of man, the voyage of his mind's return,
 To reason's early paradise,
 Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,
 Again with fair creation.

Passage to india, stanza 7.

His soul is free and can take him to any destination. His guardian is God and hence he is not bothered at all. He continues to offer prayers in the honour of God. As followers of The Gita he is free to wander in the infinite regions. There is no division of a time in this heaven – no day and no darkness of the night. He will surely feel delight in the enlightened world:

Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,
 Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all
 over,
 Bathe me O god in thee, mountain to thee,
 I and my soul to range in range of thee.
 O thou transcendent,
 Nameless, the fibre and the breath,

Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre
of them,
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,
Thou moral, spiritual fountain- affection's source- thou
reservoir,
(o pensive soul of me- o thirst unsatisfied- waitest not
there?)...

E.M. Forester and George Orwell came to India and studied the tendencies of Indian culture. They tried to understand the difference between Hinduism and Islam and then between Hinduism and Christianity. Yet they failed to understand the fundamentals of The Vedas, The Upanishads, and the Gita. They could not accept poet as the true son of God. The concept of trinity was beyond their understanding. Adam and eve lived in the delighted garden of eden and yet eve could not resist her temptation for the fruit of

Knowledge and the result was fall of man. But Whitman takes a lesson from this tragedy as he is prepared to fellow God everywhere:

All affection shall be fully responded to, the secrets shall
be told,
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and
hook'd and link'd together,
The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless earth,
shall be completely justified,
Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplished'd and
compacted by the true son of God, the poet,
(He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the
mountains,
He shall double the cape of good hope to some
purpose.)

Nature and man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,
The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

Passage to India, stanza 5.

A few questions are raised by Whitman here such as- is the human soul unsatisfied? Can this soul be pleased with material gains? Is life devoted merely to material prosperity? Why do the people engage themselves in feverish activities? Who can justify their restless explorations? Is soul bound with earthly desires? Is there any separation between nature and soul? Do earthly ambitions accompany a dead person? The poet answers that soul remains above all these earthly considerations: once the soul crosses boundaries, all tensions are gone:

Yet soul be sure the first intent remains, and shall be
carried out.

Perhaps even now the time arrived.

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already,
cross'd,)

After the great captains and engineers have accomplished
their work,

After the noble inventor, after the scientists, the chemist,
the geologist, ethnologist,

Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,

The true son of god shall come singing his songs.

Passage to India, stanza 5.

As a poet Whitman accept the utility of the past as it is related with the present. The great events of past can't be forgotten and ignored at any cost. Their shadows have wonderful effect upon the life of present generation. Let the Americans explore new fields of work. Whitman admires the work of every citizen as he is basically a champion of have-nots. Different sounds come from various industries and he admires the growth

of industries. The mountains are as important as the plain. The new machines are bound to bring material prosperity. Let there be a safe passage for these goods through the Suez Canal. The poet loves all the sermons of different religious. So, Whitman learns a lot from the ancient Indian classics and relates them with the present American economical scenario.