

**Tribhuvan University**

**Sexual Frankness in Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself***

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### **Abstracts**

Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* is widely considered as the milestone in modern poetry because of his frank sexual depiction of the American culture, which ultimately gave rise to an epoch of counter culture. The poem is a breakaway from the established tradition of writing poetry, which was generally based on praise of nature, the God and sermons. It is a fine example of distinctive philosophy of nature of man and the society. The use of sexual frankness in his writings gave rise to a new philosophic epoch, which challenged the entire literary trend in America and in other parts of the world.

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## Introduction

This research work focuses on Walt Whitman's most famous poetic work *Song of Myself*. It attempts to analyze the sensual honesty in language and description used in the poem, which appeared under another title in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Use of free verse and sexual frankness have distinguished Whitman's work from that of the others in the mid nineteenth century America. Whitman's distinctive philosophy of nature and the individual ideas were based, in part, on the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

Whitman's defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and styles exerted a major influence on American thought and literature. In 1855, Whitman issued the first of many editions of *Leaves of Grass*, a volume of poetry in a new kind of versification, far different from his sentimental rhymed verse of the 1840s. Because he immodestly praised the human body and glorified the senses, Whitman was forced to publish the book at his own expense, setting some of the type himself. His name did not appear on the title page, but the engraved frontispiece portrait shows him posed, arms akimbo, in shirt sleeves, hat cocked at a rakish angle. In a long preface, he announced a new democratic literature, 'commensurate with a people', simple and unconquerable, written by a new kind of poet who was affectionate, brawny, and heroic and who would lead by the force of his magnetic personality.

Born near Huntington, New York, Whitman was the second of a family of nine children. His father was a carpenter. The poet had a particularly close relationship with his mother. When Whitman was four years old, his family moved to Brooklyn, New York, where he attended public school for six years before being apprenticed to a printer. Two years later, he went to New York City to work in printing shops. He returned to Long Island in 1835 and taught in country schools. In 1838 and 1839 Whitman edited a newspaper *The Long-Islander* in Huntington, his birthplace.

Soon he found no interest in the job and went back to New York City to work as a printer and journalist. There he enjoyed the theater, the opera, and - always an omnivorous reader - the libraries. Whitman wrote poems and stories for popular magazines and made political speeches, for which Tammany Hall Democrats rewarded him with the editorship of various short-lived newspapers. For two years, Whitman edited the influential *Brooklyn Eagle*, but he lost his position for supporting the Free-Soil party. After a brief sojourn in New Orleans, Louisiana, he returned to Brooklyn, where he tried to start a Free-Soil Newspaper. After several years spent at various jobs, including building houses, Whitman began writing a new kind of poetry and thereafter neglected business.

*Song of Myself*, a book of courage, most downright in its dogmatic expression of the contemporary American society, set up a new trend of writing in the American literature. The poem apparently speaks of the coming of age, without the slightest consideration for the fact that much it says must cross and shock the deepest ethical instincts of a great multitude of American men and women. It is worth noting that *Song of Myself* found a publisher at a time when even the American society was still reeling under the burden of hypocrisy and orthodoxy. For, these poems force the honest critics into a corner where s/he must either speak plain words, or step down and out from his judgment-seat.

### **1. Literature Review**

First published as part of *Leaves of Grass* and later revised and expanded by Whitman in subsequent editions, the revised editions sometimes undermined its original freshness and vitality. Stephen Mitchell, one of the rare critics, who have revised and compared the first version of *Leaves of Grass* with the later ones in *Criticism in Leaves of Grass* writes, "Here is Whitman at his most wild and raw, as large and lusty as life, fulfilling his promise to all future generations" (32).

Walt Whitman, who was a significant influence on poets of the 20th century, had only a small group of devoted admirers during his lifetime. The distaste of 19th-century literary circles for the more earthly aspects of Whitman's writing, particularly his frank references to sex, is apparent in the book review of *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1882. These critiques reviled the retention of disgusting stuff in the latest edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Though the book could not attain wide influence during his lifetime, it helped him earn a good living through the income of the poem, later on.

Commenting on the poem, Whitman himself wrote in Preface to the fifth edition of *Song of Myself* as, "*Song of Myself* has mainly been an attempt to put a person, a human being (myself in the latter half of the nineteenth century) freely, fully and truly on record. I am not able to find any similar personal records, in current literature that satisfy me" (7).

Whitman's personal record in current literature troubled the critics. Their inability to find a structure in *Song of Myself* has resulted from a failure to find a centre of relevancy, an informing idea to which incoherent working parts may be justified. James E. Miller, Jr. succeeded to bring out a structure – a dramatic structure of the poem. In the first article *A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass*, he commented:

*Song of Myself* is the dramatic representation of a mystical experience. The term "dramatic representation" indicates an important distinction. The poem is not necessarily a transcript of an actual mystical experience but rather a work of art in which such an experience conceived in the imagination represented dramatically, with the author assuming the main role. (6-7)

James dramatic structure of the poem is divided into five sections. According to him, Section 1 – 5 is "Entry to the Mystical Self," Section 6 – 16 is "Awakening of Self," Section 17 – 32 is "Purification of Self," Section 33 – 37 is "Illumination and the Dark Night of the Soul,"



Section 38 – 43 is “Faith and Love,” Section 44 – 49 is “Perception” and Section 50 – 52 is “Emergence from the Mystical State.”

Dr. Gita Khadka in her dissertation, “Tantric Interpretation of *Leaves of Grass*” asserts, “The first and most important influence on Whitman is the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau” (107). Similarly, John B. Moore opines that Whitman was unmistakably influenced by Emerson. In *Master of Whitman*, Moore writes, “Emerson was the one single greatest influence on Whitman during the years when he was planning and writing the first two or three editions of *Leaves of Grass*” (77).

But the critical reaction after the third edition surprised both Emerson and Whitman. The critics were of the opinion that the text publicized vulgarity. The dissatisfaction of the critics and readers were due to the increasing allusions to physiology and sex in that particular edition. Emerson, in latter days also joined the critics in showing discontent in use of frank sexual allusions in the poem. This led to temporary fraction in relation to Emerson and Whitman.

As *Leaves of Grass* grew through its five subsequent versions in eight editions into a hefty book of 389 poems, it gained much in variety and complexity, but Whitman’s distinctive voice was never stronger, his vision never clearer, and his design never firmer than it was in the first twelve editions.

Discussing the impact of first edition of *Leaves of Grass* on the American literary history, Mitchell argues that it is impossible to exaggerate its far reaching consequence. He writes:

The slender volume of *Leaves of Grass* introduced the poet, who in the process of celebrating the nation by celebrating himself, has since remained at the heart of America’s cultural memory because in the world of his

imagination Americans have learned to recognize and possibly understand their own identity. (34)

That identity, rather than any argument, is the true significance of the volume. The topics and themes taken up by the poems are components of the speaker's personality, and the order in which they are arranged does not so much advance propositions leading toward a reasoned conclusion as it discloses the dynamism through which that personality is constituted. The key to that personality is the speaker's intuitive certainty that by being himself and himself alone he is everyone else and that, beyond all apparent conflicts, differences, and contradictions, he and America, thus people and land, are one, for each receives identity from the other as they respond to one another tally, as Whitman, himself puts it in Preface of *Leaves of Grass* as "in profound harmony" (13).

To articulate this sense of the self or, as Whitman phrased it thirty-three years later in *A Backward Glance*, to put a person freely, fully and truly on record (Prose Works 2:731) is the volume's program, as it will, indeed, remain the program of *Leaves of Grass* throughout all its subsequent versions. In the first edition, it was announced in the Preface, enacted in *Song of Myself*, and elaborated in the other eleven poems. The speaker of the first *Leaves* does not justify or explain his vision but bears witness to it as the preface consists of the argument that "he is no arguer . . . he is judgment" (102).

The appearance of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in a new edition has revived a discussion always imminent when the name of this writer is brought forward, and always more or less acrimonious. Some persons even imagine it obligatory upon them to deny him all merit of poetic endowment, so violent is their revolt against the offensiveness which Mr. Whitman has chosen to make a central and integral point of his literary method. Such critics stultify themselves by the coarseness of view and sometimes of expression with which they meet the grossness they condemn. If they can see nothing in this book except indecency and

bombastic truisms, the inference must be that their sensibilities are not delicate enough to recognize the fresh, strong, healthy presentation of common things in a way that revivifies them, the generous aspiration, the fine sympathy with man and nature, the buoyant belief in immortality, which are no less characteristic of the author than his mistaken boldness in displaying the carnal side of existence, and his particularity in describing disease or loathsome decay.

The only profitable point of view from which *Song of Myself* can be regarded is one that, while giving distinctness to the serious error of unclear exposure and to the frequent feebleness of form and style which reduce large portions of the work to tedious and helpless prose, leaves our vision clear for the occasional glimpses of beauty that the book discloses. We must also take into account the imagination often informing someone of these rhapsodies as a whole, even when its parts are found to be weak, repetitious, and blemished by inanity or affectation. The absurdities, the crudities, in which Whitman indulge, are almost unlimited and all but omnipresent. For illustration, he gives utterance to phrases like this: "I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags" (78). Following a vague impulse, without depth of reflection, to find new modes of expression, he cries, "Eclaircise the myths of Asia!" (72). "I expose!" (74), is another of these exceedingly pointless inventions; and we cannot see that the ends of freedom in art, or grandeur of any kind, are served by adopting as the symbol for a writer. On the other hand, these pages bring to light a mass of vivid and well-chosen though sometimes uncouth epithets.

Initially, Whitman had to face the challenge for *Song of Myself* because of his writing technique in expressing his frank ideas, which he preferred to term as "only for a language-experiment." But in later editions, Whitman did not have to prove that the concept was "only for a language-experiment" (78). By the time it reached its end, the trial was over: the poet

named Walt Whitman was born. In all its editions, not just the first one, *Leaves of Grass* is dominated by this presence emerging from *Song of Myself*.

By the time, 1346 lines of poetry came to life; a poet named Walt Whitman was a renowned name in the American literature. In Section 30, he quotes it in the following manner:

The insignificant is as big to me as any,  
Logic and sermons never convince,  
A minute and drop of me settle my brain,

I believe the soggy and clods shall become lovers and lamps of me. (749-52)

Inventive and illuminating accounts abound, and by their very diversity, they prove that it is inexhaustible. However construed, the poem discloses the private world of its protagonist, the “I”, so conspicuously missing from the preface, as he invites his soul and observes a spear of summer grass (Section 1). The soul is what senses the self in the other and the other in the self; its presence allows the private world to tally with the whole world without losing any of its own integrity. It is an irresistibly attractive, various worlds of delicacy, strength, and joyous acceptance. It is also a world where the vision often darkens and moments of weakness, guilt, pain, and mortal fear must be confronted.

In the 1855 edition, the power of *Song of Myself* is at its least controlled or self-consciously poetic, and the versatility and wit of its language are at their freshest and most exhilarating. The ‘ed’ of the weak past tense is not yet replaced by the later editions ‘d,’ four points of suspension are the only punctuation within a line; and beyond double spaces grouping lines into stanzas, no subdivisions of the sort that appear in later editions interrupt the onrush of words. Thus the reader’s sense is reinforced that for all the variety and multiplicity of the images, moods, and episodes that make it up, the poem is a single, unified

experience just as its subject, the Whitman presence, is one, for all its multifariousness. The diction is also freer and the verse more supple in 1855 than later.

Although *Song of Myself* has remained throughout all editions substantially what it was in 1855, Whitman kept coming back to its text until 1881, weeding and pruning even when he might have left the *Leaves of Grass* as they had grown.

An important difference between *Song of Myself* and the eleven poems that follows is that the latter are structurally closed and thus formally less innovative than the former with its essentially open, loose structure. These eleven poems have often been referred to as cuttings from the long poem, passages that for one reason or another Whitman chose not to include in it yet would not discard altogether. The assumption seems to underrate both Whitman's sense of organization and the structural unity achieved in the volume. To be sure, the topical anger of the two political poems, "Europe", "The 72nd and 73rd Years of These States" would be hard to fit into *Song of Myself*, and the omission of "Who Learns My Lesson Complete" would probably not have made much difference to the book, nor is there good reason to regret that Whitman decided to leave out "Great Are the Myths" from later editions altogether. Some of the other poems like "I Sing the Body Electric" and "There Was a Child Went Forth" are Whitman at his best, and the sequence as a whole is indispensable, for it concludes the business that *Song of Myself* has left unfinished.

The tenor of *Song of Myself* is robustly optimistic and self-confident, yet its protagonist is "somehow stunned" (Section 38) time and again by moments of anxiety, even terror, and haunted by powerful images of frustration, violence, and death. He can extricate himself from each of these episodes but cannot shake them off completely. To discover and thereby confront and overcome the forces that stun him, he must probe the depths of his self: this process is the primary burden of the so-called 'cuttings'.

Finally, *Song of Myself* is not only the song of the poet alone, but also of the entire America, the coming of the age of the Americans and, especially of the young generation of people of America. The poet sings, celebrates and adores himself, and it is the song of every American. The sensual persona in *Song of Myself* is referential to the search of identity and, frankness is the depiction of American's interest to outgo, in every possible field. Here's the key to poet's personality is the speaker's intuitive certainty that by being himself and himself alone he is everyone else and that, beyond all apparent conflicts, differences, and contradictions. Thus, the poet's "I" is every individual of America, who was on the verge of breaking away with established norms and ethics.

## **2. Delimitation and Methodology**

This thesis will be based on a close analysis of Whitman's *Song of Myself*. It will not cover all the works of Whitman; however, references related to sexual history will be taken in consideration from various critics, including Whitman, in order to justify the present research work. A tentative chapter division will be as follows.

The first chapter presents a general introduction of the whole research paper along with a hypothesis as its point of departure and a brief preview of the whole work. It also contains information on the writer and his historicity. The second chapter develops a theoretical tool by bringing the issues related to counter-culture and its source in relation to various trends and epochs, now and then. Similarly, the third chapter focuses on the chosen texts and applies the general principles and ideas set up in the second chapter. The centre of the focus is to present, how *Song of Myself* is source to sexual frankness. The analysis necessarily has to overlook other themes and aspects of the epic deemed to be related to the hypothesis of the paper. Finally, the last chapter will be a conclusion to the major ideas and findings of the study.

## Counter Culture

### 1. A Brief Synopsis of Counter Culture

Counter culture is a set of values, associated with behavioural patterns alternative and opposed to those dominant in a society. Followers of the counter-culture actively oppose the existing trends of society to derive a sense of a distinct identity. Such a set of values may be more or less coherent, consistent, and integrated but are generally quite diverse and diffuse, and even contradictory, rather than forming a tight and well-defined system. They are shared to a varied extent by followers of the movement.

Though counter culture often entails a political dimension, it is not primarily political in its aims. They differ markedly from the political movement in terms of its methods. The aim of counter-culture is to challenge dominant values directly through actions and lifestyle choices rather than to acquire power or to influence traditional political institutions and organizations. Alliances may be made with more politically motivated groups but counter-cultural groups are generally distinct in their mode of operation and general ethos, which often eschews the overtly political.

The term acquired common circulation from the title of Theodore Roszak's account of the youth rebellion and cultural and political ferment of the 1960s, which he recorded in *The Making of a Counter-Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (1969). Initially, counter-culture was taken to refer to this movement. But, slowly, the term achieved a wider sense of meaning. It started to refer to oppositional subcultures in any society at any period of history as is the case, for example, with J. Milton Yinger's *Countercultures: The Promise and Peril of a World Turned Upside Down* (1982) and Frank Musgrove's *Ecstasy and Holiness* (1974). Yinger would include, among other things, the ferment in England during the 17th century at the time of the Civil War, and Musgrove the Romantic movement of the 19th century.

The term 'counter culture' most widely is referred to an American culture that began as a movement in the 1960s giving emphasis on the idea of personal freedom rejecting the ethics of capitalism, conformity and repressive sexual mores of the contemporary society. Some critics applied the term attempting to characterize the widespread rebellion of many western youths, known as hippies, against the values and behaviours espoused by their parents.

Counterculture's deepest roots lay in the Beat generation sensibilities of the late 1940s and 1950s that chafed under the rigid orthodoxy of the era. Just as New York's Greenwich Village became identified with the beatniks, the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco developed in to a Mecca for the counter-culture. Regarding counter culture, *Encyclopaedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History 2007* comments:

Followers of counter-culture argue that to overcome the psychic, social and cultural effects of centuries of enforced subordination American blacks, like their African brothers and sisters, would have to construct and maintain an opposition to the norms and practices of white society. This trend of merger would be as forceful as it was absolute. (252)

Counter culture was a cultural bridge in an attempt to construct a bridge between the Whites and Blacks of America.

However, in sociology, counterculture is a term used to describe a cultural group whose values and norms of behaviour run counter to those of the contemporary mainstream society. Although, distinct counter-culture undercurrents exist in all societies, here (in the United States) the term referred to a more significant, visible phenomenon that reaches critical and persists for a period of time. Specially, it indicated to the young rebellious groups of writers and their attitude towards American society after the Second World War.



This is a shifted form of Beat Generation of the 1950s in America. So it refers to the tendency of going towards the opposite value of the society, which fully occurred in American society in the 1960s. Just borrowing the ideas from the Beat Generation movement, counterculture came as a movement in the 1960s. Generally, counter-culture enjoys a theological, cultural, attitudinal or material position that does not conform to the accepted social norms. The idea of counterculture began in America as reaction to the conservative social mores of the 1950s. Various factors came to nurture growing idea of counterculture in the 1960s such as the post-war growth of the American middle class whose materialism the counterculture distained, wide availability of the pill for reliable contraception that reduced the risk of sexual experimentation, the increasing popularity of a hallucinogenic drugs like LSD which encouraged introspection and alienation from straight culture, and the Vietnam War which convinced the youths that America had lost its soul.

San Francisco's Flower Children also called 'Hippies' adopted new styles of dress, experimented with psychedelic drugs, lived communally and developed a vibrant music scene. These styles and behaviours spread quickly from San Francisco and Berkeley to all major American cities and European cities. A counter-culture movement gained momentum in which the younger generation began to define itself as a class that aimed to create a new kind of society.

However, the multiplicity of meanings attached with counter-culture makes it difficult to define. There is no single, unproblematic definition, although many attempts have been made to establish one. The only non-problematic definitions go back to agricultural (for example, cereal culture or strawberry culture) and medical (for example, bacterial culture or penicillin culture). Since in anthropology and sociology we also acknowledge culture clashes, culture shock, and counter-culture, the range of reference is extremely wide.

### 3. Development of Counter Culture

The counter-culture movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s is the paradigm of a counter-culture. With antecedents in the earlier beatnik and hip subculture of the 1950s, this period saw a major movement among young people who sought a very different society from the one they had grown up in; a society in which there would be maximum freedom for the individual to pursue self-realization free from the constraints of what were seen as outmoded, repressive mores and standards of “straight” society and of its emphasis upon material and career aspirations, high consumption of mass-produced goods, and hypocritical conformity to narrow standards of respectability. According to Theodore Roszak in *America and Leaves of Grass*, it was the “repressive rationality” of the contemporary “technocratic society” that the counter-culture rejected as failing to meet creative, spiritual, and non-rational needs.

Exemplified most radically by the hippies, the 1960s counter-culture preached a message of a better world through becoming better people. Transformation of the self, outlook, and mentality, rather than changing established institutions, the creation of an alternative society and tolerance of diversity and individuality was the hippy proclamation. This transformation would produce a more spontaneous and creative attitude to life in which role-playing would be replaced by authenticity in behaviour and relationships.

The hippies announced their distinctiveness very visually through long hair styles for men and colourful clothing and dress styles. Their extremely unconventional appearance earned them the appellation “freaks”, which they enthusiastically adopted as an entirely appropriate expression of their rejection of “normality”. The ideal was to “drop out” of mainstream society and to create the alternative society by living it on an everyday basis through new patterns that ran counter to the established ones. The emphasis was on finding a way around the wasteful, profligate, capitalist consumer society through such things as free exchange of products, rejection of the work ethic, communal living, and “retribalization”.

Hundreds of communes were established, often in remote areas, as havens from the straight world and as examples to that world of an alternative way of life. The word was spread through a host of underground newspapers, magazines, and other publications.

The hippy counter-cultural movement upheld non-violence and peace and often denounced the institutions of the state and of government such as the police and the military, which were labelled instruments of repression and tools of the capitalist class. They were vehemently opposed to the war in Vietnam and compulsory military service. Burning the national flag, especially in the United States, was a common symbolic statement of rejection of such institutions and state actions.

A major theme of the counter-culture was sexual liberation. The sexual mores and values of the older generation were questioned and rejected. Not only was sex outside marriage and general sexual freedom extolled but also marriage itself as an institution was frequently questioned. Some tried group marriage, others casual sexual relationships. Above all the counter-culture attempted to dispel all sense of guilt and the “hang ups” associated with sexuality that had bedevilled, in its view, relationships in previous generations. For many caught up in the counter-culture sex was and should be pure, spontaneous, unpossessive fun not necessarily entailing deep or long-term commitment.

Perhaps even more controversial and challenging than its sexual attitudes the counter-culture took a very liberal view of drugs use. Though not tolerant of addictive narcotics “heads”, as they were known, strongly advocated the use of cannabis and, influenced profoundly by the guru and experimenter Timothy Leary who urged them to “turn on, tune in, and drop out”, psychedelic drugs such as LSD. Such substances were upheld as promising to open and expand the mind to new realms of experience and as vital aids to personal and thereby social, transformation.

Rock music was central in the counter-culture, particular styles and particular bands being closely identified with it. Most notable in this respect were The Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane, who not only in their music and lyrics but also in their lifestyles did much to disseminate its ideals and values. The Woodstock Festival provided a potent symbol of counter-cultural values and vitality to the extent that some began to speak of a Woodstock nation, an alternative social and political community within or more correctly in its own estimation, outside the main society.

The counter-culture stressed the spiritual in contrast to the material aspects of life, which modern society in its view tended to neglect. In search of spiritual goals the counter-culture exhibited much experimentalism and eclecticism, bringing together themes from mystical thought, eastern religion, paganism, Native American, and other tribal traditions, as well as a host of wholly new and innovative ideas.

Counter-cultures flourish during periods of rapid social change and generally involve the younger generation of adults. What is striking about the counter-culture of the 1960s is that most of those involved were not from underprivileged backgrounds and had rather good prospects. The period was one of relative affluence and prosperity. They were predominantly middle class and had or were receiving higher education in the universities and colleges. Yinger considers that in the United States employment aspirations, greatly elevated by the post-World War II boom, were, for many, no longer capable of being realized, leading to a sense of frustration and anomie. Musgrove, in contrast, found that in the United Kingdom young people were far from rebelling from frustrations resulting from declining employment opportunities and lack of career prospects. Rather they were rebelling against the prospect of career, work, and employment itself, at least of the conventional type which was seen as uninspiring and unfulfilling. Counter-cultural rebels were searching for a more authentic and

less constraining style of life characterized by spontaneity and fun rather than dedication to career and company. The counter-culture, for Musgrove, was a rebellion of the un-oppressed.

Not only was the period one of relative affluence but also of high occupational and geographical mobility which had produced a sense of rootlessness and restlessness, on the one hand; and an openness to experimentation and a sense of freedom from the constraints of traditional authority, community, and respectability among the young, on the other.

Demographic factors were also significant in the rise of the counter-culture. The post-World War II generation was that of the baby boomers. The very high birth rate after the war meant that the young adult generation was very much larger than previous generations with a much higher proportion of the population being between the ages of 18 and 30.

The third major factor was the particular set of social and political events that occurred during the period. This included the rise of movements seeking racial and sexual equality. Above all, there was the war in Vietnam that alienated much of the younger generation, much of which was fiercely opposed to it.

The interaction of these factors - economic change, demography, and political events goes a long way towards explaining the counter-culture of the 1960s. Other significant factors underlying specific aspects of it were the easy availability of reliable contraception, which greatly changed sexual behaviour and attitudes, the expansion of higher education, which placed many more young people in a situation where they had the time and where they acquired the inclination to question and to challenge established values and institutions, and the threat of nuclear conflict, which cast serious doubt upon the benefits of science and technocratic "rationality".

Some theorists consider that conditions at the time produced a strong sense of relative deprivation among the young from middle-class families. While having high aspirations they found themselves in overcrowded and often impersonal and bureaucratically organized

universities with relatively poor standards of accommodation and with increasing competition for jobs that were seen as unrewarding yet personally demanding. They faced the threat of risk to life and limb in military service in a pointless conflict in a country far from their own.

Another sociological concept relevant to understanding the 1960s counter-culture is that of status inconsistency. Social status can be measured along several dimensions such as wealth, education, occupation, ethnicity, and so on. When individuals are ranked highly on some dimensions but low on others they are said to be status inconsistent. Status inconsistency has sometimes been found to be associated with a tendency for involvement in radical social movements. Young people from middle-class backgrounds during the 1960s could be said to be status inconsistent due to their high ranking in terms of their class of origins but low ranking in terms of current income. They were also status inconsistent in terms of their relatively high ranking among their peers with regard to educational attainment before attending university but, for most, only average or low ranking in comparison to their peers once at university where they encountered many more able than themselves.

The counter - culture was, in itself, a short-lived affair. Disillusionment set in rapidly. Drugs did not lead to enlightenment but to dependency; freewheeling personal relationships proved to be fragile and undermined by sexual and emotional jealousies; communes were difficult to sustain economically and without hierarchy, authority, and organization; children came along and changed perspectives towards a desire for greater material and personal security.

The counter-culture however, it could be argued, has not entirely disappeared either in terms of values and outlook or in terms of behaviour and life-styles. Its heirs can perhaps be seen in deep green and ecology movements such as Earth First; road protestors; New Age travellers; the appeal of eastern mysticism and of New Age ideas; dietary regimes such as vegetarianism, whole and organic food consumption; peace movements; the anti-

globalization movement; rave and dance culture; and many other, often single-issue, movements expressing a culture of dissent and alternatives.

#### **4. Allen Ginsberg and Counter Culture**

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) an American poet, born in Newark, New Jersey is one of the leading figures of counter-culture accepted as the predecessor of counter-culture. The spokesperson for the Beat Generation of the 1950s, Ginsberg wrote in the tradition of Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams. His poetry is informal, discursive, and even repetitive; its immediacy, honesty, and its explicit sexual subject matter often give it an improvised quality. *Howl* (1956) is an angry indictment of America's false hopes and broken promises. Ginsberg, whose sexually explicit poem *Howl* (1956) became the subject of a court battle after it was initially banned as obscene. Other volumes of Ginsberg's poetry include *Kaddish* (1961), *Reality Sandwiches* (1963), *Planet News* (1968), and *White Shroud* (1987).

The Beatnik, or Beat, poets of the 1950s notoriously followed in Whitman's tradition. They adopted a radical ethic that included drugs, sex, art, and the freedom of the road. Jack Kerouac (1922-1969) captured this vision in *On the Road* (1957), a quintessential book about Kerouac's adventures wandering across the United States.

#### **5. Beat Generation**

Beat Generation refers to a group of certain American writers of the 1950s whose unconventional work and lifestyle reflected profound disaffection with contemporary society and a desire to escape from suffocating, conventional middle-class values. Instead they sought artistic improvisation and visionary enlightenment, attainable, in their view, through Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, drugs, alcohol, and sex. The writing this lifestyle produced was highly idiosyncratic and unconventional.

The Beat poets spanned the country, but adopted San Francisco as their special outpost. The city continued to serve as an important arena for poetry and unconventional

ideas, especially at the City Lights Bookstore co-owned by writer and publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Other modernist poets included Gwendolyn Brooks, who retreated from the conventional forms of her early poetry to write about anger and protest among African Americans, and Adrienne Rich, who wrote poetry focused on women's rights, needs, and desires.

However, it was Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who were the landmark figures of this epoch. They provided a stimulus that found its way into art and music, as well as active social protest, and marked the beginnings of a counter-culture that was to have a lasting impact. "Beat", with its double connotation of depressed and beatific, was first used in this way by Kerouac in about 1952.

Another milestone was the publication of *The Dharma Bums* (1958) by Kerouac, is a more conventional novel, on the theme of self-fulfillment through Zen Buddhism. *Big Sur* (1962), the sequel to *On the Road*, describes the retreat of a Beat leader to the California coast, where he attempts to put his life together. Kerouac also wrote poetry, *Mexico City Blues* (1959) and travel pieces, *Lonesome Traveler* (1960).

## **6. Hippie Culture**

A Hippie is a person who was raised under the ideological system that came out of the tumultuous 1960s in North America and Western Europe. They are either of the flower-child/baby boomer generation or that generations' subsequent offspring. They possess a core belief set revolving around the values of peace and love as being essential in an increasingly globalized society, and they are oftentimes associated with non-violent anti-governmental groups. There is a stigma of drug abuse attached to the hippies that are prevalent to this day, specifically the use and abuse of marijuana and hallucinogens. Many rock movements, poets, artists, and writers from the 1960s to today have associated with this movement, most prominently The Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, and Phish. There are others too



numerous to name. The movement, then and now, is considered a sub-culture by sociologists that associates itself with the left in all its political opinions. The conservative right often berates and abuses the opinions of people who associate themselves with the hippie movement and/or lifestyle, as they consider it dangerous and degenerative to a society to favour liberalism to such an extent.

The foundation of the hippie movement finds historical precedent as far back as the counterculture of the Ancient Greeks, espoused by philosophers like Diogenes of Sinope and Cynics. Hippie philosophy also credits the religious and spiritual teachings of Jesus Christ, Hillel the Elder, Buddha, St. Francis of Assisi, Henry David Thoreau, and Gandhi. The first signs of what we would call modern "proto-hippies" emerged in fin de siècle Europe. Between, 1896-1908, a German youth movement arose as a countercultural reaction to the organized social and cultural clubs that centred on German folk music. Known as *Der Wandervogel* (migratory bird), the movement opposed the formality of traditional German clubs, instead emphasizing amateur music and singing, creative dress, and communal outings involving hiking and camping. Inspired by the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Goethe, Hermann Hesse, and Eduard Baltzer, *Wandervogel* attracted thousands of young Germans who rejected the rapid trend toward urbanization and yearned for the pagan, back-to-nature spiritual life of their ancestors.

During the first several decades of the twentieth century, Germans settled around the United States, bringing the values of the *Wandervogel* with them. Some opened the first health food stores, and many moved to Southern California where they could practice an alternative lifestyle in a warm climate. Over time, young Americans adopted the beliefs and practices of the new immigrants. One group, called the "Nature Boys", took to the California desert and raised organic food, espousing a back-to-nature lifestyle like the *Wandervogel*.

Songwriter Eden Ahbez wrote a hit song called *Nature Boy* inspired by Robert Bootzin, who helped popularize yoga, organic food, and health food in the United States.

One who embraces life to the fullest is hippie. Promotes peace, love and happiness, but sure as hell sticks up for what they believe in. Anyone can be a hippie, not just that dirty dread-locked tie-dyed pothead with the dead shirt on. Hippies are wonderful people, was their slogan.

The Hippie subculture was originally a youth movement that began in the United States during the early 1960s and spread around the world. The word *hippie* derives from *hipster*, and was initially used to describe beatniks who had moved into San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. These people inherited the countercultural values of the Beat Generation, created their own communities, listened to psychedelic rock, embraced the sexual revolution, and used drugs such as cannabis and LSD to explore alternative states of consciousness.

In 1967, the Human Be-In in San Francisco popularized hippie culture, leading to the legendary Summer of Love on the West Coast of the United States, and the 1969 Woodstock Festival on the East Coast. In Mexico, the *jipitecas* formed *La Onda Chicana* and gathered at Avandaro, while in New Zealand; nomadic house truckers practiced alternative lifestyles and promoted sustainable energy at Nambassa. In the United Kingdom, mobile peace convoys of new age travellers made summer pilgrimages to free music festivals at Stonehenge.

Hippie fashions and values had a major effect on culture, influencing popular music, television, film, literature, and the arts. Since the 1960s, many aspects of hippie culture have been assimilated by the mainstream. The religious and cultural diversity espoused by the hippies has gained widespread acceptance, and Eastern philosophy and spiritual concepts have reached a wide audience. The hippie legacy can be observed in contemporary culture in

a myriad of forms -- from health food, to music festivals, to contemporary sexual mores, and even to the cyberspace revolution.

Along with the New Left and the American Civil Rights Movement, the hippie movement was one of three dissenting groups of the 1960s counterculture. Hippies rejected established institutions, criticized middle class values, opposed nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War, embraced aspects of Eastern philosophy, championed sexual liberation, were often vegetarian and eco-friendly, promoted the use of psychedelic drugs to expand one's consciousness, and created intentional communities or communes. They used alternative arts, street theatre, folk music, and psychedelic rock as a part of their lifestyle and as a way of expressing their feelings, their protests and their vision of the world and life. Hippies opposed political and social orthodoxy, choosing a gentle and non-doctrinaire ideology that favoured peace, love and personal freedom, perhaps best epitomized by The Beatles' song "All You Need is Love". Hippies perceived the dominant culture as a corrupt, monolithic entity that exercised undue power over their lives, calling this culture "The Establishment", "Big Brother", or "The Man." Noting that they were "seekers of meaning and value", scholars like Timothy Miller describe hippies as a new religious movement

During this period Cambridge, Massachusetts, Greenwich Village in New York City, and Berkeley, California, anchored the American folk music circuit. Berkeley's two coffee houses, the Cabale Creamery and the Jabberwock, sponsored performances by folk music artists in a beat setting. In April 1963, Chandler A. Laughlin III, co-founder of the Cabale Creamery, established a kind of tribal, family identity among approximately fifty people who attended a traditional, all-night Native American peyote ceremony in a rural setting. This ceremony combined a psychedelic experience with traditional Native American spiritual values; these people went on to sponsor a unique genre of musical expression and

performance at the Red Dog Saloon in the isolated, old-time mining town of Virginia City, Nevada.

On January 14, 1967, the outdoor Human Be-In in San Francisco popularized hippie culture across the United States, with 20,000 hippies gathering in Golden Gate Park. On March 26, Lou Reed, Edie Sedgwick and 10,000 hippies came together in Manhattan for the Central Park Be-In on Easter Sunday. The Monterey Pop Festival from June 16 to June 18 introduced the rock music of the counterculture to a wide audience and marked the start of the "Summer of Love." Scott McKenzie's rendition of John Phillips' song, "San Francisco", became a hit in the United States and Europe. The lyrics, "If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair", inspired thousands of young people from all over the world to travel to San Francisco, sometimes wearing flowers in their hair and distributing flowers to passersby, earning them the name, "Flower Children." Bands like *The Grateful Dead*, *Big Brother* and *The Holding Company* (with Janis Joplin), and *Jefferson Airplane* continued to live in the Haight, but by the end of the summer, the incessant media coverage led the Diggers to declare the "death" of the hippie with a parade. According to the late poet Stormi Chambless, the hippies burned an effigy of a hippie in the Panhandle to demonstrate the end of his/her reign.

Regarding this period of history, the July 7, 1967, *Time* magazine featured a cover story entitled, "The Hippies: The Philosophy of a Subculture." The article described the guidelines of the hippie code: "Do your own thing, wherever you have to do it and whenever you want. Drop out. Leave society as you have known it. Leave it utterly. Blow the mind of every straight person you can reach. Turn them on, if not to drugs, then to beauty, love, honesty, fun."

It is estimated that around 100,000 people travelled to San Francisco in the summer of 1967. The media was right behind them, casting a spotlight on the Haight-Ashbury district

and popularizing the "hippie" label. With this increased attention, hippies found support for their ideals of love and peace but were also criticized for their anti-work, pro-drug, and permissive ethos. Misgivings about the hippie culture, particularly with regard to drug abuse and lenient morality, fuelled the moral panics of the late 1960s.

By 1970, the 1960s zeitgeist that had spawned hippie culture seemed to be on the wane. The events at Altamont shocked many Americans, including those who had strongly identified with hippie culture. Another shock came in the form of the Sharon Tate and Leno and Rosemary LaBianca murders committed in August 1969 by Charles Manson and his "family" of followers. Nevertheless, the turbulent political atmosphere that featured the bombing of Cambodia and shootings by National Guardsmen at Jackson State University and Kent State University still brought people together. These shootings inspired the May 1970 song by Quicksilver Messenger Service "What About Me?" where they sang, "You keep adding to my numbers as you shoot my people down."

Much of hippie style had been integrated into mainstream American society by the early 1970s. Large rock concerts that originated with the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival and the 1968 Isle of Wight Festival became the norm. In the mid-1970s, with the end of the draft and the Vietnam War, and a renewal of patriotic sentiment associated with the approach of the United States Bicentennial, the mainstream media lost interest in the hippie counterculture. Acid rock gave way to heavy metal, disco, and punk rock. Hippies became targets for ridicule. While many hippies made a long-term commitment to the lifestyle, some younger people argue that hippies "sold out" during the 1980s and became part of the materialist, consumer culture.

Although not as visible as it once was, hippie culture has never died out completely: hippies and neo-hippies can still be found on college campuses, on communes, and at

gatherings and festivals. Many embrace the hippie values of peace, love, and community, and hippies may still be found in bohemian enclaves around the world.

Hippies sought to free themselves from societal restrictions, choose their own ways, and find new meanings in life. One expression of hippie independence from societal norms was found in their standard of dress and grooming, which made hippies instantly recognizable to one another, and served as a visual symbol of their respect for individual rights. Through their appearance, hippies declared their willingness to question authority, and distanced themselves from the "straight", or more conformist, segments of society.

As in the beat movement preceding them, and the punk movement that followed soon after, hippie symbols and iconography were purposely borrowed from either "low" or "primitive" cultures, with hippie fashion reflecting a disorderly, often vagrant style. As with other adolescent, white middle-class movements, deviant behaviour of the hippies involved challenging the prevailing gender differences of their time: both men and women in the hippie movement wore jeans and maintained long hair and both genders wore sandals or went barefoot. Men often wore beards, while women wore little or no makeup, with many going braless."

Hippies often chose brightly coloured clothing and wore unusual styles, such as bell-bottom pants, vests, tie-dyed garments, dashikis, peasant blouses, and long, full skirts; non-Western inspired clothing with Native American, Asia, Indian, African and Latin American motifs were also popular. Much of hippie clothing was self-made in defiance of corporate culture, and hippies often purchased their clothes from flea markets and second-hand shops. Favoured accessories for both men and women included Native American jewellery, head scarves, headbands and long beaded necklaces. Hippie homes, vehicles and other possessions were often decorated with psychedelic art.

Travel, domestic and international, was a prominent feature of hippie culture, becoming in this communal process an extension of friendship. School busses similar to Ken Kesey's Further, or the iconic VW bus, were popular because groups of friends could travel on the cheap. The VW Bus became known as a counterculture and hippie symbol, and many buses were repainted with graphics and/or custom paint jobs, these were predecessors to the modern-day art car. A peace symbol often replaced the Volkswagen logo. Many hippies favoured hitchhiking as a primary mode of transport because it was economical, environmentally friendly, and a way to meet new people.

Following in the well-worn footsteps of the Beats, the hippies also used cannabis (marijuana), considering it pleasurable and benign. They enlarged their spiritual pharmacopeia to include hallucinogens such as LSD, psilocybin and mescaline. On the East Coast of the United States, Harvard University professors Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert advocated psychotropic drugs for psychotherapy, self-exploration, religious and spiritual use. In context to LSD, Prof. Leary writes, "Expand your consciousness and find ecstasy and revelation within."

On the West Coast of the United States, Ken Kesey was an important figure in promoting the recreational use of psychotropic drugs, especially LSD, also known as "acid." By holding what he called "Acid Tests", and touring the country with his band of Merry Pranksters, Kesey became a magnet for media attention that drew many young people to the fledgling movement. The Grateful Dead (originally billed as "The Warlocks") played some of their first shows at the Acid Tests, often as high on LSD as their audiences. Kesey and the Pranksters had a "vision of turning on the world."

## **7. Sexuality and Counter Culture**

In general, 'sexuality' refers to the direction of somebody's sexual desire, towards people of opposite sex, people of the same sex, or people of both sexes. But, in literary

theory, it is associated with 'power' concept, deployed in socio-political analysis of 'sex' and 'gender.' In this regards, Beasley writes it, as:

Sexed regimes, identities and practice, which typically involve binary and hierarchical categories such as men and women, usually associated with an account of biology and reproductive function as well a sexual regimes, identities and practices. It is also commonly involved to binary and hierarchical categories such as heterosexual and homosexual usually linked to conceptions of biology and reproduction. (1)

Lately, there have been various new trends in the Study of Sexuality. People of varied sexual backgrounds and groups are in search of their identity and hence this field of study is in rapid rise. However, homosexuality and heterosexuality are the most common sects of this study. All these epochs of study have their root in Queer Theory, a relatively a new theory based on homosexuals and lesbians.

Michael Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality* (1984) is considered a landmark text for the relatively new field of queer theory, whose root lies in counter culture. Queer Theory studies the intersection between politics, gender and sexuality. Its main thrust is to refute the idea that our identities are somehow fixed or determined by our gender or sexual preferences.

Study of 'sexuality' cannot be possible without the study of 'sex' and 'gender.' In this regard, *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler has following opinion:

They are highly inter-related term and often mistaken for each other. The term 'sex' denotes to an individual's genetic identity of whether a person is female or male. At the same time, it also denotes to the sexual behaviour of an individual. On the other hand, 'gender' means class, race, ethnicity, or



imperialism. But, when it comes to scholarly studies, Beasley writes, sex and gender refers to sexed and sexual, respectively. (21)

Butler is of the opinion that the study of sexuality deals in two major parts of human life; sex and power. It focuses upon the field critical to socio-political analysis of sex, gender and sexuality. This discipline assumes that sex is a matter of human organization that is, it is politically associated with social dominance and subordination, as well as capable of change. So, theoretical frameworks and writers in this field are concerned with how power is constituted and perpetuated in the formulation of 'sexed' and 'sexual differences.' They reevaluate mainstream knowledge that marginalizes those who are beyond power position.

The crucial subject of sexuality, even today remains to be female, but these days, its study, basically refers to gay men's sexual positioning. This focus has been laid more upon gay than lesbian, because the queer behaviour of lesbian is no new concept to the society, in respect to the gay studies.

Moreover, study of sexuality cannot be studied excluded from counter-culture. Root of this relatively new field of writings lies in the sensual writings of Whitman, Emerson, Ginsberg and Kerouac. It is rather concerned with, "whether sexuality can positively disrupt oppressive power relations" (Beasley 118). But the study of Sexuality gained a full critical acclamation only from 1960s and 70s. It was oriented from gender studies. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* has a considerable contribution in the study of sexuality in literary discourse.

Characteristic of sexuality studies are more contextualised ones. The first direction of sexuality study is emancipator and second is Sexual Differences and its critiques on singular differences. Sexuality also includes topics on Multiple Differences for example Race/Ethnicity/Imperialism approaches, the phrases coined as (REI). Other popular fields it includes are Constructionism, Fluidity of Identity Crises and Queer Theory.

Beginning of Sexuality goes back to the roots of modernism. It has links with eighteenth century European Intellectual and Cultural Movement. The common element of this movement was a trust in human reason and the application of human reason to dissipate the darkness of superstition, prejudice and barbarity. In the context, Abrams writes, "Its purpose was to free humanity from its earlier reliance on mere authority and unexamined tradition," (75). So, modernity as a cultural movement contributed for the emancipator thoughts on gender and sexuality. The ethos of this movement took all human beings as equal as they possessed rationality whether they were women or homosexuals or blacks. Liberal human rights approaches first developed antidiscrimination stance for the woman and homosexuals.

Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics*, analyzes western social arrangements and institutions as covert ways of 'manipulating power' so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of heterosexual men and subordination of women. Feminist liberationist's approach perceived sexuality as intimately tied to the normative power. They developed a critique of existing heterosexuality as about a male model of sexuality in which "penetrative sex is sex, and everything else is fore play that is just the preliminary before the real thing" (Beasley 122). Such a critical analysis of sexually encouraged to discuss about the other forms of sexuality such as masturbation and celibacy. They noted a link between rape and heterosexuality, child abuse and violence. The idea of sexuality is innate need of men was criticized. The idea that debate in relation to power relation, caused split between the feminists favouring heterosexuality and lesbian feminist. Therefore, both the gay liberation movement and women's liberation movement remained significantly in sexuality political studies.

By late 1980s and 1990s the multiple differences occurred in sexual minorities including in ethnicity/imperialism theorizing. The categories of sexual identity politics began

to be questioned in sexuality studies. Many gays and lesbians expressed their frustration with the divisiveness of identity politics.

First lesbian sex radicals, who supported the more libertarian, sexuality as pleasure, position associated with gay men's politics began to mount a rejection of women's liberationists thinking. The lesbian sex radicals turned their back upon the notion of shared women centred approach of women liberationists thinking. The lesbian sex radicals turned their back upon the notion of shared women centred approach of women liberationists. They began to promote new lesbian coalition. They "denounced women centred model because it revolved around a perspective of the good women" (Rubin 78). Lesbian sex radicals actively supported sexuality, butch femme lesbian identities and the beneficial use of pornography. Moreover contrary to women centred approaches, they insisted that such practices were not initiation of heterosexual perspective norms of patriarchal relation of dominance and subordination. Besides sexual activists the critique of sexual identities arose from other minority groups such as race/ethnicity/imperialism studies. Beasley in this context writes, "They drew attention with the notion that more than sexuality, race, ethnic, class, imperial issues may be crucial for them" (124). He advocates for stronger identity oriented modernist approach in analysis or race, ethnics and others.

Bell Hooks, a contemporary critic raises her suspicion on Sexuality in her book *Postmodern Tendency*. She believes that identity politics only can be means to overcome oppression. She writes, "She raises doubts about the benefits of postmodern challenges to identity; if we say that there is no fixed sexual identity that we can call 'gay' or 'straight', then what becomes of the experiences and the understandings collectively that allow people to politically organize for gay rights," (qtd. in Beasley's *Smith and Petrases* 125). Sexual Orientation, however, refers to the sexual preference of an individual -- whether heterosexual or homosexual.

By adolescence, it is assumed that most individuals establish a clear erotic preference for a partner of the opposite sex, that is, are heterosexual. Some are attracted to members of both sexes and are termed bisexual. Small but not significant proportion of the populations is attracted only to members of their own sex and is exclusively homosexual.

In theory, biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation develop independently. For example, most commonly a biological male identifies himself as masculine (his gender identity is male), and chooses opposite sex partners (his orientation is heterosexual). Another example, less common, might be a biological male with a female gender identity who chooses to live in the female gender role and has a biological male for a sexual partner. This person would be a male-to-female transsexual with a heterosexual orientation. Even less common, but indicative of the variety of human sexuality, is the existence of transsexuals with a homosexual orientation: for example, having changed from female to male gender, a transsexual may then prefer other men.

Social conditioning profoundly affects not only a person's sexual identity and orientation but also preferred sexual activities and the sort of person to whom he or she is attracted. By this means people learn to be happy, or become frustrated or guilty about their own sexual activity and, consequently, may restrict or condemn the sexual activities of others.

Collectively, society protects itself against sexual acts that are considered unacceptable, such as rape. The law can be seen to have three functions in this respect: to protect the individual against acts which are violent, harmful to others, or exploitative; to avoid social disruption caused by explicit sex in public places; and to discourage sexual acts considered socially undesirable. These laws vary from one society to another depending on the social attitudes or the predominant religion of that society. They may also be based on the

prevailing mores of that society; for example, homosexual marriage is legal in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, but not in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Sexuality was relatively supposed to be a close term until the Victorian era. Our thinking about sexuality is largely informed by the 'repressive hypothesis' which claims that the history of sexuality over the past three hundred years has been a history of repression. Sex except for the purposes of reproduction is taboo. The only way to liberate ourselves from this repression, according to Michael Foucault is to be more open about our sexuality, to talk about sex and to enjoy it.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, certain frankness was still evident and sex was largely a common act. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the course, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. It was a time of direct shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies made a display of themselves.

But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was clearly confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right of speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one; the parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanour avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's

speech. And sterile behaviour carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible; it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty.

Nothing that was not ordered in terms of generation or transfigured by it could expect sanction or protection. Nor did it merit a hearing. It would be driven, out denied and reduced to silence. Not only did it not exist, it had no right to exist and would be made to disappear upon its least manifestation, whether in acts or in words. Everyone knew, for example, that children had no sex, which was shy they were forbidden to talk about it, why one closed one's eyes and stopped one's ears whenever they came to show evidence to contrary, and why a general and studied silence was imposed.

These were the characteristic features attributed to repression, which serve to distinguish it from the prohibitions maintained by penal law: repression operates as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and by implication, an admission to see, and nothing to know. Such was the hypocrisy of our bourgeois societies with its halting logic. It was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere; to a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits, of production, at least in those of profit. The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance: the prostitute, the client, and pimp, together with the psychiatrist and his hysteric those were "Other Victorians."

This discourse on modern sexual repression holds up well, owing to the writings of literary giants like Ralph Waldo Emerson and especially to Whitman. Their voice in genre of sexual frankness in literature is like a solemn historical and political guarantee to protect it. By placing the advent of the age of repression in the seventeenth century, after hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression, one adjusts it to coincide with the development of capitalism: it becomes an integral part of the bourgeois order. The minor chronicle of sex and its trials is transposed into the ceremonious history of the modes of production; its trifling

aspect fades from view. A principle of explanation emerges after the fact; if sex is so rigorously repressed, this is because it is incompatible with a general and intensive work imperative. At a time when labour capacity was being systematically exploited, how could this capacity be allowed to dissipate itself in pleasurable pursuits, except in those reduced to a minimum than enabled it to reproduce itself.

Since then, sex has been treated as a private and practical affair that only properly takes place between a husband and a wife. Sex outside these confines is not simply prohibited, but repressed. That is, there is not simply an effort to prevent extra marital sex, but also an effort to make it unspeakable and unthinkable. Discourse on sexuality is confined to marriage. The “repressive hypotheses” explains that there have been certain outlets of confession, where ‘improper’ sexual feelings could be released safely. Foucault identifies prostitution and psychiatry as two such outlets. Marcus labels those who turned to psychiatrists or prostitutes in Victorian era as the ‘Other Victorians.’ These Other Victorians created their own space for discourse on sexuality that freed them from the confines of conventional morality.

Foucault opines that the discourse about sex has been intensified and proliferated since the eighteenth century. Priests expected confessions to divulge the smallest temptation of desire, and sexual behaviour became an important object of study for demographic and statistical analysis. With this intensification and proliferation of discourse, the emphasis moved from married couples to cases of sexual perversion, child sexuality, homosexuality, etc.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sigmund Freud, a famous philosopher further revolutionized the study on sexuality by his famous theory of psychoanalysis study. He was obviously influenced by Whitman’s *Song of Myself*. He made open and frank discussions of sexuality possible, but his discourse is still confined to the academic and confessional realm of

psychiatry. Discourse on sexuality seen as a revolt against a repressive system, becomes a matter of political liberation rather than intellectual analysis. Foucault suggests the repressive hypothesis is essentially an attempt to give revolutionary importance to discourse on sexuality. The repressive hypothesis makes it seem both defiant and of utmost importance to our personal liberation that we talk openly about sex. Our discourse on sexuality, in its promise for a better, freer way of life, is a form of preaching.

As in Foucault words, “sexuality is a modern paradox” (Preface, *History of Sexuality*, 37). He queries, “Why do we proclaim so loudly that we are repressed, why do we talk so much about how we can’t talk about sex?” (4). As a supporter of counter-culture, he advocates repressive hypothesis that might answer that we are so aware of our repression because it is so evident, and liberating ourselves is a long process that can only be advanced by open, to frank discussion in various topics.

Whitman’s honest expression of sexual frankness in *Song of Myself* is a profound depiction of desire for change of the people, reeling under the age old social and moral orthodox dogmas. Counter-culture is a mass output from the “sprout of grass” sowed by

Whitman.



### **Sexual Frankness in *Song of Myself***

*Song of Myself* is crammed with significant description of details of sexual frankness. However, there are three key episodes to be examined in detail. The first of these is found in the section VI of the poem.

One day, a child asks the narrator "*What is the grass? Fetching it to me with the full hands*" (line 99) and the narrator is forced to explore his own use of symbolism and his inability to break things down to essential principles. A bunch of grass in the child's hand's become a symbol of the reproduction and regeneration in nature. But they also signify a common material that links desperate people all over the United States together: grass, the ultimate symbol of democracy, grows everywhere.

In the wake of the Civil War between the Southern and Northern States, use of Grass signifies graves, as Grass feeds on the bodies of the dead. Everyone must die eventually, and so the natural roots of democracy are therefore in mortality, whether due to natural causes or to the bloodshed of internecine warfare. While Whitman normally revels in this kind of symbolic indeterminacy, here it troubles him a bit. "I wish I could translate the hints" (Preface VI) he says, suggesting that the boundary between encompassing everything and saying nothing is easily crossed.

There are ample examples of depiction of sensual description in the poem; however, in Section XI, the poet is very specific. He writes: "Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,/ Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;/ Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome" (199 - 201). The swimmer is graphically described as swimming through the transparent green-shine. In the same Section, the "blab of the pave" (213) conveys its meaning accurately and with novelty. What delicate and refreshing aptness there is, too, in this sentence: "The carpenter dresses his plank; the tongue of his fore plane whistles its wild ascending lisp!" (276). Nothing could be better. In the long pieces where much is trite and

tame -- malformed prose essays they are, rather than poems -- there still exists a relation, an order which often brings some very simple and common thought into a light of unexpected significance.

In Section V, one also can find Whitman full of feelings of universal brotherhood, which is undoubtedly one of the central focuses in *Song of Myself*. Here Whitman expresses love for people all over the world. Through the expression of love, Whitman intends to maintain close relationship with all men and women of the world. He writes:

And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,  
 And that all the men ever born are also my brothers  
 and the women my sisters and lovers,  
 And that a keelson of the creation is love. (90-94).

Love is necessary to the poet's understanding of the universe. It is through love, he tries to see into the heart of creation. For him, "the known universe has one complete lover" (37).

Whitman advocates brotherly love and complete union when he gives us a catalogue containing pictures of men and women of different races and classes. He expresses his interest of union with all kinds of people – old and young, foolish and wise, child and men, smallest and largest. He says in Section XVI:

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,  
 Regardless o others, ever regardful of others,  
 Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as man,  
 Stuffed with the stuff that is coarse, and stuffed with the stuff that is fine,  
 One of the great nations, the nation of many nations – the  
 Smallest the same and the largest the same. (320-325)

Love, for Whitman, is whatever unites one with the world, the cosmos. Whatever feelings lead one towards this marvelous meeting and merging our prayers: and all those prayers can be expressed in a single word; that word for Whitman is “love.”

Whitman wants to share all the bliss he has through the spiritual quality of love. He wants everyone to give of oneself unconditionally. In this very act, Whitman finds the fullest expression of love. Moreover, to him to love is to dedicate one’s being to the whole as the drop surrenders to the sea. Whitman is pulsating with such love every moment. And he addresses everyone in this universe to feel the same. Moreover, he feels his life as full of nectar and light through the abundance of love and he wishes what has happened to him to happen with people of all castes, sex and religion. He, indeed, is ever willing to share his love with everyone. So, Whitman finds eternity in each man and woman. He identifies himself and becomes one of them. In Section XIV he says: “What is commonest and cheapest and nearest and easiest, is Me” (296). Through him the dumb voices, the voices of slaves, prostitutes and deformed persons, thieves and dwarfs, and the voices of sex and lusts are clarified and transfigured.

The “grass” in the poem shows not only the universality and eternity of each self but it is also an epitome of equality. He speaks in Section XI:

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,  
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and  
Narrow zones,  
Growing among black folks as among white. (105-108)

Here, grass is a uniform symbol of all the people and races of the world. “Sprouting” suggests life – as it sprouts in any geographical dimension without discriminating the people and race or religion.

Whitman, though he believes in soul, accepts Materialism enthusiastically symbolized by positive science, as in Section XXIII:

That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all.  
I accept Reality and dare not question it,  
Materialism first and last imbuing / Hurrah for positive science!  
Long live exact demonstration!" (83-87)

Acceptance of body would necessarily entail the acceptance of the physical world of material reality. As the body, for Whitman, offers the way into spiritual illumination, so positive sciences offers the way to "life unfold." Therefore, "to look at an object, the poet does, is to acknowledge the validity of both materialistic/scientific thinking and idealistic/mystical thinking" (Kepner 197).

Poet's vision of oneness in all things finds no distinction even between good and evil:

The prostitutes draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her  
tipsy and pimpled neck.  
The crowd laugh at her background oaths, the men jeer and  
wink to each other.

(Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you.) (Section XV, 318-19)

For Whitman, good and evil are interdependent as soul and body. They are merged in his self to free him from the limitation of phenomenal life. By obliterating the cosmic conflict of good and evil, the poet flashes his individual self over the common selves.

Whitman's dynamic self seems as a reservoir as it contains multitudes of ideas of equality. This strong feeling of equality in every opposite of the world leads him to rise above the individual level to the cosmic level.

The poet excels in frankness, when he writes: "Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, / why should you not speak to me? And why should I not speak to

you?" (Section XI, 212-13). America was in the verge of welcoming every stranger, as depicted in the above lines. The splendid, masculine swing of a people marching, and its inspiring sense of comradeship was the new air the New World.

*Song of Myself* appears to be a work of a poet who tries to reconcile and unite two seemingly paradoxical themes: the individual and the cosmos. It also tries to reconcile all other contradictions of the world. In this act of reconciliation, the poet assumes the main role. Firstly, he acquires his individual identity as "Walt Whitman" (497). Then he passionately searches for God as well as his inner self and roams through the infinity of space and time, full of exuberance. He moves from himself to other, to the world and to the eternity. In his journey throughout the world, he identifies with what he sees and feels in the world and maintains a new kind of relationship between himself and the external world. So the poem is "the poet's movement from the singular to the cosmic" (Miller 34). It is a place in which the poet merges his individuality with the whole cosmos.

The poet portrays the preparation of his journey towards the union with the Transcendent, at the beginning of the poem. Firstly, he realizes the significance of one's self, which is the source of all, without searching God here and there. Then he established himself as a "separate individual" to be able to discover reality behind the external world. In his journey of self making, he tries to unite the body and soul. "Self is both body and soul, the one not more than the other" (Miller 31). The poet realizes the supremacy of his own self in the consummation of body and soul.

Whitman sees the immortality and supremacy not only of his own self. He sees it in every self of the world. With this vision of immortality, the poet realizes that all things of the world are alike in their eternal level.

Whitman's state of transcending from one's own singular personality comes when he presents a vision of a oneness in every opposite of the world. Then he enters into the state of

identification with the mysteries of the world. The poet comes at the stage of self purification when he passionately plays in the lap of nature where good and evil equally come to touch the poet as he touches them. “Through the touch the poet is quivered to a new identity – the purified self” (Miller 20). The purified self of poet comes at the state of illumination when he gets insight about the whole world through his own reasoning power and his own intuitive understanding of all things. Then, this intuitional self of the poet enters into the state of union with the Transcendent.

### **1. Sexuality as Unity of Body and Soul**

The consummation of body and soul gives a new identity to Whitman. In the very opening lines of the poem, Whitman declares, “I celebrate myself” (1). By this declaration, he says that he discovers the reality about body, soul, outward and inward of his singular being. Soul may be conceived as the subject that sees, that can look both outward and inward. A body is considered as the vehicle of the soul. So, he gives equal significance to body and soul: “I have said that the soul is not more than the body / And I have said that the body is not more than the soul” (line 48).

Body and soul are merged together well so that they are indispensable to each other. There is perfect consummation between them and they have become one and inseparable. Whitman in his *1855 Preface to Leaves of Grass* says, “The indirect is always as great and real as the direct. The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body” (5). Whitman proves the existence of the unseen truth through his own observation and experience of the visible world. He can see soul as well as body whenever he looks at a particular object:

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;  
You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over upon me,

And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my  
bare stript heart,

And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet. (93 - 94)

Whitman, here, spiritualizes his body through sexual connotations. He can see soul in every part of his body when he understands the truth about the soul. At this point, the soul first enters and focuses the poet's attention on a single part of his body (hips of the poet) then the soul consummates to him to tell the truth about itself. When the soul plunges its tongue to the barestript heart, the body is in the grip of the soul. Thus, for Whitman the existence of body and soul are separate entities is simply unimaginable. They have their existence in perfect harmony. Each completes the other. Both are established. Whitman becomes aware of both the physical and psychic "I". In *Section 21* he declares with pride: "I am the poet of the body / And I am the poet of the soul" (322). When the body and the soul merge together, then the poet achieves a single identity, a single self. And his single self then prepares to be immortal in the world. Whitman thinks we cannot ignore either the body or the soul in the search for what is permanent and changeless about ourselves (Kepner 187).

Whitman's laudation of the flesh, in the case of *Song of Myself* is different. It is fitting to recall here the cardinal points of his creed in this regard. He himself says, "Nor will my poems do Good only, they will do just as much harm, perhaps more" (Preface IV). He claims to be the poet of the body and the soul, and says that the soul is not more than the body in this showing an identity of thought with Rossetti in *The Mystic Trumpeter*; yet he looks forward to 'a reborn race, Women and men in wisdom, innocence and health—all joy.' In his final manifesto occur these words: "I announce the great individual, fluid as Nature, chaste, affectionate, and compassionate, fully armed ... a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual, and bold" (Preface V, 21).

All this shows clearly enough that his ultimate aim is good, and that he does not set out to revel in indecency. But the plan he pursues results just as badly as if this had been his purpose; for he makes public and permanent all that which nature has guarded, in both the savage and the civilized, with mystery, holiness, and the delicate, inexorable laws of modesty. Oddly enough this elaborately natural poet breaks one of the deepest and finest of natural laws; and instead of making the body sacred; he despoils it of the sacredness which mankind now generally accords to it. He degrades body and soul by a brutish wallowing in animal matter as animal matter, deprived of its spiritual attributes.

For Whitman, self is a flowing entity. It is always full of vigor and full of life. As divinity is always imperishable, so is the self. In the poem, through the poetic meditation on “spear of grass” (126), Whitman tries to realize the immortality of self. The spear of grass symbolizes the universality and eternity of life because it seems to the poet to be “the beautiful uncut hair of graves” (110). The poet then captures his thoughts on immortality when he asks what has become of the men, women and children who are no more in this world. His answer is that “they are alive and well somewhere” (125). For him, there is no such thing as death:

The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,

And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest  
it,

And ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward [. . .] and nothing collapses.

And to die is different from what any one supposed, and Luckier. (126 -130)

Whitman, thus, attaches special significance to death. For him death is an organic, integral part of life, and it is very friendly to life. Without death life cannot exist. Life exists because of death; death gives the background. Death is, in fact, a process of renewal. According to



Whitman implication, the man who has understood what his life is allows death to happen; he welcomes it. He dies each moment and each moment he is resurrected. He dies to the past each moment and he is born again and again into the future, like a sprout of grass. In the way, death, for Whitman, is never a departure; it simply is a return to nature for rebirth and re-composition. The emergence of growing grass is the appearance of life. The grass leads to grave and grave leads to death, and death leads to continuity and identity. The moment life moment of life appears death has ceased. To be reborn as grass is to let the divine plays continue.

Whitman again reconfirms the value of death: “Has one supposed it lucky to be born? / I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it” (131–132).

For the poet, death and birth are equally important as death leads to new birth. The moment death occurs, there begins the tremendous possibility of creation in a new manner. So death is not to be feared of, rather it is to be taken as a blissful experience. This is because the very experience of death creates energy to open up new ways for further life. So, there lies no point in running away from death. For instance, it is unavoidable and, on the other and more important aspect, it is a unique occasion to come closer to the realm of higher existence. Death, then, indeed is a special opportunity for an individual. Whitman transcends, “death with the dying” (133). For him, death is no more biological fact, but rather a sort of passage, a necessary way of reunion with cosmic energy.

## **2. Vision of Oneness**

Whitman’s *Song of Myself* tries to obliterate the distinction between all pairs of opposites of the world through his own reasoning power and through the intuitive understanding of all things. When intuitive knowledge emerges in him, all the oppositions disappear. So, according to Whitman, the religious consciousness is awakened when we encounter a network of great contradictions running through our human life. When this

consciousness comes to itself, we feel as if our being were on the verge of total collapse. We cannot regain the sense of security until we take hold of something overriding the contradictions. Whitman, next, tries to establish the universal harmony between self and others, idealism and materialism, spiritualism and sensualism, visible and invisible, crossing the subject-object barriers to enter into the inner recesses of the world where there is no diversity but unity only.

Starting from the premise that “What I assume you shall assume, for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” (2-3), Whitman tries to prove that he both encompasses and is indistinguishable from the universe. In the poem, “You” is both individual and “en masse,” sometimes it is conceived as the second self of Whitman who tries to cross the boundary between the “I” and not “I.” However, very tactfully, Whitman balances the poles of human existence between “I” and not “I” bringing himself into face contact with the world of man and nature.

This paradoxical set of conditions describes perfectly the poetic stance Whitman tries to assume. The lavish eroticism of this section reinforces this idea: sexual contact allows two people to become one yet not one; it offers a moment of transcendence. As the female spectator introduced in the beginning of the section fades away, and Whitman's voice takes over, the eroticism becomes homoeroticism. Again this is not so much the expression of a sexual preference as it is the longing for communion with every living being and a connection that makes use of both the body and the soul, although Whitman is certainly using the homoerotic sincerely, and in other ways too, particularly for shock value.

Having worked through some of the conditions of perception and creation, Whitman arrives, in the third key episode, at a moment where speech becomes necessary. In the *Section* 25, he notes:

Speech is the twin of my vision;

it is unequal to measure itself,  
 It provokes me forever,  
 Walt you contain enough,  
 Why don't you let it out then?" (570 –74)

Having already established that he can have a sympathetic experience when he encounters others; Whitman says, "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels; I myself become the wounded person" (Line no. 275). Resisting easy answers, he later vows he "will never translate himself at all" (line no. 1014). Instead he takes a philosophically more rigorous stance: "What is known I strip away?" (1015).

Whitman, however, is a poet, and he must reassemble after unsettling: he must let it out then. Having catalogued a continent and encompassed its multitudes, he finally decides in Section 52, "I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" (1333-34). *Song of Myself* thus ends with a sound, a yawp that could be described as either pre or post linguistic. Lacking any of these normal communicative properties of language, Whitman's yawp is the release of the kosmos within him, a sound at the borderline between saying everything and saying nothing. More than anything, the yawp is an invitation to the next Walt Whitman, to read into the yawp, to have a sympathetic experience, to absorb it as part of a new multitude.

*Song of Myself* is a book which makes not only war upon nearly all traditional theories of true poetry, but in many places a very brutal assault upon our fixed ideas of human decency and purity. For instance, it has long been held that poetry is not merely the prose of any philosophy, history, geography, anthropology, or, we might add, anatomy or sexual physiology; but must have some sort of inherent rhythm and melody, the heartbeats and spiritual pulsations of the poet. This, for want of a better term, we call the form of poetry. Tennyson, for example, is a master of poetic form. The poems under review, as to form, run

to a chaos of monotonies. It is not the chaotic diversity of the wild woods, or the sea waves, or the autumn leaves, or the sand grains in a gravel-pit, in all which there is the articulated beauty and inbred virtue of nature obedient to the Great Craftsman. The chaos of Mr. Whitman's verse, to compare great with small, reminds us of the gray clay bluffs of Truro Beach. Would it were as clean! In form he reminds us of Martin Farquhar Tupper.

There is vastly more to be said as to his substance. First of all, and gladly, this: that he has, in his nigh four hundred pages, spurts and flashes of some things which say: "This could and should have been a noble creature" (*Section IX*, 176). He has a quick, sharp sight for the surfaces of natural scenery, as when he speaks of the "heart-shaped" leaf of the lilac; but somehow he seems incapable of grasping the inner spiritual lessons of field and flood, or a spiritual analogy. The best instance of the opposite we have found on a careful search is this sense, he writes: I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of the stars (*Section 31*, 104).

His grasp of the detail of an event, but not of its ethical quality, is shown in his description of a sea-fight. Somehow, he never shows us the soul of anything. We may ask even, "Does he believe there is any such thing as a soul?" American he is, of the ruder and more barbaric type, a prairie cow boy in a buffalo robe, with a voice of the east wind, shouting prophecies and incantations about what he thinks he sees and knows. But from civilized speech or melody he seems strangely remote. Egotism, if a virtue, is certainly an un-fragrant one, and Walt Whitman's egotism, grotesque as it is, is perhaps less grotesque than gigantic. He describes himself well enough in *Section LII*: "I am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" (1334-35).

Whitman's religion is no doubt to him a serious matter, and it is a somewhat serious matter to discover what in the world it is. He often discourses eloquently of God, as when, in *Section XLVIII*, he writes:

I find letters from God dropt in the street and everyone is  
 signed by God's name,  
 And I leave them where they are for I know that wheresoever's  
 I go  
 Others will punctually come forever and ever. (1168 - 70)

Yet the prevalent tone of his verses is curiously Asiatic, as though he were an incarnation of Brahma, and a pantheist. As he says in; "Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul" (Section III, 80).

In fact, he declares himself to be all that the universe is, even to being at the same moment each of two exactly opposite things, as though a man at any given instant were and were not. Indeed, it is this rapt but noisy mysticism which makes it rather hard to finger Mr. Whitman and touch his quality. Not that true poetry does not allow mysticism or that mystics are not often poets. Indeed, high poetry is often a blessed hint, and only a hint, of a vaster world within the veil of the unreachable and the non-measurable.

Whitman, for instance, hints at the draped and veiled world of sorrow, whose mysteries are only revealed to the mourners after here. Mr. Whitman's mysticism is a fog-bank that cloaks all, even the possible hint itself. Add to this his all-pervading granularity of speech, and he is certainly a man hard to be "understand" of common folk. And yet there are gleams in his book, not only of great things, but of possibly magnificent ones.

Whitman pays tribute to Abraham Lincoln, beginning "O Captain! My Captain!" It is a weird and rare performance. In Section 21, he writes, "O sight of pity, shame and dole,/ O fearful thought/ A convict soul is full of tenderness and pathos" (326-27). The ethical quality of Mr. Whitman's poems remains to be examined. Here, in all honesty, it is hard to know what to say or what to leave unsaid. Gray hairs have their rights, and ought to be a shield against taunt and bitterness; but woman's purity and human society have their rights also, and

there are little children growing up into the arena of the world's toil and trial who have their rights as well.

However, Whitman's physical Whitman's romance with death begins only with the third edition, in 1860. In this exuberant yet anxious world of contrasts and tensions Americans, indeed the Americans around the globe can recognize themselves as a character of the text. Perhaps, few American can recognize own self as the characters, with in the text and others still can feel very personal about the poem. This familiarization is what gives the poem its rank in the literature of the United States and explains the continuing and sometimes anxious fascination it has held for its readers.

The theory of poetry emerging from the Preface, that the poet is the prophet of his land because "the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not" (Preface V, 8), is clearly indebted to Emerson's essay "The Poet"; it is small wonder that Emerson responded to it enthusiastically. The Preface also points to what proves to be a substantial difference between the later editions and the first one. As it describes, exuberantly and at length, the speaker's undertaking and catalogues his raw materials is defiantly testing the limits of conventional prose all the while, this introduction avoids the first person singular with an almost pedantic rigor that is in startling contrast with the carefree unrestraint of the rest.

The absence of "I" throughout the literary masterpiece is another dominating feature of the writing. It is a reminder that its words are spoken by a major figure, but not by, "the greatest poet," because at the outset of the first Leaves this program is also "the direct trial of him who would be the greatest poet" (Preface XI). He must find the voice, the language, Whitman spoke of *Leaves of Grass* as "only for a language-experiment" (Preface IV, 12) that will communicate his vision to those who are blind to its truth even as they embody and live it. If the experiment succeeds, if the speaker passes his trial, he will have become "the greatest poet."

We go now upon the assumption that there are certain elements of decency which pervade all human society, heathen and otherwise, and that the world is not too old to blush. We say that there are passages in this book that never ought to have been written, much less published; passages which sound like a lecture on the obstetrics of lust and may we say it with all deference to our well-bred readers the apotheosis of the Phallus. It is hard to overstate this matter. When a man with such physical imagery of shame summons the very wind that is to be assistant in a poetical concubine age as realistic as a French invisible card, and the salt, it is certainly time for us common mortals who have still some respect for the seventh commandment to stay in doors from the elements, or, if at sea, to make all speed for the shore. The offense in this wise is not all-pervading, but it is very acute and deep.

His apologists will say of him that he is only another Adam in the Garden, naked and not ashamed. We say of him, and of all who have assisted in the making of his book, that they are guilty of an act of indecent exposure. For the rest, what Mr. Whitman might have been in poetry we have tried to fairly state. We can only add that if in these Leaves of Grass he has shown himself to be a poet, then the great and shining ones whom the English-speaking race have been wont to honour with this high title, are not.

Whitman prides himself on his healthiness. What is health? It is nothing else than the buoyant normal exercise of physical faculties in easy unconsciousness of their mode of acting. The moment there is friction, the moment we become conscious of these functions -- in heart, stomach, or brain, for example -- which ought to be carried on without sensation, health is broken, and sickness supervenes. In like manner, when Mr. Whitman begins to finger over and brood upon the secret processes of certain functions which should work unobserved, he becomes unhealthy. Corrupt he may not be, but he is undeniably morbid. It is his ambition to be 'inclusive,' to express extremes of good and evil; to fly from one pole to another, in everything. In the sphere of the body he accomplishes this maneuver perfectly; for

his presentation of man's physical being is as often diseased as the reverse. He does not seem to be aware of his 'inclusiveness' in this direction. If made so, he might reply with these peremptory words from the poem: "Do I contradict myself?" / Very well, then, I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)" (Preface LI, 1324-27). The mass cannot palliate the gross impropriety of which he is guilty of.

Whitman sees the hearts of the objects rather than the physical appearance. He not only observes but becomes what he observes. He in Section 33 says: "I don't ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded" (634). He feels their pain and pleasure as if he dwells in their hearts. For him the awakening of self gives him the realization of the self's potentiality to be all he observes.

The poet's self not only sees and absorbs the essence of a single person and a thing, it also "sees" and "hears" the whole world. So the poet bursts forth into the central essence of the world transcending the limitation of time and space, he says in Section 33:

Swift wind! Space! My soul! Now I know it is true what  
I guessed at;  
What I guessed when I loafed on the grass,  
What I guessed while I lay alone in my bed and again as  
I walked the beach under the paling stars of the morning.  
My ties and ballasts leave me [. . .] I travel [. . .]  
I sail my elbows rest in the sea-gaps,  
I skirt the sierras, my palms cover continents,  
I am afoot with my vision. (619-28)

The poet's purified self has covered continents. It is ascending above the world. The whole world is now ablaze with his illuminating presence; not a single space remains where the light of his purified self does not reach. Now he sees everything through his greater spiritual



insight. The greater spiritual insight has symbolically been achieved by greater physical sight. The poet is finally “afoot” with his vision, he realizes the immensity of his own self realizes its all inclusiveness when he says: “I am large I contain multitudes” (line no. 1324). The poet no longer restricts himself as limited and temporary, but considers himself as divine. With this realization of divinity within oneself, Whitman sees the presence of God in every object, as seen in: “I hear and behold God in every object” (1240). The pantheistic belief in Whitman leads him to reach the supreme state of the lord.

The poet is now able to experience divinity through the eye of knowledge; therefore the mystery of this vast universe is not alien to him. Thus the world realized self of Whitman tries to be itself God-like or the Absolute. This frank expression of himself, claiming in the position of the Absolute is a great remark of the poet.

This Absolute in Hindu Philosophy is like being “Brahma.” By Brahma, here it is meant God or he creator himself or the supreme spirit that fills the universe. As God is omnipresent, so is Whitman’s self. Besides, the creation shares the same qualities as the Creator, the latter being the fountain. In relation Whitman says in Section 20; “In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn less, And the good or bad I say or myself I say of them” (402-03).

The omnipresent narrator finds his being as present in every other being. He finds the reflection of his own image in every people. And he equates his disposition to the nature of the people around him. Then, the poet thinks himself “a creator” as he speaks himself the knower of everything in Section 42:

I know perfectly well my own egotism.

And know my omnivorous words, and cannot say any less.

And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself.

No words of routine this song of mine,

But abruptly to question, to leap beyond yet nearer bring; (932-35).

Here the bard is speaking on the special power of himself that makes him god-like. He not only has got that perfect knowledge of his own “egotism” but also has achieved the true calculation of the powerful range of his speech as well. Besides, he is able to envelope anyone with the quality of his special power.

In this way, the poet’s self exists outside both time and space. It reaches into the “the orchards of God” as he writes in Section 33.

Walking the old hills of Judea with the beautiful gentle god by my side;  
 Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,  
 Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring and the  
 Diameter of eighty thousand miles. (724-27).

Whitman’s meditation provides him with the company of God. He now walks with God in close togetherness. Both are constantly accompanying each other. And such a stage comes when in Whitman is God and God is Whitman. Thus the poet reaches to merge into the cosmic self in the course of his spiritual journey.

Whitman also often casts himself as a Christ like figure in *Song of Myself*. He makes the analogs between Christ and himself, a very daring work of openness in literary writings, at least during the period. He brings the union with the Transcendent and himself, when he writes about his own “crucifixion and bloody crowning” in Section IVL. He sees no illusion and suffering in his death. For him death becomes not like the bitter hug of mortality but an outlet into the eternity. As he says, “Eternity lies in bottomless reservoirs, its buckets are rising forever and ever” (848).

Similarly, he sees death the ultimate permanent union with the Transcendent, when he writes in Section L:

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?  
 It is not chaos or death, it is form, union, plan

It is eternal life

It is happiness. (1309 -1312)

The union with the Transcendental in his eyes is not chaos or death but it is an eternal life of happiness.

The poet having created himself in and through his world feels his presence everywhere. In Section LII he says, Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, / Missing me one place search another, / I stop everywhere waiting for you” (1344 – 46).

Here the poet talks about life present in various forms. He opines life never ceases to continue but changes place and course, as does a sprout of grass, which disappears in one place only to appear in other. One may not be able to feel the presence of higher force, in very first attempt but should not be discouraged and should go on and on. And ultimately, the sincere and deep meditation will provide one the power to feel and experience the bliss of unity with the cosmic self, as Whitman himself has been provided with.

This process is still in run in America. Many writers and scholars, in years to come were to follow this trend, both in writing and literature, giving rise to Hippie Generation, Beat Generation, and many such. However, after many years, during which the author has had ample opportunity to free himself from his youthful crudities, wished that only primal sanities must be revolted by this offense and protest against it. Fortunately, the chief damage incurred by his frankness was dishonoring against the physical nature of Americans; for imperfect through the race. However, *Song of Myself* remains so much purer than the stained and distorted reflection of its animalism in *Leaves of Grass* that the book cannot attain to any very wide influence.

Simply, it cannot be ignored that it marked the beginning of a new trend in America and all over the world. This trend, in the years to come, was to serve as a source of inspiration, to scores of writers and scholars, all over the world. Honest expression of inner most feelings came out intermingled with a revolutionary voice for change, which forever changed the American literary course.

## Conclusion

The present thesis has analyzed Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* as the landmark of beginning of frank expression in poetry and other epochs of literary creation. The poet's profound revolutionary attitude in writing is obvious from the very starting of the poem, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, and what I assume you shall assume" (1).

This book not only makes war on all traditional theories of writing poetry, but in many places makes a very brutal assault upon our fixed ideas of human decency and purity. All the ethical theories relating to sexual hypocrisy fall apart in the poem. For instance, it has long been held that poetry is a sacred writing, where provocative language and indications should not mingle; however, Whitman challenged the tradition through his frank remarks on sex through; "Which of the young men does she like the best? Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her" (204-05) in Section XI. Threat to sexual ideology was one among many such trends, like challenge to philosophy, history, geography, anthropology, or, we might add, anatomy or sexual physiology was in the process of making a history.

*Song of Myself* has grasp of every minor detail in the poem. Whitman not only celebrates himself, but it is an American, who sees the beauty of nature, claims himself as wise and foolish, loves music, the black and white people, all equally as an atom in the poet equally belongs to the readers, as well.

However, sexual frankness is the heart of the poem, as it turned upside down the literary trend in America. When he claims young men and women sing and dance in music, despite race and religion and celebrate life on their own, he is claiming the rise of a race and classless society. But, somehow, he never seems to show the soul of anything, and that is what the present America is about; country of soulless people. America is of the ruder and more barbaric type, a prairie cow boy in a buffalo robe, with a voice of the east wind,

shouting prophecies and incantations about what he thinks he sees and knows. But from civilized speech or melody he seems strangely remote.

Sexual frankness is a virtue, less grotesque than gigantic. And Whitman's making of *Song of Myself* is the dawn of candid expressions in the literary history of America. By challenging the established trends and traditions in *Song of Myself*, Whitman has facilitated in rise and merge of various cultures in one place, thereby enhancing path for universal brotherhood.

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