



Understanding the Cosmic Unity in the Poetry of Jalal Ud Din Rumi and Walt Whitman

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Abstract— *In this research, parallels will be drawn between the Sufi poesy of two most prominent Sufi poets, Jalal Ud Din Rumi, and Walt Whitman. While the former was known for his Persian poetry, the latter on the other hand inspired the western poets with his unique use of mystic transcendentalism, with no precedents of such usage amongst the western literature. Consequently, the researcher will make an attempt under this research, conduct comparative analysis between the poesy of Rumi and Walt Whitman, with emphasis upon the key similarities and differences which pertain to the conception of cosmic unity, used by Rumi in Masnavi and by Walt Whitman in the Leaves Of Grass and the Song of Myself.*

Keywords— *Rumi, Walt Whitman, Sufism, Divine Consciousness, Mysticism, Cosmic Unity, leaves of grass, Masnavi Mathnawi, The Song of Myself.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Jlaal-Ud-Din Rumi, the renowned Sufi poet was born during the year 1207 to a Persian family which belonged to Balkh, a city which was originally located in modern Afghanistan. Besides this, Rumi's birth place is also referred to as the present day Iran, because of which today he is known as one of the most celebrated and illustrious poets of Iran, with him acquiring the status of an influential figure in the history of Persia through his mystic contributions within the world of Sufism, with the most protuberant one being Mathnavi Manavi (Harvey, 2005).

Furthermore, the origin of Mathnavi can be traced back to Rumi's mystic encounter with Shams his spiritual friend, who then inspired him to become a Sufi and walk on a path which ultimately ended with the composition of the most mystical and transcendental Sufi poem Mathnavi, which further consisted of 27000 verse, written across couplets that were divided into 6 large volumes (Harvey, 2005).

II. WALT WHITMAN: A WESTERN SUFI ENTHUSED FROM RUMI?

Walt Whitman can be recognized as a Sufi poet who belonged to the world of Western poetry and held a

prominent position in shaping the course of western poesy, by introducing Sufism to the west, which was inspired by the idea of mysticism (a unique approach which was only adopted by him amongst all other western poets of his time) (Moghaddas, 2015).

Hereafter, it is believed by the critics of Whitman's poetry, that the poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi had substantially influenced him, to use mysticism in his poems, namely "*The Leaves Of Grass*" and "*The Song Of Myself*", with such elements that postulate the concept of sublime mysticism, that ultimately led the readers to a spiritual sense of cosmic unity between men and God (Moghaddas, 2015).

As mentioned above, both Rumi and Whitman were found to be using various concepts pertaining to Mystic elements of transcendentalism, which further allowed the readers to experience a spiritual sense of cosmic consciousness, that connects them with the divine being (Moghaddas, 2015).

Consequently, below is analysis of both Rumi and Whitman's poesy, which clearly reflect upon the great extent to which Rumi has influenced Whitman, to use the concept of divine Unity within his poems, which also has been used by Rumi in his couplets (Sharify-Funk et al., 2017) Masnavi Mathnavi, for conveying the concept of

divinity or cosmic unity between man and God (as reflected in the interpretation of their poems below).

III. RUMI'S HAPPENSTANCE WITH THE SUPREME BEING: BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY OF MYSTIC UNIFICATION

For Rumi, meeting Shams was a symbol of pure unification with the divine being, who took the position of the ultimate being in his life, someone who for him was nothing less than god.

In Masnavi and Mathnavi he stated:

“ Shams became his God: My master and my sheikh, my pain and my remedy;

I declare these words openly, my Shams and my God.

I have reached truth because of you, O my soul of truth. I have accepted your prayer, my Shams and my God.

I am check-mated by your love, for you are the king of two worlds.

So that you stare at me,

my Shams and my God I submerge myself in your presence so that there remains no impression. Politeness dictates thus,

my Shams and my God. (Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, & Nicholson, 1940)

Rumi right from the beginning had a strong belief in god and how the divine being showed its presence before him through Shams, someone who for him is nothing less than god, since it was because of Shams, that he reached the truth, the truth of the divine being, in whose presence he has submerged himself, since for him Shams, god and he himself, are unified.

Whitman on a similar mystical path, tried to assimilate change within the traditional image of the supreme soul, to the one which is comparatively more mystic.

He has further addressed God as “the Great Camerado,” in the “Song of Myself. Not only this, but he has further referred to god as the great comerado in his poem *The Leaves of Grass*:

“My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,

The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,

the great Camerado,

the lover true for whom I pine will be there” (WHITMAN, W., 2011).

Apart from aforementioned verse in Whitman has addressed the supreme being as “*The Camerado*” in another verse:

Camerado, I give you my hand! I give you my love more precious than money,

I give you myself before preaching or law; (WHITMAN, W., 2011).

Will you give me yourself? Will you come travel with me?

Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

(WHITMAN, W., 2011).

Henceforth, like Rumi, Whitman too depicted his love for the divine. While Rumi recognized and expressed his love for Shams as the supreme being, his god and a divine soul, similarly Whitman too articulated his love and respect for the “Great Camerado” whose spirit for him is nothing but that of his own brother and how God is not greater than himself.

Furthermore, use of the term “*Comerado*”, suggests a fairly mystical union which Whitman had experienced with his lord, through the identification of the divine being as his camerado. Fredrick Schyberg, a renowned Sufi critic, has elucidated a clear understanding of human like image of the Divine, which was used by Rumi and Whitman, for addressing Shams as a divine soul and the Great Comerado as the Supreme being respectively (Fayez & Muhammad, 2016).

3.1 Transcendental Consciousness: The Cosmic Existence Of One's Real Self:

Rumi has praised oneself as Universal self in his first book *Mathnawi*, when he mentions:

“Where are threshold and dais in reality?

In the quarter where our Beloved is, where are “we” and “I”?” (Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, & Nicholson, 1940)

Henceforth, as per Rumi, both we and I, is nothing but the one who is his beloved, the divine soul, he also mentions:

O Thou whose soul is free from “we” and “I,”

O Thou who art the subtle essence of the spirit in man and woman,

When man and woman become one, Thou art that One; when the units are wiped out, lo, Thou art that (Unity).

Thou didst contrive this “I” and “we” in order that Thou mightst play the game of worship with Thyself,

That all “I’s” and “thou’s” should become one soul and at last should be submerged in the Beloved (Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, & Nicholson, 1940).

Thus, for Rumi, both ‘I’ and ‘thou’ shall stay United, since for him they have divine existence if combined together. Consequently, this concept of Unity between you and I, has in fact been used by Whitman in his poem the song of myself, in which he mentions:

“I celebrate myself, and sing myself,

*and what I assume you shall assume,
for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you”*
(Whitman, W., & Bly, R., 2004)

It is clear from the above, that Whitman too has used the concept of Unity by depicting his love for himself which he celebrates with joy, thus depicting his perception towards himself and others. He also mentions how every other person shall form the same perception as he has for himself, considering for him each atom which belongs to him, also belongs to others. This unitive perception of ‘I’ being equivalent to ‘you’, is nothing but another illustration of divinity which exists in terms of his soul and that of others, further reflecting upon the extent to which everyone whether it is ‘You’ or ‘I’, are nothing but the divine itself.

Whitman also mentions how soul is nothing more than body and vice versa in the below mentioned lines:

*“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,
and nothing, not God,
is greater to one than one's self is”* (WHITMAN, W.,
2011).

Henceforth, the unity between an individual with his soul, body and God has been used by Whitman, by affirming how god is not greater than one own self, primarily because the notion of Unity exists between soul, body and God, because of which god is the same as one's soul and soul is the same as one's body, further establishing a sense of close knit relationships, which as per him exists between sole, body and the supreme being.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the above-mentioned comparison between Rumi and Whitman's poetry, it can hereby be inferred that to a great extent Whitman was inspired by the elements of cosmic Unity, which were used by Rumi in his renowned poem Masnavi Matnawi. Also, the use of body, soul and the supreme as three key mystical elements, which have unity of existence, is another comparable concept that can very well be traced within the poetry of both Rumi and Whitman.

However, the only distinctive use of this unity of consciousness between body, soul and the supreme being in the poems of both the poets is the fact that while Rumi has a far more direct approach in establishing the cosmic relationship between I, we and the beloved (supreme being). Conversely, when it comes to Whitman, then he too has depicted unity of bond between we, you, and god but the same has been done rather passively, since Whitman has

mentioned how he celebrates himself and which shall also be done by others, along with the use of excerpts like God is not greater than oneself, further establishing equivalence between God, body and soul, without particularly mentioning the fact that these three are united or how an individual is God himself, without having his own separate identity or existence.

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