



Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

Biography

- American poet, essayist and journalist born in **Huntington** on **Long Island**.
- He was the second of the nine children.
- His parents have interest in Quaker thought.
- He served as an office boy for two lawyers and later was an apprentice for the weekly Long Island newspaper the *Patriot*. Then he took job at the weekly newspaper *Star* and became the patron of the local library.
- After his teaching attempt he found his own newspaper, the *Long-Islander*.

Leaves of Grass

- A popular poetry collection by Whitman
- Considered as 'the Bible of democracy'
- First edition published in 1855 with 12 poems. He adds the famous Preface with his theory of new poetry. The second edition in 1856 with 20 new poems and the third in 1860 with total 124 new poems. The death-bed edition came in 1891-92.
- The main themes in these poems are – love, democracy, religion, science, death, sexuality, etc.

Leaves of Grass

- **'Songs of Myself'** is the longest part.
- **'Children of Adam,' 'Calamus,' 'Drum Taps,' 'Memories of President Lincoln,' 'Autumn Rivulets,'** are some of the poems from the collection.
- Whitman gets inspiration from Emerson.
- **I Hear America Singing** is a part of the **'Inscription'** section of the *Leaves of Grass*.
- **One's Self I Sing** is short lyric from *Leaves* and demonstrates Whitman as a true poet of democracy.
- **The Wound Dresser** is a song from *Leaves* under the section **'Drum Taps.'**
- **The Sleepers** is a song from *Leaves* under the section **'Autumn Rivulets.'**
- **A Glimpse** is a poem from *Leaves* under the Calamus group of lyrics. It is criticised for homosexual touch.

Leaves of Grass

- **Scented Herbage of My Breast** is a lyric from *Leaves* in the section Calamus criticised for homosexual touch. Calamus is an American plant with pink roots.
- **O Captain! My Captain!** is his elegy from the *Leaves* on the death of Abraham Lincoln.
- **Prayers of Columbus** is a poem from *Leaves*.

Song of Myself

- Appears in *Leaves of Grass*.
- Has 52 groups of lines.
- The 'I' in the poem refers to the poet himself and also includes all the Americans with their heritage.
- Section 2 to 5 makes an entry into mystical state, 6 to 16 awakens Self, 17 to 32 purifies Self, 33 to 37 illuminates the dark night soul, 38 makes shift in attitude, 39 to 43 shows the union and faith and love, 44 to 49 shows union and perception, 50 to 52 makes the reader emerge from mystical state.

- **I Celebrate Myself** is the first song in '**Song of Myself.**'
I celebrate myself, and sing myself
And what I assume you shall assume.
- **Grass** is the sixth song in '**Song of Myself.**' Grass is the symbol of democracy.
- **Walt Whitman** is the 24th song in '**Song of Myself.**'
- **Animals** is the 32nd song in '**Song of Myself.**' He presents the beauty of stallion and wishes to live with them. The poet feels that there is Brahma or the divine within him.

- **Song of the Open Road** was written in 1856 and reveals the poet's carefree spirit and optimism.
- **Crossing Brooklyn Ferry** published in 1856. The basic 'oneness of life' is the main theme.
- **Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking** is his most complex and successfully integrated poem. He has used a triad of images – **boy, bird and sea**. The sea is Life or Creation. The bird is the Soul or Inner Self and the boy is the symbol of Curiosity. Relationship between suffering and art is its basic theme. The sea becomes the '**old crone rocking her cradle.**'
- **I Hear It was Charged Against Me** expounds the poet's Marxist philosophy.
- **Pioneers! O Pioneers!** Is about the celebration of the Westward Movement in America.

We primeval forests felling

We the rivers stemming, vexing we piercing deep the mines within

We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil unheaving

Pioneers! O Pioneers!

- **Poets to Come** is a brief lyric poem.
- **Chanting the Square Deific** is about four deities. The poet adds Satan, the spirit of freedom as the fourth member to the usual trinity of Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost.
- **Faces** reveals his democratic attitude.
- **On the Beach at Night** shows the poet as visionary and mystic.
- **When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd** is a long elegy in 16 sections on the death of Abraham Lincoln. Three main symbols employed are – the star (Lincoln), the lilac (human love), the hermit thrush (the poet of the soul).

- **Passage to India** is a long poem in nine sections. Spirituality is its main theme. The completion of a railroad across North America from East to West, the laying of the transatlantic cable, the opening of the Suez canal are the significant events that inspire the poet to compose the poem.

O brave soul

O farther farther sail!

O daring joy but safe! are they not all the seas of God?

O farther, farther, farther sail: