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## Eastern and Western Mysticism: Love, Body and Soul in the Poetry of Shah Latif and Walt Whitman

### Abstract:

*The present research is aimed at unsnarling the foundations of Eastern and Western world via their very philosophies and belief systems. Mysticism a ruling philosophy has different meanings and sources of attainment in both the poles of the world. The research brings forth the clash of body and soul, abstract and concrete, senses and spirit, physical and spiritual love as key notions and points of differences. To highlight the difference between the Eastern and Western Mysticism, poetry of two representative mystics of the East and West i.e. Shah Latif and Walt Whitman respectively, has been used which truly project the difference in their ideals and sources of mystical experience. The research aims to explore the effects and impacts of the nature of mysticism on both parts of the world. It presents material development of the West as the consequence or result of the significance of materialism and bodily pleasures in the very roots of their philosophies like Mysticism. Western mysticism exhibits physical love while Eastern Mysticism holds universal love and welfare of the whole humanity as fundamental part of their mystical concept while West is interested in their own betterment and advancement. Their humanity and human love is confined to their own land. Love according to Eastern mysticism does not discriminate. It knows no boundaries, territories and geographical limitations. The present research successfully displays via poetry of Whitman who is solely interested in Americans while Shah Latif vows for the whole humanity considering all, to be the creation of his Lord.*

### Introduction

Every kind of construction stands on its basis and root materials. In the same way every kind of shapeliness is the result of the design of the foundation. On the sky surface of the above dictum man becomes what he dreams for if not destined otherwise. Similarly the world we are living in is the direct or indirect result of the foundation stones of its thinkers and dreamers. From that calculation it is presumed that the world is divided into the little different structures and the modes of thinking. It is evident from the poles of directions in the world i.e. Eastern, Western etc. Every pole or part of the world is the result of its dreamers, designers and constructors. Mainly the division between East and West remained meaningful and interesting for thinkers, writers, intellec-

tuals and politicians of almost ages and times.

The concept of the West mainly comprises Europe and America. From that distribution United States of America is mainly the matter of interest in study or in any other field of life because of its super-power status in today's world. The reasons and logic of Western materialist thought is explored from every angle of the study. It is calculated that literature and philosophy are the foundation stones in construction of any nation and country of the world. By this way, literature and philosophy shape the directions of thinking and mode of progress, on those basis nations set their goals and move onward. In this context, if seen the Eastern and the Western poles of the world, the above dictum comes true.

Today's Eastern nations are mostly relying on the spiritual philosophy and the Western world especially America is enjoying the materialist progress. Every pole is developing to its own sides and directions. Islam Confucianism and Buddhism provided the basis for Eastern and Asian thinking and philosophy and several materialist thinkers laid the basis of American materialist development. What we see America and the East today is the result of those philosophies.

### Literature Review

According to Jerome Gellman, Mysticism can be defined as "a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined in different traditions." The term mysticism is Greek in origin which literally means "to conceal" (Mysticism). With the passage of time the term got different meaning. In earlier times, it has been associated with different dimensions like Biblical, liturgical and spiritual. In medieval time the term got associated with an extra ordinary, an exceptional state of mind and experience. The most recent and most prevailed definition of mysticism is that it is a longing, a yearning to have a communion with the Absolute.

McGinn gives a new dimension and a broad vision to mysticism. He asserts in his article "Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal" that, the meaning of mysticism ought not to be confined with the experience of union with God. Mysticism according to him brings a consciousness of "presence". Presence is not union but a strong feeling of existence of the Absolute author-

ity around oneself. He further strengthens his point of view that God's presence or existence is not always to be felt like an external object. "Mysticism is new ways of knowing and loving based on states of awareness in which God becomes present in our inner acts". (Hunt, 14)

McGinn highlighted the significance of the "Consciousness of Presence" on the other hand D.J. Moores holds "Love" to be a pivotal element in mysticism. According to him, mysticism is the awareness, the perception of universe and all its objects and entities with an idea that all the objects and entities form a unified whole and are tied together by chain of Love. (Moores 35)

Many mystics and psychologists equate the meaning or state of Mysticism with Enlightenment or Illumination. They opined that mystical activity breaks the locks of the previously hidden doors and enables a person's sight to penetrate in the layers of layers of concealed facts which resultantly awards a mystic a visionary power and an enlightened mind and soul by which many issues can be resolved. James R. Horne throws light on this phenomenon and interprets mysticism as "An extreme and intense form of the insight seeking process that goes in activities such as solving theoretical problems or developing new inventions". (Horne, 9).

McClenon gives another dimension to mysticism. He associates mysticism with Ultimate Truths and Realities. He opines that mystical experiences are special states of mind that exalt man's higher self to such an extent that hidden realities and concealed truth become visible and glaring.

Delving deep in to mysticism and mystical experience many new terms were introduced like "Religious experience" a term associated with William James who popularized the term in his "The Varieties of Religious Experience". This term affected the understanding of mysticism as an exclusive experience which imparts the knowledge and perception of transcendental. "In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed. In Hinduism, in Neo-Platonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note". (James 307)

According to Book Rags, there are two very basic schools of thoughts. The first school opines that God resides in all His

creations and delving deep in to one's own self can bring communion with the Lord. The other school of thought opines that God and human are separate but the soul can be exalted through ascending stages and then communion is possible. Walt Whitman a representative of western mysticism seems to be the disciple of the first school of thought. His entire poetry echoes with the divinity of man. Whitman's mysticism amalgamates body and soul, material and abstract. Whitman's philosophy annihilates Eastern conception of purity of soul and religious experience "Whitman seeks to tear down the belief that the spiritual resides only in the religious and embraces the idea that nothing is more divine than human body and soul" (Walt Whitman A Mystic). When Eastern mysticism throws light on spiritual pleasures Walt Whitman celebrates bodily and physical pleasures. "No one has ever been more frank than he concerning his delight".

Eastern mysticism holds communion with God prior above all. According to an article named "Sufism- Islamic Mysticism", Eastern Muslim mystics cite many Quranic verses that reveals "longing and yearning for and friendship with God. Such longing is a dominant theme across the various mystical strands in the Abrahamic religions i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam". (Sufism)

Both the sides can be understood through its classical literature and philosophy. In this context the nineteenth century well-known American Poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892) can be referred to know the actual context of American development and progress in materialism. Because Walt Whitman has been claimed as America's first "poet of democracy", a title meant to reflect his ability to write in a singularly American character. Raja Sharma in his "Analysis of Walt Whitman's Poetry" reports that a British friend of Walt Whitman, Mary Smith Whitall Costelloe, wrote: "You cannot really understand America without Walt Whitman and without *Leaves of Grass*... (Sharma 27). He has expressed that civilization, 'up to date,' as he would say, and no student of the philosophy of history can do without him."

According to "A Class Unconventional-Biographies-Writers and Poets", the literary critic, Harold Bloom wrote, as the introduction for the 150th anniversary of *Leaves of Grass*: "If you are American, then Walt Whitman is your imaginative father and mother, even if, like myself, you have never composed a line of verse" (A Class 108). These examples prove the importance and influence of Whitman in American political, philosophical, and

cultural development. Because three themes predominately are found overtly in his poetry: (1) American people and American democracy (en masse) (2) sex and senses; and (3) death.

On the other hand our great mystic poet Shah Latif (1689-1752) is one of representative poet of Islamic and Eastern philosophies. On the one hand, one will find the Hindu mortification philosophy in his poetry and Islamic faith and eternity abundantly on the other. Both the poets have different world view which is also seen in today's world as well.

### Research Methodology:

Qualitative mode of inquiry has been adopted in which textual analysis has been done. The Texts of Shah Latif's and Walt Whitman's poems have been analyzed for probing and proving the research statement.

### Research Questions:

1. How far the concept of Mysticism of East and West is similar or different?
2. How Eastern and Western philosophies incorporate or discard bodily or worldly pleasures?
3. What is the role of Body and Soul and their significance in Eastern and Western Mysticism?
4. How western development can be said to be the successful impact of their philosophies?
5. How Love has been dealt as a pivotal element of mysticism in poetry of Latif and Whitman?

### Discussion:

Eastern and western philosophies both agree on the fact that the very purpose of mysticism is the attainment of mystical experience i.e. to seek communion with God.

Eastern philosophy is immersed in the Quranic teachings and the teachings of Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) who is 'Rehmat ul aalmin' (Blessing for the whole worlds). Love for God and His creations is also an integral part of Eastern Mysticism. It is conceived that mysticism believes in the existence of the soul, in the existence of God or Divine Spirit, in the immortality of human soul, and in the capacity of human being to establish an inter-

course or communication between his spirit and the Divine Spirit. Western concept of Mysticism is different. They do believe in soul but in another way. The actual difference is their treatment to attain that loftiness of the Soul and communication with the Divine Spirit. Western thinking conceives the Divine spirit and eternal Soul within physical existence as Whitman says:

I said that the soul is not more than the body,

And I have said that the body is not more than the soul.

This philosophy seeks both the things within; one who wants to attain bodily pleasure may experience the existence of soul and at the same time one who wants the Soul experience he may get pleasure from body. The above lines present the idea of West that to them there isn't any difference between body and soul, both are equal. The pleasures derived by them are interchangeable. Whitman at another place says:

If any thing is Sacred, the human body is sacred.

This illustration of the poetry displays that western mystic experience is not beyond the human body and sensual pleasure. They hold body as significant and sacred while to East, soul is sacred and pious while body is physical and hinders between man and the Divine Spirit. Whitman as representative voice of west exhorts the significance of Body and Self.

On the other hand Islamic and Eastern mysticism believes the attainment of communication with the Divine Spirit is hidden in the mortification of human physical pleasure and senses. Because the body and the soul are two different existences and physical understanding of the Divine spirit is deceptive and limited. In this world the true human and his soul is imprisoned and its salvation lies beyond the bodily attainments as Latif depicts:

O Lord, by the will this decree,

With her Marus that Marui be,

Life engoaled was the fate that I took.

That I should live miserable here,

'Body here, sold with Thee', Saith the Book.

At another place he says:

Those who love the Lord,

The world cannot hold them.  
Palaces do not attract them,  
Nor women nor servants  
Nothing binds them.

It is evident from the above lines that eastern mysticism resides in the confiscations of worldly desires and amorous feelings. People who love Lord are free from all the materialistic and sensual pleasures of the world. In above lines "Women" stand for "sensual and bodily pleasures" while "servants, for worldly comforts". Neither women nor servants, neither palaces nor any thing can deviate them from their love to Superior authority. World and its pleasures are obstacles in the way of a person who wants to seek communion with Lord (haqiqa). Unity with God requires purity of soul and according to Latif, it can only be achieved through the necrosis of woing senses and desisting of physical pleasures.

Confound thy senses, and renounce  
Thy 'Self' ...Him-knowing be;  
To recognize the Loved-one, drop  
Thy personality

The pivotal thing which is to be dropped and leave off is "Self", the lower self which the East calls "Nafs" Self comes in to being with the assistance of senses. Without the working of senses one cannot recognize his Self. Self and senses are interchangeable. Renouncing one's self means denouncing bodily senses. Latif preaches through his verses and asserts in clear and straight forward manner that confound or give up your senses and put off personality which is transitory and which is just an apparel in order to see and feel the Infinite Being. Extinction of personality (*fana*) is the key note of Eastern mysticism

Clear and sweet is my soul , and clear and sweet is that is not my soul.

Eastern philosophy resolutely sustains its faith in the purity of soul by liberating oneself from physical senses and lowers self (*Nafs*) but Whitman as a spokesperson of west declines east's notion of sole purity of human soul. He holds everything sacred and pure. Their belief in the purity and sacredness of everything

unsnarls the materialist element in their idea and concept of mysticism. In the above line Clear means purity and cleanliness which the East claims to be solely associated with soul but Whitman negates Eastern belief and holds everything sacred and pure along with the soul.

And deaf you have to be, the call  
of Reality to hear.

-Make yourself blind, so that the dear  
Beloved you may see.

Eastern mysticism relies in the abstractive nature of God and soul. Body is concrete and it needs material things for its gratification. Latif clearly projects the whole philosophy of abstract versus concrete and body versus soul in the above mentioned stanza. It is impossible to hear the call of Reality (the voice of God) with your physical ears neither one can see his Beloved with his human eyes. Because these physical sense organs can see, hear and feel physical things. God is abstract and can only be seen in and with abstraction. By deafening and blinding human sense organs one can see in to the life of the things, penetrate in to ultimate and higher realities (*Marifat*) and can reach towards the Higher and Supreme Being who is abstract and only keeps communion with abstraction means soul.

I believe in the flesh and the appetites,

Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle.

Western philosophy exhibits sensualism. When Latif presents a grand and exalted status of soul after shedding senses can see and observe Higher Realities and Higher Truths (*Marifat*), west projects a shallow vision that associates miracles with body and its senses, grand ideas with petty things. Miracles are rare happenings which do not take place frequently and are difficult to believe. These qualities distinguish them from ordinary occurrences. Whitman's association of miracles with seeing and hearing is a grave negation of the nature of miracle itself. Eastern philosophy as evident from the verses of Shah Latif preaches that miracles can be seen only through the eyes of soul whose sight can penetrate deep in to the realities of the things.

Drive vulgar crowds out of the house,

peace with the sovereign make  
From that door then on favours browse  
receiving gifts each day

Vulgar crowds stand for limitless and never satisfying worldly wishes and desires and house stands for the Being of man. Here Latif being the voice of East preaches that the rewards, presents and favors of the Divine Being are showered on those who can thoroughly eradicate the vulgar and immoral desires that reside in the form of a crowd in the body of man. By rooting all vulgarity out man can achieve serenity and silence in which the Supreme Being bestows His infinite bounties and blessings each day.

Through me forbidden voices,  
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,

Whitman's mysticism amalgamates body and soul. Those things which Eastern mysticism holds impure and forbidden, Whitman celebrates. Contrary to Shah Latif who advocates mortification of senses and physical needs Whitman justifies the emanation of lust and sex from human body. Those feelings and voices which were concealed somewhere in the body, he discloses them and gives them passage to rise because to him all bodily desires and needs are sacred.

This philosophy unlike western or Whitman's thinking considers the body and soul two different things and varied experiences. One can not achieve the lofty spiritual goal with physical capabilities which are bound to serve transitory appearance and that is used to abrogate and abnegate to reach the Beloved or Divine Spirit. For that purpose lover has to sacrifice the body and physical desires as Latif says:

Until you make your body slanderer than the needle,  
How would beloved insert in his eyes like antimony.

East believes that love is synonymous with Sacrifice and Restraining of physical urges. Real love requires exaltation and sublimity of soul, whereas the love and achievement of beloved at western thinking is exaltation of physical and bodily worship as Whitman says:

Have you ever loved the body of a woman?

Have you ever loved the body of a man?  
If any thing is sacred the human body is sacred..

It is clear denial of the Spirituality and Soul exaltation. In the western material thinking love is associated with body and physical things. The above referred lines make the western concept of love crystal clear. According to western notion, human body is to be loved and adored. Here again West differs from East in their ways and ideals of love. In eastern thinking 'self' or physical existence is great hurdle in achieving the true Spiritual love that is why it is abnegated.

So long you perceive your 'self' there cannot  
Be true prostration,  
Discard your being and then offer prayer.

In the above lines Shah Latif presents the whole essence of eastern mysticism that unless you forget about your body yourself you cannot even prostrate truly which is the basic and fundamental part of prayer, true prostration is that in which a person loose his consciousness of "Self" and bow down in front of Lord. Bodily desires are negated and it is deemed also the pleasure of mystical love unlike western thinking which is altogether opposite;

Black threads on our wrists, gold is sign of mourning,  
Hunger we prize, starvation is a pleasure.

This illustration highlights the simplicity of Eastern mysticism which is altogether opposite to the materialistic concept of the west. A mystic a true seeker of communion with Lord does not care about material things, a black thread on the wrist is better than a golden one. Hunger is a deemed state and starvation provides an ultimate and true pleasure. The lines present a grand concept of love that True and Real love exalt the soul to such a place where Hunger and Thirst do not have any existence. The lines project the denial of physical needs and pleasure to attain the spiritual pleasure and love. But attainment of love to Whitman is the attainment of Sexual/bodily desires and experience as he says:

Love-thoughts, love-juice, love-odor, love-yielding,  
Love-climbers and the climbing sap,

Arms and hands of love, lips of love, phallic thumb of love, breasts of love....

The referred lines also highlight the physical and sensual concept of love of the west which Whitman has given depiction in his poetic lines. The love which Whitman talks about is quiet worldly and superficial. Eastern mysticism opposes and discards physical elements from love.

Whitman further explains the experience of his physical love and expresses his satisfaction in it as:

I am satisfied- I see, dance, laugh, sing,  
As the hugging and loving Bed-fellow sleeps at my side  
Through the night, and withdraws at the peep of the  
Day, with stealthy thread..

The above example projects the shallow idea of satisfaction via materialistic and physical things. This idea is a complete negation of the grand concept of East, where soul needs to be free from all contaminations of the world and worldly desires. Whitman gets satisfied with meager things. For East the state of satisfaction is achieved through painstaking efforts, West achieves it in dancing, hugging, laughing and singing.

On the other hand the human senses at Shah Latif are insufficient to see the beloved and observe the true presence of the beloved in absence, existence in nonexistence everything in nothingness. He says:

Don't try to discern appearance of the beloved you are seeking,  
Only that be called conversation with him which is not a face to face--  
Those who abnegated self and were merged in Allah,  
They do not observe method of standing, genuflexion and prostration,  
When they were nonexistent only then they reached existence.

Latif here in the above lines projects the sublime idea of Existence. To East, the true seeker of Divine Love loses his consciousness, sheds his existence and abnegates his physical senses and after that he becomes nonexistent in the eyes of the world but there begins the commencement of his Real Existence.

At the Western side as is seen today is much selfishness and self development in the materialistic philosophy as Whitman says:

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble...

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear;

Above both examples illustrate the selfishness and betterment of oneself which is essence of today's American and Western priority. Whitman talks about only America and Americans. The very characteristic of a mystic is that he loves the creation of Lord means he loves Human beings too. But for Whitman humanity is confined to America only, he wants the betterment of the inhabitants of American Continent only. Whereas, Islamic and Eastern philosophy emphasize the eternal and universal well-being and welfare. Shah Latif prays from God:

O my lord, bestow prosperity on Sindh forever,

O my sweet friend, shower blessings on the entire world

The contrasting ideas are quiet visible now that Whitman's approach is limited to his own being and his own nation while Latif the representative of East vows for the whole world and for the whole creation of God. Eastern philosophy projects universal love, fraternity and betterment. Latif prays not only prays for Sindh, but for the whole humanity. To him, love and selflessness know no boundaries, territories and geographical limitations.

## FINDINGS

It can verily be perceived from the above illustrations of classical poetry of the poets that today's materialist America can be seen in its classical thinking and philosophy and today's spiritual Asia and East can be seen in its own peculiar philosophy. On the basis of above discussion and evidences it can be said that Eastern and western mysticism differs on the grounds of "love, body and soul". The clash is between the abstract and the concrete. Materialism, sensualism and physicalism are the Key notes of Western Mysticism while the East holds physical body an obstacle between man and his Creator. Communion with the Absolute Authority is possible by annihilating the senses of body. Purity of soul, necrosis of physical senses and Love for divine and humanity are the essential elements of Eastern philosophy.

Keeping faith in flesh and body and justifying the needs and physical appetites are the very characteristics of western mysticism which is altogether contrary to the East.

American material development can be said to be the outcome of such philosophies which hold material above the abstract. The thriving progress and prosperity that America is enjoying today is all related and in connection with body or physical comforts and pleasures. Walt Whitman above everything was an American. When he talks about betterment and progress he speaks in context of America while Shah Latif vows for universal good.. Whitman equates physical experience with divine and spiritual, Latif exalts the concept with seeing the unseen reality by using that sense which gets birth by the mortification of physical senses, a sight that can penetrate in to the life and heart of the things. The common element in both philosophies is Love. Love for the Absolute and love for humanity but the difference lies in the nature of love.

Islamic and eastern mysticism believes in the purity of soul and the west believes in non purification of soul. Thus today postmodernist understanding is rightly pointing out the death of belief system and religion. The Western world discarded the concept of Christian Virginity and today there is no marriage-contract and no virginity. Though they achieved the great peaks of material development yet the spiritual salvation and soul satisfaction is beyond their access.

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