CHAPTER-III

POLITICAL ALIENATION

The tyranny of the political forces and sophisticated wickedness of capitalist society dragging man to the most humiliating situations create in Whitman a sense of alienation from a political system which has often been a political. Whitman believes that politics without conscience and cautious experimentalism in action and in expression is the ruin of nations. In To The States he maintains that to ''the States or any one of them, or any city of the States, Resist much, obey little. /Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved, /Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city of this earth, over afterward resumes its liberty.'"1 In the absence of spiritual democracy nations ''once powerful'"2 stand ''reduced, withdrawn, or desolate'"3. In To A President, he says:

All you are doing and saying is to America daugled mirages,
You have not learned of Nature - of the politics of Nature you have not learned the great amplitude, rectitude, impartiality,
You have not seen that only such as they are for these States,
And that what is less than they must sooner or later lift off from these States. 4

1. whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.9
2. Ibid., p.15
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.222
Passage to India, represents Whitman's major effort to establish a new order, one based upon the fusion of traditional and philosophical speculations. In Passage to India he meditates on man's past, present, and future condition in the universe, on his spiritual being, on the nature of his immortality. The spinal idea for Passage to India is political. Whitman stresses Columbus as a major figure, symbolizing 'power and beauty', the divine efforts of heroes, and their ideas, faithfully lived up to, the spanning of the American continent by the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad in May 1869, and the idea of the 'passage ' to the 'soul to India', to the mystic wisdom -- the lore of all old philosophy. He refers to two other great scientific achievements. The completion of the 'mighty railroad', of 'the Suez Canal', in November 1869, connecting Europe to Asia, and of the Atlantic Cable, a decade earlier, suggested to him the basic direction of the poem. He is concerned with the implications of these three events for mankind, now symbolically brought together in a one-world federation. But there is primacy of intuition or feeling over reason and science:

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 324
2. Ibid., p. 321
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
Not you alone, proud truths of the world,
Not you, ye facts of modern science,
But myths and fables of old, Asia's, Africa's fables!
The far darting beams of the spirit! - the unloos'd dreams!
The deep diving bibles and legends,
The daring plots of the poets - the elder religions;
- O you temples fairer than lilies, pour'd over by the rising sun!
O you fables, spurning the known, eluding the hold of the known, mounting to heaven!
You lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses, burnish'd with gold!
Towers of fables immortal, fashion'd from mortal dreams!
You too I welcome, and fully, the same as the rest;
You too with joy I sing.\(^1\)

However, the matter of intuition versus science is not so easily resolved by Whitman in *Passage to India*. It is precisely of the three great achievements of the present and their relevance to modern man that he sings. In this "worship new"\(^2\) he celebrates the accomplishments of the past with the same joy as those of the present. Characteristically, he states his theme at the outset:

Singing my days,
Singing the great achievements of the present,
Singing the strong light works of engineers,
Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven outvied),
In the Old World the east the Suez canal,
The New by its mighty railroad spann'd,
The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires;
Yet first to sound, and ever sound, the cry with thee O soul,
The Past! the Past! the Past!\(^3\)

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 321
He continues:

The Past - the dark unfathom'd retrospect!
The teeming gulf - the sleepers and the shadows!
The past - the infinite greatness of the past!
For what is the present after all but a growth
out of the past?
(As a projectile form'd, impell'd, passing a
certain line, still keeps on,
So the present, utterly form'd, impell'd by the
past.)

Passage to India not only faces the material world but argues
in favour of a kind of value-scale for intuitions, the most
satisfying being those which come from the fullest knowledge
of and contact with the physical world, the world as it is.
Thus, ostensibly, the part played by science and scientific
achievement, as actually closing the gap between spirit and
matter, and preparing us for more complete knowledge. This
''worship new'' that he sings is not, however, convincingly
presented as really new; it is more a return to earlier, more
''innocent intuitions''. Even though Whitman perhaps intends
that these earlier myths should be seen as meaningful only now,
he does not handle the matter incisively enough to make his
argument entirely clear; the fables mount to ''heaven'',
without the help of science - ''spurning the known'', and
''eluding the hold of the known''.

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.321
2. Ibid., p.326
3. Ibid., p.322
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
2 is thematically at odds not only with section 1 but with the remainder of the same section as well:

Passage to India:
Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first?
The earth to be spanned, connected by network,
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
the lands to be welded together.1

In Section 5 the poet-speaker, the "true Son of God",2 reflects on man's bewilderment from the beginning of time over his destiny in a seemingly ever-inscrutable chaotic universe.

O vast Rondure, swimming in space!
Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty!
Alternate light and day, and the teeming, spiritual darkness!
Unspeakable, high processions of sun and moon,
and countless stars, above!
Below, the manifold grass and waters, animals,
mountains, trees!
with inscrutable purpose - some hidden, prophetic intention;
Now, first, it seems, my thought begings to span thee.
Adam and Eve appear, and their myriad progeny after them.
Wandering, yearning, curious - full of aspirations,
ever exploring,
Full of questionings, baffled, formless, feverish - with never-happy hearts;
With that sad, incessant refrain, Wherefore, unsatisfied,
Soul? and, whither, O mocking Life?
Ah, who shall soothe these feverish children?
Who speak the secret of impassive Earth?
Who bind it to us? What is this separate Nature,
so unnatural?
What is this Earth, to our affections? (unloving earth, without a throb to answer ours;
Cold earth, the place of graves.)3

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 322
2. Ibid., p. 324
3. Ibid.
To the poet there is a meaning to life, some hidden, prophetic intention. Only he, singing his songs, shall have the power to "soothe these feverish children" by affirming their essential unity with nature:

All affection shall be fully responded to, the secret shall be told;
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up, and hook'd and link'd together;
The whole Earth - this cold, impassive, voiceless Earth, shall be justified;
Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplished and compacted by the true Son of God, the Poet, Nature and restless Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more;
The true Son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

However, in Passage to India the poet's divine powers would permit him to interpret for mankind the suddenly relevant relationship between past, daring explorations, symbolizing man's "awaken'd enterprise" and contemporary scientific achievements, the achievements of "great captains and engineers," voyagers, and scientists:

Yet, soul, be sure the first intent remains it shall yet be carried out,
(Perhaps even now the time has arrived.)
After these seas are all crossed, (as they seem already cross'd),
After the great captains and engineers have accomplished their work,
After all the inventors - after the scientists, the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.326
4. Ibid., p.324
5. Ibid.
The other four lines widen the range of the poet's power:
"Who justify these restless exploration?".  
He asserts:
"not your deeds only O voyagers, O scientists, and inventors,
shall be justified"  
and "He shall indeed pass the straits,
and conquer the mountains,/He shall double the Cape of Good
Hope to some purpose".  
Man has aspired throughout history
to move from darkness into light. His progress has been measured
by the daring of explorers, the "plans, the voyages again, the
expeditions",  
and by scientific achievements, "the knowledge
gain'd, the mariner's compass".  
Man has achieved his goal,
but only in material terms, in the here and the now. His
spiritual fulfillment - the soul's Passage to India - still
awaits him:

Lands found and nations born, thou born
America,
For purpose vast, man's long probation fill'd.
Thou ronder of the world at last accomplish'd.  

Whitman delineates man's progress throughout the ages against
bitter odds. Man's ultimate triumph is symbolized by the three
modern scientific achievements. Mankind has been joined in a
one-world federation.

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 325
4. Ibid., p. 323
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
Year at whose wide-flung door I sing!
Year of the purpose accomplish'd!
Year of the marriage of continents, climates and oceans!
(No mere doge of Venice now wedding the Adriatic).
I see O year in you the vast terraqueous globe
given and giving all,
Europe to Asia, Africa join'd, and they to the New world,
The lands, geographies, dancing before you,
holding a festival garland,
As brides and bridegrooms hand in hand.
Passage to India!
Cooling airs from Caucasus far, soothing cradle
of man.
The river Euphrates flowing, the past lit up
again.1

Walt Whitman was deeply patriotic in the most religious sense of that word. The United States, for him was the heaven of democracy. Its unity was the great fact of the nineteenth century. But now, in the fifties, he saw his country hopelessly divided by the conflict over slavery, unable to meet the great emergency, because of the greed and selfishness in the North and arrogance in the South. When the Civil War began, Whitman's morale rose because the challenge to unity had been accepted, and he was soon aware of the emergence of a great man in Abraham Lincoln. When, in 1862, Whitman arrived in Washington, he witnessed the corruption and the chaos prevailing in the administration. He found consolation only in the courage, love, and a simple goodness of the great majority of common men

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 325
as he watched over them, sick or dying in the hospitals. In his bitter poem Respondent he writes:

Let the people sprawl with yearning, aimless hands!
(stifled, O days! O lands! in every public and private corruption! 1

Only the common man and a statesman with the best qualities of the common man sustained his idealism. To the distress caused by political event must be added Whitman's personal griefs and disappointments, some of them due to love and loss.

Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking is a record of loss and love and shows the deepening of every noble emotion. The ardent sensuality of Song of Myself has been sublimated here into 'the unknown want, the destiny of me.' 2

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd was written as an elegy on the death of President Lincoln, it was not a patriotic poem in the usual sense. It sings of the love of comrades, which is the spiritual binding of democracy, and also the death of a 'great companion', 3 the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands. 4 The 'gray-brown bird' 5 in the 'shadowy cedars', 6 provides the elegiac commentary. The poem

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.278
2. Ibid., p.207
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.267
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.264
praises the "strong deliveress"\textsuperscript{1} the "delicate death."\textsuperscript{2} To the poet death is "lovely and soothing"\textsuperscript{3} and its message is always love.

Passage to India contains Whitman's most eloquent idealism. The theme here is in the question: "Whither O mocking life?"\textsuperscript{4} The marriage of the seas in the Suez Canal, the crossing of the continent by steed, do not satisfy; they are but shows of a greater dream. There must be passage to more than India. The soul, "thou actual Me"\textsuperscript{5}, must voyage beyond its material successes in order to "amplify"\textsuperscript{6} its love, its ideals, its "purity, perfection, strength."\textsuperscript{7} So "sail forth - steer for the deep waters only."\textsuperscript{8}

But the individual cannot eventually assert his freedom until he has overthrown the past with its lumber of tradition and its web of restraints. Whitman is, therefore, the advocate of revolt; he is the arch-rebel. His is the pioneer's boundless impatience of restraint, and his is the revolutionary's hatred of kings and priests. He takes no account of man-make laws, and where others give duties he gives impulses. The social

1. Whitman, Walt, \textit{Leaves of Grass}, p.265
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.324
5. Ibid., p.327
6. Ibid., p.328
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p.329
conventions were among the first to be discarded. All experience, all thought, all belief, all appearance in Whitman's poetry are referred back to the ego:

And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
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,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.

In this passage taken from the fifth section of *Song of Myself* the world is described as it exists apart from the poet; yet he can name and collocate its potentially infinite aspects only so that he may discover and define his relationship to it. His objectivity is that of an impressionist, and so finally an aspect of his subjectivity. He may aspire to achieve some sort of identity with his world; yet his power of naming, describing, and collocating is such that a reader cannot but be overshelmingly, even uncritically, aware of the single ego, the self, which generates it. The power is that of a lover who rather drives himself, than is drawn, to love the world. A father Adam who bids men listen to him so that they might hear their proper names.

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1. Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p.27
and so come alive — this is how Whitman images himself. He does not fear his power, but knows that others may. And he must quiet their apprehensions. As Adam Early in the Morning says it all:

As Adam early in the morning,  
Walking forth from the bower refresh'd with sleep,  
Behold me where I pass, hear my voice, approach,  
Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body as I pass,  
Be not afraid of my body. ¹

In his poetry, the ego is made not only to assert but to preserve itself. The ego asserts itself Adamically, by naming. The poet is a father giving his name to all he sees, hears and feels. His office is to make everything part of the community of man; the sense of community is revealed as he discovers, and then yields to his infinite sense of himself. He puts things together as they never have been before; they are related only by the force of the poetic ego operative on them. There is little or no dramatic effect in the poems, even those with huge casts of character; for the items which are named in them do not interact, are not conceived as modifying and qualifying one another, so as to make for dramatic tension. They are referred back to their creator, who does with them as his sensibility wills. The great catalogues are inevitably the principal

¹. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.91
expressive form for one who would define himself as 'kosmos'.

We should not, however, take a narrow view of the use of "I" in Whitman's poetry. While it is true that the "I" in his poems refers to Walt Whitman, there is a universal aspect of "I" also. This universal aspect is seen in two ways. First, Whitman attempts an imaginative and sympathetic identification of himself with every other individual self. This tendency is seen in the very opening Section when he says; "For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you." This is also seen in the various catalogues of persons and things that are found interspersed in Song of Myself. In The Sleepers, he identifies himself with all kinds of people:

I am the actor, the actress, the voter, the politician, The emigrant and the exile, the criminal that stood in the box, He who has been famous and he who shall be famous after to-day, The stammerer, the well-form'd person, the wasted or feeble person.

Secondly, the universal aspect of "I" is to be found in Whitman's attempt at a mystical union with God, the Absolute Self.

The first-person pronoun which occurs most frequently in Whitman's poetry is poet himself, but the poet seems to

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1. Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 43
2. Ibid., p. 51
3. Ibid., p. 335
address his own soul as a being separate from himself. Whitman seems to feel that he is one thing and his soul another thing and that Walt Whitman, a person in time, has a special relation to, and a special interest in an individual also named Walt Whitman who lives beyond time and space.

The "I" in *Leaves of Grass* may mean any one of several existences in time or in eternity. In the first place, *Leaves of Grass* is obviously autobiographical in the customary sense. In the second place, it is possible that Whitman extended the range of his actual experiences and memories and identified himself with a number of imagined activities. In this shadowy region where fact and fancy mingle with each other the riddle of Whitman's sexual history is hidden. No one has more beautifully described the ecstasy of perfect sexual union than has Whitman, but how much of it is remembered and how much is imagined biographers cannot tell. Thirdly, the "I" of the poem may symbolise the great American, a figure that celebrates the heroism of those who fought the Civil War but who shrouds the ugly side of American democracy of the time. This figure toils westward with the pioneers, fights on board the Bonhomme Richard, wanders southward with slave and planter, is convict and judges, prostitute and president, anybody and nobody. This "I" is the American Everyman.
Whitman's equalitarianism was a fierce affirmation accompanying awareness of an opposing spirit in America. He looked at America as 'pride, competition, segregation, vicious wilfulness and licence beyond example.' In this ardent equalitarianism he found his subject central himself: 'I celebrate myself, and sing myself... I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven. And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.... The smallest sprout shows there is really no death.'

Leaves of Grass is not merely a collection of lyric verses but that it qualifies as a national epic embodying the reality and the ideal of American political life. In Inscriptions and Starting from Paumanok, there are many indications of the epic nature of Leaves of Grass. In the very opening poem, Whitman begins with 'One's-Self I Sing', The Female equally with the Wale I Sing'', 'The Modern Man I Sing''. In the second poem, As I Ponder'd in Silence, the Muse is invoked and reassured. The epics of the past had as their subject the 'theme of War, the fortune of battles,/The making of perfect soldiers'. Whitman assures the Muse that he too sings of

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 372
2. Ibid., p. 24
3. Ibid., p. 3
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 4
"war." It is "longer and greater one than any". It is "waged" in his book "with varying fortune, with flight, advance and retreat, victory deferr'd and wavering." But the battle-field in his case is the world; it is a battle "For life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul." Clearly the central point of this poem is that Whitman's verse qualifies as an epic, even if judged by the criterion of past epics, provided that the words 'war' and 'battle' are interpreted in a wider sense.

In *Starting from Paumanok*, he indicates his plan for covering the entire nation in his poetry:

Solitary, singing in the west, I strike up for a New World.

His poems should be regarded as "chants" for Americans:

Take my leaves America, take them South and take them North,
Make welcome for them everywhere for they are your own offspring.

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1. Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p.4
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.13
7. Ibid.; p.14
8. Ibid.; p.15
In *Song of the Exposition*, the form is epic though the tone is comic:

Come Muse migrate from Greece and Ionia,
Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts.¹

It is, true that by installing the Muse amid the drain-pipes, artificial fertilizers, and kitchen utensils, the poet lowers her dignity. But in *By Blue Ontario's Shore*, he elevates the Muse into a "Phantom gigantic superb, with stern visage"² who calls upon the poet to:

Chant me the poem, it said, that comes from the soul of America, chant me the carol of victory,

..............................................

And sing me before you go the song of the throes of Democracy.³

It is to be noted that instead of following the traditional manner of the poet to appeal to the Muse for aid and help, whitman elicits an appeal from the Muse to the poet to sing about vital themes.

The hero of Whitman's epic is different from the heroes of the epics of the past. The hero of the past epics was a man with heroic qualities, a kind of superman. The heroic qualities of Whitman's hero lie in the selfhood common to every man.

¹ Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p.159
² Ibid., p.269
³ Ibid.
whitman would have his country people believe that every one of them is potentially an epic hero if he is sufficiently aware of the richness latent in his selfhood, if he celebrates his vital procreative role, and if he is capable of a certain depth of feeling.

Drum-Taps illustrates the victory of the American epic hero "en-masse."\(^1\) No individual is singled out from the others for heroic performance. The emphasis throughout these war poems is on the large numbers of people engaged in a common national endeavour and bound together by the spirit of comradeship. These poems show that the American Civil War proved the heroic quality of an epic magnitude of America's "children en-masse."\(^2\)

The two poems celebrating Abraham Lincoln, Memories of President Lincoln and when Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd, depict the hero as possessing qualities similar to those of the soldiers en-masse. This epic hero is the "powerful western fallen star"\(^3\); he is the captain of the ship whose loss is universally lamented; he is the dear commander of the soldiers; but he is above all the "departing comrade"\(^4\) who possessed a "large sweet soul."\(^5\)

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1. whitman, walt, Leaves of Grass, p.249
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.260
4. Ibid., p.262
5. Ibid.
The epic hero of *Leaves of Grass* is related by Whitman to the resistless gravitation of spiritual law. Such a relationship may be deemed to correspond to the mythological background of the hero of the traditional epic. The whole section of *Leaves of Grass* from *Proud Music of the Storm* to *Whispers of Heavenly Death* shows the hero of this epic as possessing "religious" convictions, as aware of the spiritual world, and as being immortal. Even the gods in this modern epic are spoken of in democratic terms. For instance the poet exclaims, thus, in *Passage to India*:

> Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd,
> As fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
> The Younger melts in fondness in his arms. 2

Thus God is regarded as the "Comrade perfect". 3 The relationship with God is one of an ideal brotherhood, a perfect comrade-ship.

Whitman's epic embodied America's image of itself even as it creates that image — the American dream, the American vision during the nineteenth century. Whitman's faith was the American faith of the time. Whitman insisted on being the poet of science and democracy and, above all, of religion. In that role he defined the nineteenth century's view of the universe.

2. Ibid., p. 328
3. Ibid., p. 327
and reflected it in his epic, as Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton reflected their own times in their respective epic poems. Thus has Leaves of Grass a real claim to be regarded as America's epic. It embodies America's first terrible trial in the shape of the Civil War and it prophesises the greatness of America. It is a reflection of America's character, of America's soul, and of America's achievements and aspirations.

Walt Whitman wanted freedom for self-realisation, for himself and all the millions who populated the world. Quite early in his career he came to understand the way that such self-realisation could be achieved, in poetry, in a new American poem which would celebrate its culture so as to make the power for self-realisation for the first time spontaneously available to all comers. His readers would, thus, become celebrants; with him they would celebrate themselves in their world, hence really come to know themselves. In the familiar words of the 1885 Preface to Song of Myself: "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir .... Here is the hospitality which for ever indicates heroes.... The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into anything small it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe. He is a seer .... he is
individual.... he is complete in himself.... the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not .... But folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects.... they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls.1

Such words show a whitman who feels that he finally discovered the way to the poem made out of that living language which will warm the world with one great moral soul. Such a poem can only be epic in scope. It is to do for modern man what the epic did for men of the outworn past. Yet it cannot be in form like the traditional epic; its form must be self-transcending as must its heroes. Whitman’s world is over-flowing with that hospitality which, as he says, for ever indicates heroes. If all men are heroes, then the heroism of modern society has infinitely more aspects and qualities than can be fused in the single hero of the traditional epic. Thus Whitman conceived of an American equivalent of the epic and strove throughout his life to create one. An American epic would be one whose spirit would totally satisfy the needs of democracy in the aggregate. The working of its form and its language would be so managed as immediately to relate the reader to the milieu and the ambiance, the culture, which the form and the language project. Feeling

1. whitman, Walt, 1885, Preface to Song of Myself.
the deep need of his culture to find an adequate poetic image, Whitman wrote *Song of Myself*. Indeed, he repeatedly revised and re-arranged the whole of *Leaves of Grass* and *Song of Myself* with it, perhaps in order to make it into a total image – the full and complete surrogate for the traditional epic. But *Song of Myself* is the clearest, surest, and complete product of his desire to create an American epic.

Wordsworth's concept of democracy, as expounded in *The Prelude*, remains at best a visionary's dream, quite divorced from reality. Whitman, however, always keeps his feet firmly planted on the ground; his ideal of democracy is essentially pragmatic and earth-bound. Whereas on the political plane he denounces all prerogatives and vested interests, on the social plane he visualizes complete harmony between the individual and society. But, above all, Whitman is, what one may call, a spiritual democrat who sees in true democracy possibilities of universal peace, toleration and brotherhood. No individual is to be excluded from God's grace, since all shall be admitted unto the Kingdom of Heaven regardless of any distinctions. The most authentic specimen of true humanity is the common man. "the illustrious everyone," or "the divine average". The poet would not, therefore, ask for any special favours for himself, any privileges that he could not share with his fellow human beings:
I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.¹

What, according to Whitman, is the great clue to the cyclic progress of human civilisation? The answer to this is not to be found in the scholastic dissertations, in the great libraries of the world, nor in the ingenious theories propounded by illustrious philosophers and historians. The answer is supplied in his poem I was Looking a Long While.

I was looking a long while for Intentions,
For a clew to the history of the past for myself, and for these chants - and now I have found it,
It is not in those paged fables in the libraries (them in neither accept nor reject,)
It is not more in the legends than in all else,
It is in the present - it is this earth of to-day,
It is in Democracy - (the purport and aim of all the past,)
It is the life of one man or one woman today - the average man of to-day.²

In his preface to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman gives an elaborate exposition of his gospel of democracy, his image of the American bard. He believes that the American bards shall be mark'd for generosity and affection, and for encouraging competitors. They shall be kosmos, without monopoly or secrecy, glad to pass anything to any one - hungry for equals

¹ whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.43
² Ibid., p.305
night and day. They shall not be careful of riches and privilege - they shall be riches and privilege - they shall perceive who the most affluent man is. The most affluent man is he that confronts all the shows he sees by equivalents out of the stronger wealth of himself. The American bard shall delineate no class of persons, nor one or two out of the strata of interests, nor love most nor truth most, nor the soul most, nor the body most - and not be for the Eastern States more than the Western, or the Northern States more than the Southern.

Here is whitman the great leveller, the uncompromising apostle of equality and fraternity. The sole criterion of assessing a great work of art is how much it contributes to the cause of common humanity. In Democratic Vistas, he pleads for the regeneration of the common man. Long enough have the people been listening to poems in which common humanity, deferential, bends low, humiliated, acknowledging superiors. But America listens to no such poems. Erect, inflated, and fully self-esteeming be the chant; and then America will listen with pleased ears.

Whitman attacks political fascism, not from a fully engaged interest in politics, but because he holds particular social eruption to be a symptom of forces which are against life; he is more interested in the divinity that is within man than in social machines.

In the following chapter attention is focused on the theme of religious alienation.