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Self, Soul, and Cosmos

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Abstract

Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* is a long and deeply spiritual poem about the self, democracy, nature, equality, the body, the soul, death, and the unity of existence. Whitman begins by celebrating himself, but his "self" gradually expands beyond one individual. It includes other people, animals, plants, the earth, and the whole universe. The poet declares that every atom belonging to him also belongs to the reader. His celebration of the self therefore becomes a celebration of all existence. This paper studies the poem's literary devices, free-verse form, themes, tone, historical background, audience, and purpose. It then compares Whitman's ideas with teachings from the Vedas, Upaniṣads, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, *Vachanāmṛta*, and other Indian scriptures. These texts also discuss the spiritual self, equality, universal vision, nature, death, and the divine presence within creation. However, Whitman's poetic "self" should not be treated as identical with the ātman of every Vedāntic school. Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana maintains the eternal distinction among jīva, īśvara, māyā, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. From this perspective, true spiritual unity does not erase difference; it produces humility, compassion, equality, and devotion to Puruṣottama.

Keywords: self, democracy, equality, nature, spirituality, unity, ātman, Vedānta, Whitman, Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana

Introduction

Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* begins with one of the most confident declarations in American poetry:

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself, And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

At first, these words may sound self-centred. However, Whitman's "I" does not remain limited to his private personality. It expands to include the reader, society, nature, the body, the soul, and the whole universe.

Whitman celebrates himself because he believes that every individual possesses dignity. His self is "simple" and "separate," yet it is also connected with all other beings. He sees himself in workers, women, men, children, enslaved people, poor people, animals, plants, and even the smallest particles of matter.

Grass becomes the poem's central symbol. It grows everywhere without giving importance to wealth, race, occupation, or social position. It therefore represents democracy, equality, common life, death, and renewal.

The poem also speaks about the relationship between body and soul. Whitman refuses to condemn the body as impure or inferior. He considers both body and soul sacred parts of human existence. Death is also not treated simply as an end. It becomes part of a continuing natural and spiritual process.

Indian scriptures contain important teachings about the ātman, equality, the divine presence in all beings, harmony with nature, and liberation from fear of death. These ideas offer rich points of comparison with Whitman's poetry.

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However, this comparison must be made carefully. There is no basis for claiming that Whitman's poetic self is exactly the same as the ātman, Brahman, Akṣarabrahman, or Parabrahman. Different Vedāntic schools interpret the relationship between self and ultimate reality differently. The present paper is therefore a comparative study rather than a claim of complete philosophical identity.

1. Literary Devices and Figures of Speech

1.1 Metaphor

The poem contains many extended metaphors. The most important is the "self." Whitman's self is not limited to his physical personality. It becomes a voice through which many people and experiences can speak.

Grass is the poem's central metaphor. When a child asks, "What is the grass?", the poet offers several possible answers. Grass may be:

- The "flag" of his natural disposition;
- The "handkerchief of the Lord";
- A child of vegetation;
- A common symbol of democracy;
- The beautiful hair of graves.

Grass connects life and death. It grows from the earth where previous generations are buried. It represents both individuality and common existence because every blade is separate, but all belong to the same field.

Whitman also calls himself a "kosmos," suggesting that the individual contains many experiences, identities, and relationships.

1.2 Symbolism

Symbol	Meaning
Grass	Equality, common life, democracy, death, and rebirth
Atom	Basic unity and shared material existence
Body	Physical identity, experience, and dignity
Soul	Inner and spiritual consciousness
Earth	Shared origin and universal belonging
Journey	Life, spiritual discovery, and continuous growth
Road	Freedom, experience, and future possibility
Hawk	Wildness, independence, and natural freedom
Breath	Life and connection with the natural world
Song	Self-expression and the collective human voice

1.3 Catalogues

One of Whitman's main techniques is the catalogue—a long list of people, occupations, places, actions, and objects. He mentions workers, farmers, sailors, mothers, children, hunters, mechanics, enslaved people, and many others.

These lists have a democratic purpose. Kings, labourers, women, men, educated persons, and ordinary workers all enter the same poem. No single person is given permanent superiority.

The catalogue allows Whitman's poetic voice to move across social boundaries and include the diversity of America.

1.4 Anaphora and repetition

Whitman often begins several lines with the same word or phrase. He repeatedly uses expressions such as:

- "I am";
- "I see";
- "I hear";
- "The";
- "Where";
- "And."

This is anaphora. It gives the poem rhythm even though it does not use a regular rhyme scheme.

The repetition of "I" does not merely show ego. It allows the poet to absorb many experiences into a large, inclusive identity. However, the tension between spiritual expansion and personal self-assertion remains important.

1.5 Imagery

The poem includes rich sensory images:

- The smell of leaves and earth;
- The sound of birds and human voices;
- The touch of air upon the skin;
- The sight of animals, fields, people, and stars;
- The physical movement of workers;
- The taste and breath of the natural world.

Whitman wants knowledge to arise not only through abstract thinking but also through direct experience. Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and breathing become ways of participating in existence.

1.6 Personification and apostrophe

Whitman often speaks directly to the soul, earth, sea, body, reader, and natural objects. Nature is treated as a living companion rather than a lifeless background.

The poem's conversation with the reader is especially important. Whitman says:

"What I assume you shall assume."

The reader is not a distant observer. The poem invites the reader to enter its experience.

1.7 Paradox

One of the poem's most famous statements is:

"Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

The poet accepts contradiction because human identity is complex. A person may contain different thoughts, emotions, memories, and possibilities.

Another paradox is that Whitman is both an individual and a collective voice. He is a separate person, yet he claims connection with everyone.

1.8 Alliteration and sound

Although the poem does not use a regular rhyme scheme, Whitman creates music through repetition, parallel sentences, alliteration, and the natural rhythm of speech.

Long lines rise and fall like breathing. The movement of the poem sometimes resembles a public speech, a religious chant, or a flowing river.

2. Structure and Form

Song of Myself is written in free verse. It does not follow a fixed rhyme scheme, stanza pattern, or regular meter. Whitman's rejection of strict poetic rules supports his themes of freedom, individuality, and democracy.

The final version of the poem contains fifty-two numbered sections. However, the poem first appeared without a title in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman continued revising it throughout his life. The title *Song of Myself* was adopted in a later edition, and the familiar final form appeared in the 1891–1892 “deathbed edition.”

The poem's long lines are influenced by biblical verse, public speaking, and ordinary American speech. Many lines extend beyond conventional poetic length. This gives Whitman's voice a broad, open, and inclusive quality.

The poem does not develop through a simple plot. Instead, it moves through meditation, observation, memory, catalogue, dialogue, and spiritual vision.

Its general movement may be summarized as follows:

Movement	Main concern
Opening	Celebration of self and connection with the reader
Early sections	Body, soul, nature, and direct experience
Middle sections	Democracy, labour, suffering, and social diversity
Later sections	Death, spiritual unity, and universal identity
Final section	Departure, continuation, and invitation to the reader

The poem ends without complete closure. Whitman says that he may be found under the reader's bootsoles and asks the reader to continue searching. The self is not destroyed; it becomes part of nature, language, memory, and future experience.

3. Main Themes

3.1 Celebration of the self

Whitman celebrates the self as worthy and sacred. However, his celebration is not intended to deny the value of others. He says that every atom belonging to him also belongs to the reader.

The individual becomes the starting point for discovering universal connection.

3.2 Democracy and equality

The poem gives poetic dignity to people from different occupations, races, social groups, and conditions. Whitman refuses to restrict poetry to kings, heroes, or educated elites. Grass represents this democratic equality because it grows in rich and poor places alike. No single blade claims superiority over another.

3.3 Unity of existence

Whitman sees humans, animals, plants, earth, and stars as parts of an interconnected whole. He does not want to isolate himself from the world. Instead, he absorbs the world into his song.

3.4 Body and soul

The poem rejects a sharp conflict between body and soul. Whitman declares that the body is not inferior to the soul and that the soul is not greater than the body.

This does not exactly match classical Vedāntic distinctions between the self and body, but it challenges the idea that the physical body should be treated with shame or contempt.

3.5 Nature

Nature is a teacher, companion, and sacred presence. Grass, animals, soil, air, water, and stars all participate in the poet's spiritual vision.

3.6 Death and renewal

Whitman does not present death as complete destruction. Dead bodies return to the earth and support new life. Grass growing over graves becomes a sign of continuity.

3.7 Spirituality

Whitman's spirituality is direct, personal, and inclusive. He finds the sacred in ordinary bodies, labour, nature, and daily experience rather than only in institutions or formal doctrines.

4. Tone, Mood, Historical Context, and Audience

The tone of the poem is celebratory, confident, intimate, questioning, compassionate, and mystical. At times Whitman speaks like a public prophet; at other times he speaks quietly to the reader.

The mood may be summarized as:

Wonder → Participation → Expansion → Unity → Mystery

Song of Myself belongs to the nineteenth-century American literary movement often called the American Renaissance. It was first published in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of*

Grass, which Whitman produced himself. The first edition contained twelve untitled poems. Whitman continued revising and enlarging the collection until the end of his life. The Library of Congress describes *Leaves of Grass* as a bold work that changed the course of American literary history.

The poem was written during a period of American expansion, urban growth, democratic debate, slavery, and increasing conflict between social ideals and social reality. Whitman tries to create a poetic democracy in which different people can appear together with equal dignity.

Ralph Waldo Emerson and American Transcendentalism helped shape the intellectual atmosphere surrounding Whitman. Transcendentalist thought emphasized nature, intuition, individual dignity, and spiritual presence in the world.

The poem addresses:

1. Whitman himself;
2. The reader;
3. The American people;
4. Humanity as a whole;
5. Nature and the soul.

Its purpose is to awaken the reader to personal dignity, social equality, natural belonging, and spiritual interconnectedness.

5. “I Celebrate Myself”: Ego or Spiritual Self?

The poem’s opening may appear egoistic:

“I celebrate myself, and sing myself.”

However, Whitman’s “I” gradually includes others. His self expands rather than separating itself from the world.

Vedānta distinguishes between *ahaṁkāra*, the ego-sense connected with body and personality, and *ātman*, the conscious self. Self-celebration based on wealth, appearance, status, or superiority would strengthen *ahaṁkāra*. Recognition of the spiritual self, however, can lead to freedom from narrow identity.

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.20 states:

अणोरणीयान्महतो महीयान्
आत्मास्य जन्तोर्निहितो गुहायाम् ।

*aṇor aṇīyān mahato mahīyān
ātmāsyā jantor nihito guhāyām*

The *ātman* is smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest; it resides within the heart of the living being.

Whitman’s self also appears both personal and vast. Yet the two ideas should not be treated as identical. Whitman’s poetic “I” combines body, personality, imagination, society, and cosmic belonging. The Upaniṣadic *ātman* is a precise metaphysical category.

6. “Every Atom Belonging to Me”: Shared Existence

Whitman tells the reader:

“For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”

At the physical level, this expresses shared material existence. Human beings are formed from the same earth, air, water, and natural elements.

The *Īśā Upaniṣad* 1 declares:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।

īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiñca jagatyām jagat

All this—whatever moves in this changing universe—is pervaded and governed by the Supreme.

Whitman and the Upaniṣad both resist the idea of complete isolation. However, their foundations differ:

- Whitman emphasizes shared atoms, nature, consciousness, and poetic sympathy.
- The Upaniṣad sees the universe in relation to Īśa, the Supreme Lord.
- Whitman’s unity is democratic and poetic.
- Upaniṣadic unity is metaphysical and spiritual.

7. Universal Vision in the Upaniṣads

The *Īśā Upaniṣad* 6 teaches:

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।

सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥

*yas tu sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmany evānupaśyati
sarva-bhūteṣu cātmānam tato na vijugupsate*

One who sees all beings in relation to the self and sees the self in all beings does not hate or reject anyone.

Verse 7 continues:

यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।

तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥

*yasmin sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmaivābhūd vijānataḥ
tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvam anupaśyataḥ*

For one who sees unity, where can delusion or sorrow remain?

This vision closely resembles Whitman’s desire to enter the experiences of others. He does not want to remain separate from the suffering or joy of society.

However, “unity” does not necessarily mean that all individual beings become numerically identical. Vedāntic schools interpret these verses differently. Akṣara–Puruṣottama Darśana understands unity as spiritual harmony and universal relationship under God while maintaining the real distinction among eternal entities.

8. “Tat Tvam Asi” and Whitman’s Inclusive “You”

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7 contains the famous teaching:

तत्त्वमसि श्वेतकेतो ।

tat tvam asi śvetaketu

“That thou art, O Śvetaketu.”

The statement directs the student toward the deepest spiritual truth concerning the self and ultimate reality. Vedāntic schools explain its precise meaning differently.

Whitman repeatedly speaks to “you.” He reduces the distance between poet and reader:

“What I assume you shall assume.”

His “you” does not merely receive information. The reader is invited to recognize shared existence.

A careful comparison may therefore be made:

Whitman	Upaniṣadic teaching
The reader shares the poet's atoms	The seeker discovers a deeper spiritual identity
“I” and “you” enter dialogue	Guru and disciple enter dialogue
Unity is expressed poetically	Unity is taught metaphysically
The poem awakens democratic sympathy	Brahmavidyā awakens spiritual understanding

9. Equality in the *Bhagavad Gītā*

Whitman includes people who are often ignored by society. He gives poetic space to workers, women, poor people, enslaved persons, and social outsiders.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* 5.18 teaches equal vision:

विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।

शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः ॥

*vidyā-vinaya-sampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini
śuni caiva śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ*

The wise see with equality a learned and humble brāhmaṇa, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a person treated as an outcaste.

This does not deny practical differences among beings. It means that spiritual wisdom prevents contempt, hatred, and unjust superiority.

The *Gītā* 6.29 similarly states:

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि ।

ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः ॥

*sarva-bhūta-stham ātmānam sarva-bhūtāni cātmani
īkṣate yoga-yuktātmā sarvatra sama-darśanaḥ*

The disciplined yogin sees the self in all beings and all beings in the self.

Whitman's democratic vision and the *Gītā*'s *sama-darśana* meet in their rejection of narrow superiority. Yet the *Gītā* grounds equality in spiritual realization, while Whitman expresses it through poetic identification and democratic fellowship.

10. The Grass and the *Puruṣa Sūkta*

Grass symbolizes both individuality and common existence. Every blade is distinct, but the field includes them all.

The *Puruṣa Sūkta*, *Rgveda* 10.90, presents the universe as related to the cosmic *Puruṣa*:

पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं यद्वृत्तं यच्च भव्यम् ।

puruṣa evedaṁ sarvaṁ yad bhūtaṁ yac ca bhavyam

The *Puruṣa* is all that has been and all that will be.

The hymn presents diversity within a larger cosmic order. Whitman similarly sees many people, occupations, bodies, and natural forms as participants in a wider unity.

However, Whitman's grass is democratic and earthly, while the *Puruṣa Sūkta* is a sacred cosmological hymn. The comparison concerns unity-in-diversity, not complete doctrinal sameness.

11. Body, Soul, and Vedāntic Distinction

Whitman says:

“I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul.”

He refuses to treat the body as shameful. Physical life, sexuality, labour, breath, and sensation all belong to his poetic spirituality.

Vedānta, however, distinguishes the ātman from the body. The *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.13 explains that the embodied self passes through childhood, youth, and old age while remaining the experiencer of those changes.

This does not mean that Vedānta requires hatred of the body. The body can be respected as an instrument for dharma, devotion, service, and liberation. The error lies in identifying the entire self with the body.

The comparison may be stated carefully:

- Whitman protects the body from religious or social contempt.
- Vedānta protects the self from being reduced to the body.
- Both approaches can support dignity when properly understood.
- Neither requires hatred of embodied life.

12. Death, Grass, and Continuity

Whitman treats death as transformation rather than final extinction. He suggests that the smallest plant shows there is no true death and imagines himself returning to the earth.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.20 states:

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन्

नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।

अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो

न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin

nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ

ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo

na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre

The ātman is never born and never dies. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.

Whitman's treatment of death combines natural recycling, poetic continuation, and spiritual mystery. The *Gītā* offers a clearer metaphysical teaching: the body dies, but the jīva does not.

Grass growing from graves may symbolize material continuity, but Vedānta distinguishes this from the continued existence of the conscious self.

13. Nature, Animals, and Simplicity

Whitman admires animals because they appear calm, self-contained, and free from guilt, social ambition, and artificial pride.

This does not mean that animals possess the same moral and spiritual opportunities as human beings. Rather, Whitman uses them to criticize human greed, anxiety, and hypocrisy.

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* repeatedly teaches respect for all beings and presents nature as connected with

the Supreme. It praises compassion, non-violence, humility, and freedom from envy.

Bhāgavata 11.2.45 describes the highest devotee:

सर्वभूतेषु यः पश्येद्भगवद्भावमात्मनः ।

भूतानि भगवत्यात्मन्येष भगवतोत्तमः ॥

sarva-bhūteṣu yaḥ paśyed bhagavad-bhāvam ātmanah

bhūtāni bhagavatī ātmany eṣa bhāgavatottamaḥ

The highest devotee sees the presence or relation of Bhagavān in all beings and sees all beings as resting in Bhagavān.

Whitman's inclusive sympathy has an important parallel here. Yet the *Bhāgavata*'s vision is centred upon Bhagavān, not merely upon the expansion of an individual poetic self.

14. The *Vachanāmṛta* and Universal Compassion

The *Vachanāmṛta* teaches ātma-realization, humility, compassion, and awareness that God is the inner controller of all beings.

14.1 Five eternal realities

In *Vachanāmṛta* Gadhadā I-7, Bhagavān Swaminarayan states:

“These five entities—Parabrahma, Akṣarabrahma, māyā, the īśvaras and the jīvas—are eternal.”

This teaching is important when comparing Whitman with Vedānta. Whitman sometimes speaks as if the self expands into everything. Akṣara–Puruṣottama Darśana does not erase all ontological differences. Jīva, īśvara, māyā, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman are eternally real and distinct.

Unity therefore means harmony, divine relation, shared dependence, and freedom from hatred—not the complete disappearance of all difference.

14.2 God as inner controller

In *Vachanāmṛta* Loyā 7, Bhagavān Swaminarayan explains that God is the cause, supporter, and inner controller of all beings. God pervades and sustains creation while remaining distinct and supreme.

This gives a theological centre to universal existence. The unity of the world is not created by the poet's imagination alone; it is grounded in the sustaining power of Puruṣottama.

14.3 Compassion toward all beings

In *Vachanāmṛta* Gadhadā I-62, Bhagavān Swaminarayan teaches that God dwells as the inner controller even within the meek and small. Therefore, one should cultivate humility and should not cause suffering even to the smallest being.

This teaching gives practical meaning to universal vision. Seeing spiritual value in all beings should produce:

- Compassion;
- Non-violence;
- Humility;
- Respect;
- Service;
- Freedom from exploitation.

Whitman's poetic equality becomes, in the *Vachanāmṛta*, an ethical responsibility.

15. Akṣara–Puruṣottama Interpretation

Whitman's poem moves from the personal “I” toward a universal embrace. Akṣara–Puruṣottama Darśana provides a more clearly defined spiritual path.

Level One: bodily identity

The person initially identifies with name, body, social position, race, gender, and occupation.

Level Two: human equality

The person recognizes the dignity of others and rejects narrow superiority.

Level Three: ātma-realization

The jīva understands itself as distinct from the body, senses, mind, and social identity.

Level Four: becoming akṣararūpa

Through association with the manifest Akṣarabrahma Guru, the aspirant acquires the qualities of Akṣarabrahman and becomes free from the influence of māyā.

Level Five: devotion to Puruṣottama

The *akṣararūpa* devotee offers exclusive devotion to Parabrahman Puruṣottama.

This movement may be expressed as:

Personal Identity → Universal Compassion → Ātma-jñāna → Akṣararūpatā → Puruṣottama-bhakti

Whitman's self expands horizontally into humanity and nature. Akṣara–Puruṣottama Darśana adds a vertical spiritual movement toward Akṣarabrahman and Puruṣottama.

16. Democracy and the Vedic Ideal of Social Harmony

Whitman's democracy values both individuality and collective belonging. A comparable aspiration toward shared purpose appears in *Rgveda* 10.191.2–4:

संगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।

saṁ gacchadhvaṁ saṁ vadadhvaṁ saṁ vo manāṁsi jānatām

Move together, speak together, and let your minds understand together.

The hymn continues:

समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी

समानं मनः सह चित्तमेषाम् ।

samāno mantraḥ samitiḥ samānī

samānam manaḥ saha cittam eṣām

Let your purpose be common, your assembly united, and your minds harmonious.

Whitman's democratic catalogues bring many people into one poem. The Vedic hymn calls people toward common thought and united action. Neither unity requires complete sameness. Genuine unity allows difference while creating cooperation and mutual respect.

17. Contradiction and the Discipline of Truth

Whitman openly accepts contradiction:

“I am large, I contain multitudes.”

This is poetically powerful because human experience is complex. However, Vedānta does not treat every contradiction as equally true. Spiritual inquiry requires discrimination between:

- Self and non-self;
- Permanent and temporary;
- Knowledge and ignorance;
- Dharma and adharmā;
- God and the individual jīva.

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* distinguishes *śreyas*, the truly beneficial, from *preyas*, the immediately pleasant. The ability to contain many experiences must therefore be joined with spiritual discrimination.

Whitman celebrates complexity; Vedānta adds the need for *viveka*, disciplined discernment.

18. Comparative Understanding

Question	<i>Song of Myself</i>	Vedic-Vedāntic understanding
What is the self?	Personal, social, natural, and cosmic poetic identity	The conscious jīva or ātman, distinct from the body
Why celebrate the self?	Every individual possesses dignity	The self is conscious and spiritually significant
What creates equality?	Shared atoms, experience, nature, and democracy	Equal spiritual vision and God's presence as inner controller
Are all beings identical?	Often poetically presented as deeply united	Spiritually related, but distinctions are interpreted differently
What is the role of nature?	Sacred companion and expression of unity	Creation sustained and governed by God
What is death?	Transformation, return, and continuation	Death of the body, not destruction of the jīva
What is universal vision?	Identifying oneself with many beings	Seeing all beings spiritually and in relation to God
What is the highest fulfilment?	Participation in the universal self	Becoming akṣararūpa and offering devotion to Puruṣottama

Conclusion

Song of Myself is a celebration of individual dignity that gradually becomes a celebration of humanity, nature, and existence. Whitman's “I” begins with one person but expands to include the reader, workers, strangers, suffering people, animals, plants, earth, and stars.

The poem's free-verse form supports its democratic vision. It refuses strict poetic boundaries just as its speaker refuses narrow social boundaries. Its catalogues place different

people within the same poetic field, while grass becomes a symbol of equality, common origin, death, and renewal.

Whitman's ideas have important parallels with the Vedas, Upaniṣads, *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, and *Vachanāmṛta*. These scriptures teach equal vision, compassion, the immortality of the self, the divine presence within creation, and freedom from hatred.

However, important differences must remain clear. Whitman's poetic self combines body, soul, personality, imagination, society, and nature. The Vedāntic ātman is a more precise metaphysical reality distinct from the body and mind. Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana further teaches that jīva, Īśvara, māyā, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman are eternally real and distinct.

Therefore, spiritual unity should not be understood as the erasure of every difference. It means seeing all beings with compassion, recognizing their spiritual dignity, understanding their dependence upon God, and refusing hatred or exploitation.

From an Akṣara-Puruṣottama perspective, Whitman's opening declaration—

“I celebrate myself, and sing myself”—

may be spiritually reformulated:

I recognize myself as the conscious jīva, honour every being with equal compassion, become akṣararūpa through the Akṣarabrahma Guru, and offer my life in devotion to Parabrahman Puruṣottama.

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