

**Prablematizing: The music of  
George Harrison in the context of Contemporary Philosophy**

**Abstract**

The world is broken into many thoughts, ideas, dreams, fears and desires. Some people talk about heart and soul whereas others talk about rationalized mind and body. Actually nobody exactly knows how the universe moves. In fact, every individual has an idea of the same world, which gives them an impression of existence. George Harrison's music generates a debate on absence and presence of human existence that can be understood in the context of Post-structuralism (contemporary philosophy), and his music creates the tension between thoughts but does not come up with a synthesis, as Derrida says in "Of Grammatology". Deconstruction concludes that the two sides of the distinction mutually challenge each other endlessly without producing any proper synthesis. George Harrison's Songs such as "Within you, Without you", "Living in the material world", generates the contradictions and debate on absence and presence of human existence and reality and ends without any conclusion.

In the material world  
Use my body like a car,  
Taking me both near and far  
  
From the spiritual sky,  
such sweet memories have I  
To the spiritual sky.....

George Harrison's music poses some key philosophical arguments on God, life, love and humanism. His music can be also understood in the context of philosophical studies and counter-culture. George Harrison's interest in Western to Indian philosophy and music makes him an interesting case study.

## **Introduction**

George Harrison's music can be studied in the context of Contemporary Philosophy (Post-Structuralism) that begins with counter-culture which makes George's music more critical and debatable, during that time many musicians including George Harrison who were inspired from Indian classical music to find spirituality and peace as counter-culture does talk about it. However, George's music is highly philosophically motivated.

George's music talks about various conflicting ideas such as humanism, free love, spiritualism, materialism, God, religion, peace and love, his lyrics are philosophically inspired that generates ideas and vision of the world of an artist. George's music has essence to communicate with inner world. Usually his music does not provide a particular style of narrative or ideas so we could conceive them easily, his songs are so reflective rather than subjective.

After The Beatles days, George allows himself to be free from the material world to become a part of spiritual world, spirituality takes him towards Indian philosophy that opens the doors of peace, love to George but he never fully finds himself into spiritual world. He had always been a part of the same world but he persisted to liberate his body from the material world to spiritual sky, the form of liberation takes him towards the transcendental world and he tangled in his own cognitive universe and empirically that universe does not exist at all but it generates a tension, a tension of creation or a metaphysical debate of existence or non-existence and that debate can be argued or criticised philosophically.

It would be fascinating to study George Harrison in the context of Counter-Culture and Post-Structuralism because the whole idea of Post-Structuralism(Contemporary Philosophy) also arrives at the same time, the early 1960's and 1970's that would provide the wideness of studying the era of Gun and Roses and within that context, George Harrison would a metaphor of finding a more clear vision of Counter-Culture and Post-Structuralism.

## **Music of George Harrison**

George Harrison belongs to the era of conflict and illusion, the counter-culture which became a movement against the established system is generally considered as self-indulgent. Youth oriented movement demands a new social order. It was perhaps the last idealistic time of the

world history which impacted the every aspect of human life. It paved the way for new way of living, a form of liberation from the material world that demonstrates old social order. It can be understood as a synthesis of two meaningless wars and people have conceived sceptical consciousness about life and its meanings.

George Harrison's music represents the same tensions and arguments and here it can be argued that there is a strong philosophical-cultural insight behind the music of George Harrison precisely due to the fact that his music creates tension to philosophical thought as we know that every philosophical thought contains a strong cultural background. Indian philosophy reflects the outlook of oriental people whereas western philosophy reflects the outlook of the occidental world view of the people. Traditionally Indian philosophy has been associated with spiritualism in which importance is given to human soul. To an extent, George Harrison's music can be categorized in this category. The element of tension, with regard to his music, comes into being the moment he tries to resort to escapism i.e. he escapes from his material social existence and look at life spiritually i.e. looking within. A case in point is his song "Within you and without you, living in the material world" which creates evokes the same kind of tension. Essentially, it is a conflict between two philosophical theses and cultures. This paper seeks to problematize these questions.

George Harrison's music was a reaction against violent order. He delivers a message of peace and love. The questions arises when George propagates himself as a symbolic figure of love and peace and a dear friend of Indian God, he looks up to Indian approach of looking at God and religion. This straightjacketed approach is problematic but George has also conceded it without any qualms but the fact of the matter is his music cuts across the modern nation-state boundaries and connects with all the people of the earth. I am taking three songs of him to critically analyse the music and the world of George Harrison that become voice of Counter-Culture and Contemporary Philosophy.

### Songs – I

Without you, within you

We were talking-about the space between us all  
And the people-who hide themselves behind a wall of illusion  
Never glimpse the truth-then it is far too late-when they pass away...

“Within You ,Without You”, talks about the two philosophical worlds which are often understood as binary. The first ‘within you’ is a metaphor used for inner world which reflects love, peace and soul whereas the second ‘within you’ is a metaphor used for outer world which reflects mind and body. Through this, George desires for ultimate ‘salvation’.

In this song, George uses two Indian musical instruments namely Tabla and Sitar. The song is devoid of any western musical instrument which makes this song a sort of morning meditation prayer. The song is more like a “Khayaal” of Indian classical music. Illusion is a key word here, because “Within You, Without You”, begins with “We were talking-about the space between us all and the people-who hide themselves behind a wall of illusion”. Illusion is a distance or an abstract thought that lies between “Within and without” and a wall is the separation between “Within and without” but the wall never falls and illusion never surrenders but every time it falls into new narratives which evokes a debate and tension. The word ‘wall’ suggests multiple interpretations mainly coming from both schools with their respective logics. ‘The wall’ has many political and historical connotations too. It could be deciphered with reference to the fall of Berlin wall, which enabled people to gain their freedom.

‘Within You, Without You’ also tries to emphasis on the illusions of the people and their presence in the world. ‘Within’ seems to suggest the inner world and ‘without’ seems to indicate the outer world. Both worlds reflect two different kinds of outlook. Human beings who believe in materialist conception of world usually tend to look at the external material ‘realities’ while people who believe in idealist school of thought also known as spiritualism focuses on internal world and inner truth which resides within human beings.

‘Within You, Without You’ can be read in the context of deconstruction which denies the possibilities of having ‘absolute truth’, with pragmatic approach “deconstruction” is a form

of practice of thoughts and ideas to find errors and correct them but there must be something void in the presence, it denies the possibilities of getting absolute presence because it is a universal fact that cannot be denied because all texts have multiple meanings that conflicted each other, it creates the tension between thesis and antithesis and never reach to its synthesis. It is a never-ending process but within that process every time, we find something new and critical because the presence is always been divided into multiple thoughts. And Within You, Without You When George says, “Try to realize it's all within yourself” that generates a never-ending debate within the mind of an individual about the separation between mind, body, and liberation from body into soul to meet love and peace.

‘Give me love, Give me peace on earth’

In 1971, George Harrison performed in New York City for raising funds for the cause of Bangladeshi refugees. After ‘Beatles’ days, he all over again started propagating his ideology through these sort of deeds. His iconic image such as ‘Om’ and songs as “Give me love, Give me peace on earth” gives us a narrative through which we can understand his philosophical depth. Also, he took part in various counter-culture protests worldwide especially in western countries. Certainly, it did not bring about radical changes but made a significant impact in garnering popular support.

In, “Give me love” is George Harrison is asking for love and peace not only for himself but for the world also, it has a universal perspective of the seeing the nature, and generates a debate on the image of God in the mind of George. Since it depicts the image of God as a shapeless, bodiless supreme power which takes him towards spirituality. If, I trace this song with counter-culture, then counter culture was a movement about peace and love against war and violence so it could be read in the context of counter culture also because it is a reactionary song of that generation. The idea of God raises many questions including the possibilities of seeing God as a metaphor of love and peace and shapes different aspects of love that generally understood in the context of romance or loving someone. However, in this song George Harrison persists to portray his desire and wishes about the world that broke his individuality and shows a wider picture of his universe.

In this song, George wants liberation from his own existence and it can be understood as separation from the material world to spiritual world which is known for heart and soul. The whole idea of separation and liberation between mind, body and heart. In this song George constantly uses a word 'light' and it comes with various interpretations such as the quest of self-realization, self-consciousness about the presence of materiality and deeper way of thinking and seeing about the possibilities of an alternative world i.e. the spiritual world. It is interesting to know what drives him to spiritualism. Spiritualism is a philosophical thought which is associated with inner peace and unconditional love for omnipotent divine power. A case in point is his song, "gives me love and give me peace on earth"; in this he invites the god to take away pain and sorrow. Here it can be argued that music is the medium between material and spiritual world through which human beings get connected with omnipotent spirit. George Harrison's music can also be read in this context. He reaches to his god via music.

George Harrison mediates between both the worlds and music becomes an instrument to provide a space to his spiritual world. He performs in the same material world but metaphysically the essence of music allows him to touch the spirit of spiritualism which deals with soul and heart. Therefore, another outcome possibly would to communicate with God through music. The music a mediator between body and soul and through music George forgets his physical presence and becomes a part of the spiritual world. How far can he succeed in it? It would a key point of the arguments. There are many ambiguities and complexities and it is impossible to find 'originary complexity' and 'absolute truth'.

A metaphysical question arises about the idea of spiritual world. When George Harrison lives in the same world and talks about another world; how could he get liberation from his own physical existence? Because he has to walk on the same roads and perform in the same material space. The music gives him a path of liberation and separation from his own material existence, the essence of music made an impact in his mind that music has the power to communicate with some kind of mystical power as Ravi Shankar says 'through music you can talk to God.' Moreover, in this song, George is inviting God to liberate him from his material presence and counter culture was all about a desire to live in a transcendental space and that could be understood in the context of escapism from realities. On the other hand, we could read George Harrison's image of God as a supreme soul who is a metaphor of hope and cure of all human suffering and fear, the supreme divine power holds any physical presence

to enhance the truth. And another argument maybe possibly represents the helplessness of human beings and human loses believe in themselves to become part of spiritual Mediocrity.

In this song, there are certain words which are quite repetitive. Every time, it means something new and comes with different thoughts that make it a transcendental spiritual song. In this song, some ordinary words do have a depth and incoherency that brings the image of God become more visible to ordinary listeners. A minimal song with minimal sound and words makes it more worth listening.

‘Give me love’ represents the time and space of counter-culture and post-structuralism ,the ambiguities and tension between thoughts and ideas ,a spiritual quest which never ends but it does make a presence within the absence and that absence fills the void. In this song, George does not mention the name of any God which brings it into the context of universalism and rather than reading him in the context of Indian God, however heart and soul goes with Indian God but here it is hidden and it gives a sense of universalism.

“Oh, my God help me cope,

With this heavy load,

Trying to, touch and reach you,

With, heart and soul”...

George Harrison and his music represent an aura of absence and presence, an aura of confusion and tension, an aura of illusion and chaos. His music is completely misunderstood and misrepresented in many ways because of commercial aspects and in public domain George Harrison only been known as spiritual musician. There is so much stereotypical state of mind people have about his music and personality and even George also had an oriental approach of seeing God but sometimes it overcomes with a shadow of Indian God ,religion, philosophy, music ,that allows him to be free a lover of God who does not have any name or shape. And “Give me love” and peace on earth” is a nice example to read George’s growth as a musician of peace and love rather than just an oriental spiritual musician.

“Living in the material world”

I got born into the material world  
Getting worn out in the material world  
Use my body like a car,  
Taking me both near and far  
Met my friends all in the material world

We all human beings live in a materialist world of which violence and alienation are part of. Through this song, George tries to escape from this material world but at the end, he realizes that there is no way to find an alternative world, perhaps it does exist only in his mind. In this material world human body, many a time, functions like a machine.

Various themes including alienation, urbanization, modernity and uncertainty are associated with materialists' world. George creatively uses contemporary objects which become his metaphors like, "use my body like a car" that generates a debate between man and machine.

In the song George tries to make distinction between the material and spiritual world but his "Thesis", "Antithesis" evokes a never-ending debate that does not find its synthesis. The song ends with a pessimistic note, and it takes to my larger argument of "deconstruction and Post-Structuralism", the song does not depict the absolute existence of a lyricist, and it generates phenomenological and metaphysical argument on absence and presence of human existence and reality. In, Living in the material world "absolute truth "is broken into infinite meta narratives that never would allow us to conceive clear vision as George says in song.....

Cannot say what I am doing here  
But I hope to see much clearer,  
After living in the material world.....

If, I argue this song in the language of music then George musically creates a distinction with sounds and musical instruments, for the spiritual world he does use Indian musical Instrument "Sitar" and for the material world does use electric guitar that narrates the dilemma of two different cultures and worlds.

Throughout the song, George wishes to become part of a spiritual universe but his body does not allow him to escape from his roots because every human body does have a limitation that cannot be ignored. Hence, the song ends with a desire that "I hope to get out of this place, by the lord Sri Krishna's grace and the image of God in George's mind would be an interesting argument to deal with especially the idea of God without religion, a shapeless and bodiless



God, who is a symbolic figure of spiritualism and gives blessings to George. The idea of an omnipresent and amorphous power known as 'god' gives blessings to George Harrison. He was always part of the same material world. He used to create music, to an extent, it is believed, for his own satisfaction and spiritual needs. His first solo album 'All things must pass' was too off-beat but still well received by both masses and critics. The critics started studying his music in realm of 'spiritualism'. Songs such as 'My sweet lord' and 'Wah- Wah' are some of the examples which prove this them right.

### **Critical analysis of George Harrison's music:**

In this paper, we have discussed three varied thoughts and images of George Harrison's music. They are: spiritualism, and escapism and mediator. 'Spiritualism' and 'escapism' can be studied together as spiritualism comes handy with escapism. The whole idea of 'spiritualism' represents an alternative which is above materialism. However, the question arises how to escape? And how does it allow him (George Harrison) to escape from his existential reality? Music certainly gives a space to George Harrison to escape from his own physical presence and through music he tries to connect with spiritual world. Performance plays an important role in this. During performing he leaves behind the material realities and enters into spiritual space.

### **Conclusion**

George Harrison honestly and freely expresses his opinion and ideas about the time and space in which he lived. In this paper, I have tried to study George Harrison's a figure of counter-culture and Post-Structuralism to find a clear image of the most idealistic and violent phase of the world history. As Post-Structuralism denies the possibilities of conceiving "absolute truth" of the "originary complexities" and counter-culture also ended without giving any conclusive thought or idea and George Harrison's music also represents the same phenomenon and tension between absence and presence and as Derrida says a tension or debate of ideas never die.

The End

## Bibliography

- Indian Philosophy Vol-I and II
- Of Grammatology-Jacques Derrida
- The Dark Horse-George Harrison
- Thinking It Through
- An Introduction to Contemporary  
Philosophy By Kwame Anthony Appiah

December 2013

Pratap