

MATTHEW ARNOLD'S CONCEPT OF CULTURE: THE BEAM OF HIGH HOPE IN DEGRADING AGE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper on Matthew Arnold's concept of culture is an apprehensive to bring the analysis of our celebrated lifelong sustaining institution cherished by our forefathers since the foundation of the civilization. It is an endeavor to give momentum to the term with its real implication and its utility, and show its relevance in context to the global scenario. In his book 'Culture and Anarchy', Matthew Arnold is very much bothered with the present condition of the society which is treading the path of hectic materialism. Through his concept, Arnold is trying to reinstate the genuine meaning of the term and its application in the materialistic society. He takes the term expansively by stating it as a source of peaceful living. It is an idea of living, believing, perceiving and conceiving. It is concerned with peace of mind and happiness as living sources. Through this concept, Arnold speaks about the harmonious society in which life is mostly concerned to joy and perfection. It is also noted that the paper is not aimed with specific problem of literature but effort is being made to synthesis various ideas of Arnold in perspective of the present stipulation. It is an endeavor of systematic investigation of various ideas to attain their benefits in the course of living.

Keywords: Culture, Anarchy, materialistic society, harmonious society, perfection.

Introduction

In his essay "Social and Political Criticism" which later published in 1869 in the form of book entitled "Culture and Anarchy", Matthew Arnold has come with his idea of culture to give reaction to the established order of living. Hence, to comprehend his perception, it is better to discuss the very condition that enforced Arnold to come with his own idea of culture. It is acknowledged fact that the existing human race is advancing with a great pace by devastating the age old ethics and indispensable concepts of life. Standing on the ground of present, the age is beholding the future by forgetting the age old sustaining values. The technological advancement and blood sucking individualism and commercialism are compelling the world to alter the conventional concepts of living. Everything is going away from the fundamental in favour of new passion. The progression of globalization that has introduced the concept of multiculturalism on the grave of real culture is destroying the very significance of the term. It can be said that the word 'culture' has lost its ground to pave a way to new time and new meaning. The concept of Global Village has brought the whole world into single and formed new cultures on the

basis of commercialization. These new cultures become the matter of pride on its part; but the same is a matter of serious concern on the part of prudent. The wise heads consider that whatever has come on the wake of globalization should be taken as kind of illusions. We have got too much but at the cost of losing. The age has lost the basic values at the cost of material gain. It is a matter of great debate whether the various revolutions have brought us together or diverted. In fact, we have come together geographically but gone away emotionally. Too much commercialization has killed the basic structure of society that would fasten humanity in a single thread. In the process of gaining wealth we have lost our soul; we have got comfort but lost the real joy. Too much concern for future has taken the joy of present and glory of the past. The materialistic attitude and wayward liberalism of the age eventually resulted into a chaos. The so called scientific theories have distorted the age to be barren land in spiritual sense. The source of life becomes dry as religion has lost its control.

The state has forced Arnold to come out with his concept of culture as the rays of hope to the darken life. Through this concept, Arnold has made a crack to capture the vital thread of human temperament which is same all over the

world. His notion of culture is nothing more than the criticism of life. In his criticism, may be positive or may be negative, he has captured the perpetual aspects of all ages. Hence, his concept of culture should not be taken as a temporary reaction to the Victorian age. It is an attempt to universalize his criticism of life. He has given the far-reaching order to things as manifested in the will of the God. He has taken culture with an all-inclusive manner as differ from the social scientists who take it as a pattern of thinking and doing that runs through the activities of people. It is taken by them as the typical style of adapting to the peripheral milieu. But Arnold takes it as an interior route of living which is concerned with the decisive aspects of life. He goes beyond the external aspects of the environment, and has used his concept as an aim of life in religious sense. For him, it is a term which refers to the composite whole of ideas and things fashioned by man to come to the realization of his complete humanity which is the main source of life on this planet.

The General Meaning of Culture

The term culture as a technical word emerged in the writings of anthropologists in the decade of 1890s in American. It is used to refer the distinctive groups or traits characterizing with the tribal society. To dig up the meaning of the term, it is better to discuss the various definitions of the term to compare with the Arnold's. The postmodern society is associated with many cultures. We are not concerned with the word and its adjectives, but the stance which the term refers. All these terms refer the approach associated with the particular class. But, when we think thoroughly, we can get an idea that these terms are narrowing or misrepresenting the real. It is also noted that the term is not a natural production. It is the man-made part of the environment. It reflects the way of life, and mindset of people, their traditions, their heritage etc. It is a set of belief having abstract existence, still controls the whole life. R. M. Kissing in his review "Theories of Culture" explains the term, "Cultures are systems (of social transmitted behavior patterns) that serve to relate human communities of the ecological setting. These ways-of-life -of-communities include

technologies and modes of social grouping and political organization, religious beliefs and practice and so on." From this, it is clear that it is environment which produces culture, and it is culture which shapes the environment. Sir Edward Tyler (anthropologist) uses it to refer to the complex whole of ideas and things produced by men in their historical experience. L. White in his essay "Man's Control over Civilization" states 'culture determines everything that people do, feel and think. Human behavior, therefore, is determined by culture.' M. H. Segall describes, "Culture is nothing but a bunch of independent variables which might include basic institutions, subsistence patterns, social organizations, languages, and social rules governing interpersonal relations." In 1930s, Ruth Benedict discussed the term as a pattern of thinking and doing that runs through the activities of a people and distinguishing them from all other people. It consists of the inherited behavior pattern and distinct.

Matthew Arnold's Concept of Culture

Matthew Arnold has conceived the term 'culture' expansively by discarding all narrowness allied to the term. He takes the term positively, optimistically and progressively. He has taken it as a substitute to all types of anarchy. Here, culture takes its existence against chaos- both in external and internal. In this sense, Lionel Trilling remarks: "For Arnold culture means many things but nothing less than reason experienced as a kind of grace by each citizens, the conscious effort of each man to come to the realization of his complete humanity. Culture, as a grim alternative to anarchy or chaos, opposes all types of chaos. It is not only concerned with political, social or any types of external anarchy. Culture refers freedom, but at the same time expects restrain on our behavior. Arnold speaks: "I am a liberal, yet I am a liberal tempered by experience, reflection and renouncement."

Arnold is bothered with human values cherished by the civilization. For him, culture is an idea of perfection in our doing and thinking. It is a way of living, thinking, doing and behaving; a standard to bring peace, joy, and serenity. It has taken its origin from a

sturdy reaction towards moral life. It is concerned with all aspects that can assist life to live with ease. For him, culture is an innermost state of the mind and the spirit. He recommends culture as an inmost maneuver to get perfection. He defines culture "as a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which have been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning the stream of fresh water and free thought upon our stock notions and habits." For him, culture is a somber yearning to bring correctness of all faculties of human performance. It is an instrument to annihilate unprogressive ideas which retorts human life. It comes from the desire to bring not only logical fervor but also social and moral; to make an intelligent being yet more intelligent. Arnold has high hope from culture. He believes that it is culture which can only bring order by ceasing all types of anarchy. It is culture which can only spread the will of God into action and make the world a safe place to prosper. He has taken culture not merely as a struggle to see and learn, it is more than seeing and learning. Arnold states, "culture is considered not merely as the endeavor to see and learn this, but as the endeavor also, to make it prevail, the moral, social." By it, he is trying to project the real motto of living. He has forwarded it as a code of conduct that includes freedom as well as restrain, joy and misery, hope and despair. He considers that culture is a harmonious expansion of all faculties of human nature. It has power to bring balance between them to run the vehicle of life smoothly. It is a recommendation for spontaneous living with primary feelings. Arnold says, "But culture, which is the study of perfection, leads us to conceive of true human perfection as a harmonious perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a general perfection, developing all parts of our society." By developing all faculties harmoniously, culture leads society onward without any pandemonium. It promotes the thirst to know the self. It is more fascinated in studying the internal perfection. It is a process of making endless addition to itself, endless augmentation of its power. For Arnold, culture is the genuine voice of consciousness which always tends

toward perfection. He believes that it is culture which promotes the best self, and by that to obtain the best society. Culture is an approach of spirit fixed to obtain truth. It is a moral linking with truth, compassion, faith, love, sympathy. Culture It is a desire to bring peace and harmony in our social life. It is an instrument to eliminate brutality from the wild nature. All terms that can help the society to tread progressively means culture. It believes on to be and to do than to have. It refers endorsement of the best ideas that can encourage human beings to think absolutely, to go confidently, to tolerate patiently, and to look appropriately. It is a positive attitude to life which paves the way for coming generations and binds them into whole. Culture should be taken as a manifestation of all human hopes and aspiration and faith in self.

Matthew Arnold is a man of culture having great expectation from it. He believes on culture where anxious and directionless society can find its missing equilibrium. He knows that the ignorant humanity is fighting in darkness without knowing whom are they killing. He believes that only culture has power to confiscate all evils. Hence, he recommends culture as a prescription to all types of anguishes. He asserts in his preface, "The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties."

Arnold believes that a man of true culture never runs after power and wealth. He emphasizes that culture is an innermost operation which can only brings perfection. He says, "I shall seek to find some plain grounds on which a faith in culture may rest securely." He forwards the plain grounds for culture by stating that it is an intellectual curiosity to know the things, and an impulse for moral enhancement. The scientific passion for pure knowledge and the social and moral passion for doing well are the root of culture. Culture spreads the reason to fulfill the will of God who has sent us to make this world more and more beautiful by our contribution. The very obsession that inspires to love the world and its beauty is culture. Here we can see that Arnold is mixing intellectual sense of reason and emotional sense of love. He is not on the side of total intellectualism or total emotionalism.

Through the term 'Harmonious Balance', he refers the balance between intellectualism and emotionalism. The scientific passion for knowledge is a quality of brain and sense of love is that of heart.

Arnold is eager to help diseased society that is going to be a victim of strange disease of materialism. Through his concept, he wishes to provide respite to those whose conscious are suffering from the irresponsible obsession for power and wealth. His concept has come from the impulse towards moral development and self conquest, and becomes a silver-lining round to the black cloud of materialistic society. In such a degrading condition, Arnold wishes to improve the moral standard of living. Through this concept, he desires to stretch the basic tenets of earthly living that would help present and would fetch bright future for coming generations.

Culture and Religion

The overall discussion comes with the impression that Arnold has forwarded his idea of culture as an alternative to religion. To catch the same, let's discuss Arnold's attitude to religion and culture. Arnold says that culture and religion coexist together in some ways, but not in all. He believes that religion is relevant with the development and perfection of humanity. In this respect, he writes, "Religion, the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself." Like culture, religion is also the solemn voice of human understanding. It also sanctions the aim of culture. Like culture, it believes that the kingdom of god is within us and the external world is a reflection of the same. Like culture, it destroys viciousness from human nature. But in many senses, Arnold's concept of culture seems more flexible than religion. Religion comes out as a system of living without any adjustment. It develops particular aspects of personality, and puts a special stress on austerity. In comparison, culture is flexible than the religion. It adjusts itself in situation to seek for peace and serenity. It develops all faculties of behavior to ensemble the ambiance. He writes: It is in making endless addition of its power, in endless growth in wisdom and beauty, that the spirit of the human race finds

its ideal. To reach these ideals, culture is an indispensable aid, and that is the true value of culture.

Culture does not believe on having, but on growing and becoming. Religion is conceived by people as a system. And fault lies not with religion, but with the attitude by which it is perceived. Religion puts a stress on the over-development of particular faculty at the cost of others. But that is not happen with culture which brings harmonious development of all powers. Arnold distinguishes religion from culture in the following words, "But, finally, perfection-as culture from a thorough disinterested study of human Nature and human experience learns to conceive it-is a harmonious expansion of all the powers which makes the beauty and worth of human nature, and not consistent with the over development of any one power at the expense of the rest. Here culture goes beyond religion, as religion is generally conceived by us."

Culture as a Universal Criticism

Generally, literary writing is always studied in context to the age in which it is produced and stimulated. The age always finds its place in literary production, and both vitiate each other. It also affects the sensibility of the writers. The archetype theory believes that literary production in totally new form is not possible. The recurrent theme of mythology finds its place in literature. T. S. Eliot also refers the significance of tradition in literary productions. But it is the talent of the writer that makes literature universal. The writer always crosses the all barriers to capture the common thread of human behavior, and literature all the limitations to obtain universal aspects. The real greatness of the writer lies here. If particular work is read all over the world, in all ages and in all societies then there must be something that could be appealable to universal sensibility. Literary writers are always concerned for the general rather than particular, universal rather than situational.

As a true literary writer, Arnold has universalized his productions by his talent and sincerity. Generally, it is supposed that Arnold has given a strong reaction to the Victorian age. It may be true in some extent. But it is wrong to study his creation in context to

particular age and society. He has crossed all the limitations and narrowness to generalize his creation. His universalistic attitude can be seen in his very definitions of the poetry and criticism. He defines poetry as a criticism of life in all societies and all ages. He is more concerned to life rather than anything. He defines criticism as the disinterested endeavor to know the best which has been thought and said in the world. In his writing, he has brought the basic thread of human behavior, in thorough criticism. He is desirous to create a universal order of living, thinking and believing. Hence, we can say that time and acquaintance has never faded the drama which Matthew Arnold has shown in his writing. His concept of culture creates an impression that it is deeply rooted in human conduct and age old values. In his concept, Arnold has mingled the golden mean of worldly and ideal living. He has captured such a behavior which is applicable to all societies and all ages. It is not concerned with particular ideology, society or age. His literary talent has made his concept applicable to all ages and to all societies. It is a universal criticism of human nature. Generation will come and generation will go, but his concept will not go out of vogue or will not lose its grip. His ideas should be taken as a universal criticism of human nature as they are not delimited to any religion or any philosophical sect.

Significance of Culture

The talk on the present scenario shows the hopeless and helpless nature of the age. The wayward, valueless, and faithless living of the age is leading humanity towards its ruin. In the process of getting, the humanity is losing the very ground of its existence. Everything is going out of track and control. Human values are disappearing from our action. The materialistic attitude to life is compelling man to gather wealth at any rate. The fear of religion and God is left no more. Moral standards are crushed into pieces. Valueless and hopeless educational system is no more an issue of hope. The civilization is wounded and bloody everywhere in the process of commercialization. The cherished principles are discarded in favour of modernism. From east to west, the pattern of life is undergoing

with drastic changes. The life is lived without set destination. The assigned roles have been discarded in favour of wayward will. The present man is living a life without confidence, faith and sustainability and serenity. It is life without the remembrance of the past and anticipates of the future. The life is lived without hopes, certainty and affinity. The world is engrossed in an illusion having no sense for reality. In such a situation, the world can expect high hope from Arnold's concept of culture as way of living. By applying Arnold various ideas, we can sustain our lives. The wayward life can be brought on the right track by diverting it from external to internal. His concept can be used as a standard of living and believing. The humanity can get the lost hope through his ideas. His moral standards can bring the age old atmosphere of harmony and love. The strange disease of the society can be cured by applying his concept of culture. His ideas of perfection, sweetness, light, the best self can restore the lost empire of the ancient civilization. By treading the path of perfection shown by Arnold, we can bring serenity, peace and stability in our life. By using his canons and various ideas, we can bring perfection in our life by developing all faculties harmoniously and perfectly.

Conclusion

The discussion shows Arnold's sincerity for living with the standards of morality and humanity. He has put more stress on peaceful living by discarding all types of hurry and worry. He believes that without the path of morality and humanity, such peaceful and harmonious living impossible. He is confident about his attitude that the valueless and reckless materialistic attitude does not bring permanent pleasure to lead the life towards perfection. It would provide comfort but not the expected bliss to life. Through his ideology, he reminds that the real joy comes out of the inner perfection. The external gain can only bring comfort and luxury. It should be also noted that his concept of 'ideal life' is based on practicability and utility, not totally imaginative. He has mixed the sensuous and liberal Hellenism, austere and regulated Hebraism, strict Puritanism and hectic modernism. His ideas of perfection, sweetness

and light, the best self, Barbarism, Philistinism, Hellenism and Hebraism definitely bring some hope for wounded humanity. The ailing of the present life can be cured by applying his various ideas at the practical level. He expects that the perfection can be brought by virtuous living. Our living must be resulted out of the best self guided by right reason. It is also noted that his concepts and ideas of living are not

outdated. His ideas are come as a universal reaction to all types of chaos and anarchy which always goes against the very idea of perfection. On the basis of his concepts and ideas we would like to recommend something worthwhile at the possible level to lead humanity ahead to meet its real end that is perfection.

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