

IQBAL AND MATTHEW ARNOLD- A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Both Iqbal (1877-1938) and Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) were deeply influenced by the political, moral, social and religious changes of their age and they both delineated them clearly through their poetry, A deep and analytic study of their works shows many similarities between them.

The Victorian era is the meeting point of the romantic decay and the rise of realism. It was an era of great social and political changes and was famous for the Reform Bill of 1832. The rapid developments of scientific discoveries and technological technique brought a revolution in the outlook and thoughts of the educated section of society. However, the revolution was not sudden and substantial. The publication of Darwin's Origin of Species was a challenge to human conceit. The seeds of religious decay began to grow in the minds of men. These circumstances naturally had a deep impact upon the minds of men which ultimately resulted in a strong reaction against the growth of materialism. Matthew Arnold who was a child of his age developed interest in the past glory of the Greeks. The Oxford movement was an attempt to recover the lost tradition. According to Hugh Walker,¹⁹⁷ writers directed their attention to definite moral ideals. Indeed, it was an era of doubt and skepticism. The writers revolted against the deadening effect of conventions. In literature moral purpose gained ground. Although realism was rapidly influencing the mental outlook of the people, yet the last vestiges of romanticism were still lurking there. The general intellectual mind was in a terrible conflict. These conditions naturally had a deep effect upon the writers of this age. They tried to resist the growing materialistic movement of

¹⁹⁷ Hugh Walker, The Literature of Victorian Era (Delhi : S. Chand & Co., 1955), pp. 1-20.

scientific advancement and emphasized the need of moral purpose. It was a conflict between science and traditional human values.

Similar conditions prevailed in the political and social atmosphere of the subcontinent in the wake of the current century. Whereas in Europe scientific realism had already developed, in India it just began to raise its head against the traditional dogmas of morality and religion. Although the intellectual and staunch religious leaders decried the growing influence of scientific technique, yet the Sir Sayyid movement resisted the opposition of the orthodox. However, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his colleagues did realise that there must be set some limitations to the acceptance and recognition of technique. They were not ready to tolerate the inroad of science upon the moral and social values of the East. This led to the didactic literature of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Hali, Shibli and Maulvi Nazir Ahmad. Iqbal, in the wake of the current century, was fully aware of the advancing influence of the West. His stay in Europe deepened this feeling. Like Matthew Arnold he realised the decaying process of the moral values of the East. The Caliphate was gradually crumbling which resulted in losing its hold upon the Muslim world. The First World War was the last blow to the nominal unity of Muslim Caliphate. Being a staunch believer in Islam, Iqbal could not ignore the gravity of the situation. The safeguard and security of human values motivated him to give up the worship of Indian nationhood. That is why he devoted most of his poetic work to the teaching of his wider philosophical views which clearly bear the strong strain of humanism. It is here that we clearly perceive common features and characteristics of the two great poets.

Iqbal and Matthew Arnold both believed in close affinity between life and poetry. Whereas for Matthew Arnold poetry was the criticism of life, for Iqbal it was a "message of eternal life". A poetry which fails to reflect the spark of life is meaningless for both. Though each had his own approach, the aim and objective of both the poets were humanistic. According to Matthew Arnold, the "best that has been thought and said was the criterion for poetry". He appreciated the poetic achievements of Shakespeare, Milton,

Gray and Wordsworth for high seriousness and great ideals. Matthew Arnold rejected the personal estimate and the historical estimate of poetry. It was the real estimate which could be set for the evaluation and assessment of poetry. Although these are common characteristics of the two poets, because they were equally afraid of the prevailing influence of scientific technique upon the inward reaches of human mind, yet the approach of each poet towards safeguarding of human values is different. Matthew Arnold, for example, is indifferent to the conception of traditional religious faith. According to him, the future of poetry is immense. Whereas all- other human institutions are subject to decay, it is poetry which can stand the test of time. But, like Iqbal, he holds in high esteem and honour the ideals of the past. Both poets believe in the immense cultural and spiritual achievements of human thought. It follows that, for both Iqbal and Matthew Arnold, the past was the only refuge against the invasion of science upon the cultural heritage of man. The glorification of the past is an emotional attitude which does not stand in need of reason. Matthew Arnold believes in the revival of the past. His only criterion of poetry is the best that has been thought and said.

For Matthew Arnold, the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life to the question, "How to live".¹⁹⁸ He also maintains that a great poet must possess the strong strains of moral ideals. Matthew Arnold continues that "we find attraction in a poetry of revolt against them, or we find attraction in a poetry indifferent to them. But we delude ourselves in either case and the best cure for our delusion is to let our minds rest upon the great and inexhaustible word 'life' until we learn to enter into its meaning. A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life. A poetry of in-difference to moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life."

What, then, is the best poetry according to Matthew Arnold? He says:

¹⁹⁸ Arnold :Poetry & Prose, with William Watson's Poem and Essays by Lionel Johnson and H. IV. Garrod (Oxford : Clarendon Press), pp. 144-45.

"We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses and called to higher destinies than those which in general men have assigned to it thitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to con-solve us to sustain us. Without poetry our science will be incomplete and most of what now passes for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science will appear incomplete without it".¹⁹⁹

He quotes Wordsworth who calls poetry "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge's". He adds: "but if we conceive such high destinies of poetry, we should also set our standard. In poetry in which thought and art is one, it is the glory, the eternal honour that Charlatanism shall find no entrance. Charlatanism is for confusing and obliterating the distinct on between the excellence and the inferior sound and unsound or half sound."

Again:

"The great poetry will be found to have the power of forming, sustaining and delighting us as nothing else can. The great power of poetry is interpretative power by which I mean the 'power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full new and intimate sense of them and of our relations with them."

According to Matthew Arnold, "interpretations of science do not give us this intimate sense of objects as the interpretation of poetry gives it: they appeal to a limited faculty and not a whole man. it is not a Linnaeus or Cavendish or Curvier who give us the true sense of animals, or water or plants who seize their secret for us, who make us participate in their life; it is Shakespeare with his daffodils

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 145.

"That come before the swallow dares, and take The winds of March with beauty."²⁰⁰

Matthew Arnold further maintains:

"I have said that poetry interprets in two ways: it interprets by expressing with magical felicity the physiognomy and movement of the outward world, and it interprets by expressing with inspired conviction the ideas and laws of the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature. In other words poetry is interpretative both by having natural magic in it and by having moral profundity."²⁰¹

From the above references one can easily judge the delicate sensibilities of Matthew Arnold for the emotional aspect of human culture. He is afraid of the cultural and emotional decline because of the rapid advance of science. The spread of scientific ideas was destined to deprive man of moral and spiritual ideals. His famous poem "The Scholar Gipsy" stands in striking contrast to the spiritual restlessness and intellectual doubt of modern life.

"This strange disease of modern life, with its sick hurry and divided aims."

Another of his masterpieces "Rustam and Sohrab" is a glaring picture of the pathetic tragedy of human life which depicts the restlessness of man against the supercilious attitude of Nature : "And Rustam and his son were left alone,

But the majestic river floated on out of the mist and hum of that low land."

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Iqbal was equally afraid of the growing threat of scientific techniques which were gradually beginning to transform the mental outlook of the educated class of society. However, he was not as pessimist as Matthew Arnold was. He was in favour of scientific knowledge. Besides, he had developed an independent intellectual attitude under the influence of Professor McTaggart, Professor Alexander, Professor Whitehead and Professor Bergson. Under the influence of Bergson he believed in the ceaseless creative process of life and human culture. But at the same time he could not give up the traditional values of the past. According to Iqbal, religion and poetry hold the most significant place in the history of human culture. In the outset of his first lecture: "Knowledge and Religious Experience," he appreciates the importance of poetry of religion in the following words:

"These questions are common to religion, philosophy, and higher poetry. But the kind of knowledge that poetic inspiration brings is essentially individual in its character; it is figurative, vague, and indefinite. Religion, in its more advanced form, rises higher than poetry."²⁰²

It is generally believed that Iqbal inherited a romantic temperament; and he almost always preferred the dictates of heart to head. Sayyid Ali Abbas Jalalpuri made every possible effort to prove this assumption in his book *Iqbal Ka `ILm-iKalām*.²⁰³ But as a matter of fact it is pointless. No doubt, the glory of the past overshadowed his mind which reflects a conspicuous touch of romantic ideals, but in fact he did not recognise the boundaries of head and heart though it is not out of the place to remark that facts and ideals are interwoven in him. This is why there is a perfect balance in his Romanticism, which kept him away from the abnormal traits of mind. Although he anxiously and tensely aspired to the revival of the past Muslim glory and he was fully conscious of the miserable conditions prevailing in the

²⁰² Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 1.

²⁰³ Lahore : Maktahah-i Fanūn, 1972.

Muslim world, yet he was reluctant to worship the magnificent idols of the past. He never dreamt of an unattainable ideal world in the immediate or remote future.

Like Matthew Arnold, he tried his best to save the best human values which were exposed to the new light of scientific technique. Iqbal was equally aware of the spiritually wearisome conditions of the present age. He also deeply realised the venomous effects of rampant Western technique which were gradually, though unnoticedly, pining away the grand superstructure of the past Muslim ideals, that he was compelled to relinquish the traditional conception of art. He, too, views poetry as a "criticism of life" which therefore should be used for grand ideals and noble goals.

As Matthew Arnold condemned Khayyām's poetry²⁰⁴ on the assumption that it failed to represent the criticism of life, so Iqbal criticised the great Iranian poet Khawājah Hāfiz on the ground that he lulled to sleep the potentialities and energies of life through his poetry. He quoted Hāfiz as follows:

بے نیاز از محفل حافظ گذر
الحدذر از گوسفندان
الحدذر²⁰⁵

Iqbal time and again appreciated the great poets who viewed life with high seriousness. Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Ghāni Kashmiri, Mirza Abdul-Qadir Bedil, Anwari and Ghalib are some of those great artists whom Iqbal admired most.

²⁰⁴ Johnson & Garrod, Eds., op. cit., p. 144.

²⁰⁵ Asrār-i Khudi, (1st edn.), p. 72. 10

Under the influence of Bergson's philosophy, Iqbal believed in the creative process of life. According to Iqbal, life is a continuous creative force. Motion and creation are at the root of life. A poetry which fails to represent the changing and evolutionary nature of life is barren and bleak. Iqbal's conception of art is therefore moral. He says:

شاعر کی نوا ہو کہ مغنی
کا نفس ہو
جس سے چمن افسردہ ہو وہ
باد سحر کیا!²⁰⁶

Similarly, about the poets of the subcontinent he says:

عشق و مستی کا جنازہ ہے
تخیل ان کا
ان کے اندیشہء تاریک میں
قوسوں کے مزار!
چشم آدم سے چھپاتے ہیں
مقامات بلند
کرتے ہیں روح کو خوابیدہ،
بدن کو بیدار

²⁰⁶ Zarb-i Kalim/Kulliyāt, p. 119/381.

ہند کے شاعر و صورت گر و
 افسانہ نویس
 آہ! بیچاروں کے اعصاب پہ
 عورت ہے سوار!²⁰⁷

Again, in *Asrār-i Khudi*, Iqbal says:

سینہ شاعر تجلی زار حسن
 خیزد از سینائے او انوار
 حســــــــــــن
 از نگاہش خوب گردد خوب
 تــــــــــــر
 فطرت از افسون او محبوب
 تــــــــــــر

سوز او اندر دل پروانہ ہا
 عشق را رنگین ازو افسانہ ہا
 بحر و بر پوشیدہ در آب و
 گلــــــــــــش

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 128-29/590-91.

صد جهان تازه مضمرد
 دلـــــــــــــــــــــــش
 فکرد او با ماه و انجم هم
 نشـــــــــــــــــــــــین
 زشت را نا آشنا، خوب
 آفـــــــــــــــــــــــریں
 خضر و در ظلمات او آب
 حیـــــــــــــــــــــــات
 زنده تر از آب چشمش
 کائنات²⁰⁸

Professor M.M. Sharif also holds that "Iqbal subordinates poetry to morality and makes it subservient to life and personality."²⁰⁹ In his celebrated poem "Masjid-i Qartabah" Iqbal very forcefully represents the creative process of life and universe. The poem reflects poetry as the criticism of life in the real sense of the word. Throughout this composition, Iqbal gives up the traditional use of `Ishq and attempts to widen and deepen its meaning under the influence of vitalistic philosophy of Bergson and White-head. The `Allāmah uses the word in the sense of a mysterious force and to a state of restlessness. This restlessness makes tenser and deepens the feeling of life. This is the creative force of life which Iqbal names `Ishq and which each moment introduces us to a new world. He says:

²⁰⁸ Asrār-i Khudī/Kulliyat. p.35.

²⁰⁹ M.M. Sharif, About Iqbal and His Thought,

مرد خدا کا عمل عشق سے
صاحب فرغ
عشق سے اصل حیات،
موت ہے اس پر حرام
عشق کے مضراب سے نغمہ
تار حیات
عشق سے نور حیات، عشق
سے نار حیات²¹⁰

And then his rich imagination transports him to the romantic glory of the past where, in a mood of ecstasy, he searches for that creative emotion and force which pervades the whole universe:

کون سی وادی میں ہے، کون سی
منزل میں ہے
عشق بلا خیز کا قافلہ سخت
جان!²¹¹

²¹⁰ Bāl-i Jibrīl/Kulliyāt, pp. 94-95/386-87.

²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 107

In the Sāq-i-Nāmāh, he reflects the same creative force of life in the following lines:

فریب نظر ہے سکون و ثبات
تڑپتا ہے ہر ذرہ کائنات
ٹھہرتا نہیں کاروان وجود
کہ ہر لحظہ ہے تازہ شان
و ج —————
سمجھتا ہے تو راز ہے زندگی
فقط ذوق پرواز ہے زندگی
بہت اس نے دیکھے ہیں
پست و بلند
سفر اس کو منزل سے بڑھ
ک —————
سفر ہے حقیقت، حضر سے
م ج —————
سبک اس کے ہاتھوں میں
س —————
پہاڑ اس کی ضربوں سے
ر ی —————
سفر اس کا انجام و آغاز ہے

یہی اس کی تقویم کا راز
ہے! ²¹²

Like Matthew Arnold, Iqbal eliminated Charlatanism from the art of poetry as it is the medium of expressing the high and grand purposes of human life. According to Iqbal, poetry is the interpretation of life and a means of depicting awe-inspiring feelings about life and universe. Science totally fails to fulfil these requirements. It makes man subservient to machine and under-mines the instinctive sense of sympathy, with the result that man feels alone in the vast scheme of the universe:

ہے دل کے لیے موت مشینوں
کی حکومت!
احساس مروت کو کچل
دیتے ہیں آلات ²¹³

Though Iqbal and Matthew Arnold differ in their approaches, their ideals are more or less identical with the possible exception that for Matthew Arnold "the true meaning of religion is, thus, not simply morality, but morality touched by emotions," whereas for Iqbal it is an objective reality.

They both strongly and seriously realized the danger of threatening discoveries of science and their impact upon human values. Both wished to maintain and preserve the valuable heritage of human civilization and culture and therefore appreciated the -"inward reaches of the mind". Both were

²¹² Ibid., pp. 107

²¹³ Ibid., pp. 107-08/399-400.

aware of the intuitive value of life which enables us to penetrate into the core of life and universe. That is why they interrelated poetry, life and morality.