



## Heading Towards Philistinism: A Contemplation

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The world has seen many revolutions, revolts, wars, famines, droughts, earth quakes, cyclones and tsunami's that have drastically affected the human life in one way or the other. But the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a greater tsunami in the form of electronics. Undoubtedly the achievements of science and technology have brought unexpected and unimaginable achievements in human life. Today people live in a paradoxical situation, a situation captured by Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* suits best.

“It was best of times, it was worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us...” (3).

Culture, nature and gender are interlinked to literature and thereby to the human as a whole. We are in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A large number of countries have democratic reforms based on French ideals (Liberty, equality and fraternity). The present complex situation has industrial, mechanical progress and scientific advancement on one hand, and social unrest, Race, caste and feminist movements and violent terrorist attacks on another hand.

Our progress in science and technique has involves some tincture of evil with good. Our comforts and conveniences may have weakened our physical stamina and our moral fiber. We have immensely developed our means of locomotion, but some of us use them to facilitate crime and to kill our fellow men or ourselves. ... We have multiplied a hundred times our ability to learn and report the events of the day and the planet, but at times we envy our ancestors, whose pace was gently disturbed by the news of their village. We have laudably battered the conditions of life for skilled workingmen and the middle class, but we have allowed our cities to fester dark ghettos and slimy slums. (Durant,69)

Culture is the essence of the human progress. Human progress essentially is both physical and spiritual. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul? Contemporary materialism and mammon worshipping have become a threat to true culture. The over-development of any single power at the expense of the rest is an indication of anti-culture/civilization. Too much faith in machinery is our besetting

danger. Everyone agrees that a machine is a servant of humankind but in reality, the human being has become a servant of a machine.

“Against the panorama of nations, morals, and religions rising and falling, the idea of progress finds itself in dubious shape. Is it only the vain and traditional boast of each ‘modern’ generation? Since we have admitted no substantial change in man’s nature during historic times, all technological advances will have to be written off as merely new means of achieving old ends—the acquisition of goods, the pursuit of one sex by the other, the overcoming of competition, the fighting of wars. One of the discouraging discoveries of our disillusioning century is that science is neutral: it will kill for us as readily as it will heal, and will destroy for us more readily than it can build. How inadequate now seems the proud motto of Francis Bacon, ‘Knowledge is power!’ Sometimes we feel that the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which stressed mythology and art rather than science and power, may have been wiser than we, who repeatedly enlarge our instrumentalities without improving our purposes.” (Durant 68-69)

The sonnet, *The World Is Too Much with Us* by Wordsworth, is an ironic representation of human beings in relation to nature. While nature provides real beauty and pleasure, humans run after artificial beauty. It is the typical human behaviour to neglect what they have and wish to get something not admirable. The poet very realistically presents the relationship between man and nature in the present context.

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bears her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not. Great God! I’d rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn. (Rengasamy 20)

John Keats very suitably describes the human condition in the poem “On Fame”

“How fever’d is the man, who cannot look  
Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,  
Who vexes all the leaves of his life’s book,  
And robs his fair name of its maidenhood;  
It is as if the rose should pluck herself,  
Or the ripe plum finger its misty bloom,  
As if a Naiad, like a medding elf,  
Should darken her pure grot with muddy gloom:  
But the rose leaves herself upon the briar,  
For winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed,  
And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire,  
The undisturbed lake has crystal space;  
Why then should man, teasing the world for grace,

Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed?" (112)

Now the culture and literature is discussed from colonial perspective. The popular argument is that colonialism proved dangerous to the natives because the natives have lost their identity, lost their culture, and have lost even to the extent of their language. This is especially connected with British colonies. In fact, Aimé Césaire, a poet and politician from Martinique who was instrumental in the establishment négritude movement in Francophone literature, in his powerful work, *Discourse on Colonialism* “tries to argue that the colonialism proved the Colonizer as dehumanized and the ills of the European culture in the misconception of the idea of civilization”. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/columnist/2014-08-02/boomerang-effect>).

But it is an historically established fact that the subjects always imitate the rulers. And it is a known fact that, by the time the British colonized either African continent or some countries in Asian continent, Europe was industrially and technically advanced. During 19<sup>th</sup> century, England was known as the Work Shop of Europe. So, no doubt they have ruled many countries in the world. But, along with them, they have brought the fruits of industrialization. The critics, especially in India, accuse the British that they have taken all the wealth and the main purpose of their introduction of education or railways or other modes of transportation is only to plunder the country. That is not hundred percent true and I call it a narrow/partial acquisition because, looting people has not just happened during the colonial period. We find even today how the politicians or to certain extent governments in the disguise of development accumulate wealth either in their names or *benami*. This is history and I need not elaborate this point.

To understand the benefits of colonialism, let us take India as an example. Indian society is basically rooted in inequalities. Social hierarchy is one of the black marks on the face of India. Casteism, we know very well is the basis for unequal citizens of this country. ‘Haves’ and ‘Have nots’ can change their places in social order but a person born in India with a caste has to die in the same caste. Even if he changes his religion, his caste will remain the same. Neither education, nor employment nor inter caste marriage nor wealth of a person will save him from the clutches of the caste. One cannot live in India without a caste. Unfortunately the people who have migrated to other countries are also very much concentrating on their caste groups. Moreover “When groups and communities are perceived as cultural outsiders they tend to insulate themselves socially in spite of internal differentiation among them. In turn this breeds alienation and a segment of this population resorts to aggression and violence. Similarly when a group is eternally condemned to be inferiors, they remain in a psychological cage of their own and can rarely participate as equals in economy, polity and Society (Oommen 4).”

Then looking to the positive side of colonialism, the Adivasis or Dalits for that matter women, got their first step in the education system during colonial rule. It is a known fact that, before colonization Indian education system is called Gurukula system and it restricted the learning/education only for a few. But the missionaries and the colonial government had introduced education for all. For the first time in the history of India, the

Dalits, Tribes and women stepped in the educational institutions and undoubtedly education is the benchmark of the growth of an individual. Thus, education helped people to realize their identity, their individuality or their position in the society. Of course, we all know that many of our leaders during independence struggle have become more serious about the need for independence after the return from England. Hence, education is essential for the development of an individual and also to the nation as a whole. Such basic need called education/knowledge was denied for centuries to the natives of this country and that was denied not by foreigners but by their fellow beings. Thus, it proves to be the worst type of exploitation. Exploitation within the society by fellow citizens is naturally inexcusable and unpardonable.

The British education during colonialism made Dalits realize that they were exploited for generations in the name of religion. They were deprived of knowledge, they were deprived of social status, they were deprived of economic status, and they were deprived of political power, in a word they were deprived of a decent life. The worst of it is they were treated as untouchables. But that treatment was not given by foreigners, but by fellow Indians.

But here I wish to draw your attention to the uncivilized behaviour of the non-Dalits towards the Dalits. When we question the uncivilized behaviour of the colonial rulers towards India, what about the uncivilized behaviour of the dominant castes towards the Dalits? Hence we need not agree with political philosophers like Aimé Césaire in every argument.

The next step after gaining knowledge/education people realized their degraded position and their social exploitation. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity have played a greater role to focus them on socio-economic injustice. From then onwards slowly the common man also has become an important individual in general and the subject matter for literature. And now under the influence of these ideals in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many movements like feminist movement, African American movement Dalit movement started questioning their identity and their place. The philosophers and writers always condemn such anti human practices. P.B. Shelley a British poet and critic inspired the exploited to revolt in such situation, in his poem *The Masque of Anarchy*

Rise, like lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number!  
Shake your chains to earth, like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you:  
Ye are many — they are few! (Garnett 346)

Certainly, British education has opened the windows for the educated Indians to the world literatures. We find the influence of Romantic Movement even on Indian writers. We all know that Romantic Movement itself was influenced by French ideals. The social reform movements were further strengthened by the literature that questioned the social evils. From the year 1970s the native literatures of all the countries have come up under the banner of fourth world literature. The creative writers of the fourth world literature are the voices either in

the form of protests or in the form of demanding their right place or demanding the equal position or declaring that they are the natives or original inhabitants of the land. In the poem *Song: To the Men of England*, Shelley describes the social exploitation. He creates awareness about the exploited by saying:

The seed ye sow another reaps;  
The wealth ye find another keeps;  
The robes ye weave another wears;  
The arms ye forge another bears.

Sow seed, -- but let no tyrant reap;  
Find wealth, -- let no imposter heap;  
Weave robes, -- let not the idle wear;  
Forge arms, --in your defence to bear. (Garnett 359)

Undoubtedly what Chinua Achebe declared about their rich culture is applicable to all the fourth world cultures. He said, “ ... that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity”(Dhawan3-4). Kalyana Rao in his *Untouchable Spring* clearly explains that the then educated Brahmins during British period gathered around scholars like C.P. Brown and collected only *Puranas* and *Satakas* but never people’s literature and thereby inexpressible injustice is done to the native artists.

Conclusion:

Culture and civilizations are always in a process. They are not stagnant. At any point of time, the advanced culture always influences the other cultures. In the process of development, whoever reaches first to the winning point of the development becomes automatically the dominant. It need not be understood as dominant behaviour or hegemony, because, perhaps they wish to share their achievement with the others. May be in the process, as human weaknesses is a common criteria, the advanced may feel that they are dominating or like in the case of British colonies, who considered it as their moral obligation to civilize the uncivilized. The justification for the British is as the case may be, they are developed much ahead in using the science or technology due to their discoveries where the other colonies were lagging behind. So, it appears that they are dominating. If really they are dominating, if they really do not liked by the natives, why should they still use which is given by the British? The British have left this country may be 60 or 70 years ago. But today, we are importing many things either from America, or from Germany, or from Japan, or from China. What do we call this? What sort of domination can we see? So using a language or a tool from other country is due to the necessity of the society. If the society or people feel that it is essential, they take it. Naturally the people who give may feel a little superior. The question of superior and inferior is in the mind of a human being. A human being that is matured enough certainly understand that there is no such thing called superiority and inferiority. Such balanced thinking requires a lot of maturity and we all know that a large majority of the human beings are immature. Not only maturity, but now, many human beings do not have common sense. Lack of common

sense is one of the latest diseases in the world. When we do not respect our neighbour or a fellow being, how can we call that we are cultured? In what way colonial government influenced India to practice caste system?

Culture makes people great but not rich. Greatness is a spiritual condition that reflects the humanness. The civilized culture qualifies internal conditions in the growth and predominance of humanity that distinguishes from brutality. All human beings are members of one great whole; hence one member cannot be in different to the rest or independent of the rest. Human experiences should modify human nature that should essentially cultivate the cultured being.

The need of the hour is to have a man of culture than a man of materialistic success as man is the centre of nature and literature. According to Julia E. Gardner, Sustainable Development is:

Objectives with ecologically sound management, in a spirit of solidarity with future generations based on the principle of self reliance, satisfaction of basic... an approach to development aimed at harmonizing social and economic needs, a new symbiosis of man and earth, another kind of qualitative growth, not negative growth.(337-338)

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