

Evolution of Human Values from 17th Century to 19th Century with Reference to Arnold and Donne

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Abstract

This paper attempts to present Matthew Arnold's lucid picture of human relationship in Victorian era. This paper comments the social, religious and moral values of his period discussed by him in his works. This paper compares and contrasts the writing of 17th century with 19th century England in terms of T.S. Eliot's Dissociation of Sensibility with special reference to Arnold's To Marguerite: Continued, it brings forth the poet's yearning for the selfless individual and society. In addition to that, it also analyses the human deterioration and its root cause by comparing Arnold with Donne. Thus, by the depiction of current day corrupt society, this paper shows how human values devastated through the evolution of time till now.

Keywords: Arnold, Donne, human values, isolation, sadness, self-centeredness, corrupt, indolence, evolution.

Literature is considered as the mirror of human life, where life is filled with many values and morals that makes it perfect. Literature often showcases the human values, social values, religious values, cultural values, moral values and spiritual values through various works. Values are nothing but the socially approved desires and goals that are internalized through the process of learning morals, practicing loyalty, conditioning freedom and socialization of environment. Good values are the spontaneous manifestations of a character and values around our actions, desires and ambitions that causes no harm to others in its process. This no harm attitude and behavior is what a society considers essential for coexistence, order and general well being. An American poet Robert Frost rightly says in his poem *Mending Wall* about the making good relationships with neighbors which seriously help to develop good values in mind. He says thus,

“I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.” (Lines 12-15)

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These good values add meaning and foundation to the distinguishable well behaviors of man on earth. Social values are practiced right from the neighboring community which is a basic unit of a society so getting acquainted socially simultaneously takes one to a national community and thus to the world. Values are totally sorted out from religion whereas religion is based on some moral principles. The core intention of all religion is to ensure the welfare of human beings and preach good way of life and bind human beings together. The basic duty of Moral values is to govern an individual behavior or choice in life. Generally, human values are acquired as a part of cultural or traditional evolution. Society plays a predominant role in deriving an individual's behavior. To study the whole of the evolution of human values, it is necessary to learn it from the beginning. Since it is a long process, this paper analyses the human values of Victorian age with metaphysical age and paves a way to study the evolution by serving as an instance.

Writers of these ages shares different themes and ideas in their works. Isolation, devastation and fragmentation of society are the major themes of Victorian era. Almost all the works produced in this period witnessed any one of these themes. There are many writers who bring the picture of Victorian age into readers mind. Matthew Arnold is one such writer who vividly shows the condition of Victorian England. For this extraordinary quality, he is glorified as a sage writer. All his poems and essays addresses some or the other social issues which are highly predominant in his contemporary society. His *To Marguerite Continued* is an apt example for this kind of poetry. In this poem, he depicts the pathetic human relationship and the loss of faith and love among human beings. It is evident through this poem that in the Victorian era isolation and disconnection of man is at the peak. Arnold exposes his sense of loneliness in this poem. He feels thus,

“yes! In the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
we mortal millions live *alone*”. (Lines: 1-4)

Arnold shares his sense of isolation by picturizing Man as an island. Through highlighting the word ‘alone’, he proved his subtlety in conveying the sadness of feeling alone in the society. All the enumerated values like human values, social values, religious values, cultural values, moral values and spiritual values are devastated because of rational thoughts and advancements in technology which are emerged due to scientific beliefs. Science gave a long shift to humans to understand the values in different perspectives. Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* is an inevitable work published during the Victorian age as it proposes scientific beliefs denying spirituality. Man has undergone a serious drastic change in moral and spiritual aspects

after the publication of Darwin's book. Man believed in God and thought God as the center of universe. He firmly believed in the existence of God and worshiped God whole-heartedly. But after the publication of the book man started questioning the God and his existence because science came up with strong evidence that the human race was not created by someone but it was evolved due to the method called 'Natural selection'.

Arnold's *To Marguerite Continued* is a response to the famous line from John Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasion* (1624), which has 23 meditations totally. Out of which the meditation xviii (Nunc lento sonitu dicunt, morieris) is taken for special reference. In this piece, Donne claims that, "No man is an island". (PP 33)

Donne says that, every man in this world is connected to every other human in some or other way. Each man is a part of entire human race. Oneness and togetherness are celebrated and depicted in Donne's work which contradicts Arnold's ideas of human values. One's perception on human values varies according to the social norms of the society and it could be well understood by reading the contradictory variations of both the writers.

It is firmly believed that, social condition, human values, human beliefs of a particular period will be reflected in the works of that particular age writer. In 17th century Donne has spoken about human oneness with other. In 19th century Arnold has spoken about the human distant with other. Human values had been totally changed through the evolution of time. In English literature, writers in the enlightenment age showcased their intelligence and logical thinking with extreme prominence in their works. Whereas, the romantic age writers, ornamented their works with emotional aspects. Finally, Victorians and modernists tried to fuse thoughts with emotions in their works. It is best explained in the term 'dissociation of sensibility' from T. S. Eliot's *Metaphysical Poets*. He states that the amalgamation and unification of thought and feeling is seen in poetry of Donne and other metaphysical poets. Enlightenment, romantic, and early Victorian writers lack in unification of sensibility and suffer from dissociation of sensibility. There is always a clash between faith and reason. When human starts thinking rationally and goes beyond the technology development, he automatically starts lacking in humanity and human values. This poem is one such evident to showcase the destruction of humanness.

According to T. S. Eliot, after metaphysical poets, unification of sensibility is seen in late Victorian and modernist writers. In this poem Arnold expresses his desire for connection among the people which modern society lacks. He yearns for the humanity which is least in human hearts. He desperately wishes for the human values which are lost in terms of technological advancement. Human deterioration takes place in all aspects like human values, social values,

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religious values, cultural values, moral values and spiritual values. Current society is filled with self centered mentality and it renounces Selflessness. Now a day man least bother about human values and become egotistic in nature. Human mind and heart filled with greedy, corruption, intolerance, isolation, narrow-minded, stress, irresponsibility, indolence and least concern for environment. Man run behind money, power, wealth but they fail to concede the importance of humanity, oneness with others and kindness. This is well described in Thomas gray's *Elegy Written to the Country Churchyard*,

“The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow’r
And all that beauty, all that wealth e’er grave’
Awaits alike th’ inevitable hour
The path of glory lead but to the grave” (Lines: 33-36)

Thus, the evolution of human values is studied from one age to another with the special reference to Arnold and Donne. Though Arnold just responded to Donne’s views, it gives the modern readers a great understanding of value shift from Metaphysical period to the Victorian era. To be more specific, the analysis was made based on T. S. Eliot’s ideas who in turn was a modern critic. So, the evolution was studied from Donne to Arnold in a modernist’s point of view.

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