

Transformation of Mind from One Track to Another Reflected in Matthew Arnold's "The Scholar Gipsy" and Sarat Chandra's "Bilashi"

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to examine the transformation of human mind from one track to another as reflected in Sarat Chandra's "Bilashi" (1918) and Matthew Arnold's "The Scholar Gipsy" (1853) by analyzing and showing the reasons of changing mind of Mrityunjai and Scholar Gipsy. In "Bilashi", Sarat Chandra has tried to unfold the story of love of a couple and showed how a man changed his mind neglecting all social and religious norms. Mrityunjai, who transformed his mind to give the proper value of love for the sake of a girl and joined the gang of gipsy for ever leaving all of his belongings. On the other hand, Matthew Arnold has tried to reflect the depression of the Victorian people and showed the causes of changing their mind from one issue to another through the poem "The Scholar Gipsy". Scholar Gipsy being frustrated of the modernity, left Oxford University and joined in the gang of gipsy to discover what is hidden in their lore. This study is qualitative in nature and the data sources are secondary like books, journal articles and websites. This paper will focus the social and religious problems that Matthew Arnold and Sarat Chandra have faced in their respective periods. The textual references are given to support the argument of this study. This article will also show the reasons of alienation of Mrityunjai and Scholar Gipsy from the touch of modern people. Finally, this paper will be able to explore the reasons of transformation of mind of Scholar Gipsy and Mrityunjai in Arnold's "The Scholar Gipsy" and Sarat Chandra's "Bilashi".

Key words: Social Aspect, Religious Aspect, Frustration, Mental Agony, Gipsy Lore

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Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), is a Victorian poet and critic who portrays the story of an Oxford scholar through the poem "The Scholar Gipsy". The character of the Oxford scholar is brought here in contact with the poet's own life and his fellow men. Using the legend of medieval scholar, Arnold has tried to reflect the life of a scholar gipsy with the life of Victorians. The age in which the poet lived was full of the spiritual unrest and dissolving faiths. One of his letters to his mother written in 1869 clearly testifies the fact of his age: "My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century" (Latham VI). Through poem "The Scholar Gipsy", Arnold tried to find out the contrast between the life of the Scholar Gipsy and that of Victorian modern men. Being dissatisfied to the all ongoing norms of the society, Scholar Gipsy alienated himself from the touch of modern Victorian people and created a new world of his own. The Scholar Gipsy alienated himself from the contemporary society of Victorians and engaged himself in the team of gipsy to explore the secrecy of gipsy life. Similarly, Sarat Chandra has gone through the mind of Mrityunjai and depicted the reasons of changing mind through the story "Bilashi". He has also showed how a man can be alienated himself from the society because of love. It is seen in the story that Bilashi saved dying Mrityunjai from the hand of death with her love and affection. In return, Mrityunjai married Bilashi avoiding all social norms for nursing him to show his gratitude to Bilashi and finally chose the profession of Bilashi's father being a gipsy.

Transformation of mind in "The Scholar Gipsy": Mathew Arnold's writings reflected the attack on the classical taste and manner of the contemporary people. "The Scholar Gipsy" is completely based on a scholarly legend of Oxford University and the story of scholar gipsy was found in Glanvil's story "Vanity of Dogmatizing" (1661). Through the life of Scholar Gipsy, Arnold represented a detailed criticism of life of the Victorian people. Matthew Arnold through his poem "The Scholar Gipsy" mainly examined why scholar gipsy want to fly from the touch of modern Victorians. The poet, through the character Scholar Gipsy desired to fly from the Victorians and wanted to go to an ideal world where there would not be any chaos.

In "The Scholar Gipsy" we see Arnold has focused on a poor Oxford student who left his study and joined a group of gipsy. He used Scholar Gipsy to demonstrate the contrast between the past and present and to draw attention to the differences between the lives of the gypsies and the life of modern Victorian people. Arnold's purpose was to reveal what kind of life he has and what kind of life he is yearning to have. Actually, Victorian period was the dying and transition period of Europe. The Victorian age inaugurated a "transition from the old, outworn doctrines and tradition of the past," (Mukherjee 2) and ushered in the progressive future. In this period, a lot of industrial developments were seen and it separated Victorian people from the bonding of nature. Not only the industrial revolution but also the discoveries of the material sciences had given a rude shock to the age old beliefs that is why men had been aloof themselves from the anchor of religion and floating aimlessly in the sea of faith.

In the poem, Scholar Gipsy is the central character around whom the poem is woven. Actually, Arnold has portrayed the conditions of Victorian people through Scholar Gipsy. Scholar Gipsy was a student of Oxford University who could not continue his study because of poverty. Being bored to his surrounding world, he changed his mind set up and joined himself directly in the team of gipsy. As gipsy people do not have any high ambition and demand in their life that is why Scholar Gipsy allured to join in the gipsy team flying from fake Victorians. The Scholar Gipsy could not match himself with the materialistic world that's why he wanted to leave from the society where he lived and wanted to discover a world which is completely tension free. Actually, he wanted such a world where he could be able to contemplate himself without facing any kind of problem. The poet said,

"The story of the Oxford scholar poor,
Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain,
Who, tired of knocking at preferment's door,
One summer-morn forsook
His friends, and went to learn the gipsy-lore" (Allison et al. 784).

After joining in the gang of gipsy, many years later, two Oxford scholars who knew him happened to meet him. Scholar Gipsy told them that gypsies knew many secrets of life like how to control the thoughts of other people and when he would learn the whole secrets of gipsy, only then he would leave them and make the knowledge useful to the world. But to be master of that secret skill, heavenly power is needed.

"And I," he said, "the secret of their art,
When fully learn'd, will to the world impart;
But it needs heaven-sent moments for this skill" (Allison et al. 784).

The poet compared the past time indicating when Scholar Gipsy lived and present time indicating Victorian time. When scholar gipsy was born, man's thinking was fresh and clear and life was sparkling like the water of the river Thames but the sick hurry and divided aims made life of Victorians over burdened and sick. Being displeased, the poet advised the scholar gipsy to run away from the touch of modern Victorian people because their contact can make Scholar Gipsy also ill.

"O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads o'ertax'd, its palsied hearts, was rife—
Fly hence, our contact fear!" (Allison et al. 787-788)

Considering the pathetic condition of Victorian people, the poet requested the Scholar Gipsy to fly away from the contact of modern Victorians. The poet is asking scholar gipsy not to come in the contact of Victorian people because their life is full of infectious diseases. These diseases can kill the internal mind of Scholar Gipsy. If anybody comes in the contact of modern people, he/ she will lose the peace of mind. Whatever the Victorian people gain today, they lose it tomorrow. Actually, Victorian people do not have any patience what Scholar gipsy had. The scholar gipsy waited for heavenly light but Victorian people did not wait for it at all.

"But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
For strong the infection of our mental strife,

Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;
And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
Soon, soon thy cheer would die" (Sen 131).

The poet observed that Victorians did not have any fixed aim. They changed their aims repeatedly. The poet reflected on the great strain of modern Victorians life which destroyed the freshness and vigor of human's mind and energy. A thousand conflicting ideas forced men to change their decisions. Frequent shocks and disappointments made Victorian people's mind dead and inert. They did not have any power to think anything clearly. Every now and then, they changed their aims and ambitions and thus lost the oneness of purpose. They always ran after financial benefit and spent all their energies on a thousand schemes. They did not stick to anything for long time. They were like rolling stones that gather no moss. As a result they received a series of shocks and lost vitality of mind. They grew old and feeble going through many ups and down in course of their lives. They undertook too many works but did not attain result in any of them that is why frustrations and disappointments were their permanent companion. Frustrations and disappointments could not touch the Scholar Gipsy because he spent his time only for one purpose.

"No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours!
For what wears out the life of mortal men?
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls;
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls
And numb the elastic powers.
Till having used our nerves with bliss and teen,
And tired upon a thousand schemes our wit,
To the just-pausing Genius we remit
Our worn-out life, and are—what we have been.
Thou hast not lived, why should'st thou perish, so?
Thou hadst one aim, one business, one desire;"(Allison et al. 786)

Arnold clearly expressed his longing for the days when religion was free from question. He also realizes that modern men do not feel the necessity of religion in their heart. That is why they are called half-believers. Arnold "He is, however, a true reflection of a very real mood of the past century; the mood of doubt and sorrow; (Long 551)." He finds a great lack of unity between men and religion and these make him much unhappy.

"Thou waitest for the spark from heaven! and we,
Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd,
Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
Whose vague resolves never have been fulfill'd;" (Allison et al. 787)

At the end of the 19th century in England, an extensive spiritual loss was seen in Victorian period. This spiritual perplexity was initially caused by the Darwinian theory of evolution and German historical criticism of the bible, which forced intellectuals to boost serious confusion about Christian faith. Making matters bad, the industrial revolution cherished a materialistic spirit and thereby added to the spiritual confusion and disorientation of the age. In Victorian period, Scholar Gipsy observed that science and religion challenged each other with severe hostility; the conflict between matter and spirit was overflowing and an undeniable consequence, barrenness and emptiness of faith found den in men's hearts, that Arnold notes in "Dover Beach".

"The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar
Retreating, to the breath" (Allison et al. 794).

The Scholar Gipsy looked for the truth in his whole life. He struggled hard against all problems and finally he got the truth what he desired for. The poet was satisfied to the Scholar Gipsy with a positive hope.

"Despair I will not". In the poem, it is seen that there was no touch of despair in the whole life of Scholar Gipsy. His faith was as strong as the elm tree at Oxford which represented the sign of the truth that was perpetual. The poem ended in a note of expectation:

"Why faintest thou? I wander 'd till I died.
Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.
Dost thou ask proof? Our tree yet crowns the hill,
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side" (Chambers 109).

However, In "The Scholar Gipsy" Arnold has tried to show the transformation of human mind through the character of Scholar Gipsy. If any person is totally annoyed to his contemporary society and its people, he naturally wants to alienate himself completely and tries to turn himself from one track to another flying from the contemporary world. Being frustrated, the Scholar Gipsy wanted to escape from the world of suffering and depression. Actually, the Scholar Gipsy could not adjust himself with the atmosphere of Victorians that is why he wanted to make a new world of his own where there would not be any touch of sufferings and agony. Very beginning of his life, he could understand that he would not be able to cope up with the materialistic world that's why he tried to keep himself aloof from the world of emptiness and joined in the gipsy team.

Transformation of mind in "Bilashi": Sarat Chandra (1876-1938) is an eminent writer in Bengali literature. His short stories have mainly focused on the lower classes of people's sufferings and happiness. He has used his protagonists against all so-called society's rules and superstitions. He has chosen most of his heroes and heroines from lower class because he has grown up through hard poverty that is why he could realize the minds of lower class people very well than others. In "Bilashi", Sarat Chandra skillfully showed how a man (Mrityunjai) can be transformed from one track to another because of love.

Sarat Chandra has depicted the reason of changing of mind of Mrityunjai through the story "Bilashi". Through the character of Mrityunjai, he has tried to indicate all the people of the world who have transformed their mind because of social problems. Mrityunjai, the hero of the story, was an orphan who lived in an old house alone. He led his livelihood by leasing his big orchard around his house. Mrityunjai was the high born Hindu and Bilashi was the daughter of poor snake charmer. The author tried to show through the story how everything could be overcome by the power of platonic love. Taking the issue of love, Sarat Chandra has shown disagreement to the contemporary religious and social system. He has actually made satire to the existing conventional system of Hindu society through the story "Bilashi". He also focused so-called religious system for that Mrityunjai had to leave the society. By marrying Bilashi, Mrityunjai broke the conventional rules of society that is why the contemporary society could not give the recognition of their marriage. Not only that but also the people of the society gave blame to Mrityunjai for having rice from Bilashi's hand. According to author,

"The idiot boy had married the daughter of a snake charmer. Not only married her but also accepted rice from her hand. Such a heinous act had ruined his status in the society. He was saying, "Where were the guardians of the village when such an accident took place? If one does not obey the rules of religion and society then from now on people should live in jungle?" Other villagers also agreed that Mrityunjai had committed blasphemy. Marrying the girl of a lower caste and accepting rice from her hand was no joke" (Bhismadeb et al. 42).

Traditionally it was recognized that high born Hindu would not take anything from the lower born Hindu but Mrityunjai ate rice from Bilashi's hand. Doing food sin (anno pap), Mrityunjai broke the as usual traditional customs of the society. The people of the society thought that Mrityunjai did a great crime and it could not be pardoned. If they did not take immediate action, the society would turn into impure or unholy. Writer says about this issue,

"It was time for action or else, the village would become impure, the Hindu society and religion would become unholy" (Bhismadeb et al. 42).

In the past, it was seen that the influential Hindu people of the society, could do any types of cruelty in the name of religion. Writer showed the symptom of severe cruelty through the activities of Mrityunjai's so-called uncle. When Mrityunjai's uncle came to know that Bilashi took care of Mrityunjai at the time of sickness, immediately he gathered some people in front of Mrityunjai's house. The people who gathered together, they physically tortured Bilashi in the name of religion by the influence of Mrityunjai's uncle. The people of the

society were succeeded to out Bilashi from the society applying their so-called rules. Whenever Bilashi was out from the society, Mrityunjai could not tolerate the separation of Bilashi because he loved Bilashi from his heart. Mrityunjai remembered, at the time of his sickness, Bilashi tried heart and soul to recover Mrityunjai from the hand of death. Bilashi's condition became very critical at the time of nursing Mrityunjai. Once Mrityunjai's one of the friends named Nara (writer of the story) came to visit Mrityunjai, he described the condition of Bilashi like this,

"I did not know but looking at her face I understood that spending sleepless nights for Mrityunjai had made the young girl very weak and frail like dry flowers in the vase whose petals would fall upon slight touch" (Bhismadeb et al. 40).

Sarat Chandra had a wonderful heart that is why he could realize the proper value of love. As Mrityunjai utilized the dedication of Bilashi for him and took decision to spend rest of his life with Bilashi together. Being frustrated to the society, inhumanity of people, Mrityunjai left society with great agony and married Bilashi. "Personality is motivated by inner forces and conflicts about which people have little awareness and over which they have no control (Feldman 439)." He then joined in the team of gipsy. Entering into the team of gipsy, within few days he become out and out a real gipsy. His attire, behavior, speaking, attitude proved that he was an original snake charmer. It was quite difficult to match previous Mrityunjai with the present Mrityunjai. He learnt necessary spell from his father-in-law. It is seen in the story, after few years later, when Nara was not able to adjust himself to be a monk, came back to his own village from Burma. One day at the time of going through the Malo community, by chance he met with Mrityunjai. He was completely surprised to see the appearance of Mrityunjai as a professional snake charmer. It was also strange to see how a man could be changed so easily. The narrator of the story described the change of Mrityunjai according to this way,

"One day, while going through the Malo (fisherman community) neighborhood, I came across Mrityunjai. Sitting in front of hut, Mrityunjai had grown hairs and kept long beards. He was wearing a red ochre turban, rosaries made of Rudrakshas (one type of dress of monk) and crystals. No one would be able to recognize him. Within a year, this Kayastha (a caste of Hindu) boy gave up his caste and turned into a professional snake charmer" (Bhismadeb et al. 44).

If a person is socially, religiously and mentally tortured, then he can take any type of decision without thinking anything that we find in the case of Mrityunjai. Mrityunjai transformed himself as a professional snake charmer because of love. By watching the transformation of Mrityunjai, Nara was also completely inspired to be snake charmer. He requested to Mrityunjai to teach him all the necessary methods of catching snake because he had fascination to catch snake from his childhood. In the initial stage, Mrityunjai was not agreed but later on he gave his consent to teach Nara. Learning necessary spell from Mrityunjai, Nara also became a reputed snake charmer in the society.

"He taught me necessary spells and tricks and techniques to catch snakes. He tied an amulet containing medicine around my wrist and turned me into a full-fledged snake charmer" (Bhismadeb et al. 44).

There are lots of examples in the society who changed their profession for the sake of love. Many young boys changed their mind set up to have their beloved. To get their beloved, they did everything that was beyond the imagination of common people. Many high born man married lower caste girl and took the profession of lower caste man. After marrying the girl, it would be difficult to recognize the man who was a child of a rich family once upon a time. Mrityunjai was not exceptional from it. He also changed himself to give the proper value of love for Bilashi. According to the text,

"Many of you have heard of Brahmin's son marrying sweeper and taking up her profession. I have been seen well educated young Brahmin man marrying the daughter of domes and taking up their profession. Even the son of Kayastha marries the daughter of a butcher and becomes a full time butcher. Today, he slaughters cows and sales beef with his own hands and no one would be able to say that once this boy was someone else. All these happen for only one reason; women" (Bhismadeb et al. 44).

Actually, the life of snake charmer is very challenging. They have to go from one place to another for earning. In fact, who are snake charmer, they earn their livelihood by catching snake, showing snake dance, selling root of trees. As a snake charmer, Mrityunjai did everything regarding his profession to survive. Mrityunjai had greed for money that's why if anybody would offer Mrityunjai to catch snake, he would go there without any hesitation for having some money. One day, Mrityunjai got an invitation for catching snake,

Mrityunjai, Nara, Bilashi went to the house of milkman to catch snake. At the time of catching snake, Bilashi alert Mrityunjai that there might be two snakes in the hole but Mrityunjai did not hear her at all. When he gave his hand in the hole to catch snake, immediately he was bitten by snake. The story narrator told the incident like this,

“No sooner I had put the snake in the box and returned, Mrityunjai came out of the house making an “Uh” sound. Blood was coming out from the back of his hand. The initial shock of the event stunned all of us. For the first time, I saw a snake coming out of its nest to attack. Normally, they try to run away. Instantly, Bilashi cried out in fear and tied Mrityunjai’s hand with her Saari and gave Mrityunjai to chew all the medicinal plants she bought with her. I also tied my amulet around his arm and kept on reciting the poison retracting spell loudly” (Bhismadeb et al. 46).

Mrityunjai was very dedicated to his morality and profession that is why he did not get any fear of anything. Although catching poisonous snake is a dangerous task but he could not go back being frightened. At last Mrityunjai was died for the sake of his profession by the bite of snake. Finally, it is showed that Mrityunjai was a brave man because he did not get feared at the time of marrying Bilashi and at the time of catching poisonous snake. Through Mrityunjai, Sarat Chandra wanted to give a message to all that a normal man can be changed totally because of his hard surroundings. It is said that love is blind; it does not follow any conventional rules and regulations. If anyone is in love, he/ she is able to take any types of dangerous risk for having his beloved one like Mrityunjai. Mrityunjai also showed a real gratitude to Bilashi marrying her. If anyone is deprived from all types of right from the society, then he /she suffers from various types of mental problem. Whenever the mental sufferings of the mind cross its limitation that time any person can turn his mind to another track. Being frustrated to the society and other things, Mrityunjai changed his mind set up and finally joined the gipsy gang. He did not back to his society and sacrificed his life for the sake of gipsy purpose.

Both writers try to show through “The Scholar Gipsy” and “Bilashi” that if any man is frustrated to the contemporary society and its rules and regulations, then he/she takes strong decision to change his/her mind set up and transform himself/herself completely into an another world where he/she will get full freedom of his/her own. If anyone is changed from one track to another, normally he/she did not back to their previous track. Being frustrated to the society, Scholar Gipsy and Mrityunjai joined in the gipsy gang but they did not back to their previous track. So it can be said that social norms are also responsible for changing the mind of a man.

In the above mentioned stories, Matthew Arnold and Sarat Chandra felt a deep sense of discontentment with their own age and that led them to search for a better world and they both supported gipsy world to live. As Matthew Arnold’s period was defined by machinery and industrialization that is why he wanted to fly through Scholar Gipsy from the materialistic world to his desired world where there is no suffering of hard reality. Matthew Arnold found his desired world in the simple gipsy gang because gipsy people are completely free from earthly draw back. Similarly, Sarat Chandra has portrayed the social and religious superstition of Hindu society that was available in his time through the story “Bilashi”. Being bored to the so –called rules and regulations, Mrityunjai went away from the disordered society joining in the gipsy team. In fact, both the 19th and the 20th centuries were the ages of separations, disunities, discontinuities, disharmonies, contrasts and contradictions. The men who wanted to hide themselves from the virtual world, they engaged them in a world that is out of human adversity. Going into the fantasy kingdom, they tried to explore their cherished desire. Actually, Arnold and Sarat Chandra wanted to discover a world which is free from all types of bindings. They have focused the alienation of human being from the world of emptiness. The Scholar Gipsy and Mrityunjai wanted to avoid modern anarchy and they transform their mind set up and joined in the gipsy gang. They were so much fade up to the contemporary society that they did not back to their previous society being transformed into Gipsy. Actually they wanted to have the freedom of their mind and they got it going against the barren world.

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