

The Importance of Language is the Expression of Culture

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Culture: State of Inwardness

Culture is the state of inwardness concerned with the attainment of higher ideals like simple living and high thinking. It is impossible to study the English Language by dissociating it from the culture from which it grew. Only when a culture grows and displays a fine state of living, in that atmosphere of idealism and nobility a language grows.

Indispensability of Language to Express Culture

A culture grows when it manifests a disposition to enable one to live better. Language is a primary channel through which cultural concepts, ideas and practices are floated. Mere ideas exist in a vacuum if there is no language to express. It is here the indispensability of language comes in the expression of culture. No culture can be expressed without the instrument of language.

Finer Culture, Finer Language

In fact, there is a connection between life, literature, and language. Finer life shows finer culture to express a finer culture a finer language is required. The language must be equally suitable for the expression of noble ideas. Expression of life is closely associated with expression of language. A cultural experience to be valued must be expressed in a noble medium of language.

For example, such ideas are given in the following manner:

1. People must live within limits and restrictions.
2. Freedom does not mean doing as one likes.
3. Freedom does not mean irresponsibility.
4. A mature freedom arises only when there is a principle of self-restraint. Without self-control social control is impossible.
5. The individual must live nobly. So that the society is inspired by the individual and society draws norms for culture from such ideas of self-restraint.

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712

6. If the individual does not behave properly the society cannot be good. For a society to be good the individual must be good.

Self-control as the Basis for Social Control

It is a two way expression of two different principles converging to the same point. Self-control is the basis of social control. If the individual does not behave in a dignified way how can we expect the society to have dignity?

The greatest sign of culture is avoidance of anger and adoption of self-control. It is said that anger destroys three fourth of man's energy. Shelly said once, "The secret of all moral is love; love is the centre and circumference of everything" (12). It is love that unites the entire world as one family. This is an idea which is pervasively found in all the writings of Swami Vivekananda. Love unites as many people as possible more effectively than anger. Anger divides individuals. Anger divides nations. It is the root cause of all human tragedy. That is why it is stated in the preliminary paragraph that people must live within limits and restrictions having self-control as base structure and social control as super structure and love as the means to attain the goal.

Bearing and Forbearing

Bearing and forbearing are two marks of great culture. The first noun 'bearing' shows dignified aristocratic behaviour and conduct and the second noun 'forbearance' or 'forbearing' shows self-restraint and self-control. A dignified man shrinks or refrains from indulging in acts of violence. A dignified man does not choose harsh words. He applies the gentle method of love to correct people and lead them to virtuous behaviour.

Importance of Language Use

So much has been said in this essay about culture. Can we say it without the use of language? W.B. Yeats had of the opinion that language was the antenna of civilization. We can say language is the blood corpuscle of the human system. The importance of language in expression of culture is what has been emphasized in this essay.

Some examples are given to prove that without the use of language as a medium of expression culture cannot flourish. For example, Carlyle once said, "Virtue is its own reward"

(142). It is a marvellous expression of a wonderful ethical idea. What it means is that virtue does not require external appreciation from anyone to be virtuous and is itself a rewarding experience. By being virtuous one is in a state of joy and bliss. Carlyle puts the whole idea in a pithy compressed form.

Another illustration is taken from Edmund Burke. Burke makes a reference to this idea that Britain forgot revenue and pursued trade when he reviews the history of relationship between Britain and American colony. As long as this practice continued, there was no problem between America and Britain. But Britain thought of revenue taxation and Americans opposed it. By trade both Britain and America gained mutually but by the idea of the revenue tax America became the loser, Britain became the gainer. This now proves a viable cultural idea that by mutual beneficial trades both countries had a cordial relationship.

Small Minds and Noble Minds

Now this follows a famous utterance of Edmund Burke “Great empires and little minds go ill together” (82). What is implied is that great empires can be managed only by great minds and not by poor minds.

Wordsworth in a similar way brings out a new form of ethics from nature as a source of moral inspiration. “One impulse from vernal wood can teach me more of good and evil than all the sages can” (Blach, 221). It is now clearly established that mere sermonising is treated as a mental activity whereas nature moves humans to a greater state of moral idealism and nobility.

Dr. Johnson once said, “We are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance” (*The Works of the Poets...*, 54). He even went to the extent of saying that “He that thinks reasonably must think morally” (*Preface to Shakespeare*, 14).

What Do These Examples Prove? Medium and Matter

Now all these examples go to prove that without the medium of language as a tool for powerful expression no culture can be expressed. No ethical idea can be made clear and explicit. The purity of the language is involved in the expression of culture. If the medium is not pure and noble it is impossible to express marvellous cultural ideas in a simple intelligible

way. On the one hand language is based upon clarity and intelligibility in communication and on the other hand very grand cultural ideas wait to be expressed through the instrument of language.

The relationship between language and culture is like the relationship between the body and the soul; one is inseparable from the other. Both medium and matter must be expressed as far as possible in a very elevated manner.

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