CHAPTER - VIII
An attempt is made in the concluding chapter to look at the concept of culture of Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot from an Indian point of view. Both have been influenced by the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. Both the authors emphasize the importance of action for its sake and not for the sake of the fruit, an attitude advocated by Hindu philosophy. The significance of disinterestedness is stressed by both the authors and they refer to Arjuna, the hero of the Bhagavad Gita, in this regard explicitly. They bring out the importance of the role of the "best self" and its discovery as opposed to the "ordinary self" in the task of perfection of the individual as well as society at large. This "best self" is known as 'Swabhava' and 'Swadharma' according to Hindu philosophy. Culture which aims at perfection, starts with this discovery of the true self—the best self.

Matthew Arnold declared that a critic needed two essential qualities: disinterestedness and a sense of what is relevant at any given moment. He must be dispassionate and stand above the mundane realities. He must belong to no party, whether intellectual, political or religious. He judges all practical activity by ideal standards through thinking objectively. Arnold affirms: 'the humanising, the
bringing into one harmonious and truly human life, of the whole body of English society - that is what interests me. I try to be a disinterested observer of all which really helps and hinders that.¹

This view of 'Disinterestedness' is repeated in other essays of his. 'It is of the last importance that English criticism should clearly discern what rule for its course, in order to avail itself of the field now opening to it, and to produce fruit for the future, it ought to take. The rule may be summed up in one word, - DISINTERESTEDNESS. And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from practice; by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches;......

Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and free ideas."² He asserts emphatically "I am bound by my own definition of criticism: a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world".³

This theory of "Disinterestedness" leads Arnold to stress detachment in life. In "Culture and Anarchy", the stress is on this detachment and work done in detachment.

3. Ibid., P.36.
This is stated as early as in the sonnet entitled "Quiet Work" where nature is presented as:

"Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting"\(^4\)

Detachment comes only when one realises the principle that action should be indulged in not for the sake of result. Action for the sake of action is inspired by a knowledge of the will of God. This principle gives importance to knowing or knowledge. In such materialistic cultures, as those of England and America, the critic is often regarded with suspicion as he always speaks and does not act. To the objections from practical English politicians that he was always complaining and never doing, he replied in 'Mixed Essays': "But with the increasing number of those who awake to the intellectual life, the number of those also increases, who having awoke to it, go on with it, follow where it leads them. And it leads them to see that it is their business to learn the real truth about important men and things, and books which interest the human mind. For, thus is gradually to be acquired a stock of sound ideas, in which the mind will habitually move and which alone can give our judgements serenity and solidity.\(^5\) Arnold calls disinterestedness the "Indian virtue of detachment" and it is clear that he has in mind the Bhagavad Gita and its definition of the ideal man. Arnold's theory of disinterestedness

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is of a more positive character than the Greek ideal of stoicism.

Eliot's response to the Spanish civil war attains greater significance when he speaks of what taking sides implies and suggests again how far he is removed from men engaged, dangerously and sometimes heroically, in direct political activity: 'Any eventual partisanship should be held with reservation, humility and misgiving. That balance of mind which a few highly civilized individuals such as Arjuna, the hero of the Bhagavad Gita can maintain in action, is difficult for most of us even as observers and as I say, is not encouraged by the greater part of the press'.

Having relegated partisanship to the realm of the uncivilized, Eliot goes further and denounces one of the most frequently used means for achieving partisan goals: violence. Political theory must be distinguished from political actuality. Political actuality, as Arjuna would be sure to know, belongs to a lower domain. For 'the people who think, and that is a small minority', there must obviously be something higher.

Eliot joined issue with those who had accused the new movement in poetry and criticism of being "divorced from life". 'A literary review should maintain the application, in literature, of principles which have their consequences

7. Ibid., P.292.
also in politics and in private conduct; and it should maintain them without tolerating any confusion of the purposes of pure literature with the purposes of politics or ethics. To maintain autonomy, and disinterestedness, every human activity and to perceive it in relation to every other, require a considerable discipline. Every activity is conceived of as being separate and apart, boxed off in order to maintain its integrity and governed by rules internal to it which are not those of any other activity. Above all, the literary activity is not allowed to become a substitute for the ethical one. At the same time, each activity is subject to principles which are ultimately religious and moral. What concerned Eliot was the concept of unalterable truth as "an immutable object or Reality" outside Time, and against which opinions held within time, such as the shifting, relativist values of modern science and of liberalism, are measured. What applies to literary criticism applies to all human activity as well. Thus both the authors preach the doctrine of disinterestedness which is essentially the main tenet of Hindu philosophy. Hindu philosophy lays stress on this sense of detachment and disinterestedness as essential prerequisite for the purification of the 'Soul'. "Karma Yoga" is a moral discipline of purification of the will. Its object is to change "Kamya Karma" into "Nishkama Karma" or duty not even for duty's sake but for the sake of the Divine. No man can...

remain without performing "Karma" and "Karma" includes thought, speech and covert action. Every embodied soul follows his animal inclination or desire for sense-objects. He not only seeks sense-pleasures but also desires some outside ends like success, profit, name and fame. These are called desire-oriented activities or "Kamya Karmas". Such ends are not desirable morally as they make the person the slave of his senses. Therefore, the "Gita" or the "Song Celestial" prescribes the way of "Nishkama-Karma" as the way of moral life. "Karma" is done because it is impossible to remain without doing it. But it ought to be done for purification or progressive harmony without caring for the fruit or the consequences, as "Nishkama Karma". The "Karma Yogin" is not a slave of the five senses, but is a victor thereof. His 'true self' gives him his 'Swabhava' which becomes his 'Swadharma' and in doing his 'Swadharma' he is making the will of God prevail. Man's senses should learn to move freely amidst sense - objects without feeling attraction or repulsion and to act always in obedience to the true self. True Sanyasa, thus, does not consist merely in retiring from the world into seclusion but in subduing the senses and discovering the purposes of the true self. He may succeed or fail, derive pleasure or suffer from pain. He should not care for them. This is the concept of "Swadharma" as directed by "Swabhava".
Matthew Arnold remarks: "Because we habitually live in our ordinary selves, which do not carry us beyond the ideas and wishes of the class to which we happen to belong..... But by our "best self" we are united, impersonal, at harmony. We are in no peril from giving authority to this because it is the truest friend we all of us have; and when anarchy is a danger to us, to this authority we may turn with some sure trust. Well and this is the very self which culture, or the study of perfection, seeks to develop in us; at the expense of our old untransformed self, taking pleasure only in doing what it likes or is used to do, and exposing us to the risk of clashing with everyone else, who is doing the same.' It is our "Best self" that decides our "Swadharma" according to Hindu philosophy.

Both the writers stress the importance of knowledge of the best that is thought and said in the world. This knowledge of the best that is thought and said leads to refinement and culture. This is perfection for Matthew Arnold.

T.S. Eliot also speaks of the best that is thought and known. He is of the opinion that modern society is not conducive to cultivation of culture and the progress and development of a cultured man. He observes in this connection: 'The steady influence which operates silently in any mass

society organised for profit, for the oppression of standards of art and culture; the increasing organisation of advertisement and propaganda - or the influencing of masses of them by any means except through their intelligence - is all against them. The economic system is against them; and against them also is the disappearance of any class of people who recognise public and private responsibility of patronage of the best, that is made and written. The key words are "the best that is made and written". They form part of the definition of culture as given by Matthew Arnold. Eliot shares the pessimism of Arnold that modern civilization is against the development and flourishing of culture.

Eliot exercised a vast influence over the literary world and helped in the moulding of contemporary literary taste through his editorship of the important quarterly "The Criterion" which continued to appear till before the II world war. In it he 'aimed at bringing together the best in new thinking and new writing in its time, from all countries of Europe that had anything to contribute to the common good'. Thus, even in his editorial stint, Eliot did not forget the best that is thought and written.

In the opinion of Matthew Arnold, the common man needs to know something of the best that has been thought

and said in the world. He needs literary experience, namely experience of how men have felt and expressed themselves in former times. He needs the historic sense. He needs the flexibility of spirit which is the best fruit of literary training. All these he can have if he has culture. He is then a perfect individual. Culture is defined by Matthew Arnold as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically".  

This definition of culture as perfection leads to the concept of Stithapragna of the Hindu Scriptures. The Stithapragna is disinterested, has a knowledge of the will of God and can act without fear or favour for progressive harmony of the society. It is these people that should form the nucleus in society, leading it to perfection. Both Arnold and Eliot seem to have been influenced, even if dimly, by this spiritual wisdom of the East. The influence on Arnold becomes evident when a reference is made to the use of terms "righteousness", "reason" and

"will of God". The full historical and Arnoldian meaning of 'reason and will of God' is much larger and deeper than 'reasonableness'. One clue appears early in the chapter on "Sweetness and Light" of "Culture and Anarchy": "The moment this view of culture is seized, the moment it is regarded not solely as the endeavour to see things as they really are, to draw towards a knowledge of the universal order, which seems to be intended and aimed at in the world, and which it is man's happiness to go along with or his misery to go counter to, - to learn, in short, the will of God, - the moment, I say, culture is considered not merely as the endeavour to see and learn this, but as the endeavour, also, to make it prevail, the moral, social and beneficent character of culture becomes manifest".12 This comes close to Loka Sangraha of the Gita. The reference to the ancient stoic doctrine, to the wise man's effort to go along with the providential order of the world, recalls Arnold's early and continued attachment to Epictetus. He describes Marcus Aurelius as "perhaps the most beautiful figure in history". Arnold's God may indeed seem to be much more in the stoic than in the judaeo-christian tradition but Arnold was able to fuse the two: "At the bottom of both the Greek and the Hebrew notion is the desire, native in man, for the reason and the will of God, the feeling after the universal order, - in a word, the love of God".13 This sentence is in the line of Christian stoicism and especially Spinoza.

Behind these utterances is the age-old concept not merely of reason, but of 'right reason', a phrase Arnold uses continually throughout "Culture and Anarchy". "Right reason" is, in fact, one valid source of authority, the one valid defence against anarchy. The concept of right reason, implicit in Plato and Aristotle, was formulated by the ancient stoics and was readily assimilated into Christian thought after codification in Roman Law. Cicero asserted that morality is founded on the universal law of right reason implanted in every human heart. The premise that there are ethical absolutes which man can comprehend forms the basis for the assertion. Right reason thus becomes a kind of philosophic conscience implanted in all men and this enables the distinction between right and wrong. The right reason of mankind in its collective wisdom through the ages constitutes the natural law. It has a universal application. Arnold, while speaking of right reason, was speaking in accord with concepts which had been a dynamic force for a long historical period. In "Culture and Anarchy", Arnold uses "right reason" as opposed to the "ordinary self". "Right reason", thus, provides an ideal standard of thought, feeling and action. As a liberal conservative, Arnold's constant endeavour was to fuse the best of the old with the best of the new. His definition of culture insists upon fresh knowledge and critical scrutiny, resulting in the revision of traditional wisdom.
T.S. Eliot desires exactly this knowledge when he speaks of what a literary review like "Criterion" should achieve.

The Indian social organisation was based on Varna, a much misunderstood concept. The classification was based on the innate 'Swabhava' of individuals and when the Scriptures, starting from the Vedas, spoke of the Brahmmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Sudras, they referred to the innate qualities of (not hereditary) and orientation to wisdom, strength, harmony and perfection. The ideal presented in the Vedas is the integrated Man who is rooted firmly on his feet in service, with the principle of exchange working towards harmony above it - strength - physical, vital, mental, moral and spiritual placed even higher and wisdom controlling all. That was the image of the Virat Purusha, the ideal perfected man. This image represented the society organized pyramidwise, hierarchically progressing towards perfection. It is not caste based, as has always been misrepresented but based on 'Swabhava' and 'Swadharma' - the dominant quality of the true self fixing the place of the individual and social organization - the whole thing moving towards harmony which can only be progressive.

The concepts of Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot have their correspondences in oriental wisdom, the wisdom
of the 'Gita' and the 'Upanishads' and the 'Vedas'. We would be far wrong if we say that they were influenced by and intuited responding to the basic truths of these Scriptures in their visions of a perfect society.

Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot showed the path of right reason.