

# Aldus Huxley: A Schmick Philosopher

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## Abstract

Aldus Leonard Huxley needs no introduction in the literary canopy. He was a great non-fiction writer, philosopher, short story writer, novelist and what not. His thinking is beyond his age and circumstances. He was determined to find truth behind each phenomenon and that's why he argues very boldly that the writers use false in spite of presenting true value of the existing fact. That's why he discusses about the chemically pure and impure mode of literature. It is the mode of Huxley's thinking that he remains in the favour of chemically pure tragedy as its function is catharsis; but he explores a chemically impure work has its impact even after a long time.

He just wants to present the art, as nearer as possible to truth; and truth sometimes confronts in abstract form, to deal with abstract the best way is either silence or music. If we put our imagination in religion we may get the peace that comes to us in the form of silence with the music of "Om"; none of us would deny the peace is fact, a fact inexpressible. Huxley was against the writing as a stereotype and dull, instead he always supported something adventurous also.

Huxley was god gifted with acute and far ranging intelligence which he used tremendously by his wit in his pessimist satires. He, not like Chaucer, never holds the abuse of his age up to ridicule but he criticizes them forcefully and with apt reasoning like Ibsen, Swift and Shaw. He discusses in an elaborate manner and by the end of almost in every essay leaves some space for the views of the readers so tactfully. The present paper is a humble attempt to explore unparallel mode of his observing the matters and thinking that put him among the canopy of the practical literary writers.

## Keywords:

## Introduction

This would not be an exaggeration to call Aldus Leonard Huxley a great writer, a marvelous thinker and a schmick or stylish philosopher, who not only propounded his own ideas in a very peculiar manner that charmed the world deeply as well as thoroughly, with his tremendous wit and enlightened insight. His genius exemplified in lines like:

1. May be this world is another planet's hell.
2. Experience is not what happens to man; it is what a man does with what happened to him.
3. Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.

The lines above are simply exploring the fact that how Huxley reinvigorates the prevailing concepts by his keen or rather queer observation and meditation; after going through the lines one may get a glimpse of his mode of thinking up to great extent.

Undoubtedly Huxley was a gem and hone at Eton and Oxford but he has an intellectual background that provides much aid in flourishing his zeal in spite of his weedy eyesight. His father Leonardo Huxley was a man of letters, editor of Cornhill magazine and a well known biographer. He was grandson of prominent biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, a great admirer of Darwin, who advocated Darwin up to such extent that he gained a nickname as 'Darwin's bulldog'; not only this Thomas Henry coined the term "agnostic". Aldus Huxley was grand nephew of the versatile critic and poet Matthew Arnold.

Number of non-fiction and essays are there in his credit those took him on the pinnacle of the artists like The Perennial Philosophy, Grey Eminence, The Devils of Loudun, The Doors of Perception, On the Margin, Essays New and Old, Ends and Means, Do What You Will, Collected Essays, Music at Night etc. In spite of these he penned novels, Story collections, Poetry, Screen Plays, Plays and what not. But he gained popularity and recognition as an eminent author with the publication of Brave New World in 1932. There is no doubt if it is said about Huxley:

*"Huxley is not only a literary giant, but one of the greatest thinkers of our age"*

Huxley was god gifted with acute and far ranging intelligence which he used tremendously by his wit in his pessimist satires. He, not like Chaucer, never hold the abuse of his age up to ridicule but he criticizes them forcefully and with apt reasoning like Ibsen, Swift and Shaw. He discusses in an elaborate manner and by the end of almost in every essay leaves some space for the views of the readers so tactfully. The present paper is a humble attempt to explore unparallel mode of his observing the matters and thinking that put him among the canopy of the practical literary writers.

**Truth seeker – A genuine observer with realistic approach:**

As all writers are considered to be the product of their era, affected by the social, economical, political, cultural and religious conditions of contemporary time; as for a Aldus Huxley is concern, he may be considered iconoclast, his mode of observing and looking into the matters are quite different. His thinking is beyond his age and circumstances. To keep himself aloof he meditates under specific contemporary circumstances on any particular matter before proclaiming any ideology. He was determined to find truth behind each phenomenon and that's why he argues very boldly that the writers use false in spite of presenting h true value of the existing fact. That's why he discusses about the chemically pure and impure mode of literature. As he discusses in his essay 'Tragedy and the Whole Truth' Homer was a genuine writer who dare to speak naked truth without any shades. He put things very clearly, as Homer separates himself from others by presenting the reality in the closing lines of Twelfth book of his Odyssey:

"When they had satisfied their thirst and hunger, they thought of their dear companion and wept, and in the midst of their tears sleep came gently upon them."<sup>1</sup>

Huxley utters forcefully that natural instincts has their own impact upon physical body and those can not be omitted completely, if convinced to resent the truth; but it's not so easy. The true representation of reality is something which tragedy omits, as he has given the example of Macduff of Shakespeare's Macbeth. He says if Macduff would drink, sleep and satisfied his hunger, after knowing the brutal murder of his wife and kid, the tragedy would be something else. To a genuine note he finds Fielding after Homer who dare to present reality by giving example of Sophy Western from Tom Jones; as innkeeper had fallen because of Sophy Western, a bumpkin laughs upon her. This is also astonishing because a heroine is considered not to be laugh upon on one hand and on another hand heroines are usually constructed in the way as they are as light in weight as feather.

Huxley quotes I. A. Richards who affirms that "good tragedy is proof against irony and irrelevance-that it can absorb any thing in into itself and still remain tragedy". It is the mode of Huxley's thinking that he remains in the favour of chemically pure tragedy as its function is catharsis; but he explores a

chemically impure work has its impact even after a long time. For Huxley, tragedy should perform its functions in either case as he utters:

"There is no reason, after all, why the two kind of literatures – the chemically impure and chemically pure, the literature of the Whole truth and the literature of Partial Truth- should not exist simultaneously; each in its separate sphere, the human spirit has need of both"<sup>2</sup>

Huxley's unbiased temperament for the truth or genuine finds place in his essay 'Agra'. He very realistically presents the true account of his experience by comparing the Taj with other monuments and great architectures of the world. Undoubtedly Taj is considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World but he finds Taj as a deficiency of fancy, a poverty of imagination and its minarets as worst architecturally feature. He condemned the art and architecture of Taj in terms like:

"But it is not necessary to go as far as Europe to find specimens of a more varied and imaginative elegance than that of the Taj. The Hindu architecture produced buildings in comparably more rich and interesting as work of art ..... But I have seen enough of the art in Rajputana to convince me of its enormous superiority to any work of the Mohamedans. The temples a Chitor, for example, are specimens of true classicism."<sup>3</sup>

In his zeal to be true to himself as an honest observer and writer of art, he penned further:

"In this last respect Hindu ornament is decidedly superior to that employed by the later Moguls. The pietra dura work at the Taj and the Shahdra toms at Lahore is marvelously neat in execution and of extravagant costliness. These qualities are admirable enough in their way; but they have nothing to do with the decorative value of the work considered as art."<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes truth is hidden and sometimes lay in front of the eyes but can not be interpreted as truth. Man as a social animal commits a mistake usually to think whatever is interpreted by him is only pure naked truth and avoids the whole truth against his own tiny existence. Huxley criticizes such aspect of human nature in his mighty quest of presenting the truth in literature; he says as:

"We would live in such a world, if we were always conscious of all the aspects under which any event can be considered. But in practice we are almost never aware of more than one aspect of each event at a time. Our life is spent first in one water-tight compartment of experience, then in another."<sup>5</sup>

**Utility of Music & Silence in Literary work**

This world is made up of material as well as abstract. Abstracts inculcate in itself that can't be expressed in words but only experienced. Silence and music are invaluable part of our existence. Almost every fundamental fact may be experienced and not to be expressed as it is that's why silence and music become so important. Huxley has a firm belief that music has the power to disseminate the inexpressible. The question arises then, if anything that can't be expressed by means of the words how music may

express that? For this dilemma Huxley suggests something to understand as:

"It 'says' less because it is always speaking"<sup>6</sup>

To interpret the statement above, it may be said that what comes to one would come under the category of 'speaking' and what one experienced after getting those external input and after manipulating those with prejudices, psychological state, contemporary circumstances and on personal pattern, would come under category of 'say'. But to 'say' is not so easy, sometimes it became much complex to express; in such a condition either music or silence play a vital role to put the things across. Huxley is of the opinion that perhaps for this we should be thankful to the artist's specially musicians as he utters:

"We are grateful to the artist, especially the musician, for 'saying clearly what we have always felt, but never been able to express'."<sup>7</sup>

In most of the plays, as we have seen, Shakespeare time to time calls upon music to help him to put the things across. There are number of examples where silence or music fulfils the demand of the situation; the utility become more intense in audio visual arts. Huxley points out:

"...we should have found it absolutely impossible to express by means of words or dramatic action what those three or four minutes of violin playing made somehow so luminously manifest to any sensitive listener... inexpressible had to be expressed, Shakespeare laid down his pen and called for music. And if the music should also fail? Well, there was always silence to fall back on."<sup>8</sup>

In this respect, the mode of thinking of Huxley is very clear. He just wants to present the art, as nearer as possible to truth; and truth sometimes confronts in abstract form, to deal with abstract the best way is either silence or music. If we put our imagination in religion we may get the peace that comes to us in the form of silence with the music of "Om"; none of us would deny the peace is fact, a fact inexpressible. It would be a vain attempt by any critic to explain the experience inexpressible, which is expressed only by music, in 'own words'. It is possible, though to tough, that one may assume thing and would be correct up to some extent but the reality would still remain too far away. Even the software or programming will produce its own set version. According to Huxley:

"...critic can only refer his readers to the original work of art: let them go and see for themselves. Those who overstep the limit are either rather stupid, vain people, who love their 'own words' and imagine that they can say in them more than 'own words'..."<sup>9</sup>

He further says in favor of music as an inseparable tool to express the true experience in the words like:

"...What is true of painting is equally true of music. Music 'says' things about the world, but in specifically musical terms. Any attempt to reproduce these musical statements 'in our own words' is necessarily doomed to failure."<sup>10</sup>

He proclaims his ideology regarding music again in his essay Meditation at El Greco, as:

"We are accustomed to thinking of ourselves as thinking entirely with our heads. Wrongly, as the physiologists have shown. For what we think and feel and are is to a great extent determined by the state of our ductless glands and our viscera."<sup>11</sup>

#### **Obviousness Vs Greatness in Literary Writing**

What is great? If we ponder a little bit, we come across something has eternal significance, morally apt, has reference to the fundamental of human nature, something close to humanity and abundance of truth may be considered as great. Then, what about obvious? As there are so many things those are true, close enough to the fundamental nature of men and has some essence of humanity but surprisingly they are not great. This peculiar phenomenon has a great importance in literature, as aestheticism is one of the major functions of literary writings. Huxley clarifies the dilemma in very simple but empathetic way when he confesses:

"All great truths are obvious, but not all obvious truths are great"<sup>12</sup>

Huxley explores his idea by saying as it is obvious that evening frocks are longer this year or you can fly from London to Paris in two and half hour etc. may be truth but not great. Unfortunately popular art makes use of obvious truths, says Huxley, it should be avoided. He condemned this worse attempt to make the obvious as great in the following terms:

"Popular art gives a deplorably beastly expression to the obvious; sensitive men and women hate this beastly expression; therefore, by a natural but highly unscientific process, they affirm that the things so hatefully expressed do not exist. But they do exist, as any dispassionate survey of the facts makes clear. And since they exist, they should be faced, fought with, and reduced to artistic order."<sup>13</sup>

He prefers the perfect blending between truth and obvious, where sensations may get place long with the truth and that would produce a genuine work of art and literature; because generalization is good but along with substance of truth and humanity. He enhances his idea by saying beauty is necessary in terms of cosmetics, as for as women are concern specially and that's obvious but never denies the value of inner beauty, that is truth. In this respect the reverent John Keats is relevant:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, -

That is all

Ye know on earth, and ye need to know."

Unless the inner beauty all the cosmetics is futile, the outer beauty may has its impression but of very short duration. He proclaims forcefully skin foods, point rollers, electrical hair removers and cheap health motors can't have the capability to make anyone beautiful forever, the impact of artificial tools are not as permanent as the satisfied mind and inner happiness that one can get by social justice and deserving respect. Huxley points out:

"It is not ever by improving health. All men and women will be beautiful only when the social arrangements give to everyone of them an opportunity to live completely and harmoniously, when there is no

environmental incentive and no hereditary tendency towards monomaniacal vice."<sup>14</sup>

#### **Optimistic approach towards Life**

Huxley is very much in the favor of universal fraternity, brotherhood, peace, justice and space to all; he not only urges the requirement of these should be reflected by the writings of scholars but himself set milestones in this respect through the medium of his unique mode of thinking and mighty pen. As his style is always vigorous and forceful, his points appeal at once to mind as well as heart of the readers. He finds an exclusive charm in ignorance almost as the pleasure of knowledge; ignorance gives an open sky to fly, one may think even unimaginable because neither there is fear to lose nor anything like defame. As he says:

"I am not one of those conscientious travellers who, before they visit a new country, spend weeks mugging up its geology, its economics, its art history, its literature. I prefer, at any rate during my first few visits, to be a thoroughly unintelligent tourist. It is only later, when my ignorance has lost its virgin freshness that I begin to read what the intelligent tourist would have known by heart before he bought his tickets."<sup>15</sup>

Huxley was against the writing as a stereotype and dull, instead he always supported something adventurous; that is why he confesses the he used to spend his time at public places like coffee houses, tedious streets, hotel lounges etc. to get something new and sensational to observe and ponder upon. He loves something that gives him a kind of inspiration which become the tool for the moral teaching, either that is conversation, people, sight or anything but that would be at random neither set nor planned. In his kind of ignorance he had found that even the pride is a kind of blessing as for as the question of existence is concern. Though it's obviously odd to listen but he satisfied his opponent with his wit and wisdom; he says that this is one's pride that make him active and to be alive, activity is must. In his quest for the genuine writing he finds 'all men are snobs about something'. He discusses about different kind of snobberies like disease, booze, Modernity, art (platonic art snobbery and unplatonic art snobbery) and cultural snobbery.

These are only few names of the multitudes of the snobberies in other words one may say that there is nothing exists in this world about which men can not snob. The fact is, these snobs are catalysts those who act continuously for the existence of society; as neither any society nor any country may rest in stagnation, for the sustainable development and proper growth the activity is must and this responsibility of sustainable existence is strictly carried by the snobbery ridden people. As they encourage activity.

"The value of snobbery in general, it humanistic 'point', consists in its power to stimulate activity. A society with plenty of snobberies is like a dog with plenty of fleas; it is not likely to become comatose. Every snobbery demands of its devotees unceasing efforts, a succession of sacrifices." Huxley writes further, " if we regard activity as being in itself a

good, then we must count all snobberies as good; for all provoke activity"<sup>16</sup>

#### **Aim of the Study**

The present paper is aimed to touch the untouched aspects of his view of observing particular idea and especially human nature. His bold statements, witty arguments, sincere observation and keen thinking over any matter compel any one to look into any matter with a different aspect, genuine as well as true. His unbiased temperament of writing and presenting truth in its naked form, either he would be praised or criticized, forced me explore the world of his own. So as for as aim of the study is concern, this paper presents how realistic his approach was in writing, whenever he penned something, like he uttered once that sometimes truth couldn't be expressed by words, abstracts are as important as materials.

#### **Conclusion**

Aldus Huxley is philosopher for all time who preaches boldly, to please and charm is not his job that's why he put the things in so realistic manner just to enlighten an improve. He by his observation and look into the matters out of the world gives a pleasant shock to the world; his mode of thinking is in the direction to present the things in their actual form. Though his way of thinking is odd to some but undoubtedly he is one of the giants of English literary world with a purpose, pious purpose to educate mortals by his schmick philosophies. As once he asserted:

"I am always a little uncomfortable when I find myself unable to admire something which all the rest of the world admires- or at least is reputed to admire. Am I, or is the world the fool?"<sup>17</sup>

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