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The Inherent Political Current in Arun Gupto's *Culture Thought*

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Abstract:

The human society has different religion, thought and cultures. The religion is to make the human race as more civilized and disciplined than other beings. The different human societies have their peculiarities in these manners but the similarity among different cultures and communities brings harmony in the society. This article objectifies to have a great respect to all the culture and religions without any biasness. It is notable that the two perspectives of seeing a thing or event in our culture give different meanings which are purely a cultural perspective, and the political perspective. Despite having good ideas on these two heads, sometimes an excellent author even can slip erroneously to blend the pure event with the politics. This article selects a very recent Nepali literary text, Culture Thought, as an experimental material to examine the question raised here. This qualitative research renders throughout the text as per the set of definition of culture and its traits to bring out the political manner as crystal clear from the mixed ideas. It is essential for a healthy relation among religions, countries and their diversified cultures. As this selected experimental book, Culture Thought, has richness in cultural matter, it has some political ideas underlying throughout it which draw a line among nations of South Asia.

Keywords: Culture, hero, idol, myth, politics, religion, villain.

Introduction

Arun Gupto is a retired professor of English from Tribhuvan University currently working at I. A. C. E. R., a research wing and higher studies centre of Pokhara University at Baneshwor, Kathmandu. His student and contemporary friends have witnessed him teaching the papers like Non-western, Post-structural Theory, Cultural Studies, different theories, and so on with keen interest. He himself writes that he has the background of multi-nationalities from his ancestor to himself respectively, from Bangladesh to Nepal's Kapilwastu to Kathmandu via India in the South-Asia. He has been frequently writing the

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articles in the national newspapers in Nepal on the educational matter of the universities of Nepal comparing with other universities around the world. He is the author of an English text, *Goddesses of Kathmandu: Grace, Rage, Knowledge* which is a deep insight on femininity, rituals, religion, sexual politics, gender and ecology. His very recent *Cultural Thought* is the first book ever published in Nepali language in July 2023 which has four sections (Hero-Villain; Goddess's Thinking; Character Thinking, and University and Town) with altogether twenty-eight chapters including essay and interviews. This Nepali text, *Culture Thought*, is a non-fiction on the different idols of the god and goddesses of the Sanatan Hindu and the Buddhism; their comparative study; myths of China and of the Middle-East; youths of Nepal in comparison to other countries, and so on. One can read the author's curiosity on the facial contradictories of the god and goddesses and also in the mind of sculpture who erects the temple elegantly but does not make a beautiful idol rather leaves a stone for worshipping inside it.

Despite the author, Arun Gupto, having good knowledge on these two culture and politics heads, he does not even mark how he mistakenly or intentionally reaches to blend the pure cultural event with the politics. As this selected text, *Culture Thought*, has rich cultural spices, it has some political ideas side-by-side also which draw a marginal line among countries of South Asia. This qualitative research work renders throughout *Cultural Thought* as per the set of definition of culture, religion and politics, and their traits to bring out the political manner as crystal clear from the mixed ideas in the text. It also consults the related article, book, dictionaries through print and online media. The article primarily objectifies to distinguish the differentiation between the events of culture and politics, and secondarily, it objectifies a great respect to all the culture and religions globally with liberalism without any biasness in the human societies. It is essential for a healthy relation among religion, countries and their diversified cultures.

The Theoretical Tools It Applies

This research article selects a new Nepali literary text, *Culture Thought*, as an experimental material to examine the amalgam of cultural and political ideas with its impact on the reader. It is necessary to discuss some terms to seek the meaning of those terms to coincide in his book. They are principally culture, politics and religion. According to one definition of 'culture' (Hornby, 2007, p. 373) is a particular group or country with its customs and beliefs, the overall way of life, art and its social organization. This definition is having wide meaning of human activities and group concerning to the culture. But a human is not only related to material but also with some invisible things. For example, while a

human needs the materialistic visible foods, clothes, medicine, vehicle, watch, electronic gadgets and so on for livelihood, saving of body and luxury, she/he also needs affection of parents, enthusiasm, anger and so on to react on social feelings and events which all are invisible. When considering culture in this way, Brown and Hood (2005) maintain that it is the channel of signs one perceives, meanings, and the worldviews of a certain group of human beings. These two authors add that while material culture concerns with objects and artifacts like tools, garments, buildings, weapons, and art objects on the one hand, the non-material culture concerns with the language of the society, knowledge, attitudes, norms, behaviours, customs, beliefs and values. It is noticeable that the culture changes over time and place because the above two different definitions of culture from different sources have common thing that they define culture in a particular group, that is, culture of different groups have different types. It is the reason Deepa Thokar elaborates the definition of culture of Brown and Hood in a more detail that it changes over time, when a person from one culture comes in contact with the other culture and when there is advancement of science and technology (Thokar, 2023). To justify her claim, Thokar maintains the example that the Chhath festival of the Madheshi people in Nepal is, now, also the festival of the non-Madheshi people in the valley and the mountainous region of Nepal, and despite having Zeetiya and Karawa Chauth festivals for the welfare of the husbands in the Madhesh, the Teej festival of mountain and valley is also preferable for the Madheshi women.

Where there is the broad term culture, it automatically covers the human psychic activity term, politics. It is after all a part of non-material culture. But politics does not remain limited to the limited definition of culture. It has multiple dimensions, that is, one can transfer its meaning to any particular situation and can imply in her/his own way. However, according to another definition of 'politics' (Hornby, 2007, p. 1166), it is an act of getting and practicing the power in the public life and being influencing the decision in the society or in the country. For such political practice, a person joins a political party but a figure like author or a lecturer can influence the society and the country without joining any political party.

Regarding the term religion, people have different opinions. The religious people have their own definition for the religion of an individual in term of 'duty' in the family and society. For example, a parent has 'duty' to rear up the children and take care of them. This parental 'duty' can be a type of religion. In the same way, a student has studying duty as religion but the teacher has teaching duty as religion. However, the religious figure has a kind of faith in religion. According to another definition of 'religion' (Hornby, 2007, p.

1279), it is a belief that a god or gods exist and the consequently worshipping activities to those gods. In the light of such range of ideas, it is necessary to apply the vision of any definition very cautiously in a particular situation.

Reading between the Lines in *Culture Thought*

Gupto talks on the key difference between some Hindu religious scriptures under the first section, Hero-Villain, in the essay 'Spivak: A Vanguard' in this prescribed book *Culture Thought*. These religious texts are philosophical assets of the Sanatan-Hindu culture. He writes that while *Upnishad* is the theoretical form of the philosophy, *Puran* is the fictional representation of it (Gupto, 2023, p. 34/35). According to him, it is the duty of the reader to imply the meticulously written text of the author. Referring to Gayatri Chakraworti Spivak, he claims also that the South Asian Studies is not merely the study of India and its philosophy rather it is the overall study through Nepal, Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh and so on which will give the total cultural study of this area.

In his essay 'Mythical Villain' in the very book, Gupto compares the villainous character of Parijat (Vishnu Kumari Waiwa, a resident of Darjeeling who came to Nepal in 1950) in her *Shirishko phool*, that is, Flower of Rain Tree, with Suyogveer with Rabindranath Tagore's Vinodini in his literary work *Chokherwali* and Iago of William Shakespeare in *Othello*. He calls Suyogveer as a death-angel. He analyses Suyogveer as the one of the most dangerous villains in the Nepali society who enters the life of Sakambari character pretending as a gentleman and claims her life (38). But when Gupto turns from such cultural criticism to the political frame chapter 'This Time is of the Political Villain', his definition of villain also changes. Then he identifies the current political time is of the villains. He claims that the inner revolt of a person takes the form of a villain as one can see in Duryodhan of the *Mahabaharatha* epic or Iago in *Othello* (77). He further writes that the villains in South-Asia make the 'religion' as a weapon on their attractive character to the people. This last remark is transparent to India's Narendra Modi's government and his Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

Gupto's 'Abstract Thinking: Great Hero' essay in *Culture Thought*, however, hears balanced and impartial. It erects straight the hair of body of the reader. He writes that the hero or heroine has two conditions: to fight with time and to react upon the event (51). He mentions that the hero remains always a defeated but again he fights and revolts. Under the sub-title 'Hero of a Myth', he clarifies that the birth of an ideal mythical hero like Buddha and Christ is not a simple where one is, respectively, from elegance and lacks.

Here, Gupto recalls the mythologist Joseph Campbell's story in which the two wrestlers fight to be selected as hero from whom the dying one is hero. From this parallelism of death, he draws the conclusion that the symbolic death of a person, which is difficult than the real death, gives the birth of a hero (52).

Gupto's 'Goddess of Dashain: Polymorph' essay in *Culture Thought* has description of goddesses, definition of philosophy, reason behind idol creation, and so on. This part of his text really talks on cultural part purely. He understands that philosophy is nothing but the learning of something through eyesight and the idols are the symbolic art (90). Referring to David Kings, he picturises on further pages that the goddess Kali represents motion of time; Bhairawi of beginning and destruction of existence; Tara of recreation; Chhinnamasta of distributor of life energy; Tripurasundari of desire and completeness; Bhuvaneshwari of helping cosmopolitan existence; Kamala of unity of reunion; Baglamukhi of destroyer of negative energy; Mahakali of to control the demonic force, and so on. It is important to note that there is contradictory on the faces of these goddesses. The author reads those deformities with good qualities curiously. He notes that the contradictory is in the face of goddess Durga when she kills a demon Mahishasur, she is calm (93). In another essay 'The Contradictory of Goddess' in the same book, Gupto has done more study on this contradictory. He gives some more examples. He writes that the heron faced goddess Baglamukhi represents knowledge; goddess of Great Knowledge, Chhinnamasta, has head on her hand but she mates with her husband Lord Shiva after beheading herself, and the fearful face of Bajrayogini represents pity (97; 101).

The contradictory in idea and thought is natural. It is unnatural when one claims the existential body as a myth. So does Gupto in this section, 'The Contradictory of Goddess', also. He writes that some people accept the myth as history as Ram is just a character but not an existential body because the archaeology and the history cancel the fact of existence of Ram (99). Here, the author either has not read the texts over existence of Sanatan-Hindu's gods Ram and Krsishan or he does not like to hear about their existence intentionally. To support the logic, one cannot cancel the existence of Ayodhya for existence of Ram, and Mathura, Dwarka and many places in Gujarat of India for existence of Krishna where their scientifically tested buildings' bricks, walls, idols, and so on are still present on the earth and inside waterbody. Krishna Narayan Pandeya inks the birth date of Rama as 1,25,56,100 B. C. in the title 'ShreeRamasya Itihas Tithikram' as well as birth date of Shree Krishna as 3,226 B. C. and death of Krishna 3,102 B. C. total life span making 125 years, 07 months and 09 days in the title 'ShreeKrishnasya Itihas Tithikram' with their main events of life achievements in his text *Historical Eyeview of Bharata*

(*Nayandrishtam Etihashik Bharatam*) (Pandeya, 2003, p. 178; 182). On this evidence, one can say boldly that Ram and Krishna are facts but not the fiction.

The author writes on another part of culture, that is, 'nationality' elaborately in 'The Blindfaith and Questions of Nationalism' in his *Culture Thought*. While dealing the term nationality, he contradicts with some ideas when he describes citizenship. Before this essay, 'The Blindfaith and Questions of Nationalism', in the book, the author deals with some types of 'citizenship' in another essay 'We are still the Subject', which are firstly, citizenship based on the view of Margot Ruth Aline Lister's book *Citizenship and Feminist Perspective* which writes that the citizenship should be gender sensitive rather than gender neutral and it demands that one should get the citizenship as per the interest; secondly, environmental citizenship bases on the aggregate responsibility and the behavior of the citizen for sustainable development in the society rather than its printed citizenship number; thirdly, economic citizenship advocates that there should be financial independence of women from men, and fourthly, cultural citizenship bases not on differences but on diversifications and it does not believe in particular religion rather diversities (Gupto, 2023, p. 57/58).

Gupto elaborates nationalism at many places. He looks broadly upon this term. He claims that the old nationality has the bases of similarity (sameness) and othering (Gupto, 2023, p. 136). He further writes that there is no foe in the world but he confesses that there are some controversies on ideology, foreign policy and thought. It is common in the family matter even that where there is variation in ideas of members on a certain agenda, there is no peace and harmony in the family for over a time period. It is also applicable on the national level also.

Culture Thought denies the mythical concept of nationalism. When its author discusses nationality, it sounds purely a global politics with a harmony. It is important to keep in the mind that the book's name is *Culture Thought* rather *Political Thought*. The writer claims that a country cannot progress with the single theme of nationalism (Gupto, 2023, p. 137). He sees the term 'nationalism' as an obstacle and says that the global market, for example, of Cocacola or other item, cannot stop business worldwide saying that China is my enemy. He gives example of Mahatma Gandhi that he has power of negotiating with the then British Rulers in India so should be the handling of current affairs of the world. As the author gives example from India and China frequently, one can easily understand that he writes unfavorably the Narendra Modi's government in India which strongly advocates nationality theme with the countries with which it has business partnership. As

the author himself writes that there are different perspectives but no enmity in the world today, India's perspective over China or Pakistan becomes right because no any country likes its partner or neighbour encroaches its territory or sends the anti-social element for cross-border terrorism which India has been continuously raising the issue on the global platforms.

In the name of culture and nationality, Gupto seems confused in many pages of the book. This is because he thinks with broad mind worldwide but illiberally to BJP of India and Narendra Modi. He writes that sometimes there are many good things in the nationalism but arts and literature are only perfect rather than other factors ... in the version of George Bernard Shaw, patriotism is the last resort of a scoundrel (138) and again when he himself confirms in the essay 'Against the Irresistible Media' in the book that cultural nationalism is fine than the political nationalism to raise the feeling of nationality through memory, history and feelings (146). That is, the author accepts nationality but in cultural form only. If he does not accept nationality, why he gets hurt upon Manisha Koirala when she makes a remark on national territory of Nepal but the Indian media pounce upon her. When Manisha Koirala speaks on the boundary line of Nepal, some Hindi medium television channels attack on her blaming that she eats of India but sings of China (144). Here, Gupto is in the 'favour' of nationality which he denies at many other places in the book. This is contradictory because Manisha Koirala is not speaking on culture rather nationality.

The human activity like politics is a part of culture. In his book, Gupto tries to strengthen democracy in the world. He thinks that to remain in power for a long time after one term of the election in the name of race or religion is the sign of dictatorship in the person. But the author is in confusion here also. He picturises in the section 'Three Pillars of the Democracy of South-Asia: Gandhi, Pakistan's Movement and the People's War' that to remain in the power for a long time and to deny the science are the two obstacles of the democracy in the global politics (149). He puts forward an example of denying the issue of global warming labeling as propaganda. As the author takes the name of India and Narendra Modi as the head of the government directly on the page 141 to exemplify and indirectly touches the Modi government on many pages, his just mentioned two these points are not as obstacles in the context of India and Narendra Modi because this is the second term of his premiership on the performance but the science is continuously progressing in the space exploration economically cheaply or providing the COVID vaccine to the world population at low cost to save human civilization from the deadly COVID-19.

Gupto deals with the erroneous cultural practice of research in Nepal in comparison to the American and European as well as Chinese universities. He is unhappy with the culture of Nepali government not providing enough budgets for university and especially for the humanities & social sciences. He is dissatisfied with the Nepali research not having interlinked with teaching items (235). He sees that the Nepali research reports untouched in the rakes of library for here is research work just for class conduction and allowing the degrees rather than utility to make nation. He is in the hope of Nepali research to be utilized by the nation as per the necessity like China and America.

The Findings

Arun Gupto's text *Culture Thought* deals with culture in a wide range of idol, god and goddesses, myths, hero-villain, citizenship, nationality, religion, and so on. The author has not joined any political party but his writing influences invisibly as the characteristics of the politics that has been maintained in this article in the section 'The Theoretical Tools It Applies'. He is at bay from active politics in Nepal or either any country but it seems that his intermingling with many cultures from Bangladesh to Nepal via India makes him irresistible in the worry of vanishing his own cultural identity. He is in the mental condition of a migrant who moves from one place to another place but her/his mental consciousness does not leave the past like V. S. Naipaul in *The Mimic Men* or N. C. Chaudhuri in *The Content of Circe* and *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, and so on. Despite having this fact, Gupto has extensive knowledge on world's politics and the texts through meetings, travel, witnessing many of the political changes in his life in different countries. So, he likes a total political freedom of the people whether it is in Nepal or in other countries in South-Asia and he laments over the pitiable situation also on some countries like Pakistan but his study colour is studying Pakistan through Indian media. That is why; he sees some countries not highlighted in Indian media which is natural because why India or any other country should highlight its rival or any other country unnecessarily is an intellectual question. However, there is a confusion state in the mind of the author while dealing with the citizenship and nationality concepts. It seems that what he claims at one place in the *Culture Thought*, he crosses at other place in the another context while dealing any conceptual topic (Gupto, 2023, p. 57-58; p. 136). But he writes on the political theme in other book and its titles also proves, viz. *Goddesses of Kathmandu: Grace, Rage, Knowledge* which is a deep insight on femininity, rituals, religion, sexual politics, gender and ecology. The political colour of the text will give another dimension of *Culture Thought*. So, Karna comments in an article that Gupto has

touched the political issues of India unnecessarily in the context of China and Pakistan without elaborating India's problems well in the present *Culture Thought* and one-sidedly (Karna, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Gupto is a lover of cultural arts of the South-Asian religion and countries. Since he has been a university teacher with sound knowledge of the content he taught as well as he enjoys the positive changes in the university's curricula and also in Nepal, he has reached to touch some political matters unknowingly while explaining the text, *Culture Thought*, in its manner. Even his English book, *Goddesses of Kathmandu: Grace, Rage, Knowledge* which is a deep insight on femininity, rituals, religion, sexual politics, gender and ecology has also political colour when he raises the issue visibly of 'sexual politics' or invisibly of 'femininity, religion, gender and ecology'. Gupto's understanding that the globalization and the liberalism have widened the concept of citizenship is perfect in *Culture Thought* above discussed in this article with many chapters and thoroughly but he seems to make religion as a theme of Modi to remain in India is a political tool because there are developmental works, and also the progress of democracy and science both in India today. Hence, if the culture study gets lost in the dive of politics, the definition of culture of Brown and Hood, and of Hornby that has no connection with politics at all will get unmatched with the notion of Gupto. So will be the condition of Thokar's ideology on culture that it changes over time, when a person from other culture meets with a new person and also with the rapid development in science and technology. These are the natural processes of changing a culture but if one imposes the culture through media and politics, it will create nothing but a chaos.

Therefore, following are the recommendations for the author of the text, *Culture Thought*, and its readers to be exact and accurate about content while going through it:

- i) the vision of a reader and an author on a cultural event should be innocent and pure for culture's sake only. One should not intermix the idea of cultural reading it mixed with politics, and likewise, the fact proved with evidences should not be termed as fiction which becomes a political agenda;
- ii) to learn the situation of Pakistan or any other country, one should not try to complete the mission only through Indian media rather its range should be wide, however, India has its right to defend itself from its rival and such literary attack;
- iii) the matters of citizenship and nationality should be on the new horizons of

globalization and liberalism in the world respecting the traditional conceptual also to keep harmony in the society for there is a national awareness in every citizen of the world;

- iv) a good business partner or neighbor should never encroach the territory of its neighboring country or help infiltrate the anti-social elements for cross-border terrorism;
- v) one should remain in the ruling power with performance in the favour of people and the country rather than becoming a dictator;
- vi) the Nepali government should have the culture of adopting the meritorious researches for nation building work, and
- vii) after all, the culture of food, dress, song, research, science and technology are for closeness among human beings of different societies. Othering divides the human but cultural proximity unites.

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