



MATTHEW ARNOLD'S THEORY OF POETRY AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN HIS POEMS

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ABSTRACT

Great service to English Poetry has been done by Matthew Arnolds as because he was a critic also. He has rendered great services to English Poetry. He lived in a period which was facing turmoil due to scientific and material progress of England. The people of that period were fluctuating between two worlds one is dead and other is to born. Many moral as well as religious codes have been changed rapidly and people become frustrated. In this condition Arnold came before the tormented public with his poetry which proved to be a ray of hope. Arnold with his fellow countrymen craved for life in the age of darkness, longed for sweetness in world of bitterness and he has incarnate an Apostle of Culture trying to lure his fellowmen in a radiant realm where thought and life blossom like roses. Arnold has been recognized universally that he is a great poet not only of Victorian age (1831-1901) but also the whole gamut English Literature. He made poetry not a mere means of expressing emotion but as a mirror of life where the wounds of social life clearly visible. In the age of turmoil Arnold offered people safe ground poetry based on moral values of life. G.K. Chesterton said that Arnold was 'even in the age of Carlyle and Ruskin, perhaps the most serious man alive'. H. J. Muller declares that "if in an age of violence the attitudes he endangers cannot alone save civilization, it was worth saving chiefly because of such attitudes." Arnold's poetry "must be called modern because that applied to the ideas of critic, reformer, and prophet who dedicated most of his life to broadening the intellectual horizons of his countrymen." Arnold's poetry still being read and has many contemporary elements. These are as valid today as in Victorian age. Kenneth Allott said, "if a poet can never teach us to understand what we feel and how to live with our feelings, then Arnold is a contemporary."

KEYWORDS :

Arnold's Theory of Poetry

Role of a Critic : Arnold viewed criticism in a very special way. Criticism he says "A disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate what is thought and felt." A critic must play a great role. A critic must be a great person who has learned and thought deeply the past and present and must have a comprehensive knowledge of every literary movement and the great poets and writers who contributed greatly to the respective movements of literature. He should be a disinterested person without any bias. "By exercising creativity, individual needs to produce great works to achieve the literary objective. A critic plays a major role in ensuring that the creative individual understands that their works will be held against the higher standard." R. A. Scott James says— "the function of Arnold's critic in broadest sense of the term is to promote culture". He aims at "getting acceptance of his ideas" in "carrying others along with him in his march towards perfection".

Poetry is a criticism of life : Arnold held high esteem of poetry it is not only a medium of self expression or source of pleasure but it is a tool to criticize life so that we can see life more critically and must act to shape and mould life. "It is, 'a criticism of life under the condition of fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty'". Poetry in other words must concern itself with life and its problems. By criticism Arnold meant that "Nobel and profound application of ideas to life". Poetry should present life in such way that it must high ideal. The task of the poet is to judge life critically and place before us higher ideal to pursue. The present life led by the people must be judged in such a way that the ideal one should be brought before them. The aim of life is not to be enriched materially but it should be morally sound. So that the coming generation can hold esteem for that and would be encouraged to follow a more advanced one.

Moral Nature of Poetry: Poetry not only an intellectual exercises but is a source of inspiration which will lead man to choose right path. Moral does not mean a narrow religious didactic sense because it may encourage us to revolt; poetry must answer "How to live". A revolt against poetry is a revolt against life. Poetry is superior to history as because history tells us a stated fact. Religion directs man to lead a highly disciplined and austere life. But poetry presents before us an imaginary and a perfect world where there is no scope of mistake. The great poets like Milton, Dante and Shakespeare have done this not in a direct but in indirect way.

Keats says in 'Grecian Urn'—

"Forever wilt thou love and she be fair"

Shakespeare said in the 'Tempest'—

"We are such stuff

As dreams are made off and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep"

Regarding Arnold's criticism of life Eton said— "something that would illuminate and inspires us for the business of living." Arnold with Wordsworth considered poetry as— "the impassionate expression which is the countenance of all science." Arnold says that "philosophy and religion will be replaced by poetry in future".

Vulgarization of Poetry and Philistinism: Arnold in his essay 'culture and anarchy' (1869) regretted for the state of vulgarization of social values. He expressed it through the term Philistinism. Philistinism occurred from the German world Philistine. Originally it meant a German group of people who do not have university education. They do not have a progressive culture and they prefer wealth and property to culture. Now the same is applicable to English Bourgeois, merchants, middle class Victorian era (1837-1901) whose wealth rendered them to indifference to culture. They boast of their wealth and felt proud of their standards of life. But they had a very degrading moral value. As literature mirrors the life and it should cater the emotional needs of the people of present England. Eliot said— "a writer while writing about himself writes of his age." The result is the vulgarism of literature that is very deplorable. They constitute a major portion of English society and the society is represented by them. So if they are not led to the right path whole English society is to be an inferior society. So they need to purge by introducing higher ideals before them through the medium of poetry. Regarding the attitudes of these English people Arnold said— "Consider these people, then their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tone of their voice; look at them attentively observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come forth of their mouths, the thoughts which make the furniture of mind; would any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that one was to become just like these people by having it?"— Culture and Anarchy (1869) pp-28-29

Subject of Poetry : Arnold said that qualities of great poetry are to be found in the matter and substance of poetry as well as the

manner of style. Poetry must have a seriousness— 'The best poetry' Arnold defines, 'will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining and delighting us, as nothing else can'. In this regard Arnold preferred subject not contemporary but classical subjects which have perennial interest. These can appeal to modern people as well as ancient people or future generation also. So he chose subjects from mythology, saga etc. and not of contemporary subjects. These subjects must appeal people of all generation.

Touchstone Method : It is a short quotation from a recognized poetic masterpiece by Arnold 'The study of poetry' (1880), employed as a standard of instant comparison judging the value of other works. He recommends certain lines of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton as touchstones for testing the presence and absence high poetic quality in samples chosen from other poets. 'The touchstone method'— introduced scientific objectivity to critical evaluation by providing comparison and analysis as two primary tools for judging individual poets. Thus Chaucer, Dryden, Pop and Shelly fall short of the best because they lack 'high seriousness'. Even Shakespeare thinks too much of expression and too little conception. Arnold's ideal poets are Homer and Sophocles in the ancient world Dante and Milton and among moderns Goethe and Wordsworth. Arnold put Wordsworth in the front rank not for his poetry but for his 'criticism of life'. And in this light he has divided the poets 'as good', 'as great' and as 'not so good' and 'not so great'.

Grand Style : Arnold preferred grand style in writing poetry and classical restraint rather than exuberance of emotion. Grand style "arises in poetry when a noble nature poetically gifted treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject. The grand style is notable for its use of figurative language and for its ability to evoke emotion. This style is highly ornamented with stylistic devices such as metaphor and similes as well as use of personification. It involves longer speeches to influence the audience around a particular belief or ideology. This style involves heroic couplet and blank verse.

Elegy and Arnold : Arnold's best toll to expound his poetic creed is elegy. An elegy is a poem of serious reflection typically a lament for the dead. Elegy is derived from the Greek word 'Elegus' which means a song of bereavement sung long with a flute. This type of poetry originated in ancient Greece and mastered by Theocritus in the 3rd century B.C. Bion and Moschus excelled in elegy. This type of elegy was called pastoral elegy because this poem laments the death of a shepherd by his fellow shepherds in very idyllic and natural setting. Nature is personified, and invocation to Muse, plenty of classical allusion, a question put to flora and fauna in that often intervention of God and Goddess. They are called pastoral elegy. A deep reflective tone and pathos undergo through these poems. Arnold proffered this type of elegy and among English elegy writers like Milton, Shelly etc. tops the list.

Some famous elegies of Arnold :

1. Thyrisis : It is a famous elegy of Arnold and it pays a great tribute to his friend Arthur Hugh Clough. Arnold and Clough were friends and Oxford mate. Both were poets and had deep emotional affinity. But Clough died a pre-mature death. Clough's wife requested Arnold to write a poem in Clough's memory. Arnold said that in his leisure time he will think of it and advised Lady Clough to read '**Bhagawad Gita**'. After few years at last he was successful in writing about Clough. Though the poem is written in memory of Clough but the poem says little about Clough. Rather it is more a Oxford poem depicting the rural setting of Oxford and the sweet memory of Oxford life which he spent with Clough. The poem is urban in setting and very reflective in nature. It is a Victorian poem but it has modern connotation. It depicts the Victorian people, their frustration and restlessness of the intellectual Victorians who crave for spiritual illumination. This poem is a memorial of vanquished youth. This poem laments for a vanquished glory and a vanquished friendship. It eternalizes the Oxford countryside—

"How changed is here each spot man makes or fells!
In this two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same;
The village street its haunted mansion lacks,

And from the sign is gone Sibylla's name
And from the roofs the twisted chimney-stacks
Are you too changed, ye hills?"

2. Scholar Gipsy : This poem is the best of Arnold's elegy. It has stood the test of time and it is one of the finest poems of English literature. This elegy tells the story of a scholar who had left Oxford in order to master the art of gypsies who have the magical power to know the hearts of the people. He roamed in the Oxford country side and moved lonely through years. His presence is noticed only by the folk who lived in this country side. The poem depicts the fate of a common Victorian people who are out of their necessity or multi aim of life cannot live a life of peace and perfection and weaver bitterly.

"Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives nor knows for what he strives
And each half life a hundred different lives".

3. The Forsaken Merman : It is one of the most popular of Arnold's poem. It is so enchanting that if Arnold did not write any poem he would have secured a permanent place in English literature. The poem tells a love story of Merman who lives in depth of the sea with his family. A mortal named Margaret out of her emotion and romanticism married the Merman and went to the depth of the sea to live with the Merman. She became the mother of the children of Merman. But after few years she felt homesick and hearing the bell of church returned to home and never met the Merman. The Merman in hers absence became very lovelorn and called Margaret but she did not respond to his call. A deep pathos runs through the poem. The poem tells the deep love of the Merman for Margaret. In her absence his life is a hell which he cannot bear and tells in tears.

"Children's voice should be dear to a mother's ear;
children's voice, wild with pain
surely she will come again...
one last look at the white walled town
and the little grey church on the windy shore...
There came mortal,
But faithless was she...
there dwells a loved one
But cruel is she
She left lonely forever
The king of the sea"

4. Memorial Verses : Through this poem Arnold criticizes his own time and society which has fallen to 'Iron times of doubts, disputes, distraction, fears.' In the same poem Arnold paid great tribute to great European poets— Byron, Goethe and Wordsworth.

"When Byron's eyes were shut in death
We bowed our head and held our breath
He taught us little, but our sole
Had felt him like a thunders roll"...
"When Goethe's death was told, we said
Sunk, then is Europe's sagest head
Physician of iron age"...
"And Wordsworth— Ah, pale ghost, rejoice!
For never has such soothing voice...
Others taught us how to dare...
But who like him, will put it by?"

5. Dover Beach : It is one of the finest elegy of Arnold and it is as enchanting today as was in Victorian age. Through this poem Arnold reminded the spiritual doubts and uncertainty, and loss of faith in Christianity and material progress leading to skepticism. A world without faith and religion is dreary as a barren sea shore. Absence of faith makes life meaningless, without beauty.

"The sea is come tonight
The tide is full, the moon lies fair"...
"The sea of faith
was once, too, at the full, and round earths shore
lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar"...

"Hath really neither joy nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace nor help or pain;
And we are hear a on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and fight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

6. Rugby Chapel : This poem is tribute by Arnold to his own father who was a great teacher and a great man. He led a life of principle. He was admired throughout the country for his contribution to the Education System of Britain. The subdued filial love of Arnold is projected in a very grim way. Arnold compared his father with a mighty oak tree who led a life purpose. But the countrymen of Arnold lead life without meaning. They simply pass time by eating, drinking and sleeping.

"What is the course of life
Of mortal men on the earth?
Most men eddy about.
Here and there—eat and drink,
Chatter and love hate,
Striving badly achieving nothing"

7. To Marguerite: Continued: This poem is a very pathetic in nature which tells the story of unfulfilled love of the poet with Marguerite. Arnold loved her but due some reason their love was not consumed. She married to someone. But the love for Marguerite remained alive in valley of Arnold's heart like a perennial stream. This poem depicts the isolation of human beings and loneliness. The poem says about the sad fate of mankind as a whole. The treatment of mankind is very modern in nature and provides the ground for modern existential literary theory of 20th century.

"Yes; in the sea of life ensiled
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the scoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone."

8. To Shakespeare : This poem is sonnet through which Arnold has paid a great tribute to Shakespeare. Shakespeare the great poet and dramatist attracted attention for the ages and has been criticized. He is a mysterious figure whom critics down the ages failed to understand completely. Through the image of a mighty mountain emerging from the depth of the ocean and extended beyond the clouds and even makes his abode in the company of stars. The ordinary men cannot comprehend his majesty.—

"Others abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask: Thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill
That to the stars uncrowns his majesty
Planting his steadfast footsteps in the sea,
Making the Heaven of Heaven his dwelling-place,"

CONCLUSION:

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) is one of the famous poet and critics of the 19th century. He is often regarded as the father of scientific criticism. He also wrote extensively on social and cultural issues, religion and education. Arnold for the first time upheld the comprehensive view of poetry. The function of poetry is not only an intellectual exercise or means to cater the emotional necessity of any period but the function of poetry is to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. He offered commendable services to English poetry. Apart from the contemporary poets he had taken the zeal of a missionary, a moralist and a teacher. His contribution to English poetry is immense. His poems are source of perennial joy. His poems will not be obsolete. He will be read and read in the distant future also no reading of English poetry will be complete without reading Arnold.

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