

Matthew Arnold as a critic(B.A. Part1 Eng Hons Paper V 2017-20)

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Matthew Arnold is the most celebrated critic of Victorian age. English criticism was at an adolescent stage prior to Matthew Arnold which was brought to high pedestal by Matthew Arnold. Critics like Dr. Johnson and John Dryden tried their level best to give English e or literature new colour and grandeur but the credit to elevate English criticism to a new height goes to Matthew Arnold. He purged English criticism of the purities latent in it and helped it acquire a universal stature which was a distant dream. Arnold craved for purity and morality in criticism. He insisted that literature should be treated as a platform to propagate moral value. That's by he laid down certain parameters to evaluate a work of art. Actually Victorian society was passing through acute crisis following the clash between science and religion. Science challenged the supremacy of religion which created a chaos in society. People were in a dilemma whether to accept science or religion as the guiding force of society. At this juncture Arnold came forward for the rescue of suffering humanity and held the view that literature should come forward to find out a way out of a complete mess. Thus Arnold insisted that a very challenging job has to be carried out by literature. It must propagate moral values to serve as a torch-bearer of society. He also insisted that criticism should work as a watch dog to see whether or not literature has carried out its responsibility properly. He has suggested that critic should use the works of great masters of literature like Shakespeare and Milton as parameter who have enriched society by their significant contribution. This initiative will help critics evaluate the work of art and give proper treatment accordingly. Arnold has called this practice of using the works of great masters as parameter for the evaluation of a work of art as 'touch- stone theory'. Later on F. R. Leavis also expressed

solidarity with Arnolds views on criticism saying that critic must ensure that values and norms must be propagated through literature. He laid emphasis on purity of criticism which he may have inherited from Arnold.

Arnold has defined poetry as 'the criticism of life'. He insisted that poetry must concentrate on those activities which enable man to achieve excellence in life. His critical output finds expression in his two books, 'Essays in Criticism' and 'Culture and Anarchy'. It is often says that he elevated criticism to such a great height which was earlier undreamed of and insisted that criticism has to bear a new responsibility by guiding the society through giving a go ahead to literature propagating moral values. He described the function of criticism as 'a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas' Arnold widened the horizon of criticism by giving an extensive coverage to his critical output and suggested English critics to remain in touch with the literature other than their own .

Arnold was a classicist in literature. Poetry according to Arnold has to shoulder greater responsibilities. It must provide a healing touch to the problem of the suffering humanity and has thus defined poetry as the criticism of life. Poets must crave for 'high seriousness' in poetry. There should be no room for trivial or superficial ideas in poetry. He therefore took the romantic poets for task for showing least concern for sublime ideas. He therefore defined poetry as the criticism of life in his critical treatise Essays in Criticism Shelley's poetry for intellectual incoherence which was later on affirmed by T.S. Eliot and made a very disparaging remark that 'Shelley is an ineffectual angel beautified his wings in the void'. . This objective can be achieved by distinguishing the best poetry from the inferior, the genuine from the counterfeit for which we must steep ourselves in the work of the acknowledged masters which can be treated as touchstone to exemplify 'high seriousness' and superiority of diction in their poetic composition.