

1 Discuss Matthew Arnold as a literary critic.

**Introduction** — Matthew Arnold held a very significant position among the Victorian critics. He is a poet turned critic. His reputation as a great literary critic depends largely on his work 'the preface to the poem (1853)', 'Essays in criticism' first series (1866) 'Culture and Anarchy', 'Literature and Dogma' (1873), 'God and the Bible' 'Essays in

criticism' second series (1888). His criticism may conveniently be divided into literary criticism and socioethical criticism. T.S. Eliot doesn't regard Arnold as a great critic. He calls him a propagandist. A salesman, a clever advertiser rather than a great critic. He finds him lacking in the power of connected reasoning.

**Arnold's theory of poetry** — Arnold's theory of poetry has been vividly described in 'the study of poetry'. He regards poetry as a criticism of life. According to Arnold, "Poetry is a criticism of life. Under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty."

**theoretical criticism or theory of poetry:** — This definition has been condemned by J.D. Jump, Arnold further says, "the criticism of life is the noble and profound application of ideas to life and laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty as truth and seriousness of substance and matter and felicity and perfection of diction and manner. In his view poetry makes man moral better and nobler. The poet gives in his poetry what he really and seriously believes in. He speaks from the depth of his soul and creates a thing of beauty. Arnold is against direct moral teaching. He regards didactic poetry as the lowest.

**His practical criticism** — Illuminating and suggestive remarks on poets like Homer, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Thomas Gray, Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley, Robert Burns etc and poetry are covered all over Arnold's literary criticism. The essays in criticism, 1st and 2nd series, consist the best of his practical criticism. In the study of poetry, he makes a rapid critical survey of English poetry from Chaucer to the end of 18th century. In order to show that



really great poetry is the criticism of life and it has high seriousness. He applied the touch stone method of criticism. He wrote a no. of essays on both ancient and modern poets like Homer, Shakespeare, Gray, Keats etc.

His touch stone method of criticism:- In order to guide the critic in the performance of his tasks, he uses touch stone method. He was dead against abstract criticism. Arnold has used this method to judge the intrinsic value of poetry. According to Arnold, "Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and therefore can do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touch stone to other poetry." This is the method which he used to dispose of Chaucer's. He says that Chaucer is a great poetic classic because he has not the accent of classic.

Personal and Historical significance of his criticism :-

Arnold says dealing with his function of criticism, "Our personal affinities, liking and circumstances have great power to sway our estimate of that or this poet's work and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses".

Personal estimates result in the hysterical, eruptive and the aggressive manner in literature.

Arnold's criticism is of great historical importance, although it is equally fallacious and misleading. Arnold agrees with Taine that knowledge of the life, a knowledge of his character and circumstances, as well as of his social milieu is essential for correct understanding. Arnold did invaluable service to the cause of literature and literary criticism.

George Watson points out, "Arnold is the great gainsayer of criticism, the most insistent and professional of non-Confessionist." George saints very regards Arnold's services

to English criticism as a perceptist or an actual craftsman.