

## INTRODUCTION

The title of the dissertation is "Critical Evaluation of Matthew Arnold's Poetry as a Criticism of Life". The objective of this study is to evaluate Arnold's poetry in the light of his definition of poetry. According to him poetry is "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty and poetic truth". Moreover, the dissertation aims at showing how Arnold's poetry is criticism of life in the Victorian age. It also concentrates on the discussion of Arnold's poetry as a criticism of life in terms of various interpretations by Matthew Arnold himself and other critics.

Arnold was a poet turned critic who evolved his own theory of poetry. But his theory of poetry as a criticism of life aroused my interest and I felt that there might be some truth, otherwise he had not defined/so. Some of his poems hold true to his ideal i.e. in most of his poems, we observe 'the criticism of life' in (a) one or the other sense.

Arnold's concept of 'Criticism of life' has various levels of meaning and his poetry is to be judged on their basis also. In general sense of the term 'criticism of life', Arnold criticises life in the Victorian age. Some

times 'criticism of life', as a noble and profound application of ideas to life' is obvious in some of his poems. 'Criticism of life' is interpreted as an attempt to realise an ideal life. It is a blending of objective life and poets imagination or a blending of ideas and the concrete. The author means by 'criticism of life' the artist's critical penetration into the life he presents'. It means interpretation of life and it implies "the judgment that selects, the imagination that re-arranges, the passion that turn the whole world to his own bent, fancy with her dainty fingers flicking up the images in fact, that faculty of man which carries an emotional meaning into outside things, the creative faculty which must be called critical only because it has to work upon life which is outside". It is not a 'criticism of life' abstracted from life, but the critical force which enters into the author's presentation of life. Sometimes criticism of life means presence of High-seriousness. The 'criticism of life' beautifies, intensifies, illumines and heightens life. It is not only an appreciation of life but also a creation of life. It is sometimes a process of idealisation.

Arnold himself explains his concept of 'criticism of life' he writes "Truth and seriousness of substance and matter, felicity and perfection of diction and manner, as

these are exhibited in the best poets, are what constitute a criticism of life made in conformity with the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth; and it is by knowing and feeling the works of those poets, that we learn to recognise the fulfillment and non-fulfillment of such conditions". What Arnold actually means by criticism of life is that poetry is not a photographic picture of life. It will present an ideal life which one should seek to realise. The ideas expressed in poetry will be integrated with life. Poetry will follow the principles of poetic truth and poetic beauty. By poetic truth Arnold means truth and high seriousness. In other words poetry must be ~~reach~~ in matter. Poetry should not be written on trivial subjects. By poetic beauty Arnold means expression. Matter and expression, form and content, should go hand in hand. In this way, poetry becomes a source of consolation and delight.

Arnold believes that poetry does not present life as it is rather the poet adds something to it from his own noble nature, and this something contributes to criticism of life. Poetry makes men moral, better/nobler, but it does so not through direct teaching, or by appealing to reason like science, but by appeal into the soul, to the whole of man. The poet gives in his poetry what he seriously believes in he speaks from the depth of his soul, and speaks it so

beautifully that he creates a thing of beauty, and so a perennial source of joy, sustaining and delighting us, as nothing else can". It answer to the question how to live, but it does so indirectly by conforming to the ideals of truth and goodness. Arnold is against direct moral teaching; he regards didactic poetry as the lowest.

In writing criticism in verse, Arnold conforms to his own definition of poetry as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. Moreover, Hugh Walker is of the opinion that his definition of poetry as a criticism of life is applicable to his own poetry.

In order to evaluate Arnold's poetry as a criticism of life, I have devoted the first chapter to Arnold's poetical and critical works and the Victorian age. In the second chapter I have decided to discuss Arnold's theory of poetry. The third chapter is devoted thoroughly to the discussion of Arnold's poetry as a criticism of life and the final one concludes the whole.