UNIT 5: MATTHEW ARNOLD: "LITERATURE AND SCIENCE"

UNIT STRUCTURE

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- describe the life of Matthew Arnold
- explain the context of the essay "Literature and Science"
- analyse Arnold's style and language
- examine the contributions of Matthew Arnold as an essayist

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will give you an introduction to Matthew Arnold and provide you with a detailed study of the man, his life and his works.

A detailed synopsis of the essay has also been included in this unit for a better understanding of the interrelation of literature and science. Over and

above, this unit aims to acquaint you with the themes that form a crucial part of the essay. Besides this, the unit shall also discuss the style and the language used by Arnold.

5.3 MATTHEW ARNOLD: LIFE AND WORKS

Matthew Arnold has always been rated very highly among English essayist. It was through his essays that Arnold asserted his greatest influence on literature. His writing on the role of literary criticism in society advance classical ideas and advocate the adoption of universal aesthetic standards. His insistences on standards, the total quality of civilisation have left permanent marks on modern criticism. His essays articulate the desire to establish universal standards of taste and judgement. According to Arnold, 'critical inquiry' should not be limited to literature but should also include theology, history, art, sociology, science and political theory.

Arnold's essays deal with, practically, the entire fabric of English civilisation and culture in his day. His writings are all directed by one clear and consistent critical purpose. The purpose was to rationalise our intellect in terms of art, literature and religion.

Matthew Arnold, the son of Thomas Arnold, the famed headmaster of Rugby School, was born on 24th December 1822 at Laleham, Middlesex, England. He was an English poet and cultural critic. He worked as an inspector of Schools. He has been characterised as a 'sagewriter', a type of writer who chastizes and instructs the readers on contemporary social issues.

Arnold was not only poet but also a social and religious critic who devoted a large part of his life to demonstrating the central part that an adequate literary culture could and should play in society. He also tried to rescue religion from the rationalist scoffers on the one hand and the rigid fundamentalists and dogmatists on the other by propounding a liberal Christianity based on a view of the Bible.

Matthew Arnold married Frances Lucy, daughter of Sir William Wightman, Justice of the Queen's Bench. He had six children. He died

suddenly in 1888 of heart failure when running to meet a tram that would have taken him to the Liverpool Landing Stage to see his daughter.

As a literary man, Matthew Arnold published one of the most significant volumes of poems *Empedocles on Etna* in 1852. The second volume of the same anthology was published in the same year entitled *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems*. In 1853 Arnold published another anthology entitled *Poems: A New Edition*, a selection from the two earlier volumes famously excluding *Empedocles on Etna* but adding new poems, *Sohrab and Rustum* and *The Scholar Gipsy*. After a grand success of the anthology mentioned above its second part appeared in 1854 entitled *Poems: Second Series*, including a new poem *Balder Dead.*

In 1857 Arnold was selected as the Professor of Poetry at Oxford and he was the first in this position to deliver his lectures in English rather than in Latin. He was interested in European educational practices and conducted three trips to the continent in 1859 for its study. He self published *The Popular Education of France* (1861) which was later published under the title *Democracy* (1879).

From poetry Arnold moved on to the realm of essays. His *Essays and Criticism: First Series* appeared in 1865. *Essays and Criticism: Second Series* appeared posthumously in 1888. *Thyrsis*, an elegy to Clough, who had died in 1861, came to light in 1866. One of Arnold's major works in social criticism,*Culture and Anarchy* appeared in 1869. It is a series of periodical essays. The preface was added in 1875. The essay divides English society into three constituent classes: aristocracy, bourgeoisie and working class. None of these classes either sympathizes with or upholds a truly refined high culture which could stand unmoved in the political and religious order. According to Arnold, "[culture] seeks to do away with classes ...". *Literature and Dogma*, Arnold's major work in religious criticism appeared in 1873. Another significant essay composed by Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Science* was published in 1882.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. How did Matthew Arnold begin his career?

Q2. How did Arnold's life come to an end?

Q3. Name any two major works of Matthew Arnold.

Q4. What are the genres that Arnold was associated with?

5.4 EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT

"Literature and Science", the two terms present in the title of Matthew Arnold's essay are extremely diverse in their explanation. But Arnold, through the work tries to bring in a logical relation between them. He focuses on the gap between science and humanities in the 19th century when the industrial age had set in and the humanities did not matter to anyone.

In a practical world, philosophy does not have a strong grip. It is always termed as unpractical and **impracticable**. Having a minute observation of the essay we come to know that Arnold supports not only rational thinking as a part of education but also emphasizes on the knowledge of nature. He believes that the knowledge of nature is interesting to all men since the result of the scientific investigations of nature had a bearing on human life. At the very outset of the essay, Arnold seems to be supporting the practical people against the philosophies of Plato. Later on, he attempts to highlight the concept that the notion of the practical people is not worth supporting as all branches of knowledge are important and undoubtedly humanities are not an exception in this regard.



Impracticable : impossible or difficult in practice.

Supporting an unrestricted and objective criticism, Arnold implies that the prosperity of a society is dependent upon its intellectual life which is free from personal, political and practical considerations. From this implication of Arnold, a fact comes to light that only intellectual attitude is not sufficient but it should be rational, as well as, liberal. This fact undoubtedly proves that literature and science are internally like two sides of the same coin despite being different in external sense.



Belles Letters: humane letters

Albuminous: of or pertaining to albumin (a kind of monomeric proteins occur in egg white.

Arnold is totally against the idea of the practical people giving the sole importance on 'natural sciences' as the core of education. According to Arnold, "all knowledge is interesting" and the concept of supporting natural science as the core of education can never be accepted. He pinpoints that the human life is built around powers (power of conduct, intellect, beauty, social life and manners) of which we have the need for. Giving more importance on humane letters Arnold stresses that science discredits religion. Further, he adds that it is hard to show the relation between powers and humans without **belles lettres**.



Copernicus: Nicolaus Copernicus, a renaissance mathematician, an astronomer who formulated a model of the universe that placed the sun rather than the earth at the centre of the universe.

Galileo: Galileo Galilei, an Italian astronomer, physicist, engineer, philosopher and mathematician.

Newton: Sir Isaac Newton, English physicist, mathematician, astronomer, alchemist and natural philosopher.

Darwin: Charles Darwin, an English naturalist and geologist, best known for his contribution to evolutionary theory.

To strengthen the connection between science and humanities/ religion, he refers to a fine example of an egg and a chick. He says, " It is very interesting to know, that, from the **albuminous** white of the egg, the chick in the egg gets the materials for its flesh, bones, blood, and feathers; while, from the fatty yolk of the egg, it gets the heat and energy which enable it at length to break its shell and begin the world." To be more specific, the albumious white of the egg refers to the knowledge of natural science and on the other hand the fatty yolk of the egg refers to the knowledge of nature. It establishes a clear cut concept of balancing science and humanities in a highly remarkable way.

To sum up, Arnold feels that humanities cannot in any way lose its position in the leading educational system despite repeated oppositions. According to Arnold literature or humanities is the base for "knowing the world and ourselves." Moreover it would be incorrect to say that Arnold is strictly not in favour of natural science. Defending the significance of natural science, Arnold forwards a comment that to know the best of a modern nation does not mean just knowing their belles lettres but we must acquaint ourselves with what has been done by **Copernicus, Galileo, Newton , Darwin** and so forth. Hence, Arnold feels that to cater humans with knowledge in true sense the connection between literature and science is undisputable.

5.5 MAJOR THEMES

Arnold belongs to such an age when the rapid advent of science and technology was one of the most remarkable aspects. Due to the rapid

advancement of science people seemed to be more rational and as a result they became highly dependent on facts and ideas which were scientifically proven rather than being affected by the traditional ideas of religion and humanities. This attitude has created a new era of differentiating the two ranches of knowledge, literature and science from each other. With special reference to the prescribed text we may say that the gap between science and literature has found a special expression and gives the readers a new provision of thinking in a new thought provoking manner. In short, the inevitable aspect of Victorian period, conflict between faith and science is one of the major themes of the essay "Literature and Science". Here, Arnold tries his level best to minimize the gap between science and literature by forwarding different sorts of references from numerous fields of study.

Another theme of the essay is the Arnoldian concept of education. Education is a vast subject that can never be captivated in a limited spun of interest. To support the broad concept of education, Arnold, very critically portrays that only the knowledge of natural sciences is not sufficient to justify the concept of education. Invigorating the novelty of educational value, Arnold strives to focus on the value of all branches of knowledge as an integral part of it. According to him all knowledge is interesting and the knowledge of humanities is not an exception in this regard. Hence, to put the essay in a nutshell, we can say that the concept of education does not stand on any one particular study but is an amalgamation of all branches of knowledge.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5. Explain the essay "Literature and Science" in about 200 words.

Q6. To which Victorian conflict does the essay refer?

5.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Matthew Arnold's argument intermixes a post- Carlylean irony and an often heavy handed wit; it reiterates phrases, terms and embodied ideas; it

offers its readers what purports to be an investigative moralism and it attempts to establish the nature of a broad and all – embracing notion of culture. His polished, didactic and satirically witty prose works have earned him quite a big fan following. His narratives and descriptions were pleasant and picturesque, loaded with outstanding similes to produce a lingering effect on the readers' mind. Arnold's approach was markedly eclectic. He derived ideas from a broad and diverse range of sources.

Arnold's essays show demand of development, clarity and arrangement and simplicity of style which marked his inspiration from the Greeks as well as Goethe and William Wordsworth.

The style of Arnold has been praised at once too much and too little. His words have such fascinating effect that whether or not you agree with the matter, the manner inspires you with a personal affection for the author. He focused his writings on an examination of how things work for us here and now.

Arnold uses a language that binds him and his readers intimately, arising the feeling that the reader is actually sitting opposite him engaged in an informal, intimate and cosy private conversation.

In this essay "Literature and Science", Arnold strives to show the readers a well-arranged relation between Literature and Science in an immensely critical manner which is not only convincing but also is of great significance.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7. What idea of Arnold's style did you get after reading the essay?



5.7 LET US SUM UP

After reading this unit, you have been familiarised with Matthew Arnold- his life, his works and his place in the world of the English essay. Furthermore, you have been introduced with one of his most significant

essays where he focuses on a torn relation between education composed principally of liberal arts (knowledge of humanities) and education composed significantly of scientific knowledge and professional training (knowledge of natural science).



5.8 FURTHER READING

1. Abrams, M.H. (2005). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Bangalore: Prism Books Pvt.Ltd..
2. Choudhury, Bibhash. (2012). *English Social and Cultural History*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd.
3. Daiches, David. (1994). *A Critical History of English Literature*, (Volume II) New Delhi: Gopsons Pvt.Ltd.
4. Sanders, Andrew. (2007). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Websites:

https:// en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew Arnold.

www. literaryhistory.com>ARNOLD

http:// www.bartleby.com/223/0407.html.

www.literature-study-online.com>essays.



5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Matthew Arnold started his career as an Inspector of Schools.

Ans to Q 2: Arnold died suddenly in 1888 of heart failure when running to meet a tram that would have taken him to the Liverpool Landing Stage to see his daughter.

Ans to Q 3: *Empedocles on Etna(1852)* and *Culture and Anarchy(1869)*.

Ans to Q 4: Poetry, literary, social and cultural criticism.

Ans to Q 5: Refer to Section 5.4.

Ans to Q 6: The conflict between faith and science.

Ans to Q 7: Refer to Section 5.6.



5.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. How does Matthew Arnold compare and contrast the two branches of knowledge in his essay "Literature and Science"?

Q2. What particular aspect of Matthew Arnold's style do you find most appealing and why?

Q3. Why does Matthew Arnold say that he does not agree with the practical people's idea of education?

Q4. State the grounds on which Arnold supported literature as an integral branch of knowledge?

Q5. Arnold uses the example of an egg and a chick in his essay "Literature and Science". Explain the significance of this example.

Q6. Make a note on Matthew Arnold's career as an essayist with reference to "Literature and Science".

Q7. What, according to Arnold, is the prosperity of a society dependent upon? Explain.

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