

# Matthew Arnold as a Pastoral Elegiac Poet : A Critical study

Dr. Vitthal A. Ugemuge

(Head Dept. of English)

A.M. College Adyal

## Abstract :-

The term *Pastoral*, is derived from Latin word 'pastor' which means a shepherd, so that pastoral poetry deals with the bucolic life of shepherds. Poets like Theocritus, Virgil and Moschus are usually associated with pastoral poetry. Lemon as pointed out that "... is characterized by certain conventions". The poet and the deceased are shown as shepherds living in the midst of nature which is personified and joins in the mourning. The major features of pastoral elegies begins with an invocation to the muse and contains numerous classical allusions. In fact, Theocritus, the father of pastoral poetry. Matthew Arnold was the most melancholy and elegiac poet in English Literature. One of an eminent critic Garrod writes at length on the elegiac character of his poetry which deserves to be quoted: "If I had to define Arnold's place in poetry, I should be disposed to say him, quite simply that he is the greatest elegiac poet in our language ...." Matthew Arnold composed two remarkable pastoral elegies i.e. *The Scholar Gypsy* and *Thrysis*. Arnold naturally turned to the Greek and Latin convention in this respect.

## Introduction :-

Matthew Arnold has two pastoral elegies; *The Scholar Gypsy* and *Thrysis* stepped in classical lore. Arnold naturally turned to the Greek and Latin convention in this respect. And yet Milton's *Lycidas*, Shelley's *Adonais* and Arnold's *The Scholar Gypsy* and *Thrysis* are not of the same pattern. Milton mourns his friend in the character of a shepherd. Shelley also mourns Keats in the character of a shepherd. In Milton's *Lycidas* the mourner wears a 'mantle blue' and shepherd in *Adonais* has magic mantles rent. In both the pagan mythology and rural conventions are artistically interwoven. Arnold's *The Scholar Gypsy* is not a carbon copy of the traditional pastoral poems. The poet says :-

Go for they call you, shepherd, from the hill.

Go, shepherd and until the wattled cotes!

No longer leave thy wistful fock unfed.

Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats. (Lines 1 to 4)

Here the poet does not represent himself as a shepherd. The poet dismissed the shepherd as soon as the poem begins. The scenes described in the poem are not idyllic. They relate to urbanised Oxford, where one does not expect wild or rustic scenes. Here Arnold has no scope to invest nature with the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration and the poets dream. In a truly pastoral poem the rural setting must be idealised. Moreover, there is no lament here for the death of a shepherd. It is the lament for vanished faith.

The tone of the poem has a modern touch. The poem is, no doubt, pastoral, but the spirit breathed in it is typically Victorian the spirit of unrest spiritual illumination.

Another literary pastoral elegy of the poem of Arnold's *Thrysis* that commemorates his friend, Arthur Clough. *Thrysis* is a companion piece to *The Scholar Gipsy* is one of the finest poems inspired by Oxford, almost unique in English Literature. It can compare favourably with Milton's *Lycidas* or Shelley's *Adonais*. Clough and Arnold were intimate friends at Oxford, and although the same intimacy could not be maintained they had loving regard for each other. Arnold mourns here :

Alack, for Corydon no rival now!  
 But when Sicilian shepherds lost a mate  
 Some good survivor with his flute would go  
 piping a ditly sad for Bion's fate;  
 And cross the unpermitted ferry's flow, .... (Lines 81 -85)

Corydon, i.e. Arnold has no rival now. For *Thrysis* Clough his only rival, is no more. The poet recalls the pastoral poets of Sicily. On the death of Bion, his friend Moschus wrote an elegy to commemorate him. In fact, *Thrysis* is unrivalled. "No poem is any language," says *Swinburne*, "can be more perfect as a model of style, *unsurpassable* certainly, it may be unattainable."

The idea of the poetic contest between *Thrysis* and *Lityersis* is borrowed from Moschus. The language of the poem is modelled on that of Theocritus. In a letter to his mother, Arnold wrote: "The diction of the poem was modelled on that of Theocritus, whom I have been much reading during the two years this poem has been forming itself, and I meant the diction to be artless as to be almost heedless".

### Conclusion :-

While brooding pastoral elegies of Arnold's it is assumed that both of his poems – *Thrysis* and *The Scholar Gipsy* are remarkable piece of literary piece in English Literature. The composition of two pastoral elegies placed him as one of the outstanding poet in English languages. In this connection J.C. Shairp, Arnold wrote: "*Thrysis* is a very quiet poem, but think solid and sincere. It will not be popular however ....! John Morley also assigned to *Thrysis*" "the second place" among the greatest English elegies. Tennyson sent a message to Arnold, not to write any more of those prose things, like Literature and Dogma, but to give us something like his *Thrysis*. Garrod one of an eminent critic writes: "How great I think it, I am almost afraid to say plainly .... Mathew Arnold was conscious that in *Thrysis*, he had too much left out Clough, that the man was not there or that he had not made his sufficiently real .... But if he has not made which the Oxford countryride is delineated a living scene. This truth of scene gives to *Thrysis* an element of beauty wanting in our great elegies .... If *Thrysis* and *The Scholar Gipsy* had no other merits yet their art in landscape, and the fine sentiment with which they particularise, with which they fix natural details – these two talents alone might vindicate for Matthew Arnold a place with the greatest poet

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