

(01) B. A. Part I (English Honours)

victorian Poetry

victorian age was an age of great activities. It was an age of Catholic emancipation, parliamentary reform, suppression of slavery in the colonies and the construction of first railway in 1825. Two important factors of the victorian age were (i) The steady advance of democratic ideals and (ii) the growth of science and scientific spirit. The growth and advancement of democratic ideals led to the breakdown of feudalism and brought in social and intellectual change. The growth of education contributed to the growth of human knowledge. The works of Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens, Kingsley and Mrs. Browning show that the literature of the period was fed by social interest and practical deals. The changes brought about by the industrial revolution have found reflections in the society of the age. The changes were manifold. The problem of bread, unfortunate

te and destitute children, the horrors of prison life, the need for reform in the jail administration, the movement of the working class - all are reflected in the literature of the period. The great spiritual and intellectual unrest is attributed to the growth of scientific spirit and this is a dominant characteristic of the Victorian era. Science, in addition to influencing people's outlook, fostered a spirit of restlessness and commercialised modern life. Wordsworth laments the tendencies and cries out:-

The world is too much with us
late and soon,
getting and spending we
lay waste our powers.

It has already been said that the prophetic spirit had passed from the hands of the poets to the hands of the prose writers. Though the former still held a high rank but it cannot be said for certain that the influence

exercised upon by the poets was equal to that of the prose writers. The main source of inspiration of the Victorian poets lay in the restless activity of the mind. They were interested in the truth of things. Philosophy and psychology had much appeal for them. Victorian poems are critical and the poet's ideal lies in objectivity. The important poets of the Victorian era are Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, E. B. Browning and George Meredith.

Alfred Lord Tennyson - He is the most representative of the Victorian poets. Almost all the important currents of thought can be seen in his poetical works. Tennyson is at his best when describing or depicting visual beauty. There is a blending of acute observation and delicate poetic feeling in his poetry. He paints nature as a background. During Victorian era science had invaded the realm of art too.

When we look into the description of nature and read his nature poetry, we find them "to be the works of an inspired scientist." His most memorable work is "In Memoriam" and "Christmas Eve and Easter Day." They are more than the reflection of the troubled thoughts. They bring out Tennyson's dramatic vigour and imaginative insight. 'Maud' is a love poem which is a blending of glorious phrasing and expression of sheer ecstasy and rapture of passion. 'The Lady of Shalott' has a haunting music. 'In Memoriam' is not only an elegy written after the sad demise of Arthur Hallam but is an exposition of the poet's religious philosophy. It also presents the questions interrelated with science and religion which had started troubling the poet's generation. Other important poems of Tennyson are 'The Princess', 'Idylls of the King', 'The Lotus Eaters' and 'Break, Break, Break'.

Robert Browning - He was a versatile genius. The unique power of the poet lies in his comprehension and dramatic representation of the varied aspects of human nature. If Tennyson was the most representative of the Victorian poets, he was the most intellectual representative of his generation and the generation that followed. No poet of the nineteenth century can ~~be~~ exceed Browning in dramatic power. The defect of the poet is that he pays scant regard to the understanding of the people. The period of Browning's activity may be divided in four parts.

- (a) The period of experiment (1832-1846) - When he seems to be seeking his true medium. The works of the period are 'Pauline', 'Paracelsus', 'Sordello and Dramatic Lyrics', 'Pippa Passes' etc.
- (b) The period of his best works (1846-1869) - A period when he tries to blend emotional and intellectual sides. The works of this

period is varied in nature. The important works of the period are 'Dramatic Romances', 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day', 'Men and Women' and 'In a Balcony'.

(c) It is in this period (1869-1876) that his intellectual side gets the upper hand. Though the reverse of this period is caustic and dialectic, it lacks in imaginative beauty - "Browning the thinker comes up but - Browning the artist declines". The important works of the period are 'Dramatis Personae', 'The Ring and the Book', 'Aristophanes' Apology' etc.

(d) In this period (1876-1889) Browning the artist reawakens the freshness and forcefulness of the early days are lacking but the reawakening is enough to delight us with some measure of the old magic. The works of this period are 'La Saisiaz', 'The Two Poets of Croisic', 'The Dramatic Gdyls', 'Jocoseria' etc.

Matthew Arnold - The source of Arnold's inspiration is Greek classics. His 'Strayed Traveller' and 'Meyerrinus' are Greek in form and treatment. A champion of classical ideals of poetry, Arnold adhered to a melancholic philosophy of life. His important works are 'Strayed Traveller and other poems', 'Merope' and 'Hud poems'. The individual poems are 'The Scholar Gipsy', 'Thyrsis', 'Sobres and Restum', 'Dover Beach' etc. 'Thyrsis' is an elegy and is in the group of three important elegies, the other two being 'Adonais' and 'In Memoriam'.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning - The poetess, the wife of Robert Browning was not as gifted as her husband but was definitely studious, ~~that~~ thoughtful and dreamy. Her work 'The Battle of Marston' was published by her father in 1826. At fifteen she became an invalid due to a spinal injury. Shortly after that her fam-

ily moved to London and the young poetess published 'The Romance of Margaret', 'The Rhyme of Duchess Mary' and 'The Lay of the Brown Rosary'.

George Meredith - His first poem was published in 1849 in 'Chamber's Edinburgh Journal' to commemorate the battle of Chillianwallah. The first volume he published was a book of 'poems' in 1851 which included 'Love in a Valley' dedicated to his father-in-law. Then came the 'Shaving of Shagpat' which was very much appreciated by George Eliot. Meredith collected some of his poems and published them in two volumes, namely 'Poems of Tracy Life' and 'A Reading of Earth' and then returned to novel with 'One of our Conquerors'.

The end.

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