***Submitted by***

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***Dover Beach***

**About the poet:** Mathew Arnold, the son of Dr.Arnold of Rugby, was born on December 24 1822. He studied at the famous university of Oxford. He was elected Fellow of Oriel. In 1847, he accepted the post of Secretary to Lord Landsdowne. He was later elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1857.He died in 1887.

Arnold’s famous works are *Essays in Criticism*, *Culture and Anarchy,* *Friendships Garland, Literature and Dogmas, Discourses in America, Sohrab and Rustom, The Scholar Gypsy, Merope, Thyrises, Rugby Chapel* etc.

**Substance** **of the poem**

Dover Beach is a lyrical poem composed by Victorian poet Mathew Arnold. It was first published in 1867 in the collection titled New Poems. Set against the backdrop of Dover, a famous English ferry port in England, the poem gives expression to the conflict between science and religion that the Victorian society experienced.

The majestic seascape of Dover visible from the poet’s sea facing room during one of his visits to Dover with his wife Frances in 1851 inspired the composition of this poem. The overwhelming and awe inspiring beauty of Dover beach on a full moon light is too irresistible to miss. So, the poet invites his wife to the window to enjoy the beauty of Dover spread out before them. At night, the sea wears a calm and peaceful look. The flickering light of the lighthouse on the French coast bordering Dover falls on the sea water. The tall and chalk white cliffs of Dover stand tall and proud at a distance.

The aural imagery is quite pronounced in the poem. The aural imagery soon overtakes the visual as the reader is alerted to different sounds produced by the waves hitting the shores of Dover. The approaching waves hit the shore and lap up all the pebbles lying on the beach and retreat. As they hit the shore again, they fling the pebbles back again on the beach. This repeated action of the waves produces a “grating roar” that sounds like a painful cry. The thick panting and heaving of the waves disrupts the silence of the surroundings. According to Arnold, the sound of the waves rises and falls in accordance with the forward and backward rush of the waves. Arnold compares the moaning sound of the waves with the sad music of human life. To reproduce the words of Wordsworth, it echoes “the still sad music of humanity.”

The poet goes on to add that the Greek tragic dramatist Sophocles too must have heard a similar note of eternal sadness while he sat by the Aegean Sea and listened to the rumbling waves. It is this underlying note of sadness, Arnold presumes, that must have inspired Sophocles to create tragic dramas of human misery and suffering. By alluding to Sophocles, Arnold lends a classical touch to his poetic narrative in true Victorian style.

Thereafter, Arnold narrows down his focus to the Victorian conflict between science and religion. The advancement in science and technology coupled with the gaining popularity of the evolutionary theories shook the religious foundation of Victorian society. Religious faiths and values were put to the test and found wanting. People found themselves in a state of confusion whether to embrace science or forsake their religious faith and beliefs. Arnold laments the loss and steady erosion of religious values from society. He wistfully looks back to the time when the Victorian society firmly rested on the rock solid foundation of religion and the sea of faith prevailed. Faith protected human lives like a girdle and gave the Victorian Society a sense of stability and order. But all that is past. Arnold uses a very poignant image of the retreating waves to describe the disappearance of religiosity and spirituality from human lives.

Finally, the poet sings of the power of love to tide over the present crises. In a world bereft of faith, it is only love that can sustain one another. Only love is life affirming and has the power to turn things around. The poet therefore appeals to his beloved to be his constant companion. He wishes that in a world filled with despair and hopelessness, they should draw strength and inspiration from each other. Beneath the superficial beauty of the world, there is a void. There is no sense of joy, certitude hope love or kindness left in this world. In the darkling plain, people grope around for a sense of meaning. Stuck in a state of blind confusion, they struggle to balance the conflicting claims of religious faith and scientific doubt.

**Reference to the context**

1. And we are here as on a.......night

The quoted lines occur in Mathew Arnold’s lyric titled *Dover Beach*. The poet gives expression to the feelings of deep seated anxiety that Arnold suffered due to the breakdown of the religious faith in the Victorian society.

The poets begin with a description of the majestic beauty of Dover Beach on a full moon light. The still and silent waters of the sea, the shadow of the tall Dover cliffs and the moon blanched land lends an ethereal charm to the surroundings. The majestic seascape overwhelms the poet with a sense of awe. The grating roar of the waves as they lash the shores gathering and flinging the seaside pebbles as they move to and fro breaks the silence of the sea. The rumbling sound of the waves arouses melancholic thoughts in his mind. It makes him conclude that the Greek dramatist Sophocles too must have heard the same mournful sound of the waves while sitting by the Aegean Sea. And the eternal note of sadness borne by the waves must have inspired him to pen his tragic pieces on human pain and suffering. The disappearance of religious faith from Victorian society alarms the poet. The clash of religious faith and scientific temper has disrupted the stability of the Victorian society. The poet watches helplessly as the sea of faith dries up. Against this bleak scenario, he reposes his faith in the power of love that can make life worth living in a world bereft of hope, love, kindness or joy. He pleads his wife never to stop loving him. In the given lines, the poet draws a depressing picture of the contemporary times. Devoid of faith, the Victorian society has been reduced to a mere wilderness. It is a darkling plain where the people are caught in the clash of ideologies between religious faith and scientific doubt. The people are left with other choice. They can either struggle against or seek escape from the prevailing chaos and confusion.

1. **Write the critical appreciation of the poem Dover Beach**

Dover Beach is one of the celebrated poetic works of Mathew Arnold. Arnold’s expertise was more in prose than poetry. Yet, with Dover Beach, Arnold established his credentials as an equally gifted poet. The poem was first published in 1867 in the collection titled New Poems. Within a canvas of 32 lines, the poem combines the diverse elements of life, love and nature. The poem is structured as a dramatic monologue suggesting a conversation between the poet and his wife.

The poem begins as a quintessential nature poem with the depiction of the majestic seascape of Dover Beach. The poet weaves in a romantic atmosphere by the reference to the fair moon, the calm sea, the moon blanched land, the tranquil bay and the sounds of the waves on the background. The implied presence of his wife further heightens the romantic atmosphere.

However, in the second stanza there is a sudden shift in the mood. What begins as a nature lyric slowly attains serious and philosophical undertones. The reference to the sad and doleful music produced by the waves hitting the shore has an element of eternal sadness. The poet rides on this link of eternal sadness to venture into the realm of Greek poetry and introduce Sophocles the Greek dramatist into the poem. Victorian poets had a special fascination for the classical past and Arnold too experiments with same.

The poem is a realistic and authentic picture of the Victorian society in that it gives voice to the Victorian tug of war between science and religion. The fast decline of religious values and faith due to the onslaught of scientific advancement alarms the poet. There is a tone of regret as he longs for the past Victorian society when the sea of faith prevailed. The image of the sea of faith bounded by a bright girdle is most appropriate in conveying the idea of a society built on the firm foundations of religious faith and beliefs.

The poem can also be interpreted as a love poem in so far as it highlights the power of love. According to Arnold, love alone can come to their rescue in a world beset with the conflict between faith and doubt. It is the poet’s firm belief that love alone can ensure stability to their lives otherwise threatened by the forces of doubt and scepticism.

1. **Comment on the mood of the poem of the poem Dover Beach.**

Dover beach is one of the most memorable poems of Mathew Arnold. Published in 1867 in the collection titled New Poems, it is set against backdrop of Dover, a famous English ferry port in England

The poem deals with the quintessential Victorian conflict between Science and religion. During the Victorian era, the growth of the scientific temper threatened the religious faith and beliefs held dear by the Victorian society. It is this very conflict that is at the core of the poem. The mood of the poem is therefore by and large serious.

In the opening stanza, the poet is seen enjoying the majestic seascape of Dover. The mood of the poem at this stage is mainly serene. There is a sense of quiet and silence that pervades the atmosphere. The reference to the calm sea, the tranquil bay or the sweet night air further heightens this sense of peaceful surroundings. The poet too is in a mood of quiet contemplation thoughtfully looking at the vast ocean sprawled out afore his eyes.

However, the mood of undisturbed calm is slightly disrupted by the poets’ reference to the sound of the waves lashing at the shore at some distance. He asks his wife to listen to the sound of the waves. This first hint of human communication by the seashore also disrupts the silence of the surroundings. The reference to the ‘grating roar’ as the wave gathers and hurls the pebbles during their backward and forward rush breaks the silence of the seas. This characteristic sound of the waves reminds Arnold of the great Greek dramatist Sophocles known for his tragic depiction of human lives. The poet assumes that Sophocles also must have heard a similar sound while sitting by the Aegean Sea and felt in his heart and soul the eternal note of sadness. By drawing a reference to Sophocles and his plays dealing with trials and tribulations of human life, the mood of the poem abruptly takes a melancholic turn. The awareness of unending human miseries and sufferings lends the poem tragic undertones.

In the subsequent stanza, the mood persists. The poet is haunted by a sense of loss and regret at the gradual erosion of religious faith and belief from human society. He laments the loss of the past when the sea of faith was full and people led stable and secure lives. Unable to change the situation, the poet has no other choice but to accept the way things are. Therefore, there is a sense of passive acceptance and surrender to the present situation.

However, in the lines that follow, the poet sees a sliver of hope. He is optimistic that if not anything, at least, his love would help him survive in these crisis ridden times. He, therefore, implores his wife to be his pillar of strength and support. The poet believes that it is only the power of love that can triumph in the long run.

The moment of hope is only fleeting. As the poem draws to its climax, the poet is once again pulled back into the depths of despair. The reference to the ‘darkling plain’ aptly captures this note of darkness.

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies, clash by night.

The ending of the poem is pessimistic. The poet is unable to offer any concrete solution to tide over the crisis. The image of the ignorant armies clashing by night swept by the confused alarms of struggle and fight creates a situation of chaos from where there seems no escape.