

### 3. The Victorian Conception & Function of Poetry

Although poetry was not the supreme literary type in the Victorian age, it was consistently seen as an art form with high intellectual function and frame of mind. Poetry became an art form in the Victorian age which means that it acquired profound significance as a liberal art. This also means that poetry became professional vocation rather than an amateurish activity.

Because the Victorian age was an age of material progress and scientific mentality the Victorians assigned a cultural function to poetry. Matthew Arnold, the main spokesman of this age, claims that the mission of the Victorian poet is to guide culture by offering contact with 'the great primary human affections.' Through its seriousness, beauty and truth, poetry addressed the 'question of how to live.' Victorian poetry, according to Arnold, is meant to civilize by bringing people in contact with great ideas of the Hellenic culture. It is a means to propagate great cultural ideas and cultural values. The Victorian poet should maintain a high sense of 'seriousness' and objective 'disinterestedness' in order to fulfill his mission.

Although moral seriousness is an important aspect of Victorian poetry, this poetry is not moral in vision or tone. Morality here should not be seen in its narrow religious or ethical sense. It is, rather, human and universal in appeal. This is why Matthew Arnold and other philosophers of the Victorian age were optimistically confident that poetry may replace religion as the ultimate source of spiritual nourishment for humanity. The mission of the poet is to convey in his poetry cultural values which are 'sweet' and 'light' as opposed to Barbarian and philistine values.