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Class - B. A. I  
Paper - II  
Topic - Critical  
Appreciation 'Dover Beach'

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Give a critical appreciation of the poem  
'Dover Beach'. - by - Matthew Arnold.

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This beautiful ode, written in the elegiac strain, is characteristic of Arnold in many ways. It has been aptly remarked by an eminent critic that Arnold was 'a classic, writing in a romantic age', and the present poem is an illustration in painting. The poet has painted here a scene that is full of romance. The sea near Dover has been flooded by white moonlight and it is at its full tide. The shore of France is visible in the distance beyond the sea where a light gleams and is gone. The poet is looking at the scene and inviting his beloved to witness it. Then again he is experiencing a sense of melancholy wistfulness at what he is seeing. He yearns for the sea of faith that once was full but is now sunk so low. All these show him as a romantic poet.

But in his artistry, he is perfectly classical. His style is simple and direct, his pictures are complete and clear with a wonderful economy of words. Again the reference to Sophocles shows his classical scholarship and is perfectly appropriate in a poet like him.

As usual with Arnold, there is here an 'application of ideas of life'. The poet finds in the melancholy sound of the retreating tide a new thought. He is reminded of the decay of faith in modern life and the supreme need of love which alone is real amid all the vain shows of life.

yet the poem is scarcely to be taken as embodying Arnold's deliberate creed for which we must look rather to such poems as Morality, Self-dependence and The Rugby Chapel.



Explanation-01

Sophocles long ago . . . . .  
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

These lines occur in Arnold's 'Dover Beach'. The poet is listening to the melancholy sound of the retreating tide of sea as he stands on the beach. The feelings that arise in his mind remind him of Sophocles, who too, had heard such a sound from the shores of the Aegean Sea and found in it a symbol of the ebb and flow in man's sorrows. The poet, as he stands on the shores of this northern sea, far off from the Aegean Sea, finds in the sound a new thought. He is reminded of the ebb and flow in man's faith.



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02-07-2020

01

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Topic - Explanation  
- 02  
'Dover Beach'

Explanation - 02

The Sea of Faith  
was once, too at the full and round  
earth's shore  
lay like the folds of a bright girdle  
furled.

Arnold gives us a beautiful comparison in these lines. The human society is compared to the earth and the religious faith to the sea. Just as in full tide the sea rises and surrounds the earth with a girdle of shining waves, similarly in ancient days, a deep religious faith surrounded mankind and protected it from all evils. But those days are gone. The rise of materialism has brought about the decay of faith and filled people's hearts with doubts and thoughts of scepticism and misery.

Explanation - 03

But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long withdrawing  
soars  
Retreating to the breath  
of the night-wind, down the vast  
edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world.

The poet here compares the golden age of faith and religious belief with the age of modern materialism. In the ancient days the world

was full of faith. The tide of faith was at the flood. People had deep religious faith and society was happy and contented. But in the present generation faith has decayed. The tide of faith is on ebb. A strong breeze of scepticism now blows and is helping on the ebb of faith. Faith is retreating, leaving behind only the dry and soulless conventions. With the ebb of faith, joy and contentment and peace of mind vanished. Their place has been taken by doubts, thoughts of scepticism, wretchedness and misery of life. Human life has become miserable and wretched, full of doubts and scepticism. Such has been the result of the gust of materialism which has swept away all religious faith.

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- 04

### Explanation - 04 'Dover's Beach' by - Arnold

For the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.

Arnold strikes here the note of sadness and pessimism which characterises his poetry. He says that the world is devoid of all joy and happiness, though it looks so beautiful and charming. Its joys are elusive, its love is short-lived and its pleasures are fleeting. There is nothing certain in this world. Everything depends on chance. The world is full of misery, pain and disappointment for which there is no cure. Love and faith alone can save mankind and the restore to human life peace and joy which once characterised it.

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### Explanation - 05

And we are here as on a darkling  
Plain.  
Swept with confused alarm of  
struggle and flight  
where ignorant armies clash  
by night.

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The imagery here is of two armies meeting each other at night on a dark battlefield, which is unknown to both. A struggle ensues and one army is completely routed. Then follows a confusion. The defeated soldiers fly in

different directions in order to save their lives. The result is disorder for the defeated army. This is exactly what happens to mankind in this world when the wave of materialism sweeps away all faith and love from men's mind. Darkness then surrounds us. We have no clear cut aim before us, no fixed goal. We are swept this way and that, by the cruel circumstances. Our efforts are wasted, our energy is interred away in useless discussions, we see no clear goal before us and feel floundered and lost into the sea of the stern struggle of life. What the poet suggests is that unless we have faith we can never face the grim struggle of life and overcome the miseries which are inevitable in life.

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04.04.2020.