



## ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN MATTHEW ARNOLD'S POEM THE DEATH OF SOHRAB

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper aims to explore the theme of Anthropocentrism reflected in Matthew Arnold's poem 'The Death of Sohrab.' Anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings are the most important entity in the universe. Anthropocentrism interprets or regards the world in terms of human values and experiences. It is a major concept in the field of environmental philosophy. The same belief of anthropocentrism is reflected in Arnold's 'The Death of Sohrab', that death of the sohrab, being very important is lamented by the objects of nature. The poet describes the death of sohrab against the background of activity of nature by using simily. So it is the honest attempt of the present researcher to interpreter, analyse and evaluate this poem to explore the the theme of anthropocentrism embedded in it.*

**KEYWORDS:** Anthropocentrism, human, universe, environmental, philosophy.

### INTRODUCTION

Matthew Arnold (1822-88) was the son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the great head-master of the famous Rugby School. He was educated at Winchester, Rugby and Balliol College. Oxford. He was private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne from 1847 to 1851. He was appointed Inspector of schools in 1851. Earlier in 1848, he spent his holidays in Switzerland where it appears that he met, fell in love with, but parted from the young French woman who appears as 'Marguerite' in a number of his poems. In 1850 he met Frances Lucy Wightman, daughter of a prominent English judge, and in 1851 he married hp. In order to support his family, he accepted the appointment as Inspector of Schools, a position in which he continued for thirty-five years until his retirement in 1886. He is known both as a poet and a, prose-writer, especially as a critic. Among his volumes of poems may be mentioned the strayed *Reveler* (1849), *Empedocles on Etna* and Other poems (1852) which was a turning point in his life (. From 1853 he turned more and more to prose and criticism. In 1857 Arnold was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford, which was a great tribute to his growing reputation as a poet. The most important of his prose-works were the 'Essays in criticism'. His '*Culture & Anarchy*' — a criticism of English social and political life, appeared in 1869, and this was. Followed by various works of religious criticism, '*Literature & Dogma*', God & the Bible' being some of them.

As a poet, Arnold belongs to the Skeptical school of poets. The theories of Darwin and Lyell had lessened the faith of the people in the Bible and had given rise to a conflict between religion and science. In Arnold's poetry, faith appears only occasionally, and doubt on the other hand is presented with great power. Arnold's poetry is the record and the fruit of the continual struggle he made to overcome self-doubts, moral and religious questionings, and moods of despondency. There is nothing in his poetry to indicate that Arnold believed. Nature had anything to teach man that man did not learn elsewhere. He had little faith in the

divine powers on Nature. There is a tone of melancholy in his poetry but he could not be labelled as the poet of indecision and despair, though his genius was essentially elegiac.

### The Death of Sohrab

Arnold's imagination was haunted by the idea of the Great Poem. He supposed the Great Poem to be most easily based on the study of ancient Greek Literature. According to him the Great Poem was essentially a poem of action. Thus in the poetry of human actions, Sohrab and Rustum stands as his single success, in which he could fulfil the desire of his heart. The poem shines in solitary star like splendour. The poem has severity and serenity of beauty and its composition is pure and noble in all its parts. On finishing the poem he wrote to his mother that "all my spare time has been spent on a poem which I have just finished and which I think by far the best thing, I have yet done, had that it will be 'generally liked, though one never can be sure of this. I have had the greatest pleasure in composing it — rare thing with me, and as I think, a good test of the pleasure you'rewriting is likely to afford to others; but then the story is a very noble and excellent one".

He was already experimenting on the ideal poetry he had conceived-choosing a great subject and making the action all important, and describing it. In a suitable language. Arnold succeeded in this aim and his blank verse is an effective vehicle of his heavy and serious thought content. This poem brought him enormous success as a poet.

The poem is based on the narration of the last day of Sohrab's life and the tragic fight with his father where Sohrab gets mortally wounded as it was found in Firdausi's great epic, the Shah Namah i.e. the history of the Kings of Persia written about the tenth century. Matthew Arnold followed this history from Sir John Malcom's History of Persia. In addition to this, he benefited greatly from the Review of *Moll's* edition of Firdausi's Shah Namah by Saint Beuve.

Here is the story of Sohrab and Rustum as we get it in Sir John Malcom's *History of Persia*.

'The Young Sohrab was the product of one of Rustum's initial marriage. He had left his mom, and looked for distinction under the standards of Afrasiab, whose armed forces he directed and before long got a prestige past that of all contemporary saints however his dad. He had conveyed passing and disappointment into the positions of the Persians, and had panicked the boldest warriors, of that nation, before Rustum experienced him, which finally that here set out to do, under a pretended name. They met multiple times. The first occasion when they separated by shared assent, however Sohrab had the bit of leeway. The second, the adolescent acquired a triumph, however allowed life to his obscure dad. The third was lethal to Sohrab who when writing in the aches of death, cautioned his winner to evade the vengeance that is roused by parental burdens and bade him fear the anger of forceful Rustum, who should before long discover that he had slaughtered his child Sohrab. The words were as death to the matured saint, and when he recuperated from a stupor, he brought in despair for verifications of what Sohrab had said. The perishing Sohrab tore open his mail, and demonstrated his dad a seal which his mom had set on his arm when she found to him the mystery of his introduction to the world, and bade him look for his dad. Seeing his own seal rendered Rustum very distraught; he reviled himself, endeavored to stop his own life, and was just forestalled by the endeavors of his withering child. After Sohrab's demise, Rustum consumed his tents and every one of his merchandise, and conveyed the dead body to Seistan, where it was interceded. The military of Turan was pleasing to the last solicitation of Sohrab, allowed to cross the waterway Oxus left alone. It was instructed by Haman: and Zoarrah went to with respect to Rustum, to see that this commitment was regarded by the Persians. To accommodate us to the impossibility of this story we are educated that Rustum could have no clue that his child was in presence. The mother of Sohrab had kept in touch with him that her kid was a little girl, dreading to lose her dear child on the off chance that she uncovered reality; and Rustum, as before expressed, battled under a faked name, a use normal in the valiant battles of those days".

Arnold found that the theme of this story was great and serious according to the Greek standards. He felt sure that it would certainly evoke great poetry. Arnold, however, made some changes in the story from the point of view of universality, probability, and humanity. The element of fate is very prominent in

'Sohrab and Rustum'. Arnold firmly believed that the lives of human beings were governed by Fate as in case of Sohrab and Rustum. Both of them seem to believe in the invincibility of Destiny; everything would surely happen according to heaven's decree.

The tragic atmosphere pervades throughout the poem. The very situation of the father and son standing in the battlefield against each other is pathetic. Nature, too, serves a very important purpose in 'Sohrab and Rustum'. The action takes place in the desert and the great warriors seem to be dry like the deserts but essentially they are very soft and the feeling of love dominates their hearts. The desert and the river Oxus are the peaceful witnesses of the grim tragedy in 'Sohrab and Rustum'. In the concluding lines, Nature seems to regain the repose after the fight is over. The dark cloud shifts, the moaning wind is pacified, the river Oxus concentrates on its course, and there is frightening calm everywhere. The poem is known for its oriental atmosphere. The names and the places are oriental the description everywhere is essentially oriental and it is woven in the poem so artistically that it becomes part of the narrative. Further the similes used by Arnold in the poem are artistic and come to us as a combination of Homeric and Miltonic similes. Arnold has thus surpassed himself in the little epic fragment he painted in a masterly manner.

The passage 'The Death of Sohrab' forms the concluding part (lines 838-892) of the epic fragment 'Sohrab and Rustum.' It describes the death of Sohrab and Rustum's deep sorrow at the death of his son against the background of nature. It tells us, 'Sohrab looked at Rustum and smiled. Then he caught hold of his spear and snatched it out from his side and thus relieved the extremely painful wound; but at this, the blood began flowing out in a quick stream out of his wound as water from a fountain. The soiled white tissue of his side looked like the white violets plucked from the tree by children. Sohrab's head hung down on his chest, his limbs eased and he lay there without any movement and he had lost all his colour, and he lay with his eyes shut. Then all his strength gave way and from his covetable body the spirit reluctantly departed very much sorry to leave the beautiful warm mansion. Thus Sohrab lay in the sand and the great Rustum covered his face with his horseman's cloak and sat there by the side of his dead son.'

'And night descended over the desert, which had witnessed the grim tragedy of Rustum, and everything grew dark with the coining of night. And with a night a cold fog came up slowly from Oxus. The majestic river flowed on and soon entered into the regions where the star-light could be seen only through the mist. After flowing merrily through the silence of the Chorasmian desert, it turned sharp to the north, overflowing with water, bright in the moonlight and large in expanse. But when the Oxus goes ahead, the sands begin to check the flow of the waters and break the stream so that for miles together the river gets narrowed down and is divided into many small currents. The river now flows with difficulty with the one aim of meeting the sea. And at last the cheerful home welcomes the river to the bright tranquil sea from which near the horizon emerge the stars as if having bathed in the waters, and begin to shine over the Aral Sea.'

Thus after the great tragedy is over, the world, like the great river bed, continues its normal activities.

The concluding lines of 'Sohrab and Rustum' reveal that in his poetry Matthew Arnold is a controlled person with a perfectly composed mind always trying to gauge man's relation to nature.

### CONCLUSION:

Anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings are the most important entity in the universe. Anthropocentrism interprets or regards the world in terms of human values and experiences. It is a major concept in the field of environmental philosophy. The same belief of anthropocentrism is reflected in Arnold's 'The Death of Sohrab', that death of the sohrab, being very important is lamented by the objects of nature. The poet describes the death of sohrab against the background of activity of nature by using slimily.

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