Psalms as Postmodern Poetry

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By

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I could not have done this without my God.

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Psalms holds within it the ability to make you pause, reflect and examine yourself. Very few books can make us standstill and take stock of ourselves—the Book of Psalms is one such book that holds within it the wisdom of the past, the relevance of today and the purpose of tomorrow. The focus of this study is the Book of Psalms, which is a collection of 150 poems of great antiquity. While studies have been carried out on the Book of Psalms down the ages, there is a severe paucity when it comes to a postmodern perspective and analysis of the psalms. This book hopes to fill that vacuum with a thorough investigation into the postmodern elements in the Book of Psalms to establish its continued relevance to a postmodern audience and thereafter. A contextual reading of the psalms has also been attempted to explore the Book of Psalms as a poetic text that can help us deal with these mercurial times. The scope of the study also includes an analysis of the various ways meaning is sought out in life with an attempt to trace the multiple meanings that emerge in the psalms in the light of these findings.

As a prelude to the study, a detailed investigation was also carried out to collate the various poetic elements found in the compositions of the psalms. The Book of Psalms is poetry that is primarily emotions and feelings entwined with thought, expressed via poetic devices and framed in a poetic language that has stood the test of time. The psalms have provided a voice to innumerable people through the centuries. The beauty of the Book of Psalms as a classic of all time lies in its ability to have connected with readers over thousands of years from different literary phases and historical periods. This particular study was driven, by a keen awareness of the dearth of postmodern studies of the psalms and investigated how the Book of Psalms can appeal to the postmodern age as it contains within it various elements that can be traced as precursors that are characteristic of postmodern poetry within its different creative segments. The enduring relevance of the Book of Psalms lies in its ability to connect people to God, and its overwhelming success lies in the fact that though times change, the eternal nature of God and the fundamental nature of people remain the same. The poetry of the psalms provides us with words and thoughts that reflect our various individual postmodern angst even as it guides us to God—the fount of all wisdom and the fountainhead of peace.

CHAPTER 1

POETRY, A HARBINGER OF TRUTH

1.1 Poetry—The crown of literature

Human thought and imagination have been encapsulated and preserved in literary outpourings and offerings down the ages. Literature has been the valiant vanguard against time's unceasing attempts to crown oblivion and unite it with obliteration. Whether it be contending against persecution or wassailing popularity, literature has survived adroitly by taking on numerous forms and genres through the ages. However, the reigning queen of all its various genres is, without a doubt, poetry. It marches ahead of all and takes its rightful place as queen of all thought. "The crown of literature is poetry. It is its end and aim. It is the sublimest activity of the human mind. It is the achievement of beauty and delicacy," said Somerset Maugham. Poetry's allure lies not in its imperial resplendence but in its unswerving loyalty and fealty to truth. Henry Ward Beecher affirms this thought when he declares, "Poetry is the robe, the royal apparel, in which truth asserts its divine origin" (Beecher).

Many poets and critics have tried to capture its nobility and artistry through insightful or pithy definitions. They have, however, only achieved to define certain *aspects* of poetry. In attempting to define and explain poetry as a whole in all its glory, one has to acknowledge its revelatory truths and also capture its capacity for refined and distilled thought; one should also endeavour to mention its beauty of form but not fail to mention the prowess of the poet…eventually one can only succeed in communicating vestiges of its mesmerizing appeal. The beauty of poetry lies in its elusiveness and its subjectivity. Socrates was able to discern this mystifying trait of poetry when he said, "I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled poets to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean" (Krieger 126). Plato concurred with Socrates in thought when he said, "Poets utter great and wise things which they do, not themselves understand" (Plato), but Aristotle went a step forward when he said, "Poetry is finer and more philosophical than history; for poetry

expresses the universal and history only the particular" (Aristotle). Sir Philip Sidney echoed this thought much later "So, then, the best of the historian is subject to the poet" (Sidney 93). Keats' reflections on poetry reverberated this thought when he described poetry as "great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject" (Remak 364). Nevertheless, Maugham said it best with a sense of awestruck finality when he said, "The writer of prose can only step aside when the poet passes" (Maugham 15).

1.2 The poets and their vocations

The hallmark of a poem is always the measure and quality of the effect it has on the reader. As Rene Char opines, "A poet must leave traces of his passage, not proof" (Char 8). A poem stands the test of time not because of the reputation of the poet but because of what the poem is capable of offering the reader and the critic. A good poem can never die once offered onto the altar of posterity. It lives on in the lives and hearts of those who read it. It comes alive when readers read it and share it with others in different ways through their thoughts and actions. Good poetry can be resurrected and resurfaced because a person tends to return to what provides food for the mind, the heart…and the soul. Good poetry thus sustains us. Great poetry inspires. This kind of poetry will never die, which time cannot vanquish, and though it might get buried under the influx of other outpourings of creative literature, it is resurrected because the reader seeks it out. Good poetry can regenerate like a phoenix and inspire new poetry, strengthening, animating and preserving the cycle of literary creation. Thus the poet cannot but help leave traces of their passage in the new creation, as T. S. Eliot jocularly described it, "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different" (Eliot).

A poet gains approbation or censure based on the effect of their work on the audience. Walt Whitman was right when he quipped, "to have great poets, there must be great audiences" (Whitman). The same thought is echoed in Goethe's words when he said: "Personality is everything in art and Poetry." (Goethe). The poet generally does not seek, obtrusively at least, to be enshrined and worshipped as much as they desire their work to be appreciated and acknowledged. Steinbeck understands this angst when he opines, "The writer must believe that what he is doing is the most important thing in the world. And he must hold onto this illusion, even though he knows it's not true." (Steinbeck). The poet's vocation is primarily centred

on human destiny, reality and what the poet views as truth. Their impressions and thoughts stem from this understanding. They write about what they value most and feel strongly about because authentic poetry comes from an overflowing heart, an overwhelming feeling. “He answers in the writing of his poem, not to some outside command, but the uprising surge of his nature and his feelings” (Fowlie 83), what Wordsworth famously called the “overflow of powerful feeling.” The poet who takes his vocation seriously is a prophet on a mission. They seek readers who can listen to that lone voice calling in the desert and decipher the meaning behind the message. They have seen the truth and want to communicate it to the world. To quote John Drinkwater, the poet and dramatist, “Great men are rare, poets are rarer, but the great man who is a poet, transfiguring his greatness, is the rarest of all events” (Drinkwater 13). A poet seeks to verbalise what the reader might only be dimly aware of. The poet grasps and grapples with ephemeral truth and articulates it in poetry. When the mass of people are caught in the dreary pursuit of work and routine, the poet stands alone—against the flow. Poets hope to bring to us the clear truth wrested from the turbid waters of the hackneyed and the mundane. Salman Rushdie characterized a poet’s vocation as “to name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it going to sleep” (Rushdie).

Life teaches the poet, and the poet seeks to enlighten us because the poet puts lessons they have learned from life into words. Out of their experiences, the theme and life of a poem is conceived. Out of their art, poetry is born. The poet cannot help themself. To rephrase Wordsworth, tranquillity is taken over by emotion which then births poetry. Kierkegaard elaborates on this depth and intensity of feeling when he tries to define a poet’s vocation,

> What is a poet? An unhappy man who hides deep anguish in his heart, but whose lips are so formed that when the sigh and cry pass through them, it sounds like lovely music... And people flock around the poet and say: ‘Sing again soon’ - that is, May new sufferings torment your soul but your lips be fashioned as before, for the cry would only frighten us, but the music that is blissful (Kierkegaard 45)

Each poet’s contribution is thus vital and unique. “Every great writer brings one absolutely new thing into the world--himself, and it is just because he puts this one new thing into what he writes that his work bears its own special hallmark, and has something about it which makes it unlike the work done by anyone else” (Hudson 1). The poet preserves for posterity not only their thoughts but what is thought, felt and valued among people. They dream, dream. They see visions. They protect and preserve the dreams of

the individual and the collective unconscious. They safeguard the beauties of the dream world to protect, preserve and cherish them. This idea is echoed in the poetry of Langston Hughes:

> Bring me all of your dreams, You dreamers...
> Bring me all of your Heart melodies
> That I may wrap them
> In a blue cloud-cloth
> Away from the too-rough fingers
> Of the world. (Hughes)

Robert Graves understood this when he said, "[T]o be a poet is a condition rather than a profession. He requires whatever it needs to be completely his own master" (Graves). Defining poetry is indeed an elusive, evanescent enterprise, however Prof. Jay Parini, in his attempts to deconstruct poetry in his landmark text, *Why Poetry Matters,* quite succeeds as he writes,

> Poetry cannot be read…it can only be re-read. For me, it is (a) continuation of the Holy Scriptures, the kind of language one studies for insights and inspiration, for spiritual direction, for correction. Poets write in the line of prophecy, and their work teaches us how to live. The language of poetry, when properly absorbed, becomes part of our private vocabulary, our way of moving through the world. Poetry matters, and without it we can live only partially, not fully conscious of the possibilities (emotional and intellectual) that life affords (Parini xiv).

The elusive nature of poetry has been captured in pithy ways by many gifted souls with felicitous expressions, but the last word undoubtedly goes to Robert Browning, who said it so beautifully when he said, "God is the perfect poet" (Browning).

1.3 Poetry—A literary history overview

Poetry, the queen of the creative arts, the noblest and most stately of all, is also an inspired, indescribable, timeless art. From the earliest creative poetic articulations to the inspired songs of poetic geniuses, she reflects humanity's aspirations and imaginations skillfully and faithfully records the changing periods. To try to define her boundaries is no mean task as she wields her sceptre skillfully down the ages—from the earliest oral poetic traditions echoing through the history of humanity to the postmodern poetry that demands reader interaction and raises more questions than it answers—she reigns supreme.

Poetry traces its antecedents from the tradition of oral recitation. It is widely believed that poetry predates literature. The earliest written texts are hymns found among the Sumerians and the Egyptians. The hymns and laments (Sumerian) pyramid and coffin texts (Egyptian) from the third millennium reveal that poetry was one of the oldest forms of writing. Enheduanna, the daughter of Sargon who founded the Akkadian Empire by conquering the Sumerian city-states in the 23rd century, was not only a princess and high priestess but is widely acclaimed as the first-ever poet to have penned down verses in known human history. The historian Paul Kriwaczek considers her poems "models of petitionary prayer. Through the Babylonians, these poems influenced and inspired the prayers and psalms of the Hebrew Bible and the Homeric hymns of Greece. Through them, faint echoes of Enheduanna, the first-named literary author in history, can be heard in the hymnody of the early Christian church" (Kriwaczek). Furthermore, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Sumerian) and *The Story of Sinuhe* (Egyptian) are both written in verse. Even as we delve further down the timeline of classical literature, we come across the literary contributions of the known major civilizations: Indian, Persian, Chinese, Hebraic and Grecian, and realise that most of the early written work is in the metrical form of poetry, making poetry the most popular and sought after genre for the literature of classical antiquity. An overview of the timeline of world literary history reveals that the great literary works of the ancient world were in poetic form. Poetry's antecedent of oral narration is one of the primary reasons behind this. The oral lineage of poetry was facilitated primarily by the tradition of committing the contents to memory. So casting the literary works in metrical form aided the rote learning of the works, thus ensuring their survival and perpetuation. A perfect example would be the *Rig Veda* which is in use today. India is credited with honouring one of the oldest works of poetry in the form of Rig Veda, widely accepted as one of the "oldest extant texts in any Indo-European language." Linguistic evidence demonstrates that the "Rigveda was composed in the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent, most likely between c. 1500–1200 BC, though a wider approximation of c. 1700–1100 BC has also been given" (World Encyclopedia). The oral chants of the verses from the Vedas are intoned even today in solemn occasions of Hindu ceremonies making it the oldest unbroken oral tradition in continued use. The core of the poetic works of the Vedas is about the origin of the universe and God. The themes are primarily metaphysical and philosophical, dealing with cosmology, worship, virtuous acts and human behaviour, all couched in poetry. Lyrical texts are a universal phenomenon, be it the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the *Avesta* of Zoroastrianism, the Didactic poetry of Hesiod, the Lyric poems of Sappho, The Odes of Pindar (Greek), Vyasa's

Mahabharata, Valmiki's *Ramayana* (Indian), the epic poetry of Virgil (Roman), the Elegiac poetry of Catullus (Roman), the Classics of Poetry (Chinese), the satires of Horace (Roman), the epic poetry of Ovid or Lucan (Romans), Caedmon's *Hymn* (Anglo-Saxon) *Beowulf, Song of Roland,* Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat,* Rumi's Spiritual couplets, Petrarch's Sonnets, Hafez's *Ghazals* or Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*.

Our viewfinder on the timeline of world literature makes us pause next at the cradle of Western civilization—the Greek civilization, also known as the birthplace of democracy. This fertile ground provided the optimum conditions for creating many great literary works because it fostered a long and varied cultural history and hosted varied settlements, interlocking civilizations and different communities. The literature born in the Mediterranean region includes the greatest classics the world has to offer—the Old Testament of the Bible and the Greek epics, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. These sources are considered the greatest reservoirs of inspiration for European literature and European art. The *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* are reincarnated as epic poetry after existing as oral poetry and folklore. The oral tradition is admirably given material and physical form by the Greek bard Homer. These works have become the cornerstone of Western thought and writing and are routinely called the Classics. The Hebrew *Book of Psalms,* part of the Hebraic Old Testament, also shares its antecedents with the oral tradition and owes to it the authorship of its Greek translation roughly during this period of classical antiquity. These works continue to inspire and enlighten readers even today. The classical Greek period gradually gives way to the classical Roman period with the ascendancy of the Roman Empire.

The period of classical antiquity owes its magnificence also to the great poets Sappho, Virgil, Horace and Ovid, who belong to the classical Roman period. Written in Latin, most works are reflections of Roman life, including some that detail its extravagant and decadent culture and the many triumphs of the Roman Empire. The works also reveal the erstwhile influence of the cultured and mature literature of the Greeks, even as they draw upon and include the traditions and myths of other cultures that were incorporated as the Roman Empire extended. "Catullus pioneered the naturalization of Greek lyric verse forms" (Mastin) into Latin poetry. The golden age of Roman literature produced the great epic poetry of Virgil in the *Aeneid*, the odes and satires of Horace and the elegiac couplets of Ovid. Horace focussed on love, friendship, philosophy and the art of poetry through his major works, namely the *Odes*, *Epistles* and his famous *Ars Poetica*.

The magnificence of the Italian civilization and its glories, as reflected in its literature, abates after the fall of the Roman Empire and the eternal city of Rome—the *Caput Mundi,* meaning the capital of the world is now no more the centre of the world—and our attention shifts to Great Britain with its grand sobriquet of the Empire where the sun never sets. English Literature is especially relevant to our enquiry and study; specifically, the history of poetry in English Literature is a field of study to linger in as it traces and parallels the scope of this study: the English translation of the Book of Psalms. At the very outset, a cursory view would reveal that the literary geniuses representative of each age, from the preliterate to the Postmodern, also chose poetry as an art form to express themselves creatively, as in Chaucer, Philip Sydney, Edmund Spenser, John Donne, Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare, John Milton, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, T. S. Eliot, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Tom Stoppard to name a representative few; poetry was their chosen channel for the outlet of their genius and as harbingers of the truth.

1.3.1 Poetry in the Old English Period

The old English poetry of the old English period technically covers the Anglo-Saxon period of British literature. The major themes that preoccupied the poetry of this era would be the power of destiny or fate and the conflict between the church and pagan beliefs. Poetry was used as a voice to provide thoughts, teaching and insight on morality for religious faith and religious instruction. Another dominant theme was the glowing account of the exploits of great warriors and heroes. The genre that this period adopted and sustained religiously was the oral tradition of literature, with poetry being the mainstay and the predominant form. Poetic devices like the caesura, alliteration and repetition made their appearance gradually. The oral tradition also helped in uniting the diverse peoples and tribes of the land under one banner of English through the narration and collection of commonly known myths, even as warrior clans slowly metamorphosed into agricultural communities. *The Dream of the Rood*, considered one of the earliest literary works, is a poem written in alliterative verse and preserved in the *Vercelli Book,* an anthology of prose and poetry that dates back to the 10th century. Other famous inclusions in the anthology are *Andreas, The Fates of the Apostles, Soul and Body,* and *Elene*.

The notable works of this period are *Beowulf,* the *Exeter Book, The Cædmon manuscript* and *Bede. Bede,* written by Caedmon, marks the beginning of

Anglo-Saxon poetry. *Beowulf* is one work that has survived the vagaries of time in its entirety. *Beowulf,* an epic poem with 3182 alliterative lines about the mighty exploits of Beowulf, is the oldest surviving long poem in Old English, written when dragons and tales of hidden treasures were not just whispers in the wind but plausible rumours.

> Monsters like Grendel haunted the misty moors and the black spots where the waves boiled; the dragon lurked in the fen or in the caves of the rocks; hateful phantoms rode on the storm clouds or lay in wait for the traveller when he crossed the swollen stream or passed the grey stones on the heath. A whole world of fearful imagination was born which has never left our literature. Out of both, out of the Celtic love and the German fear of wild nature, has grown at last the modern poetry of nature, a mingled web of love and awe. And between both, and also influencing modern poetry, was all the romance of the wildwood which collected itself in story and ballad round the life of the bold outlaw in the forests, and was mingled with the gaiety of the fairy crew that danced by moonlight in the pleasant glades (Brooke)

One of the surviving works of Caedmon is "Caedmon's Hymn," a nine-line alliterative poem of praise sung in honour of God. The poem also has the honour of being one of the earliest attested examples of Old English poetry and also happens to be one of the most ancient recorded examples of sustained poetry. The largest collection of Old English literature is, of course, *The Exeter Book* by Cynewulf, which is an anthology of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Both Caedmon and Cynewulf were miraculously transformed by spiritual visions and religious experiences from being ordinary human beings to genius poets. The form and composition used in these poetical works are similar to the poetical composition of later dates in that they use alliteration—"the regular and emphatic repetition of the same letter" (Hudson 17). It is written in the alliterative verse style commonly used in Middle English poetry by rhyming chroniclers; the two halves of the alliterative lines are often linked by rhyme as well as by alliteration. The last known and notable poem of this period would be *The Battle of Maldon,* also called *Byrhtnoth's Death,* bringing this period to a glorious finale.

1.3.2 Poetry in the Middle English Period

Chronologically, the pre-Chaucerian period spanned between 500–1340 CE and was set during the historical period of the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Normans. The Norman Conquest spanned over 200 years and marked the French language's ascendancy and the French's cultural dominance. Poetry's significant sway continued to prevail well into the Middle English period with the works of Orm, who wrote *The Orrmulum,* which is a verse

work of some 10,000 lines. The *Orrmulum* narrates the story of the gospels and is of linguistic significance because of its consistent use of double consonants after short vowels. However, what the *Orrmulum* lacks in personal feeling, the *Poema Morale* more than makes this up. The *Poema Morale* [moral ode], composed in the early Middle Ages, is a poem that outlines proper Christian conduct. The narrator, a wise older man, reflects on his own life and the failures he has experienced, ending with a detailed description of Judgement Day and the rewards of Heaven. Interestingly, the narrator deals with both personal sin and collective guilt. The poem seems to have enjoyed unprecedented popularity by the times it has appeared in various manuscripts and compilations of the Middle English period, with the longest version containing 200 rhymed couplets. *The Owl and the Nightingale*, also composed around the same time, is a work that mirrors the conflict of the time and "is the first example in English of the *débat,* a popular continental form; in the poem, the owl, strictly monastic and didactic, and the nightingale, a free and amorous secular spirit, charmingly debate the virtues of their respective ways of life" (Columbia).

Some of the other significant works of the period include *Havelok the Dane, King Horn* and the extensive *Confessio Amantis,* a work of some 34,000 rhyming couplets by John Gower. The other notable mentions of this age include the *Cursor Mundi,* which are all verified accounts of history and scripture which ratifies the premise that creative composition found its voice through poetry.

1.3.3 The Fourteenth Century

The fourteenth century has the honour of being the century in which the English language finally found its feet and planted itself securely in the British Isles, becoming the language of the English people both in spoken and literary circles. *Poema morale, The Owl and the Nightingale* and the *Chronicle* are all famous poetical works of the period. Chaucer is credited with the honour of being the father of English poetry because he lifted English, which was till then the poor person's language, by favouring the English Language over the exalted language of the nobility and the Church, namely, French and Latin and he goes down in history as the "the first finder of our fair language" (Hoccleve). He chose to write his poetry in English, the everyday language of ordinary people. Chaucer's poetical works enjoyed unprecedented popularity and favour because of his poetic genius and its appeal to an audience that was outside the intelligentsia and the strait-laced academic circles. The poets who followed the English poetic tradition continued to consolidate the status of English as a respectable language and

honoured the bulging coffers of English poetry by adding masterpieces in the form of poetical works.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the French influence over England waned, and the surviving native English tradition resolutely superseded it. The various dialects and the Anglo-Saxon fragmented into several dialects and evolved into Middle English. Geoffrey Chaucer was more than a little responsible for this coming to pass, and he has been immortalized by John Lowes, who rightly remarks, "Chaucer found his English a dialect and left it a language" (Quiller-Couch 210) and further on by John Dart who refers to Chaucer as the person who, "[f]irst taught the Muse to speak the English Tongue" (Dart 55). *The Canterbury Tales* stands like a lighthouse of burnished gold shedding light on the medieval world, much of which would have been shrouded in darkness if not for the creative genius of Chaucer. Chaucer's deft hand with poetry sheds light on the various facets and classes of his society through his gift of characterisation and insightful use of dialogue. It was under his able influence that 'rime' gradually replaced alliteration, even as Chaucer's admiration for the Italian renaissance thought also seeped into his writing.

> Chaucer has rightly been known as the 'Evening star of the Medieval Day' and the 'Morning star of the Renaissance.' He speaks to both the old and the new. His verse engages us even today, showing the widespread in the specific which has made Chaucer a writer of the Middle Ages as well as of all times (Latest Contents).

With their many claims to fame, Chaucer's works also mirror the truth effortlessly and honestly, explaining why good poetry is timeless. His poetry thus is a brilliant example of why we need to keep poetry as an art alive and flourishing.

The poetry of alliteration and the emergence of the Anglo-Saxon verse form bore some great poetical works in the fourteenth century. John Gower, who wrote *Confession Amantis* to whom Chaucer dedicated his *Troilus and Criseyde*, is of noteworthy fame, as is the important alliterative moral allegory *Piers Plowman* by William Langland. Other poems of note include *The Pearl*, a Christian allegory composed with elaborate skill and insightful sensibility that is meaningful on several symbolic levels and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* also by the same anonymous author, which has been referred to as the finest Arthurian poem in English.

The fourteenth century saw another spiritual dimension added to English poetry with the work of Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English religious

poet and a Yorkshire hermit. “Rolle is often regarded as typical of English mystics; his writings are characterized by tender, burning love of God and of Jesus and Mary, with constant allusions to sweetness and music; there is much lyrical analogy with human affection” (Columbia Encyclopaedia). Julian of Norwich, who lived in this period, was an anchoress and a famous Christian theologian. She is considered one of the earliest woman poets of England and the most important English mystic of the 14th century. Her writings in *Revelations of Divine Love* reveal a writing style that can handle complex thoughts in a rhetoric that is clear and effective. These two poets left an important legacy of spiritual poetry expressing and detailing the mystical element of Christianity.

1.3.4 The Fifteenth Century

Edmund Spenser undoubtedly occupies a place of pre-eminence among the poets that followed Chaucer. His fame rests not only on the voluminous *Faerie Queene* and *Shepheardes Calender* but also on the Spenserian stanza and the pictorial quality of his verses, where one encounters pure poetry. “His work is filled with a noble moral spirit, while the quality of pure essential poetry – that quality which defies analysis but can never be missed by any sympathetic reader is to be felt on every page” (Hudson 49). Not for nothing was Spenser known as the poet’s poet. Philip Sidney wrote the *Apology of Poetry* to defend poetry against the aspersions and criticisms aimed against it, mainly those famous indictments levelled against it by the influential and notable Plato and the accusations of the Puritans, especially Gosson. Stephen Gosson, a failed dramatist himself, dedicates his *School of Abuse* to Sir Philip Sidney and indicts poetry on four main counts. Sidney replies, defending poetry passionately with his famous *Apology for Poetry.* His inspired writing makes the *Apology* a landmark in the history of literary criticism.

Gosson indicts poetry on four grounds: “A man could employ his time more usefully than in poetry, Poetry is the mother of lies, Poetry is the nurse of abuse, and Plato was right in banishing poets from his ideal commonwealth” (Bosco).

> (a) Defending poetry against the first charge, he says that man can’t employ his time more usefully than in poetry. He says that ‘no learning is so good as that teacheth and moveth to virtue and that none can both teach virtue, and thereto as much as poetry.’
>
> (b) His answer to the second objection that poets are liars is that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar. The poet creates something by

> emotion or imagination against which no charge of lying can be brought. The astronomer, the geometrician, the historian and others, all make false statements. For the poet, 'nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth,' his end being 'to tell not what is or what is not, but what should or should not be.' The question of truth or falsehood would arise only when a person insists on telling a fact. The poet does not present fact but fiction embodying the truth of an ideal kind.
>
> (c) The third objection against poetry is that it is the nurse of abuse, 'infecting us with many pestilent desires or wits' may be partly justified, but for this, a particular poet may be blamed but not poetry. To this charge, Sidney replies that poetry does not abuse man's wit but it is man's wit that abuses poetry. All arts and sciences misused had evil effects, but that did not mean that they were less valuable when rightly employed. Abuse of poetry, according to Sidney, is not the problem of poetry but of the poet.
>
> (d) The fourth objection, that Plato had rightly banished the poets from his ideal republic is also not tenable because Plato sought to banish the amoral poets of his time, and not poetry itself. Plato himself believed that poetry is divinely inspired. In *Ion*, Plato gives high and rightly divine commendation to poetry. His description of the poet as 'a light-winged and sacred thing' reveals his attitude to poetry. Sidney concludes, 'So as Plato banishing the abuse, not the 'Thing', not banishing it, but giving due honour unto it, shall be our patron and not an adversary.' In this way, Sidney very strongly defends poetry against the accusations made by Stephen Gosson on poetry" (Dutta).

Sidney further elaborates that the superiority of poetry over history and philosophy is irrefutable, opining that philosophy merely deals with its theory and teaches by precepts; history teaches by examples, but poetry provides both practical and theoretical explanations. Poetry is hence undoubtedly the monarch of all knowledge. It "not only shows the way but giveth [gives] so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it" (Sidney). Sidney is valiant in his efforts to establish poetry as the most superior of all the various branches of learning "[P]oetry, according to Sidney, is superior to philosophy by its charm, to history by its universality, to science by its moral end, to law by its encouragement of human rather than civic goodness" (Pandian). Philip Sidney stands apart from his contemporaries because instead of occupying himself with rhetoric and prosody, he gave himself up to creative literature. He wanted his audience to feel an emotional response to the literature they read—in this, he was the precursor of the reader's response theory. J.W.H. Atkins has pointed out that "to him poetry was a natural human activity enabling men to sing to beauty and truth and to satisfy their longings for a world

transformed, thus nurturing in them what was good and noble. This, then with its element of permanent truth, was the substance of Sidney's message to an age perplexed and even hostile" (Naeem). Sidney synthesises the critical literary thought of Plutarch, Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Scaliger, Minturno, and a host of other writers and critics, bringing together romanticism and classicism. It is the first attempt in English to deal critically with poetic art, practically and not just theoretically:

> His definitions of poetry, two in number, speak of his greatness as a critic. The first is: 'Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end,—to teach and delight.' The second is: 'it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet', but it is that feigning notable images of virtue or vice, or -what else, with that delightful teaching; which must be the right describing note by which to know a poet. The poet speaks of both what is and what should be, of what is universal and what is particular. Poetry has liveliness and passion, which are lacking in history and philosophy (Dutta)

1.3.5 Sixteenth Century

William Shakespeare, the Bard of Avon, often introduced with hyperbolic words and extravagant adjectives, is generally considered the greatest English dramatist of all time. While he is generally acclaimed and known worldwide for his dramatic works, he was also a brilliant poet. Poetry thrived under his able craftsmanship, and English poetry came of age under the able guidance and sheer genius of William Shakespeare and John Milton. Shakespeare was called the 'sweet swan of Avon', and his use of blank verse influenced and continues to influence poets today. His two main contributions to poetry were the "verbal immediacy and the moulding of stress to the movement of living emotion" (Ford). Milton is widely recognised as the epic poet of English Literature. His *Paradise Lost* did for English poetry what the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* did for Greek literature. For the first time, poetry was written not just for a section of the populace of readers but for an entire nation, "epic poetry is about the story of a whole group of people, or a culture. The story of an epic was never a surprise to the listeners it was composed for -- they already knew the story, because it was the story of their history, their religion, and the cultural identity they already knew. It was an artful retelling of the stories that make a culture what it is" (Writer). An epic poem, by its very nature, is written in an elevated language with glorious themes. Milton considered himself divinely inspired and chose for his epic the theme of how paradise was lost by humanity's disobedience, placing it within the vast landscape of how Satan disobeys

God. He goes on to write over ten thousand lines in verse organised into 12 books detailing the ultimate answer to a lost paradise with the resurrection of Jesus through which Paradise is regained. He was aptly bestowed with the title 'Poet of the Sublime' by John Dryden.

1.3.6 Seventeenth Century

As part of its growth and development, poetry gained a new facet to its character by introducing metaphysical poetry. When poets rebelled against the popular Elizabethan conventions, the traditional modes and accepted customs of writing poetry—a new form of poetry was born. Metaphysical poetry was a direct response to the scientific curiosity of the times, which was incessantly fuelled by the immense discoveries in various fields, namely astronomy, alchemy, astrology, gardening, cartography, botany, psychology, physics and medicine. "The part played by science in the inspiration of many poets was determined by the diverse combinations of four main factors: the utilitarian spirit, intellectual curiosity, the reliance on reason and the reliance on faith" (Ellrodt). With elaborate puns and far-fetched similes, metaphysical poetry tried to marry the sublime with the ephemeral. *Meta*, the Latin word for a turning point, refers to something beyond, and the word physical refers to the tangible. So metaphysical poetry would mean poetry that deals with esoteric subjects mystically beyond the physical environment in which we find ourselves caught. Situated in the Jacobean age, metaphysical poetry blossomed during the final stages of the Tudors, and in its efforts to carve out an identity for itself differently from the poetry of the Elizabethan times, metaphysical poetry grew into its own. Metaphysical poetry "is the fruit of renaissance tree, becoming over ripe and approaching pure science" (Islam). The leading poet of this movement was John Donne, who crafted exquisite poetry along with his contemporaries George Herbert, Andrew Marvell and Robert Southwell. Other notable metaphysical poets were Richard Crashaw and Abraham Cowley.

Another category of poetry that blossomed during this time was Cavalier poetry, which celebrated '*carpe diem.'* It was the interim period of the Restoration and the political turmoil that followed the English Civil War that laid the ground for the flowering of Cavalier poetry. The poetry of the cavaliers was mainly directed at adoring royalty, revering the crown and royalist ideals, and making use of classical references and allegory. The 'seize the day' tone that marked this poetry championed the cause of making the most of opportunities that arise and living life to the fullest. Common traits also certainly exist in Cavalier poetry in that most poems "celebrate beauty, love, nature, sensuality, drinking, good fellowship, honour, and

social life" (Black). The most famous representatives of Cavalier poetry were Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, Thomas Carew and Sir John Suckling.

1.3.7 The Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century was an age of great transition as agrarian civilizations waned, and industrial civilization was ushered in as powerfully as the first steam engines. This was undoubtedly reflected in the literature of the times. Poetry revelled in the romanticism of the eighteenth century as it broke free from the strict shackles of poetic diction enmeshed between the closed couplet and the heroic couplet. The era was an age of transition with innovation and varied experiments in form and theme. The top note of romanticism is primarily the 'return to nature' theme, not so much for its picturesque attractions as "a deepening belief that as the cramping conventions of our artificial social system prevent the free development and expression of individuality, and give birth to many evils, the only way of salvation for men and nations lies through a radical simplification of life" (Hudson 160). As a natural corollary to this poetic theme of naturalism, the poetic form also resorted to blank verse ushering in the Romantic revival, as evident in the romantic melancholy of Grey's "Elegy" and the courtship of Byron's *Don Juan.* William Blake, the mystical poet, integrated pictures and text and created the "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience", which stemmed from his beliefs about the human condition. Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge spearheaded the Romantic era with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads,* which they co-authored. The masterpiece "Ode to a West Wind" ensures Percy Bysshe Shelly's place with the Romantic poets as did John Keats with several exquisite poems, "Ode on Melancholy," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode To a Nightingale" and "Ode to Psyche."

1.3.8 Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century was a time of great literary creativity, thanks to the advancement of art appreciation in social and political circles. In the intellectual sphere, science progressed by leaps and bounds and the political sphere was marked by the growth and progress of democracy. These two currents created the greatest upheavals of the century and provided the greatest impetus to the literary giants of the time who were, however, not oblivious to the romantic undercurrents of the previous era. Poets were caught "wandering between the two worlds," to use a phrase coined by

Mathew Arnold. The greatest poets of the century were Tennyson and Browning. Tennyson was appointed as Poet Laureate after Wordsworth's death, and his works form the best representation of Victorian poetry. He wove into his poetry all that he felt and thought about the various cultural crosscurrents of the age in a style that is both lyrical and varied. Poetry, under his able guidance, found an appealing voice in so many different genres that "no English poet has left masterpieces in so many different kinds of verse" (Bloom 84). The Browning couple carried on the legacy of lyrical poetry with great passion, writing lyrical poetry, but they did not confine themselves only to romance but engaged with the contemporary issues of the age and experimented with many poetic styles, including a revival of ballads. According to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the function of a poet is not to be caught in the past but to look to represent the age they are living in.

> "Their sole work is to represent the age,
> Their age, not Charlemagne's,—this live, throbbing age,
> That brawls cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires"

Emily Brontë, though well-known for her novels, was also a poet of some measure. Her poems, though few, were passionate in content and conventional in form. Gerard Manley Hopkins is easily considered one of the most talented poets of the Victorian age and the foremost religious poet of the era. His reputation also rests on poetic innovations like the sprung rhythm. His genius combined the visual and verbal to paint beautiful poems as the artist that he was. His religious consciousness and his realisation of religion as the ultimate reality birthed many famous poems that celebrated the sublime, as in "God's Grandeur," "Pied Beauty," "Starlight Night," "Thee God, I come from, to Thee go and Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend." The mid-19th century saw the introduction of Pre-Raphaelite poetry introduced by Dante Rossetti, and it was immortalised and sustained by William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, Thomas Woolner, James Collinson George Meredith, William Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne, William Michael Rossetti and Christina Rossetti. While the obvious rationale of Pre-Raphaelite poetry was its break from the tradition of Victorian poetry, which primarily concerned itself with the socio-political themes of the day, it had several common features. The common characteristic features were its interest in Romanticism, Sensuousness, Medievalism, devotion to detail and its use of meter and music characterised by lush vowel sounds. Christina Rossetti, referred to as the queen of the Pre-Raphaelite school, wrote poetry typically "described as 'Pre-Raphaelite' in its rich and

precise natural detail, its use of symbol, its poignancy, and its deliberate medievalism" (Poetry Foundation).

1.3.9 The Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century, poetry takes on a garb far more different from previous ages. The literary tradition is given a cursory nod as the individuality and the personality of the poet take the fore. There was an abundance of poets who were creating poetry in volumes like never before, and their poems gained an easier route to the public forum, but even as the visibility increased, the quality of the poetry declined. As Thomas Babington Macaulay retorts, "As civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines" (Perry 80). The poets of the twentieth century stood at the edge of shifting ground, with worlds careening into each other. The early twentieth century saw poetry become a new and streamlined avatar of Modernism. This new avatar gave poetry a new and revamped appearance as it abandoned rhyme and meter. It was an unequivocal reaction to formalism, ornate diction and the excessive verbal embellishments of Victorian poetry. Instead, the modernists sought out the best practices of using poetry in the classical literature of other cultures and their literature. The most common characteristics of twentieth-century poetry were the unflinching realism adopted to contemporary themes, humanitarianism combined with a celebration of romanticism with an unmistakable tone of disillusionment and an undertone of disorientation with top notes of pessimism. T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" would be a representative poem of the age in that it is often referred to as the single most influential poetic work of the century and lauded as the most revolutionary poem of the last hundred years. While "The Wasteland" effectively mirrors the dilemma of a generation, it also elevates the literary tradition to a higher level. The poem credits T.S. Eliot, along with Ezra Pound, with revolutionising the very face and style of poetry. Eliot successfully uses the "fragmented form of the poem to express his themes" (Goodman), and they are reflected as such in the content. Some modernist poets banded together to form the Imagists who favoured clear, sharp and precise poetry. The imagists rejected the tenets of Romantic, Victorian and Georgian poetry and worked with non-traditional verse forms to achieve directness in the speech that clamoured for free verse. Poets like Walter De La Mare and W. H. Davies mourned the loss of the vanishing benevolent England in poems like "O Lovely England" and "In the Country." Walter de la Mare especially revelled in the creation of worlds and themes shrouded in a dreamlike undefined state of mystery. "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats provide a dramatic portrayal of the

twentieth century and its future, as he writes about how "things fall apart and the centre cannot hold." His poetry was powerfully influenced by his mystical inclinations, his passion for the Irish, and his use of allusive imagery and symbols. His effective and extensive use of symbols gained him a notable position among Symbolists. With Naturalism and Realism holding sway, the advance of Darwinian philosophy and empiricism brought about a surge in popularity for symbolism. Philip Larkin was the leading voice of a band of poets who congregated under the banner "The Movement," which was a call against neo-romanticism. "In 1964, he confirmed his reputation as a major poet with the publication of *The Whitsun Weddings*, and again in 1974 with *High Windows*: collections whose searing, often mocking, wit does not conceal the poet's dark vision and underlying obsession with universal themes of mortality, love, and human solitude" (Poets.org).

Poetry took on a new role with the advent of the First World War, fuelling the long-standing debate about how intense emotion can generate great poetry, and the war provided a backdrop against which a varied range of emotions was played out. Poetry was the one canvas that could truly capture the vagaries of war and the gamut of the emotions it generated. Poetry provided a channel for all, from those caught in the overflow of powerful emotion to those caught in a paralysed and comatose state, devoid of feeling. The war poetry cemented the resilience of the British in the English consciousness through the poetry of the soldier-poets, particularly Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Edward Thomas and Rupert Brooke. But:

> the scope of First World War poetry is much wider than that of the trench lyric. There is a substantial and distinguished body of war poetry by male civilian poets, including Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling and D.H. Lawrence, as well as by women poets such as Charlotte Mew, Mary Borden, Vera Brittain, Rose Macaulay and Margaret Postgate Cole. Today, the poetry of the soldier-poets has coalesced, beyond literary history and cultural memory, into a recognisable structure of feeling. Herein lies an undeniable part of its power (Das).

Ted Hughes was a poet of international repute, writing poetry that explored the mythical, the elemental and the dark unconscious and was named Poet Laureate after Philip Larkin turned it down. Other famous poets of the twentieth century were W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, Seamus Hussey, Elizabeth Jennings, Kingsley Amis, Alan Jacob, Harold Pinter, Hugo Williams, J. R. R. Tolkien and Carol Ann Duffy, to name just a notable few. While D.H. Lawrence and Tolkien gained international fame and repute as

novelists, they both took to poetry to explore their pet themes. Tolkien wrote poetry that combined legend, fantastical worlds and faith; in fact, some of his poems are part of the narrative of his novels, while D.H. Lawrence wrote exploring the conflict between instinct versus expectation and the dehumanizing effects of modernity and industrialisation:

> Through this plurality of poetic tones and voices can be seen the gradual arrival of postmodernist poetry in Britain. Seamus Hussey is obviously a postmodern poet, who occupies first place in the *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* published by Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion in 1982. The poets that come after – Tony Harrison, Douglas Dunn, Dereck Mahon, Ann Stevenson, James Fenton, Tom Paulin, Christopher Reid, Carol Rumens, Paul Muldoon and others follow the postmodernist line. There are the poems in which the poets are not inhabitants of their own lives, as much as intrigued observers, not victims but onlookers, not poets working in a confessional heat but dramatists and storytellers…(they) represent a departure, one which may be said to exhibit something of the spirit of postmodernism (Bhatnagar 21).

The beginning of postmodern poetry saw the end of modernist poetry, and a new era was born.

1.3.10 The Twenty-First Century

The most marked literary movement of the twentieth century would be the unfolding of a new literary movement in literary history—the postmodern age. As with all literary movements, one would be hard-pressed to mark an exact date when the postmodern period was launched in the world of poetry, but soon the prefix ‘post’ was increasingly being applied to modern poetry that sought to celebrate pluralism and formlessness. Even as modernist poetry became increasingly disillusioned with Realism, postmodernist poetry completely rejected the idea of Realism and substituted it with hyper-reality and magical realism. While in modernist poetry, conflict was sought to be solved by the poet, in postmodern poetry, the poet throws up their hands to engage the reader with the conflict. This slow shift from linear narration to fragmentation with the attempt to depict the illogical and the random brings about an element of playfulness that is often deliberate. This element of playfulness is quite evident in many modernist works and can be considered a precursor to the characteristic of playfulness that is central to many postmodern works. As with all atypical literature that reflects the society of its birth, postmodern poetry is very akin to the society in which it is born. Tim Woods talks about a “society which lacks firm belief systems…which is given over to hedonism, playfulness, individualism, and

living for the moment, and yet which also promotes the marginalised and hidden, and purports to be anti-essentialist, anti-elitist and anti-hierarchal" (Woods 13). As we find ourselves in the postmodern age, our time-honoured definitions of poetry need also be revised to include all of the learning and revelations of the age as reflected in its poetry: its fears, triumphs, exclusiveness, and exclusiveness. "Postmodern poetry is a means of poetry that has been explored since about the 1960s and is often noted for a few noted stylistic and thematic aspects. This poetry is often written in a way that is quite free form and meant to reflect the process of thought or organic speaking through a stream of consciousness style" (Wiesen). Postmodern poetry owes a world of debt to the innovativeness of Charles Olson, who formulated 'projective verse' and 'open field' poetics, focussing on using speech patterns for form and perceptions for content. Olson, incidentally, also was the architect behind the Black Mountain poets who perceived "an increasing suspicion of language as a source of self-expression" (Woods 85). It rejects the grand meta-narrative and replaces it with an arbitrary personal view, continually trying to bring the reader into play. While modernist poetry tries to communicate a coherent whole, postmodernist poetry encourages discourse between diversity and hegemony, the oppressed and the despot. It rejects the seeking-after utopias to embrace the dystopia around it wholeheartedly. Some of the tools Postmodern poetry uses to achieve its ends are, notably, deconstruction and difference:

> Continued assaults on the citadel of centralist tradition led, by early nineties, to somewhat of a poetry boom. The media, whipping the storm, suggested that poetry might be the new rock'n'roll. Pop stars began to admit to liking verse with the odd one or two writing it. The trend of allying verse with songwriting set by Bob Dylan continued (Finch).

Poetry, that mercurial soul adapted, and soon enough, poetry was no more sought to be found only on paper for edification but more as an offering, or rather an oblation for entertainment in media, cafés and pubs and other centres of urban solace and from there to all corners of popular culture. It was a palliative assuagement for the alienation felt by individuals. Poetry gained the popularity it had never had when poet seers became lyricists and songwriters. Lines of poetry camouflaged as song lyrics set to catchy tunes were on the lips of the young and old, ably helped along by those technological marvels in the form of various players and screens. In this milieu, the post-modern society unfolds as a society free from moral direction and in which entertainment is the new god. Unfortunately, this unconscious deification of entertainment and its multiplying devotees has brought about a situation so dire that Vargas states, "our generation's

engagement with the entertainment business has caused not a few of us to lose the art of thinking" (Vargas). This epidemic transmits itself expeditiously in so many subliminal ways that the "only change from the eighteenth–century attitude, then, is the view that you don't actually have to go to the metropolis to be corrupted by it – you can be infected in the comfort of your own living room. The infection is a form of urban alienation" (Barry):

> By the turn of the millennium, poetry in Britain had reached a multi-faceted stand-off. Despite the work of editors like Simon Armitage and Robert Crawford (1959-) who have made brave attempts at uniting post-modern, post-Christian, post-war, post-Hiroshima, post-structuralist, post-devolution poetries under one pluralistic banner the many gleaming and disparate parts of British poetry do not like making a coherent whole. Minority writing (ethnic, genre, sexual orientation) has as many proponents and fans as pop writing did in the seventies. Twenty-first-century British poetry is no longer precisely English. Like the world literature with which it is now firmly allied it has as many facets as the eye of a fly. Saying exactly what it is, remains the problem of the moment (Finch).

Antony Burgess was a poet whose poetry waltzed with intertextuality and flirted with a poetic style that was both self-reflexive and formalist, containing dominant postmodern elements similar to Tom Raworth. John Olson has noted that in Raworth's work, "words and lines are highly compressed: one perception immediately and directly slides to a further perception, and these perceptions accrue, multiply, ricochet and expand into a domain of accelerated cognition, protean and variable as cumulonimbus, or gouache" (Olson). Although the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy is multi-faceted, covering a range of topics, she provides an honest voice for the various hitherto unvoiced and unexplored nuances of the female experience. Her poetry is often rightly grouped at the top with other postmodern poets, paving the way "for other feminist voices in the mainstream contemporary British poetry" (Flajsarova). The clever use of wordplay and his intelligent wit bordering upon sarcasm and irony ensure that Simon Armitage is no stickler for tradition or modernism. He "is never content mourning for times past, and his most recent collection, *Tyrannosaurus Rex versus the Corduroy Kid* (2006), mixes poems of stark political relevance and mythological potency with those of absurdist humour" (Wilkinson), making him for some, the poster boy of postmodernist poetry in England. While a wide array of subjects and themes are dealt with by contemporary poets, the politics of identity, whether it be regional, class, racial or sexual, continue to preoccupy the minds of poets, paving the way for postmodernism to be comfortably ensconced in the minds of the poetry-reading public. Subjectivity, ambiguity, playfulness and experimentation with form were

increasingly popular with the poets of the age, notably James Fenton, Tony Harrison, Christopher Reid, Carol Rummens, Douglas Dunn, Robert Crawford, Ian McMillan, W.N. Herbert and the Irish poet Paul Muldoon. Precursors of the postmodern movement such as Peter Didsbury, also called a postmodern maestro, and Peter Ackroyd are two poets whose works boast of postmodern stratagems. The lyrical genius of J.H. Prynne's poetry and his influence were responsible for liberating "English poets into a genuinely new conception of poetry, the structure of his language itself giving courage to those who would break with the empiricist conventions of the mainstream" (Prynne), and it was that break that gave poetry new form, relevant contextualisation and new significance in the form of postmodern poetry.

Feelings are our natural response to the world and stimuli around us. Our feelings and emotions motivate us to act and think. They inspire our creative endeavours. They help us bond with other living beings. Our feelings help us survive and deal with the world we live in, helping us interact with the world we inhabit. Feelings play an important role in our lives and selfhood as they define and form who we are—as we carve our identity and continually create our personality. As our lives intersect with the lives of the people we come across, our selfhood is constantly in flux because of our feelings. If there is one sphere of literature that religiously devotes itself to emotions, it is the world of poetry.

Poetry helps us deal with our emotions and feelings and, consequently, with the world. Poetry helps us channel, identify and understand our feelings. Poetry helps us make sense of our emotions—they give words to our deepest experiences of what we are and what others feel too. "Poetry is a beautiful way of expressing feelings - happy, sad, angry, caring. It is also a way that we share with other people, to help them with those feelings" (Stepanek). They provide an outlet for the overwhelming emotions—of joy or pain that we undergo. Poetry can deal with the entire gamut of emotions that humans undergo. Like Sigmund Freud reportedly attests about a poet, 'Everywhere I go I find that a poet has been there before me." Unlike ever before we live in an age where feelings are given much attention. We are coaxed to celebrate what we feel unreservedly and try and express it. We are urged by common and popular culture to deepen and intensify our feelings and allow them to run their course. Suppressing feelings is a strict anathema in today's popular opinion. Like a cathartic treatment, poetry helps in the free flow of emotions, deepening feelings and forming meaning even as we give in to our feelings and revel in our emotions. "Poetry at its best calls forth our deep *being*" (Housden). We are more of ourselves because of poetry. Every poem forged on the iron of our emotions is a fragment of our life framed for

posterity. When we read the poems of others, we are invited into a segment of their lives. Unlike the momentary pleasures of soap operas and movies that invade our living rooms, our mobiles and our mind space, poetry can make us pause and think; it inspires reflection. However, the melodrama of daytime drama and night-time soap that masquerades as entertainment deadens our minds and our ability to think. Today's entertainment appeals to our baser instincts to gain ratings and eyeballs. Unlike entertainment that opens the bedroom door wider for its audience, leaving nothing to the imagination and making its audience voyeurs of sorts—a poem provides a keyhole into the mind of a poet, and if one delves further, poetry is a poet's heart laid bare. Poetry is thus truly the language of the heart. While it might not be as popular as entertainment shows and programmes, poetry scores higher and is ranked more nobly because its appeal is not voyeuristic but enlightening. Poetry is a revelation. When we read a poem, we understand wholly, and we can better understand ourselves and our myriad feelings. "Poems can help you say, help you show how you're feeling, but they can also introduce you to feelings, ways of being in the world, people, very much unlike you, maybe even people from long, long ago" (Burt).

Poetry can provide us with the luxury of solitude or company. In this super-fast highway of our times, poetry can provide that much-needed circle of silence, that island of peace nestled within the mayhem of our chaos. It can provide us with the pit stop that most of us need occasionally. Not only does it provide an opportunity to revel in our selfhood and reconnect with ourselves and our emotions, but poetry can also help us create true and strong relationships that can be like extensions of ourselves. Poetry can also be a great communitarian tool helping us bond and forge relationships as we share our opinions, experiences and understandings through the common platform of poetry. Writing and reading poetry has been a proven tool in developing resilience. Poetry holds within it the power to help us interpret and reinvent life.

All poetry is formed with a kind of music innate to that poem. The fibre of poetry is its musicality. Poetry's natural rhythm and music can soothe disturbed minds and calm seething hearts not through distraction but with reflection. In this, "the poet finds his moral proved" (Ezekiel).

The universality of human emotions and feelings makes poems and poets reach an extensive audience, giving them universal appeal. The appeal of poetry can extend beyond life spans and eras and outlive aeons. "We live by our greatest poems--the Bible and the Koran, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita, Shakespeare and Dante, etc. In this sense, poetry is central