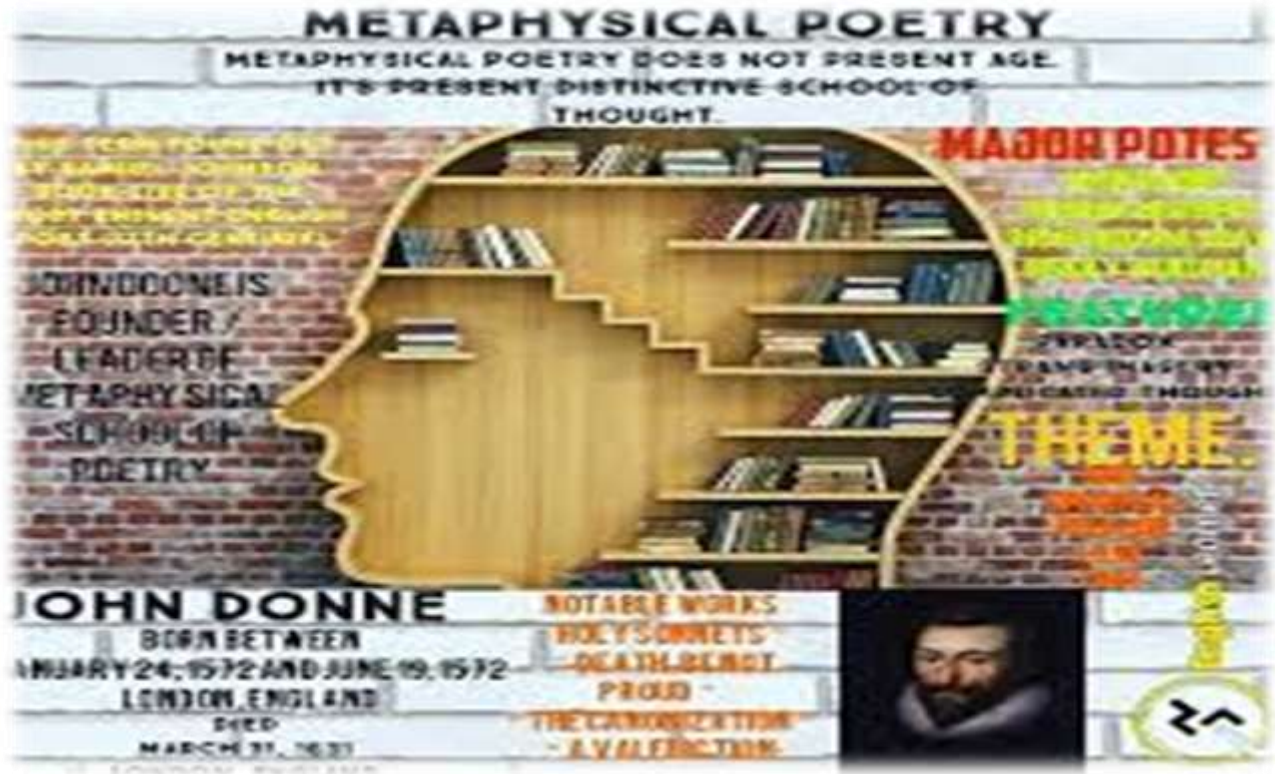


E-CONTENTS ON METAPHYSICAL MOVEMENT

In this chapter we will learn:

- What is Metaphysical Movement of poetry?
- Historical background of Metaphysical Movement.
- Features of Metaphysical School of poetry.
- Metaphysical Poets
- Contribution of Metaphysical Movement in English Literature



THE METAPHYSICAL MOVEMENT

The Metaphysical movement of poetry arose as a revolt and reaction against the romantic exuberance and excesses of the Elizabethans, and the great English poet John Donne was the leader of this revolt. His poetry is remarkable for its concentrated passion, intellectual agility and dramatic power. He is given to introspection and self-analysis ; he writes of no imaginary shepherds and shepherdesses but of his own intellectual, spiritual and love experiences.

John Donne is the founder of the so-called "Metaphysical school" of poetry, of which Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and Abraham Cowley are the other leading poets. Literarily "Meta" means "beyond" and "physics" means "physical nature." It was Dryden who first used the word. "Metaphysical" in connection with Donne's poetry and wrote, "Donne affects the metaphysics", and Dr. Johnson confirmed the judgment of Dryden. Ever since the

word "Metaphysical" has been used for Donne and his followers. However, the term is an unfortunate one for it implies a process of dry reasoning, a speculation about the nature of the universe, the problem of life and death, etc. Donne's poetry is not metaphysical in the true sense of the word. His poetry does not expound any philosophical system of the universe, rather it is as much concerned with his emotions and personal experience as any other poetry. No doubt, there is much intellectual analysis of "emotion" and "experience" but this by itself cannot be called metaphysical. The poetry of the school of Donne is not metaphysical as far as its content is concerned.

Donne's poetry may be called "metaphysical", only in as far as its technique or style is concerned. It is heavily overloaded with "conceits", which may be defined as the excessive use of over-elaborated similes and metaphors, drawn from the most far-fetched, remote and unfamiliar sources. Poets have always perceived similarity between dissimilar objects and used similes and metaphors to convey their perception of that similarity. The peculiarity of the metaphysicals lies in the fact that : (1) They use figures of speech excessively, (2) Their similes and metaphors are far-fetched and are often drawn from the most unfamiliar sources, (3) Their similes are elaborated to the farthest limit. (4) The relationship they perceive are not obvious. They are difficult to understand, (5) Their images are logical and intellectual, rather than sensuous or emotional. In their "conceits" Donne and his followers constantly bring together the abstract and the concrete, remote and the near, the spiritual and the material, the finite and the infinite, the sublime and the commonplace. His mind moves with great agility from one such concept to another, and it requires an equal agility on the part of the readers to follow him. Hence the difficult nature of his poetry, and hence the charge of obscurity that has been brought against him. The difficulty of the readers is further increased by the extreme condensation and density of metaphysical poetry.

The chief characteristics of metaphysical poetry may be summarised as follows :

1. It is complex and difficult. Most varied concepts are brought together.
2. It is intellectual in tone. There is an analysis of the most delicate shades of psychological experiences.
3. There is a fusion of emotion and intellect, as there is intellectual analysis of emotions personally experienced by the poet.
4. It is full of conceits which are learned, intellectual and over-elaborated.
5. It is argumentative. There is subtle evolution of thought as the poet advances arguments after arguments to prove his point. He is often like a lawyer choosing the fittest arguments for the case.

6. Originality is achieved by the use of a new vocabulary drawn from the world of trade and commerce, the arts, and the sciences.

7. In order to arrest attention often a poem begins abruptly and colloquially, and unusual rhythms are used. Unusual, compound words are also used for the same purpose.

8. It is often dramatic in form. As has been well said, his poetry presents "a drama of ideas". Mataphysical lyrics are dramatic.
