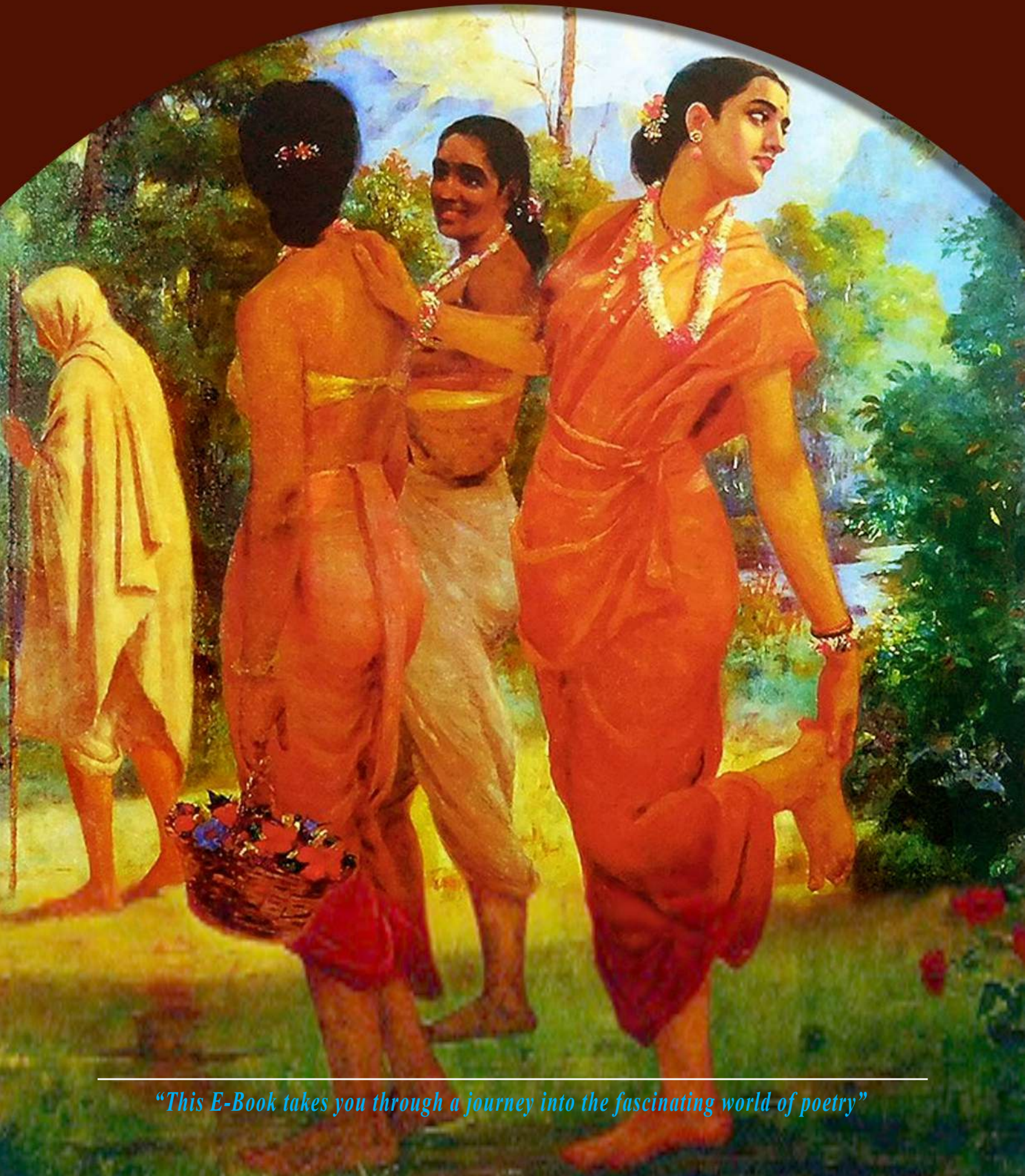


Is Poetry Alive or Dead?



"This E-Book takes you through a journey into the fascinating world of poetry"

Is Poetry Alive or Dead?

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Cover: Shakuntala-Painting by Raja Ravi Varma depicting a scene from Recognition of Shakuntala by Kalidas, the greatest poet of India

A POETIC ODYSSEY

Does poetry have a place in our rapidly changing digital world? Is poetry alive or dead? These



were the central themes we discussed in *Life Stream (Annual Issue, 2022)*, the e-magazine which we publish every year. Keeping the relevance of these issues in today's world, we decided to bring out an e-book on the same theme titled "***Is Poetry Alive or Dead?***"

This e-book covers a number of related topics vis-a vis the central theme. Before we delve into these topics, we attempt to grasp and appreciate the **relevance of poetry** in our lives. Our journey through **Poetry over the Ages** provides a glimpse into how it has evolved to its current form.

In the **Personality section**, we pay a tribute to Kumaranasan, a renowned poet of Malayalam literature.

The **Economics section** explores the seemingly unrelated realms of poetry and economics.

We also discuss the impact of advances in **science and technology** on poetry.

In the **Music section**, we delve into the intricate connection between music and poetry.

Within the **Poetry section**, we discuss poetry with social relevance, with reference to Edward Thomas's poem, "The Owl" that serves as a poignant reminder of our public responsibilities.

Can a place inspire the creation of poetry? We explore this idea in the **Travel section** with a focus on the Lake District in England, which serves as a compelling example.

The sensory experience of sight, colour, fragrance, and taste in food can be a powerful source of inspiration for poetry. We invite you to savour the delight of **food poems**. Furthermore, poetry's beauty lies in its ability to bridge the gap between our existence and the vast expanse of the mysterious universe. In "**Poetry and the Universe**", we delve into how great poets visualise and bring the universe closer to us.

The themes presented here have been meticulously curated from electronic and print media, reports, books, speeches, and various other sources, ensuring accessibility to all readers in one cohesive collection. To enhance your reading experience, we have divided this issue into three parts (Sections I, II, and III). We sincerely hope that the readers would appreciate this e-book on poetry, which tries to bring the diverse aspects of poetry in one place, in order to help you decide-" Is poetry alive or dead?"

Editorial Committee

INTRODUCTION

Does Poetry Matter Anymore?

This article aims to explore the question whether poetry still matters in our lives. We give a brief overview of the topic, and then present more detailed arguments in the following articles. By the end of this volume, we hope that the readers will be able to form their own opinions on whether we should have a poetic outlook on the world.

In 2003, an article in *Newsweek* made a striking remark, “We can easily picture a world without movies, plays, novels and music, but a world without poems is already here.” The author confessed, “I am troubled that I have not opened a book of poetry for years and that I, who used to spend hours reading modern poets like Lowell and Berryman, cannot even name a living poet.”

The *Washington Post* reported government data showing that today poetry has fewer readers than ever. Another writer observed that major newspapers have stopped reviewing or publishing poetry. Jonathan Yardley, a book critic for the *Washington Post*, wrote, “Contemporary American poetry is only read by poets, by writing students, and by literature scholars — and by hardly anyone else.”

Importance of poetry: Different writers have expressed the importance of poetry in their own ways. For some, poetry is a way of conveying the thoughts and feelings of a writer through rhythmic words. For others, poetry is one of the most flexible mediums of expressing human emotions and experiences; poetry acts as a universal channel for all thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

As another writer has said, “Poetry is everywhere around you. Poetry shares. Poetry heals. Poetry energizes. Poetry speaks up. Poetry reveals. Poetry announces changes. Poetry is what makes music meaningful. Poetry is a light, let it guide your way.”

Some writers point out that poetry gives us a historical insight into what previous generations found “beautiful, important, or profound” Some admire the power of poetry to deal with a wide range of topics such as love, war, social issues, the beauty of nature and the love of god. All agree that poetry is a “timeless, resourceful art, which could benefit readers of any age.”

Nature and poetry: Poetry can be found everywhere, hidden in nature — in the smiling flowers, shining stars, deep dark woods, still clear waters or the mysterious mountains, but one needs to have eyes to see and a mind to appreciate it.

Look what the great poet Kumaranasan from Kerala said in a Malayalam poem dedicated to the Goddess of Poetry (*kavya devatha*). The poet felt her presence everywhere — “in the slanting doe-eyes (of a beautiful woman) and in the gesture of a sage in deep meditation” “She sometimes bathes in the pool of endless tears of children who lost their mothers, or, sometimes in the streams of blood spilled by fighting warriors,” he adds.

Sadly, in today's world, we do not have the time to "stand and stare" or reflect deeply on things that are not directly relevant to us.

Why poetry matters: We know that change is what drives human development. Poetry is no exception. Technology has created other forms of self-expression. Despite technology, poetry will still survive in newer and simpler forms, and it will not vanish completely. "The poetry of earth never stops," wrote John Keats. So we do not need to look elsewhere to understand why poetry matters to us.

While discussing the poetic history of Assam, a writer from the distant north-east beautifully summed it up, "Overwhelmed by the complexity of the lives one leads, worrying about appearances, trapped in fears and worries, half suffocated by the flow of lukewarm thoughts and feelings, one may reject what poetry has to offer; but under its influence peace returns to the restless mind, the world crumbles, loveliness shines like flowers after rain, and, further, reality is once more charged with mystery."

How Poetry Helps

Writing and learning poetry still matters to us, even from a pragmatic point of view. Writer's digest, a web forum dedicated to writing, has this to say.

1. **Poetry Is Good For Developmental Learning:** It teaches children the art of creative expression, which is most found highly lacking in the new age educational landscape.
2. **Poetry Is Good For Developing Skills:** Writing, speaking, and understanding can all be greatly influenced and nurtured by the use of poetry.
3. **Poetry Helps Improve Ideas:** Reading and writing poetry makes you think of new ideas, but can also dramatically change the way you perceived old ones. It is a way to process experiences, visual descriptions, and emotions.
4. **Poetry Is Therapeutic For The Writer.**
5. **Poetry Is Therapeutic For The Reader.**
6. **Poetry Helps You Understand the Significance of Words Themselves:** Writing and reading poetry makes one understand the significance of every single word and their placement.
7. **Poetry Helps You Understand People:** Reading and writing poetry actually gives people the improved ability to understand others.
8. **Poetry Helps You Understand Yourself.**

References

These are websites that we found useful while compiling this. Please also search the web to know of what has come later.

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SECTION-1

POETRY THROUGH THE AGES

PART- I

In Part- I We deal with the great epics.

Epic Poetry

The epics are the expressions of the deepest emotions and the noblest of thoughts that are unique to mankind. But do they only reflect the life and times of the people they were written about? Here we give you a glimpse of the beginning of world poetic history and the creation of the great epics, and their lasting influence.

The Beginning: According to historians, poetry in an oral form came before written texts and evolved from musical traditions. “The earliest poetry exists in the form of hymns, chants and other forms such as recorded prayers, or stories about the religious subject matter, but they also include historical accounts, instructions for everyday activities, love songs and fiction.”

The earliest poetry is believed to have been recited or sung as they were rhythmic and repetitive — it made them easy to remember and retell. Many ancient works from the Vedas (1500–500 B.C.E) to the Odyssey (800–675 B.C.E) were composed in poetic forms, to help memorization and oral transmission.

Epic Poems: Poetry appears in the earliest records of many cultures across the world. Many famous literary masterpieces all over the world were written in the form of epic poetry. Epic poems were common in the ancient world because they could be narrated orally.

Many ancient poets composed epics that were usually long, narrative poems, often describing the adventures and heroic deeds of their heroes. They described the trials and tribulations of the heroes and other characters in the epics. People could easily relate to those characters.

Plato called epic poetry a mixture of dramatic and narrative literature. The stories contained in the epics were so dramatic that they captured the full attention of the listeners, and those who watched their performances were mesmerised.

Importance of Epics: The great epics have played an important role in shaping human culture and civilisation, and that they indeed have a lasting impact in our lives. For they have influenced everything that matters to us—literature, poetry, dance, drama, art, paintings, music, and so on. Through stories narrated in these poems, poets attempted to teach lessons in morality and guide people to lead a virtuous life, individually and collectively, thereby showing them the way to the pursuit of ultimate happiness and fulfilment.

Regardless of the language in which they were written, the epics portray the adventures of the human spirit; the great challenges in the life of individuals; the collective destiny of people; the rise and fall of kingdoms; and the death and destruction of great cultures. Throughout the ages, they have influenced our individual and collective conduct and behaviour. Both then and now, they help to strengthen the bonds that hold societies together.

We can easily discern what the epics teach us from a poem about the *puranas* (ancient Indian legends and traditional lore) written by Malayalam poet Vallathol. An approximate summary of a few lines from the poem is as follows, “They (the *puranas*) rule by discriminating between justice and injustice; dharma (righteousness) and adharma (immorality); Without blinking an eye, they watch in amusement, the playful illusion turning dust into gold; they lament when the flower of human life falls into a swamp ... The sceptre is thrown away and the yoga staff is held; the golden crown turns into a pile of matted hair... Through a stare with the force of power and authority, or restraining our hands with the power of love, or gently holding and stroking us lovingly, they stop us from acts of evil.”

It is truly remarkable that ancient poets, living in distant and isolated regions with little cultural exchange, composed epic poetry that, while featuring different narratives, shared a common vision, values, and concerns.

When we reflect on the world’s great epics, our minds often turn to well-known works such as the *Mahabharatha*, the *Ramayana*, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*. Yet, intriguingly, we discover that there are other magnificent epics in various languages and regions as well. Let us now explore some of the most significant epic tales.

Epic of Gilgamesh: Penned in Akkadian, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is frequently regarded as one of the earliest examples of epic poetry, dating back to the late 2nd millennium BC. Gilgamesh, a

hero in ancient Mesopotamian mythology and the king of the Sumerian city state of Uruk, embarks on a captivating journey alongside his wild companion Enkidu.



Gilgamesh as represented in an Assyrian palace relief (713–706 BC) Wikipedia

This epic chronicles their arduous quest for the secret of immortality, delving into themes of family, friendship, and the responsibilities of rulership. Above all, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* delves into humanity’s enduring struggle with the fear of death.

The legend of Gilgamesh’s extraordinary feats is narrated through five surviving Sumerian poems, recorded in cuneiform script on Babylonian tablets that have been archaeologically excavated. The most complete rendition of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is preserved on a set of twelve clay tablets.



The Deluge tablet, carved in stone, of the Gilgamesh epic in Akkadian, circa 2nd millennium BC (en.wikipedia.org)

This epic has been translated into numerous major world languages, and it is widely accepted among classical historians that it had a significant influence on the creation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in ancient Greece during the 8th century BC.

Some have even proposed that the flood story in the Book of Genesis, recorded on the Deluge tablet, has been directly borrowed from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

“When all the illusions of personal immortality are stripped away, there is only the act to maintain, the freedom to act.”

– **John Gardner, *Epic of Gilgamesh***

From the Epic of Gilgamesh

Gilgamesh, where are you roaming?

You will never find the eternal life that you seek.

When the gods created mankind, they also created death,

And they held back eternal life for themselves alone.

Humans are born, they live, then they die,

This is the order that the gods have decreed.

But until the end comes, enjoy your life, spend it in happiness, not despair

That is the best way for a man to live.

Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor: According to Wikipedia, the oldest surviving poem in the world is the “Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor”, composed in Hieratic and estimated to originate around 2500 BCE. This narrative hails from the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, approximately spanning the years 2050 to 1710 BC, and recounts a heroic journey to “the King’s mines”. Some experts speculate that the papyrus on which this story is inscribed may predate *Gilgamesh* by around five centuries.

Descent of Inanna: Inanna, also known as Ishtar, was the daughter of Nanna and the ancient Sumerian goddess of love, beauty, fertility, wisdom, and more. The epic from between 2112 BCE and 2004 BCE, chronicles Inanna’s extraordinary journey from her celestial realm to Earth and into the depths of the underworld beneath the Earth’s surface. Her purpose is to visit her sister, the queen of the underworld. Some sources suggest that this epic may even precede the

Epic of Gilgamesh, although the authenticity of this claim remains uncertain.



Goddess Ishtar on an Akkadian Empire seal, 2350–2150 BCE. Wikipedia

Two distinct renditions of the story recounting Inanna/Ishtar’s descent into the underworld have endured -a Sumerian version dating between approximately 2012 BCE and 2004 BCE, and an Akkadian version from the early second millennium BCE. The Sumerian narrative is nearly three times the length of its later Akkadian counterpart, brimming with intricate details.

An article interprets this poem as “an archetypal myth portraying the journey every individual must undertake to attain completeness. Inanna is not a ‘whole person’ until she confronts her ‘darker half’, dies and returns to life”. By the poem’s conclusion, this interpretation asserts, Inanna, having descended into darkness, shedding the vestiges of her

former self, confronting her 'shadow', and experiencing a profound rebirth, "emerges as a fully realised individual, fully aware of herself".

"Your great deeds are unparalleled; your magnificence is praised! Young woman, Inanna, your praise is sweet!"

Lines (272–274)

Descent of Inanna

The Akkadian version begins with Ishtar approaching the gates of the underworld and demanding the gatekeeper let her in.

*If you do not open the gate for me to come in,
I shall smash the door and shatter the bolt,
I shall smash the doorpost and overturn the doors,
I shall raise up the dead and they shall eat the living:
And the dead shall outnumber the living!*

Moving on to other notable early epic poems, we have the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharatha**, both from India and originally thought to be written in Sanskrit. The *Ramayana* has achieved status as "a significant narrative in both Hindu and Buddhist mythologies across various Asian regions." Some scholars even contend that either the *Mahabharatha* or the Tibetan *Epic of King Gesar* may lay claim to being the longest epic poems in history. In terms of narrative chronology, the events of the *Ramayana* precede those of the *Mahabharatha*.

Ramayana: Composed by the sage Valmiki, an unexpected figure considering his background as a hunter, this Sanskrit epic is dated to approximately 200 BCE. It comprises nearly 24,000 verses, primarily written in the *shloka* metre, divided into seven *khandas* with the first and seventh sections added later. The *Ramayana* recounts the story of Rama, the paragon of humanity, and explores the goals of human life.

Dasaratha, the King of Ayodhya, faced the predicament of having four wives, none of whom could bear children. Eventually, each wife gave birth to a son after a *yagya* (sacrifice) was performed. Rama, the eldest son born to Kausalya, the senior-most wife, held a special place in Dasaratha's heart. Thus, he desired that Rama succeed him on the throne. Meanwhile, Rama marries Sita, renowned for her unwavering devotion, selflessness, bravery, and purity.

However, Rama is exiled to the forest for 14 years, and his younger brother Bharatha is crowned king due to the manipulations of Kaikeyi, Dasaratha's third wife, and her conniving maid Manthara. Accompanied by Sita and his younger brother Laxmana, Rama encounters a series of challenges in the wilderness.



Rama with his wife Sita (Credit: worldpress.com)

Sita is abducted by the demon king of Lanka (modern Sri Lanka). With the assistance of the Monkey God Hanuman and his army, Rama vanquishes Ravana (a great scholar despite his evil nature) and rescues Sita. Upon returning to Ayodhya, Ram ascends to the throne as king, and two sons are born to him. However, due to malicious rumours about Sita's chastity, she is abandoned in a forest along with their two sons.

Sage Viswamitra, in whose ashram Sita resides with her two sons, brings her back to Ayodhya and subjects her to an *agnipariksha* (a trial by fire) to prove her purity. After demonstrating her chastity, Sita declines to return to the throne as the queen of Ayodhya and chooses instead to return to the Earth, her mother.

There exist nearly three hundred versions of the *Ramayana* world-wide, with the Sanskrit version attributed to the sage Valmiki being the oldest. Numerous Indian languages boast their own interpretations, alongside Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain adaptations. Additionally, Cambodian (*Reamker*), Indonesian, Filipino, Thai (*Ramakien*), Lao, Burmese, and Malay versions of the tale exist. Re-telling span all major Indian languages, including Kamban's *Ramavataram* in Tamil (11th–12th centuries), *Champu Ramayanam* by Bhoja (11th century), and *Adhyathmaramayanam* by Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan in Malayalam (17th century).

Tribal variations: We came across a fascinating article in *Deccan Herald* that shed light on the diverse tribal interpretations of the *Ramayana*. Among tribes such as the Bhils, Mundas, Santhals, Gonds, Sauras, Korkus, Rabhas, Bodo-kacharis, Khasis, Mizos, Meiteis, and more, one can encounter numerous versions of the *Ramayana*. These tribal communities, while preserving the fundamental structure and themes of the text, have seamlessly integrated their local geography and rituals. They have done so by incorporating indigenous songs and narratives and by imbuing the characters with the moral and ethical codes unique to their communities, resulting in a rich tapestry of tribal *Ramayana* versions.

In the hill regions of Assam, renowned for their weaving skills, Sita takes on the role of a master weaver. Among tribal communities that engage in puppet shows, there are those who venerate Ravana (*Ravana upasakas*) and believe in his invincibility.

The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh have fashioned their own *Ramayana*, intimately intertwined with their local traditions and deeply rooted in their oral storytelling tradition. They are also celebrated for their distinctive folk painting tradition.



Chau dance- Sangeet Natak Academy

Buddhist and Jain variations of the *Ramayana* can also be found within tribal cultures. Among the Tai-phake community in the north-east, Rama is revered as a Boddhisattva. In Odisha, tribal dance forms depicting the *Ramayana* are collectively known as Chhau dance. Interestingly, in many tribal narratives, Rama's brother Lakshmana assumes the role of the central hero.

Moreover, in various folk and tribal renditions, Sita transforms into the formidable deity Kali, responsible for vanquishing Ravana and other demons.

Valmiki, the narrator of the *Ramayana*, is thought to have originally been a Kirat tribal. However, owing to his wisdom and saintly attributes, he evolved into a Brahmin, proficient in Sanskrit. What was once a savage existence culminated in Valmiki's transformation into the *adi kavi* (first poet) of Sanskrit through the composition of the *Ramayana*.

“No burden is too heavy for providence, not even death.” – **Ramayana**

“Those who have knowledge of dharma say that truth is the highest dharma.” – **Ramayana**

“There is no deity more powerful than time.” – **Ramayana**

“The *Ramayana*'s message is not that we passively give in to Destiny, but that we gallantly stick to Duty” – **Chaitanya Charan Das**

Verses from Ramayana

On Rama the virtuous

*In the learning of the Vedas highest meed and glory won,
In the skill of arms, the father scarcely matched the gallant son!
Taught by sages and by elders in the manners of his race,
Rama grew in social virtues and each soft endearing grace,
Taught by inborn pride and wisdom patient purpose to conceal,
Deep determined was his effort, dauntless was his silent will!
Peerless in his skill and valour, steed and elephant to tame,
Dauntless leader of his forces, matchless in his warlike fame,
Higher thought and nobler duty did the righteous Rama move,
By his toil and by his virtues still he sought his people's love!
Dasharatha marked his Rama with each kingly virtue blest,
And, from life-long royal duties now he sought repose and rest.*

Blind hermit's curse on Dasharatha when he unintentionally kills his son while hunting

*Sorrow for a son beloved is a father's direst woe,
Sorrow for a son beloved, Dasharatha, thou shall know!
See the parents weep and perish, grieving for a slaughtered son,
Thou shalt weep and thou shalt perish for a loved and righteous son.*

Parting of Sita

*If unstained in thought and action I have lived from day of birth,
Spare a daughter's shame and anguish and receive her,
Mother Earth! If in duty and devotion I have laboured undefiled,
Mother Earth! who bore this woman, once again receive thy child!
If in truth unto my husband I have proved a faithful wife,
Mother Earth! relieve thy Sita from the burden of this life!"*

– From the English translation of Ramayana: The Epic of Rama, Prince of India by Romesh C. Dutt

Mahabharatha: Often described as “the longest poem ever written”, the *Mahabharatha* is a monumental work. Its most extensive version comprises over 100,000 *Slokas* (individual verse lines, each in a couplet), along with extensive prose passages. With a total count of about 1.8 million words, the *Mahabharatha* is approximately ten times the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined, or about four times the length of the *Ramayana*.

The bulk of the *Mahabharatha* was likely compiled between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE, with the oldest preserved sections dating to around 400 BCE. The original events recounted in the epic probably occurred between the 9th and 8th centuries BCE. It is believed that the text reached its final form during the early Gupta period (around the 4th century CE). Since then, the story has undergone countless re-telling, expansions, and adaptations.



Sage Vyasa composing the Mahabharata (ref: Wikipedia)

The *Mahabharatha* is divided into 18 *parvas* or chapters, with the central narrative revolving around two branches of the Kuru clan—the Pandavas and Kauravas. Their rivalry and struggles for the throne of Hastinapura form the core of the story. The Kauravas are the elder branch, and the feud between Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava, and Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava, escalates into the epic battle of Kurukshetra, fought in the region north of Delhi, in present-day

Haryana.

Interwoven into this narrative are numerous smaller stories and philosophical discourses. The *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred text within the *Mahabharatha*, is of profound significance, and the epic itself holds a revered place in Hindu scripture and world literature.



Mahabharatha-The battle of Kurukshetra (blogspot.com)

The *Mahabharatha* continues to be immensely popular in India, ingrained in folklore, music, performing arts, and culture for centuries. It has been adapted into plays, TV series, cartoons, and films to cater to contemporary audiences. Even today, children are named after characters from the epic, and across India, locals often proudly associate their locales with events from either the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharatha*.

A Persian rendition of the *Mahabharatha*, titled *Razmnameh*, was commissioned by **Akbar** in the 18th century and crafted by **Faizi** and 'Abd al-Qadir Badayuni.

Beyond the borders of India, the *Mahabharatha*'s narrative has left an indelible mark in Southeast Asian cultures influenced by Hinduism, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. Its various episodes have been immortalised in stone, particularly in sculpted reliefs adorning the temples of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom in Cambodia, as well as in intricate Indian miniature paintings.

“The body of a man is like the chariot; his soul, the driver; and his senses, the horses. Drawn by those excellent steeds when well trained, he that is wise and patient, performs life’s journey in peace

– **Vidura, Udyoga Parva, Mahabharatha**

“Men lose good judgment in things which concern their interest.”

– **Dhritarashtra, Bhishma Parva, Mahabharatha**

The Song Divine

Pivotal moment at the onset of the Kurukshetra battle sees both armies poised for conflict as



they await the sound of the conch shell that signals the commencement of warfare. At this tense juncture, Arjuna stands at the centre of the battlefield, grappling with a profound moral dilemma and overcome by a sense of despair over the impending violence and inevitable loss of life.

It is at this moment of crisis that Lord Krishna, who serves as Arjuna’s guide and charioteer during the war, steps forward to provide counsel. What follows is a profound dialogue between the two, encompassing a wide array of spiritual and philosophical themes that transcend the immediate battlefield. This makes the *Bhagavad Gita* one of the most renowned and influential Hindu scriptures.

Comprising 700 verses, this scripture is situated within the *Mahabharatha*, specifically chapters 23 to 40 of book six, known as the Bhishma Parva. Its composition is attributed to the latter half of the first millennium BCE, and the *Bhagavad Gita* masterfully combines elements of the spiritual and the practical, the divine and the worldly.

Quotes from the *Bhagavat Gita*

Krishna counsels Arjuna to fulfil his duty as a Kshatriya (warrior) by upholding dharma (righteousness) through selfless action.

*When meditation is mastered,
The mind is unwavering like the*

*Flame of a lamp in a windless place.
In the still mind,
In the depths of meditation,
The Self reveals itself.
Beholding the Self
By means of the Self,
An aspirant knows the
Joy and peace of complete fulfilment.
Having attained that
Abiding joy beyond the senses,
Revealed in the stilled mind,
He never swerves from the eternal truth.*

●●●

You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions.

●●●

There are three gates to this self-destructive hell: lust, anger, and greed. Renounce these three.

●●●

When a man dwells on the pleasure of sense, attraction for them arises in him. From attraction arises desire, the lust of possession, and this leads to passion, to anger.

From passion comes confusion of mind, then loss of remembrance, the forgetting of duty. From this loss comes the ruin of reason, and the ruin of reason leads man to destruction.

●●●

Death is as sure for that which is born, as birth is for that which is dead. Therefore, grieve not for what is inevitable.

●●●

Through selfless service, you will always be fruitful and find the fulfilment of your desires.

Romesh C. Dutt who translated the verses of *Ramayana* into English says, "The *Mahabharatha* depicts the political life of ancient India, with all its valour and heroism, ambition and lofty chivalry. The *Ramayana* embodies the domestic and religious life of ancient India, with all its tenderness and sweetness, its endurance and devotion. The one picture without the other were incomplete; and we should know but little of the ancient Hindus, if we did not comprehend their inner life and



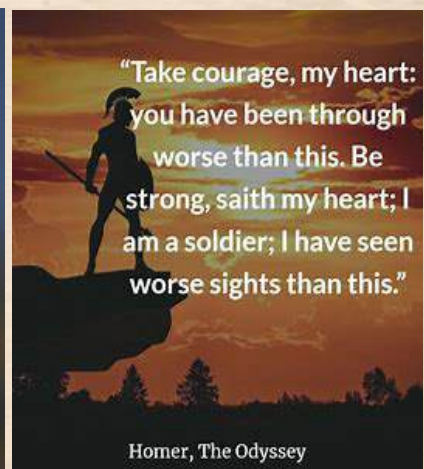
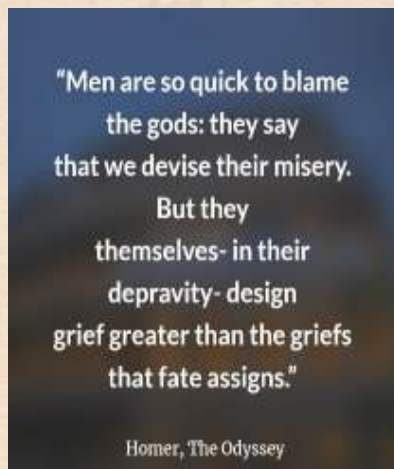
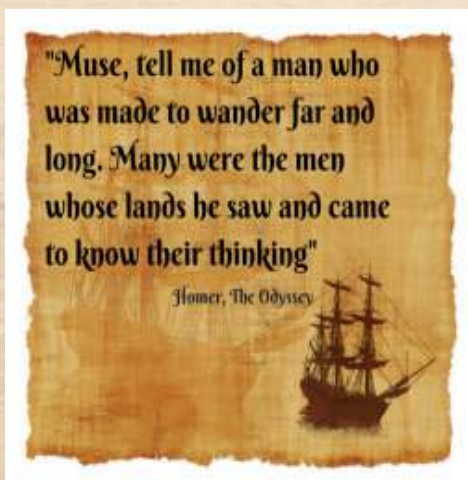
The Iliad en.wikipedia.org

faith as well as their political life and their war-like virtues. The two together give us a true and graphic picture of ancient Indian life and civilisation; and no nation on earth has preserved a more faithful picture of its glorious past.”

Moving to the realm of epic poetry, we encounter the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, both attributed to the poet Homer and believed to have been composed circa the 8th century BC. These two masterpieces are among the oldest extant works of Western literature, brimming with tales of heroism, pride, bravery, and war, and offering guidance for spiritual, ethical, and social progress.

The *Iliad* chronicles the epic clash between Achilles, a valiant Greek warrior, and King Agamemnon of Troy during the Trojan War. This narrative explores the themes of greed, pride, and cunning, serving as a rich tapestry of human virtues and vices.

The *Odyssey*, consisting of 24 books, also attributed to Homer, narrates the captivating journey of Odysseus, the Greek hero and King of Ithaca, as he endeavours to return home following the Trojan War. Along this arduous journey, he faces numerous perils, including the loss of his entire



(Ref: bing.com)

crew. Upon his return, he is recognised solely by his loyal dog and a nurse. With the assistance of his son, Telemachus, Odysseus reclaims his kingdom by vanquishing persistent suitors who had sought the hand of his steadfast wife, Penelope, and conspired with their foes.

Although the *Odyssey* was originally composed around the 8th or 7th century BCE, the circulated volumes were handwritten in Greek until the first printed Greek version was produced in Florence in 1488. The first English translation, authored by playwright and poet George Chapman, emerged in the 16th century. The *Odyssey* remains a timeless classic, offering a rich tapestry of adventure, longing, temptation, the eternal battle between good and evil, and ultimate triumph. Odysseus and his story, though centuries old, continue to resonate with the contemporary imagination.

Notably, parallels between the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Odyssey* have been identified. Both Odysseus and Gilgamesh embark on journeys to the ends of the Earth and descend into the realm of the dead.

The *Odyssey* has served as inspiration for various works of art and fiction, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), which re-imagines the story from Penelope's perspective, and the Coen brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000). This epic poem continues to captivate those intrigued by ancient travel and adventure.

The *Iliad* is only great because all life is a battle, the *Odyssey* because all life is a journey, the *Book of Job* because all life is a riddle.

– Gilbert K. Chesterton

“A man who has been through bitter experiences and travelled far enjoys even his sufferings after a time.”

– Homer, *Odyssey*



Ref: finerartamerica.com
Caption: Priam asking for the return of Hector's body

“Of all creatures that breathe and move upon the earth, nothing is bred that is weaker than man.”

– Homer

Meeting between Achilles and Priam

The meeting between Achilles and Priam is one of the most poignant scenes in the *Iliad*. When Hector, Trojan prince and son of old Priam of Troy was killed, Achilles did not give the body back to the Trojans, but took it with him to the Greek camp as revenge for the killing of his dear friend Patroclus by the Trojans. Then Priam goes alone to the Greek camp, and with great humility, begs Achilles to return his son's body.

“Priam entered in, and coming close to Achilles, clasped in his hands his knees, and kissed his hands, the terrible, man-slaying hands that had slain his many sons.

Achilles seized with wonder at sight of God-like Priam, and seized with wonder were the others likewise, and they glanced one at the other.

But Priam made entreaty, and spake to him, saying: “Nay, have thou awe of the gods, Achilles, and take pity on me, remembering thine own father. Lo, I am more piteous far than he, and have endured what no other mortal on the face of earth hath yet endured, to reach forth my hand to the face of him that hath slain my sons.”

So spake he, and in Achilles he roused desire to weep for his father; and he took the old man by the hand, and gently put him from him.

So, the twain bethought them of their dead, and wept; the one for man-slaying Hector wept

sore, the while he grovelled at Achilles' feet, but Achilles wept for his own father, and now again for Patroclus; and the sound of their moaning went up through the house.

But when godly Achilles had had his fill of lamenting, and the longing therefore had departed from his heart and limbs, forthwith then he sprang from his seat, and raised the old man by his hand, pitying his hoary head and hoary beard; and he spake and addressed him with winged words: "How hadst thou the heart to come alone to the ships of the Achaeans, to meet the eyes of me that have slain thy sons many and valiant? But come, sit thou upon a seat, and our sorrows will we suffer to lie quiet in our hearts, despite our pain; for no profit cometh of chill lament."

In the end, the body of Hector is returned to his father Priam.

– *Iliad*, Book 24, Translated by A.T. Murray

While we have highlighted some of the world's great epics, it is possible that other languages have produced their own remarkable epics. India, for instance, boasts epic poetry in numerous major languages.

Considering the future of these epic traditions, in countries like India, the practice of reading, interpreting, and discussing the *Ramayana* still endures in various regions, with a dedicated month known as the "*Ramayana* month" in the state of Kerala. However, these traditions are primarily upheld by the older generation, raising questions about their longevity. In the modern era, electronic modes of communication are gradually replacing the traditional methods of engaging with these classics.

It has become increasingly challenging to find the time to immerse oneself in these great literary works. Nevertheless, the vast river of poetic history continues to flow even in the swiftly evolving technological age, albeit with different ideals and a changed spirit. Newer, shorter forms of poetry are on the rise, but the enduring values and the philosophical and moral battles depicted in the great epics, along with the timeless quest for the ultimate truth, may continue to inspire humanity for generations to come.

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POETRY THROUGH THE AGES

PART II

In Section-I, Part-II we provide a concise overview of the emergence of poetry in its early stages and highlight some significant poetic movements. Moving on, in section-II we delve into the progress and transformation of poetry across major Western European languages, as well as the rich tradition of English-language poetry in the United Kingdom and the United States. Finally, in section-III we celebrate the contributions of women poets from that era, honouring their remarkable literary achievements.

SECTION-I EARLY POETIC MOVEMENTS



The Parnassus (1511) by Raphael: famous poets recite alongside the nine Muses atop Mount Parnassus (Photo credit: Alamy)

Early Poetry

Poetry, an essential facet of human history and civilisation, emerges from the depths of language. Historians speculate that language either naturally evolved within humans or sprouted from social interactions.

The origins of poetry are shrouded in the haze of time, making it challenging to pinpoint precisely when, where, and how this art form began. Nevertheless, we can broadly trace the historical trajectory of poetry as documented in various literary and critical sources.

Poetry's journey through history is a tale of evolving forms and themes. It dawned in ancient epochs, with notable works like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (2150 BCE - 1400 BCE) and the *Descent of Inanna* (1900 BCE–1600 BCE), both exemplifying early literary prowess.

The medieval period (400 A.D) witnessed the transition from Latin to vernacular languages, marking a shift in poetic subjects. The Renaissance era (1500 A.D) then became a poetic renaissance, characterised by a literary revival. The Neo-Classical period (1660–1800 AD) led to a return to classical values and forms.

However, the Romantic era (1798–1850 AD) ushered in artistic and emotional freedom. Modern poetry (1850–present) has continued to evolve, exploring new styles and themes, reflecting the ever-changing landscape of human expression.



Aristotle

Classification: Aristotle's *Poetics* categorised poetry into the epic, comic, and tragic genres, establishing guidelines to assess the quality of each. Over time, this classification expanded to include three major genres — epic poetry, lyric poetry, and dramatic poetry, with comedy and tragedy serving as sub-genres of the latter. Aristotle's influence extended through the Golden Age of Islam and into the European Renaissance.

Poetic Movements: Throughout history, numerous poetic movements have left indelible marks on the course of poetry. These movements, both major and minor, were community-based and shaped poetry during their respective eras. Examples include the Ancient Greek poetry schools, Provençal literature, Sicilian court poets, Elizabethan and Romantic poets, American Transcendentalists, Paris expatriates (Surrealist), and Beat poets, each contributing to the tapestry of poetry's evolution.

Ancient Greek Poetry (8th to 4th centuries B.C.): Ancient Greek poetry blossomed within



Homer

the broader cultural and intellectual movement in Greece, representing a golden age that spanned nearly three centuries. Greek poets transitioned from the oral tradition to written poetry, categorising their work into epic and lyric forms. Renowned figures include Homer, Hesiod, Sappho, and Pindar. Lyric poetry gained prominence, becoming akin to modern rock music, with lyric poets celebrated as the rock stars of antiquity. The exceptional lyric poet, Sappho, emerged as a rare female voice from ancient Greece.

Medieval Times (about 455–1485): In this era, poets experimented with subjects and languages. Latin had been the language of scholarly works and poetry, but poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer started crafting poems in the vernacular language spoken by the common people.

Provençal Troubadours: Poetry thrived as the earliest form of French literature during the late



Song of Roland- Manuscript Bodleian Library MS Digby 23, Part 2 (Wikipedia)

Middle Ages. The *Song of Roland*, a French epic, was born during this period and remains a testament to the era's literary prowess. Many romances and epics initially written in verse were later adapted into prose.

Sicilian School: Inspired by the Provençal troubadours, the Sicilian poets of the mid-13th to early 14th centuries integrated Arabic, Byzantine Greek, and Latin influences. They invented new words, giving birth to the Italian language. The *canzone*, a derivative of the *canso*, emerged

as a popular verse form, and the 14-line sonnet structure was created, standing the test of time.

Elizabethan and Shakespearean Eras: Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced ballads and sonnets to England, and these forms thrived through the works of poets such as Wyatt, Philip Sydney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare. The Elizabethan era allowed poets to explore a wide range of subjects, making it akin to the expressive culture of Ancient Greece.

Metaphysical Poets: Emerging a century after the Elizabethan era, metaphysical poets explored nature, philosophy, love, and metaphysics, breaking away from primarily religious themes. Prominent poets included John Dryden, Samuel Cowley, John Donne, and George Herbert.

Romantic Poets: The Romantic period, marked by poets such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Lord Byron, represented a pinnacle in literary history. It lasted for approximately three decades, fostering utopian values, spiritual exploration, and artistic development.

American Transcendentalists: Transcendentalists in the US from 1836 to 1860 championed utopian ideals, spiritual exploration, and artistic expression, rebelling against prevailing cultural norms. Notable figures included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Beat Movement: A group of young intellectuals and students in New York and San Francisco initiated the Beat movement, which lasted for about 15 years between 1948 and 1963. It left a significant influence on the literary world.

Section II

In the previous section, we explored the emergence of poetry and poetic movements in Western Europe, the UK, and the USA. Now, let us delve deeper into the poetic history of these regions.

I. Greek Poetry

Let us take a comprehensive look at the entire history of Greek poetry, which is usually divided into various periods.

The first is Ancient Greek Age (800 BC–350 AD), which is further subdivided into Pre-classical (800–500 BC), Classical (500–323 BC), Hellenistic (323–31 BC), and Roman Ages (31 BC–284 AD). Next comes the Byzantine age (350–1453) and then modern Greek poetry from around the mid 15th century to the present.

Ancient Greek Literature (800 BC–350 AD) refers to the oldest surviving written works in the Greek language, spanning until the fifth century AD. The pre-classical (800–500 BC) poetry was rooted in myths and included the works of Homer, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

The Classical Period (500–323 BC) marked the beginning of drama and history. It saw the development of various literary genres, including lyrical poetry, odes, pastorals, elegies, and epigrams. Prominent lyrical poets of this era were Sappho and Pindar.

The Hellenistic Period (323–31 BC) emerged after Alexander the Great's death and the rise of Roman influence. Greek culture thrived in Alexandria, Egypt, where poets like Theocritus, Callimachus, and Apollonius of Rhodes gained fame.

The Roman Age (31 BC–284 AD) produced important works in poetry, comedy, history, and tragedy, while Byzantine literature (350–1453) was notable for Acritic songs, with *Digenes Akritas* being the most famous. It is often considered the sole surviving epic poem from the Byzantine Empire. In the 20th century, the world wars and civil war influenced Greek poetry, resulting in poets expressing disillusionment and defeat. Prominent modern Greek poets include **Kostis Palamas, Angelos Sikelianos, Yiannis Ritsos, Odysseus Elytis, Dionysios Solomos, and George Seferis**. Seferis received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963, while Odysseas Elytis received the same honour in 1979.

Today, there are several young Greek poets contributing to the vibrant world of Greek poetry, keeping the tradition alive.

***Axion Esti* by Odysseas Elytis**

Axion Esti (1959) which translates to “It Is All Right” is the most famous poem composed by Odysseas Elytis and is regarded as a monument of contemporary poetry. *Axion Esti* is a long poem in which “the speaker explores the essence of his being, as well as the identity of his country and people”.

The poem is inspired by the memories of the 1940–1941 war, the German



Odysseas Elytis

occupation, the Greek resistance and the Greek Civil War that followed. Elytis having experienced all these critical phases of modern Greek history considers them as a “timeless siege of Greece by the forces of Evil”. This poem was set to music by Mikis Theodorakis and became very popular.

Axion Esti is divided into three sections—“The Genesis”, “The Passion”, and “The Gloria” and is considered as an autobiography of the poet. The first section details Elytis’ great love for his own country; the second section deals with the loss of innocence with World War II, and the final section is the rediscovery of the beauty that still remains. A few lines from “Genesis”.

*In the beginning the light and the first hour
when lips still in clay
Try out the things of the world
Green blood and bulbs golden in the earth
And the sea, so exquisite in her sleep, spread
Unbleached gauze of sky
Under the carob trees and the great upright palms.*

2. Roman Poetry

Roman literature began in the late 3rd century BCE. The earliest Roman poetry (Latin poetry) dates back to the second century BCE. Poetry was a widely appreciated art form, and poets from this era continue to influence modern poetry.

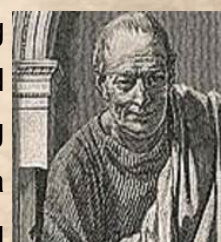
Roman poetry initially drew heavily from Greek poetry, as many Roman poets were either Greek or deeply influenced by Greek poetic traditions. They explored themes such as love, philosophy, historical epics, and Greek mythology.

The Golden Age of Roman poetry (70 BCE–14 CE) saw the emergence of renowned writers like **Virgil**, **Horace**, **Catullus**, **Propertius**, **Tibullus**, and **Ovid**. Virgil (70–19 BCE), one of the Augustan period’s Roman poets, is best known for his epic work, *Aeneid*. This epic recounts the journeys of Aeneas, the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus, and the age of Augustus.



Virgil

Roman poetry not only adapted Greek styles but also surpassed them, leaving an indelible mark on the world of literature. **Quintus Horatius Flaccus**, commonly known as **Horace** (65 BCE–8 BCE), held the prominent position of being the leading Roman lyric poet during the era of Augustus. His literary works encompassed satires, where he keenly critiqued the vices of his time, as well as odes exploring themes such as love, friendship, philosophy, and the art of poetry. Horace had a profound appreciation for nature, which he regarded as the primary wellspring



Horace

of inspiration for poetry. One of his most renowned literary contributions is the verse-essay titled *Ars Poetica*, an exploration of the art of poetry that gained significant acclaim. Horace is also celebrated for coining the famous phrase *carpe diem*, which exhorts individuals to “seize the day”.



Ovid

Publius Ovidius Naso, known as **Ovid** (43 BCE), was another luminary in Roman poetry during the Augustan period. Ovid stood as one of the most prolific poets of his era and is often regarded as one of the three canonical poets of Latin literature, alongside Virgil and Horace. His poetic works elevated Roman poetry to a level of elegance and lyricism that could rival the finest Greek poetry.

Ovid’s magnum opus, *Metamorphoses*, served as a profound source of inspiration for subsequent authors, including Chaucer, Milton, Dante, and Shakespeare. In the case of Shakespeare, Ovid’s influence extended to some of his plays, such as *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The golden age of Roman Poetry also saw the emergence of two renowned poets—**Marcus Annaeus Lucanus**, more commonly known as **Lucan** (39–65 CE), and **Publius Papinius Statius** (45–96 CE). Additionally, there was **Titus Lucretius Carus**, also known as **Lucretius** (99-55 BCE), who was both a poet and philosopher.

Lucretius was celebrated as a proponent of rationalism and reasoning. His notable work, *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things), penned around 60 BCE, was considered a challenging affront to religious beliefs. Notably, the poem included a remarkable description of Brownian motion in verses 113–140 of Book II, which he used as evidence for the existence of atoms.



Lucretius

This remarkable period of Roman poetry flourished under the reign of Augustus, giving rise to young Latin poets like **Gaius Valerius Catullus** (84 BCE – 54 BCE), who is revered as one of the greatest Roman lyric poets.

The impact of Roman literature extended far and wide, especially throughout the Western world. The use of Latin as both a spoken and written language became widespread, leading to the emergence of the Romance languages, including Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Catalan, all of which evolved from Latin. These languages continue to have a profound influence on contemporary culture and communication.

Virgil’s Aeneid

Aeneid is an epic poem in Latin, written by Virgil between 29 BC and 19 BC. In Greco-Roman mythology, Aeneas was a legendary Trojan hero, the son of the Trojan prince Anchises and the Greek goddess Aphrodite. The poem *Aeneid* narrates the legendary story of Aeneas, a Trojan, who fled the fall of Troy and travelled to Italy, where he became the ancestor of the Romans.

In Book 6, Aeneas travels to the underworld where he sees his father Anchises, who tells him of his own destiny as well as that of the Roman people. Anchises describes how Aeneas’ descendant

Romulus will found the great city of Rome, which will eventually be ruled by Caesar Augustus.

Turn your two eyes

This way and see this people, your own Romans.

Here is Caesar, and all the line of Lulus,

All who shall one day pass under the dome

Of the great sky: this is the man, this one,

Of whom so often you have heard the promise,

Caesar Augustus, son of the deified,

Who shall bring once again an Age of Gold

To Latium, to the land where Saturn reigned

In early times.

Let us now delve into the chief languages that evolved from Latin.

3. Italian Poetry

Italian poetry has a rich history dating back to the 13th century, and its influence has extended to many European languages, including English. Notable Italian poets throughout history have left a lasting impact on literature and culture. Here are some key figures and periods in Italian poetry:

Giacomo da Lentini (13th Century): Also known as Jacopo da Lentini or Il Notaro, he is credited with inventing the sonnet, a significant contribution to the world of poetry.

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321): Often referred to as Dante, he is one of Italy's greatest poets. Dante wrote in the vernacular language, making his work accessible to a wider audience. His *Divine Comedy* is a masterpiece of literature and has had a profound influence on Western art and literature.



Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304–1374): Petrarch is considered the founder of Humanism due to his contributions to the popularity of classical literature. His sonnets became a model for lyrical poetry, and his works include *Trionfi* (The Triumphs) and *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* (Fragments of Vernacular Matters).



Matteo Maria Boiardo (1440–1494): Boiardo is known for his epic poem *Orlando innamorato* (Orlando/Roland in Love).

Torquato Tasso (1544–1595): Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata* (Jerusalem Liberated) is an epic that depicts the combats between Christians and Muslims during the First Crusade.

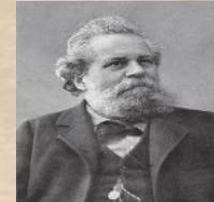
Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837): Leopardi is considered one of the greatest Italian poets of

the 19th century and a key figure in literary romanticism.

Giosuè Alessandro Giuseppe Carducci (1835–1907): Carducci, Italy's official national poet, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1901. His notable works include *Odi barbare* (Barbarian Odes) and *Rime nuove* (New Rhymes).



Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938): D'Annunzio was a multi-faceted figure in Italian literature, known for his works and contributions to political life.



Umberto Saba (1883–1957): Saba's poetry is characterised by its simplicity and autobiographical themes. His notable poems include "Trieste", "Ulisse" (Ulysses), and "La Capra" (The Goat).



Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888–1970): Ungaretti, one of Italy's foremost poets of the 20th century, is known for his poetic contributions during World War I.



Eugenio Montale (1896–1981): Montale, along with Giuseppe Ungaretti and Salvatore Quasimodo, is considered a founder of hermeticism in poetry. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1975.



Salvatore Quasimodo (1901–1968): Quasimodo, also a Nobel laureate, was known for his lyrical poetry and strong anti-Fascist stance.



Twentieth century Italian poetry reflects a diverse range of genres and movements, influenced by economic, political, and social factors. It explores themes relevant to modern society while also paying homage to Italy's rich cultural heritage, including echoes of opera.

Italian poetry has had a profound impact on the world, and its poets continue to inspire readers and writers across the globe.

The Divine Comedy

(From the last Canto of Paradiso 33, pp. 46–48, 52–66)

*As I drew nearer to the end of all desire,
I brought my longing's ardor to a final height,
Just as I ought. My vision, becoming pure.*

•••

*Entered more and more the beam of that high light
That shines on its own truth. From then, my seeing
Became too large for speech, which fails at sight.*

•••

*Beyond all the boundaries, at memories undoing—
As when the dreamer sees and after the dream
The passion endures, imprinted on his being*

•••

*Though he can't recall the rest. I am the same:
Inside my heart, although my vision is almost
Entirely faded, droplets of its sweetness come*

•••

*The way the Sun dissolves the snow's crust –
The way, in the wind that stirred the light leaves,
The oracle that the Sibyl wrote was lost.*

– Translated from Italian by Robert Pinsky

4. French Poetry

French poetry has a rich history that has evolved over centuries, shaping and influencing literary traditions across the world. Here, we explore the fascinating journey of French poetry through different periods and prominent poets.

Medieval French Poetry: French poetry finds its earliest roots in the Middle Ages when the written word was primarily in verse, rather than prose. During this time, many romances and epics, originally composed in verse, were later adapted into prose. By the late 13th century, French poetry began to distinguish itself from the Troubadour poets, both in content and form. Notable works from this period include the satirical “Roman de Fauvel” (1310–1314) and the contributions of renowned poet and composer **Guillaume de Machaut**.

15th Century Renaissance: The 15th century witnessed a significant evolution in French poetry.

Charles, Duke d'Orléans, wrote poignant ballads reflecting themes of loss and isolation during the tumultuous Hundred Years War. **Christine de Pisan**, a prolific writer of her time, authored the "Cité des Dames", regarded as an early feminist manifesto. **François Villon**, a vagabond poet, gained legendary status during the 16th century and continued to inspire poets in later centuries.

16th Century Renaissance and Petrarchan Influence: The early 16th century marked a period of poetic experimentation influenced by Petrarch and Italian poetry. Poets like **Jean Lemaire de Belges** and **Jean Molinet**, known as "les Grands Rhétoriciens", were at the forefront of this movement. French poets **Clément Marot** and **Mellin de Saint-Gelais** are credited with introducing sonnets into the French language, significantly impacting the form.

Jacques Peletier du Mans and Horace's Influence: Jacques Peletier du Mans, a humanist, played a pivotal role in French poetry by translating Horace's "Ars Poetica" in 1541. His collection *Œuvres poétiques* (1547) included translations of Homer and Virgil, marking a significant step in the evolution of French poetry.

Civil Wars and Agrippa d'Aubigné: The late 16th century saw French poetry reflecting the turmoil of the civil wars, with **Agrippa d'Aubigné's** "Les Tragiques" offering a powerful poetic commentary on the conflict.

Poetry in the 17th and 18th Centuries: The 17th and 18th centuries witnessed poetry becoming a central literary form for noblemen and professional writers. It was used to commemorate various events, from joyful celebrations to tragic moments. Poetry played a significant role in theatre, with the majority of scripted plays composed in verse. Notable poets from this era include **Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux**, **Jean de La Fontaine**, **Jean Racine**, and others, who contributed to the classicism in French poetry.

French Romanticism and Beyond: The 19th century marked the rise of French Romanticism, led by Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Gérard de Nerval. They introduced new forms



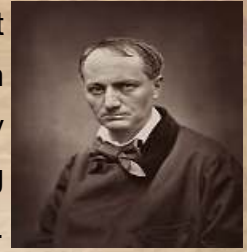
and revived older ones. The 20th century brought radical experimentation, with poets like **Paul Éluard**, **André Breton**, **Louis Aragon**, and **Robert Desnos**, founding the Surrealist movement. Surrealism continued to influence experimental writing and art internationally.

Contemporary French Poetry: Today, contemporary French poetry is marked by surrealism's legacy, exploring unfamiliar and often surreal landscapes. Young poets continue to push boundaries and redefine the language of poetry.

Notable French Poems

1. "Les Roses De Saad" by Marceline Desbordes Valmore (1786–1859)
2. "Le Lac" by Alphonse De Lamartine (1790–1869)
3. "Demain, dès l'aube" (Tomorrow, at Dawn) by Victor Hugo
4. "À Une Passante" by Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867)

Charles Baudelaire stood as an emblem of the modern literature movement in France. His distinctive style of prose-poetry left an indelible mark on an entire generation of poets. His most renowned work, a collection of lyric poetry titled *Les Fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil), encapsulates the ever-shifting essence of beauty in the rapidly industrializing Paris during the mid-19th century.



One of his famous poems, *À une passante* (To a Passerby), delves into the poet's profound fascination with the grace and allure of a woman he encountered on the bustling street. Here are a few lines from the poem.

*The deafening street around me roared.
Tall, slim, in deep mourning, majestic grief,
A woman passed, lifting and swinging
With a pompous gesture, the hem and flounces of her skirt,
As for me, I drank, twitching like a madman,
From her eye, livid sky,
Where the hurricane is born,
The softness that captivates and the pleasure that kills,
A lightning flash... then night! O fleeting beauty,
By whose glance I was suddenly reborn,
Shall I see you again only in eternity?*

5. “**Le Dormeur Du Val**” by Jean Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891)



Rimbaud was a French poet whose works deeply influenced the Symbolist movement and Surrealism. Published in 1888, it is one of the most iconic French poems ever, penned by the poet at the age of 18. It serves as a poignant tribute to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives in war. During its creation, France was embroiled in conflict with Prussia. Here is a part of the poem.

The Sleeper of the Valley

*A young soldier, open-mouthed, bare-headed
With his neck bathed in the blue-green cress
Sleeps; he's stretched out in the grass, under the sky,
Pale on his green bed where the light falls like rain.
His feet in the gladiolas, he sleeps.
Smiling as a sick child would smile, he takes a nap.*

*Nature, cradle him warmly: he's cold!
No perfume makes his nostrils quiver;
He sleeps in the sun, hand on his chest,
Quiet. There are two red holes on his right side.*

6. “**Le Pont Mirabeau**” by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918)



Apollinaire was a French poet, playwright, short story writer, novelist, and art critic. He is considered one of the great poets of the early 20th century, as well as “one of the most impassioned defenders of Cubism and a forefather of Surrealism”. The poem, first published in 1912 as part of Apollinaire’s collection titled *Alcool/s* (Alcohol), reflects on love and life in a unique and evocative manner.

7. “**Liberté**” by Paul Eluard (1895–1952)



Éluard, a key figure in the Surrealist movement and known as The Poet of Freedom, penned this ode to liberty during World War II in 1942. It passionately celebrates the concept of liberty and resistance against oppression.

8. “Les Feuilles Mortes” by **Jacques Prévert** (1900–1977)



This is a renowned French poem written in 1946. The poem employs dead autumn leaves as a symbol to evoke feelings of lost love, emptiness, and nostalgia. It remains beloved and relevant in the French-speaking world.

(Note: This list is not exhaustive, and many other notable French poets and poems exist.)

Victor Hugo (1802–1885)

Victor Hugo is considered to be one of the greatest French writers of all time. With a career spanning over 60 years, he wrote in a variety of genres and forms. He was also renowned for his poetry collections, such as *Les Contemplations* (The Contemplations) and *La Légende des siècles* (The Legend of the Ages).

“**Demain, dès l’aube**”, (“**Tomorrow, at Dawn**”) by Hugo is a classic poem from the collection *Les Contemplations*. It is a recount of the time Hugo visited his daughter’s grave (she had passed away a few years before in a drowning accident).

Tomorrow, at Dawn...

*Tomorrow, at dawn, when the countryside turns white,
I leave. You see, I know you are waiting for me.
I will go through the forest, I will go across the mountains.
I cannot stay away from you any longer.
I will walk with my eyes fixed on my thoughts,*

*Without seeing anything outside, without hearing any noise,
Alone, unknown, back bent, hands crossed,
Sad, and the day for me will be like night.
I will not watch the gold of the falling evening,
Nor the sails in the distance descending towards Harfleur,
And when I arrive, I'll put on your grave
A bouquet of green holly and flowering heather.*

5. Spanish Poetry

Spanish verse boasts one of the broadest and most comprehensive ranges of genres, verse forms, and stanzaic structures in the world of poetry. Early Spanish poetry drew influence from various sources, including travelling Troubadours, the Church, the Moors, and French Romanticism.

In the nascent stages of Spanish poetry, primitive lyrics were composed in the Mozarabic dialect, which had Latin origins with a blend of Arabic and Hebrew elements. This represents one of the oldest forms of poetry in Spain.

The Medieval period spanned 400 years and featured diverse poetry, primarily centered around religious and didactic themes. Spanish epics, likely influenced by French literature, emerged during this period, including works such as “Cantar de Mio Cid”, “Cantar de Roncesvalles”, and “Mocedades de Rodrigo”. The “Poem of El Cid”, of unknown authorship, is recognised as one of the earliest Spanish verse works, recounting the heroic deeds of El Cid.

The “Mester de Clerecía” (clerical minstrel poetry) genre gained prominence in the following era. Clerics wrote these medieval works to disseminate Christian faith while addressing a wide array of subjects, such as religion, philosophy, history, knowledge, and adventures. Notable examples include “The Miracles of the Virgin Mary”, “Poema de Fernán González”, “Book of Alexander”, “Cato’s Examples”, and “Book of Apolonio”.

During subsequent periods, the dominant language shifted from Galician-Portuguese to Castilian. The main themes drew inspiration from Provençal poetry, and these verses were often compiled into collections known as *Cancioneros*. Prominent works during this era include *Cancionero de Baena*, *Cancionero de Estuniga*, and *Cancionero General*. Other significant compositions encompass sections of the “Dance of Death”, “Dialogue between Love and an Old Man”, verses by “Mingo Revulgo”, and verses by the “Baker Woman”.

The 15th century continued to exhibit the medieval patterns of didactic and religious themes. Renowned Castilian poet **Jorge Manrique** thrived during this period.

The Renaissance period marked the publication of “Don Quijote” in 1605 by **Miguel De**

Cervantes. The Renaissance introduced a division between the natural and supernatural realms as a reaction to the omnipresence of religion in the Middle Ages.

This era witnessed the development of three distinct types of poetry—the Profane, exemplified by **Garcilaso De La Vega**, who wrote about love and pastoral life; the Ascetic, with noted poet **Fray Luis De Leon**; and the Mystical, represented by **Saint John** of the Cross and **Saint Teresa** of Jesus.

The Baroque period in the 17th century brought forth scepticism and pessimism as a reaction to the idealism and optimism of the Renaissance. Poets such as **Góngora** and **Quevedo** were prominent figures during this period.

The Enlightenment and Neo-classicism, originating in 18th century France, signalled a return to classical principles with an emphasis on education and morality.

The 19th century introduced Romanticism in response to the rationalism of the preceding era. Notable poets from this period include **Espronceda** and **Béquer**, with **José de Espronceda** producing his finest works after encountering English Romanticism. Realism and Naturalism took centre stage in the 19th century, aiming for objective representations of reality.

The 20th century, characterised by the search for formal beauty, witnessed the initiation of Modern Poetry by **Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer**, known for his simple and intimate style. **Federico García Lorca**, a member of the Generation of 27, explored avant-garde art and poetry.

In the post-war period, 20th-century Spanish literature delved into social realism, addressing contemporary social issues. In the 1960s and beyond, during the modern era, **Juan Ramon Jimenez** played a pivotal role in modernist poetry. The authors of the 98 Generation sought to rejuvenate society and confront the challenges of Spain's contemporary problems.

Women Poets: Spanish poetry also boasts a rich tradition of women poets hailing from South America, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Spain. Their works often include short, romantic, and straightforward poems. Some of their poems have been translated into English, and they have made significant contributions to the world of literature.



Gabriela Mistral

Some notable women poets include **Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda** (Cuba), **Delmira Agustini** (Uruguay), **María Elena Walsh** (Argentina), **Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz** (Mexico), **Alejandra Pizarnik** (Argentina), **Gabriela Mistral** (Chile), **Mercedes Negron Muñoz** (Puerto Rica), **Rafaela Chacón Nardi** (Cuba), **Nydia Lamarque** (Argentina), and **Rosario Castellanos** (Mexico). Mistral won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945, becoming the first Latin American ever to do so.

6. English Poetry

Presently, English is not confined to Britain alone but extends its reach across former colonies and continents, establishing itself as the global language of knowledge and commerce. In the previous section, we delved into the origins of English poetic history. Here, we offer a more comprehensive account of its evolution.

Early Poetry: The earliest remnants of English poetry emerged in Anglo-Saxon, the direct precursor to modern English, as early as the 7th century. Among these early works is a hymn on the creation attributed to **Cædmon** (fl. 658–680), a legendary figure said to be an illiterate herdsman.



The first page of *Beowulf* in Cotton Vitellius A. xv.

The monumental epic poem ***Beowulf*** stands as the sole surviving heroic epic in its entirety. Scholars debate its exact composition date, but the manuscript was produced sometime between 975 and 1025. “The Dream of the Rood”, penned before circa AD 700, is a Christian poem from Old English literature, belonging to the genre of dream poetry.

Subsequently, poems covered historical events like the Battle of Brunanburh (937) and The Battle of Maldon (991). Others were religious or devotional, and some took the form of elegies, including “The Wanderer”, “The Seafarer”, and “The Ruin”.

Anglo-Norman Period and the Later Middle Ages: With the Norman conquest of England commencing in 1111, Anglo-Saxon underwent a gradual transition into Middle English. Around the turn of the 13th century, **Layamon** authored his *Brut* in Middle English.

The Norman aristocracy predominantly spoke Norman French, making it the language of courts, parliament, and polite society. In 1362, English replaced French and Latin in Parliament and the courts of law. The 14th century marked the resurgence of significant works in English literature, including those by **Geoffrey Chaucer**, hailed as the “Father of English poetry” and regarded as the most esteemed English poet of the Middle Ages.



Chaucer

The rise of Scottish poetry began with **James I** of Scotland’s composition of “The Kingis Quair”. Leading poets in this Scottish group were **Robert**

Henryson, William Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas. Henryson and Douglas introduced a strain of almost savage satire into their works, with Douglas translating Virgil’s *Aeneid* into Middle Scots, known as *Eneados*.

The Renaissance Period: The Renaissance made a gradual entrance into England around 1509, extending until the Restoration in 1660. The early 16th century did not particularly stand out, with **Thomas Wyatt**, one of the earliest English Renaissance poets, introducing the sonnet form from Italy.



The Elizabethans: Elizabethan literature blossomed during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603), marked by a genuine appreciation for poetry and the arts. Notable developments included the emergence of the Elizabethan song tradition, centered around courtly poetry and the monarch, as well as the growth of verse-based drama. A renowned work from this period is **Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene***.



William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare popularised the English sonnet, infusing significant changes into Petrarch’s model. Shakespeare’s works during this period, including “Venus and Adonis” and **Christopher Marlowe/George Chapman’s** “Hero and Leander”, often drew inspiration from classical mythology. Translations of classical poetry became more common, with Chapman translating Homer’s *Iliad* (1611) and *Odyssey* (c.1615).

Poetry from 1603 to 1660: This era saw the emergence of the Metaphysical, Cavalier, and School of Spenser poetry styles. Samuel Johnson coined the term “**Metaphysical poets**” to describe a group of 17th century English poets known for their inventive use of conceits and emphasis on spoken rather than lyrical verse. Prominent poets included **Abraham Cowley, John Donne, and John Cleveland**.

Cavalier poets adopted a lighter and more elegant style compared to the Metaphysical poets.

Leading figures among the Cavaliers were **Ben Jonson, Richard Lovelace, Robert Herrick, Edmund Waller, Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, and John Denham**.



Edmund Spenser

The School of Spenser consisted of poets who followed in the footsteps of **Edmund Spenser** (1553–1599), considered one of the pre-eminent poets of the English language. **Phines Fletcher (1582–1648)** and **Giles Fletcher (1583–1623)** were key representatives of this school.



John Milton

John Milton (1608–74), one of the greatest English poets, is often regarded as the last major poet of the English Renaissance. His most renowned epic poems, including *Paradise Lost* (1667), were penned during the Restoration period. *Paradise Lost* narrates the Christian creation story, detailing the rebellion of Satan, the creation of the world, and the fall of mankind. Notable poets of this period included **John Dryden** (1631–1700), who served as England’s first Poet Laureate from 1668, **Alexander Pope** (1688–1744), and **Samuel Johnson** (1709–1784). These literary figures made significant contributions as satirists, critics, and writers, leaving a lasting impact on English literature.



John Dryden



Samel Johnson



Alexander Pope

Pope is celebrated for poems such as “An Essay on Criticism” (1711), “The Rape of the Lock” (1712–14), “The Dunciad” (1728), and “An Essay on Man” (1733–34). Irish poet **Jonathan Swift** (1667–1745), a satirist, author, essayist, and poet, composed satirical verses during the early 18th century.

Towards the end of the 18th century, poetry began to shift away from the strict Augustan ideals towards a greater emphasis on sentiment and feelings. Poets like **Thomas Gray, George Crabbe, Christopher Smart, Robert Burns, and Oliver Goldsmith** helped pave the way for the Romantic movement.

Romantic Movement (1800–1850): Originating in Europe in the late 18th century, the Romantic movement was a reaction against prevailing Enlightenment ideas. It prioritised individual creative expression and placed nature at the core of its work. Romantic poets, including **William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, George Byron, Percy Shelley, and John Keats**, expressed passion, pathos, and personal emotions, reshaping English literature. Unfortunately, some of them died young—Keats, at the age of 26, Shelley at 30, and Byron at 36.



William Blake (1757–1827) was a multi-faceted English artist, encompassing the roles of poet, painter, and printmaker. Remarkably, he remained largely unrecognised during his lifetime. Nevertheless, later critics highly regard him for his exceptional expressiveness, creativity, and the profound philosophical and mystical themes that run through his work.

Between 1793 and 1795, Blake created a collection of poems known as the *Minor Prophecies*. This collection includes notable works such as “In Europe” (1794), “The First Book of Urizen” (1794), “The Book of Los” (1795), “The Song of Los” (1795), and “The Book of Ahania” (1795). Blake’s influence extended to the Beat poets of the 1950s and the counterculture of the 1960s. In recognition of his enduring impact, the BBC’s poll of the 100 Greatest Britons ranked Blake at number 38. Additionally, his visual artwork enjoys high acclaim worldwide.

Here are some oft-quoted lines from his poem “**Auguries of Innocence**”.

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*



William Wordsworth (1770–1850), a foundational figure in English Romanticism, is celebrated for his poetic exploration of spiritual and epistemological themes, his deep connection between humanity and nature, and his advocacy for using the language of common people in poetry. He held the position of Poet Laureate of England from 1843 until his passing.

Wordsworth's profound affinity for nature is a hallmark of his work. Many generations of English-speaking individuals have cherished his poems. Notably, students in earlier times often committed his verses to memory, with two of his renowned poems, "The Daffodils" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", being widely taught in schools.

Wordsworth is perhaps best known for co-authoring "Lyrical Ballads" with Coleridge and for "The Prelude", which is considered his magnum opus. Here is an excerpt from "The Prelude", titled "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe".

*Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought!
That giv'st to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion! not in vain.*

Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey", published in 1798, is among his most famous poems, along with others like "My heart leaps up when I behold", "A slumber did my spirit seal", and "The Solitary Reaper".

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834), a multi-faceted individual encompassing the roles of poet, literary critic, philosopher, and theologian, is renowned as one of the architects of the Romantic Movement in England, along with Wordsworth. Coleridge, who was one of the Lake Poets, created masterpieces such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan".



In addition to his poetry, Coleridge left a significant mark on the world of prose with his major work, *Biographia Literaria*. His critical contributions, particularly his insights on Shakespeare, held substantial sway and were highly influential.

Furthermore, Coleridge's ideas exerted a major influence on American transcendentalism, with Ralph Waldo Emerson being among the notable figures inspired by his work.

George Gordon Byron (1788–1824), often referred to as Lord Byron, stands as one of the prominent figures of the Romantic movement. Byron's poetic prowess was coupled with a flamboyant and notorious personality that captured the imagination of Europe.



Notable among his works are "Don Juan" and "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", which remain celebrated to this day. Byron also gained popularity for his shorter

lyrical compositions featured in "Hebrew Melodies". A quintessential example of his poetic expression can be found in the following lines from "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage".

*"There is pleasure in the pathless woods,
there is rapture in the lonely shore,
there is society where none intrudes,*

*by the deep sea, and music in its roar;
I love not Man the less, but Nature more."*

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) emerged as a significant figure among English Romantic poets. Renowned for his radical writings and his unorthodox political and social views, Shelley did not attain fame during his lifetime. However, his reputation steadily grew after his passing. He is acclaimed as a superb craftsman and a lyric poet without equal, as well as one of the most advanced and sceptical intellects to ever engage in poetic expression.



Among Shelley's most celebrated works are "Ozymandias" (1818), "Ode to the West Wind" (1819), and "To a Skylark" (1820). He also co-authored a philosophical essay titled "The Necessity of Atheism" with his friend T. J. Hogg in 1811. Shelley's political ballad, "The Mask of Anarchy" (1819), stands as a significant piece in his oeuvre. Additionally, he produced long poems such as "Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude" (1815), "Julian and Maddalo" (1819), "Adonais" (1821), "Hellas" (1822), and his final, unfinished work, "The Triumph of Life" (1822). His "Prometheus Unbound" (1820) is considered a masterpiece of English literature.

Shelley also ventured into prose fiction and composed numerous essays addressing political, social, and philosophical issues. It is worth noting that much of his poetry and prose remained unpublished during his lifetime. In his verse, Shelley often conveyed profound ideas, as exemplified by the lines:

*"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts."*

John Keats (1795–1821), part of the second generation of Romantic poets alongside Lord Byron and Shelley, led a brief but impactful life. Keats, who passed away from tuberculosis at the young age of 26, dedicated his short existence to perfecting poetry marked by vivid imagery, sensual appeal, and an attempt to convey philosophical ideas through classical mythology. His odes, characterised by lyrical meditations on various subjects, stand out as his most distinctive poetic achievements.



Today, Keats's poems and letters remain immensely popular in English literature and are extensively analysed. His notable works include "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "Sleep and Poetry", and the sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer". Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark" are two of the glories of English literature.

The Romantic movement came to a close by the end of the 19th century, due to untimely deaths of the younger poets. However, it profoundly influenced poetry not only in Britain, but also countries of Europe and America. It also swayed poets in its former colonies like India, where Hindi and regional poetry owe a debt of gratitude to Romantic poetry.

Ode to a Nightingale

*Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!*

– John Keats

To a Skylark

*Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.
Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.*

– P.B. Shelly

Keats and Shelly



At the foot of the beautiful Spanish steps built on a steep slope in Rome is the house where John Keats died in 1821. Keats moved to Rome after he fell ill, hoping that the weather in Rome would favour his health. However, he died within a few months, aged 25, from tuberculosis.

Some say that young Keats recited his poems to a successful woman and writer, Mary Shelley, walking along the stone steps. The house is now a museum where people can see different memorabilia of Keats's work and that of the English Romantics.

Though Shelley and Keats were mutual friends, their world view was different. Keats was a romantic; Shelley was an idealist. Upon learning of Keats's illness, Shelley graciously requested him to stay with his family in Italy, which the poet politely declined. Shelley wrote the beautiful elegy "Adonais" after Keats died.

The very next year, Shelley himself drowned in a shipwreck; and his body was washed ashore. A volume of Keats's poetry was found in his pocket. Both Keats and Shelly are buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome.

The Victorian era, encompassing Queen Victoria's reign from 1837 to 1901, was a time of significant political, social, and economic change. Prominent Victorian poets included John Clare, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Matthew Arnold, Christina Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

During this period, comic verse thrived, with magazines like *Punch* and *Fun* brimming with humorous creations.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) emerged as a leading Victorian poet. His poetry is noted for its diverse metrical forms, vivid imagery, and melodic language. He grappled with the doubts and challenges of an age where traditional religious beliefs faced scrutiny due to scientific and societal progress. Tennyson served as the Poet Laureate for much of Queen Victoria's reign.



Some of his notable works include *Timbuktu* and *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), which featured poems like "Claribel" and "Mariana". Tennyson also crafted shorter lyrical pieces like "Break, Break, Break", "The Charge of the Light Brigade", "Tears, Idle Tears", and "Crossing the Bar". He frequently drew inspiration from classical

mythological themes, as seen in “Ulysses”. “In Memoriam”, a lengthy poem comprising 131 sections, mourned the untimely passing of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam (1811–1833) while addressing contemporary issues of the Victorian Age.

In his poem “Ulysses”, Tennyson reflects on the desire for continued exploration and learning in old age. He beautifully encapsulates this sentiment with lines like, *“I am a part of all that I have met; Yet all experience is an arch wherethro’ Gleams that untravell’d world whose margin fades Forever and forever when I move.”*

He also explores the purpose of life with the lines, *“To follow knowledge like a sinking star Beyond the utmost bound of human thought”* and *“To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”* These words offer inspiration to those in their later years, emphasising the value of continued growth and exploration.

Towards the end of the Victorian era, English poets began showing interest in French symbolism, marking a shift towards decadence in Victorian poetry.

The Victorian era extended into the early 20th century, with the **Georgian poets** being among the first significant figures of the post-Victorian period. This group, featured in the “Georgian Poetry” anthologies, included poets like **Edmund Blunden, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence, Walter de la Mare,** and **Siegfried Sassoon**. Their work represented a reaction against the decadence of the 1890s and often leaned towards sentimentality.

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) and **Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)** were influential writers and poets during this transitional period. Kipling’s poem “If” stands as a tribute to Victorian stoicism and traditional British virtues.

Modernism: The 20th century ushered in modernism, characterised by avant-garde poets such as **Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, H.D.,** and **Ezra Pound,** as well as **D.H. Lawrence** and others. Pound was a significant figure in the early modernist poetry movement and played a role in developing Imagism, which emphasised precision and economy of language.



T.S. Eliot (1888–1965), an American-born British poet, became one of the major poets of the 20th century and a central figure in English-language Modernist poetry.

His poem “The Waste Land”, published in 1922, is regarded as one of the most important works of the century. Another famous poem, “The Hollow Men”, published in 1925, reflects despair and desolation with its memorable lines, “This is the way the world ends, Not with a bang, but a whimper”.



Other notable poets of the 20th century include **A. E. Housman (1859–1936), Alfred Douglas (1870–1945), Gilbert K. Chesterton (1874–1936),** and **Edward Thomas (1878–1917),** who was inspired to write poetry after an encounter with Robert Frost. He met his demise during World War I; **A. A.**

Milne (1882–1956); D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930); J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973); Robert Graves (1895–1985); C. Day Lewis (1904–1972; the Poet Laureate from 1968 until his death); W. H. Auden (1907–1973; an Anglo-American luminary); Philip Larkin (1922–1985); Ted Hughes (1930–1988); and Michael Rosen (born in 1946).

Contemporary English poetry has evolved to encompass voices and influences from around the world. However, given space constraints, we have not delved into the diverse and rich landscape of modern English poetry, which features a wide array of native and international talents.

The Waste Land

Published in 1922, the world celebrated 100 years of this poem last year

Part 1 – Burial of the Dead

*What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
your shadow at morning striding behind you
or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.*

7. American Poetry

American colonists began crafting poetry in the 17th century, well before the unification of the Colonies. As one might aptly observe, “The development of poetry in the American colonies reflects the growth and evolution of the colonies themselves.”

Early American poetry often embodied Puritan ideals, but as the nation progressed toward independence, it began to reflect the changing landscape. Early colonists’ poems mirrored contemporary English styles, but in the 19th century, American poetry started to forge its own distinctive identity. By the latter part of that century, American poets had established their individuality and achieved widespread recognition.

Between 1910 and 1945, much American poetry was published in political periodicals, primarily

on the far left. Unfortunately, many of these works were lost during the McCarthy era in the 1950s. We have seen influential English-language poets like Pound and Eliot emerge in the first half of the 20th century, challenging traditional poetic forms, meter, and Victorian diction. African-American and women poets also made significant contributions during this era.

As the millennium approached, there was a growing emphasis on poetry by previously under-represented groups, including women, African Americans, Hispanics, Chicanos, Native Americans, and other ethnicities. This period saw the emergence of numerous poets, indicating that newfound freedom in America inspired traditionally marginalised groups to express their deepest emotions and thoughts through poetry.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) tops the list of notable American poets. He was an essayist, lecturer, philosopher, and poet, a leading figure in the American Transcendentalist movement of the 1820s and 1830s. He popularised individualism and mentored Henry David Thoreau.

Emerson believed that “Nature is a language and every new fact one learns is a new word.” His poetry combined beauty and profound wisdom, as seen in his famous poem “The Snow-Storm” and others.

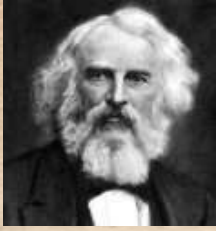


Hamatreya by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson wrote “Hamatreya”, a beautiful poem that explores “the permanence of mother earth in comparison to the transience of human beings”. The poet was fascinated with the Hindu scriptures, especially the sacred Vedas. “Hamatreya” (a shortened form of “Hail Maitreya”) is based on a passage of the Vishnu Purana. To a question raised by his disciple Maitreya on the real worth of earthly possessions, Sage Parasara replies thus.

*Where are these men? Asleep beneath their grounds:
And strangers, fond as they, their furrows plough.
Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boy
Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;
Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet
Clear of the grave.
Ah! the hot owner sees not Death, who adds
Him to his land, a lump of mould the more.*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882) achieved immense popularity during his lifetime



and gained recognition overseas as well. His poetry is characterised by its lyrical and musical qualities, often weaving tales of mythology and legend. Notable works include “Paul Revere’s Ride”, “The Song of Hiawatha”, and “Evangeline”. Longfellow holds the distinction of being the first American poet to translate Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was a writer, poet, editor, and literary critic, with a primary passion



for poetry. He played a central role in the Romantic movement in the United States. Poe’s literary career began with the publication of his first collection, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, under a pseudonym while he served in the United States Army. Poe is acclaimed as the architect of the modern short story, and his poem “The Raven”, published in 1845, achieved instant success.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was a prominent American naturalist, essayist, poet, and



philosopher, deeply associated with transcendentalism. His most renowned works include *Walden*, which explores simple living in natural surroundings, and his essay “Civil Disobedience”. Here is a short poem by Thoreau.

Winter Memories

*I have remembered when the winter came,
High in my chamber in the frosty nights,
When in the still light of the cheerful moon,
On every twig and rail and jutting spout,
The icy spears were adding to their length
Against the arrows of the coming sun,
How in the shimmering noon of winter past.*

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) is hailed as one of the most influential American poets, often referred



to as the “father of free verse”. Whitman’s unique style marked a departure from traditional poetic forms. His poetry, along with Dickinson’s, is recognised as the emergence of truly indigenous English-language poetry in the United States. *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855, is one of his most celebrated works. Whitman revised the poem at least nine times during his life time. The collection has influenced popular culture, films, music and literature, later on, and became

recognised as one of the central works of American poetry.

*I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) is regarded as one of America’s most significant poets, and her work is explored further in the section on Women Poets.



Robert Lee Frost (1874–1963), considered one of the greatest American poets of the 20th century, is renowned for his realistic depictions of rural New England life. His poems, characterised by their profound insights into the human experience, include “The Road Not Taken” and “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”.



James Mercer Langston Hughes (1901–1967) was a prominent figure of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural and artistic movement among African Americans in the 1920s. Hughes’s poetry addressed the struggles and experiences of black Americans, with poems like “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1920), written in the summer after his graduation from high school. Here are a few lines from it.



*My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.*

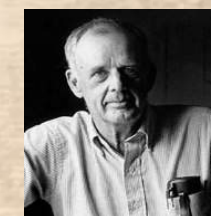
Ogden Nash (1902–1971) was known for his humorous and unconventional style of writing in light verse. His poetry was acclaimed as some of the most humorous by the *New York Times*.



Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) played a significant role in the Beat Generation and was best known for his poem “Howl”, which critiqued capitalism and conformity in the United States.

Maya Angelou (1928–2014) was a renowned American poet, civil rights activist, and champion of black feminism, further discussed in the Women Poets section.

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963) is among the most influential American poets of the 20th century, with her contributions explored in the Women Poets section.



Wendell Erdman Berry (born in 1934) is a multi-faceted American author known for his novels, poetry, essays, and environmental activism.

Bob Dylan (born in 1941) is a world-famous American songwriter and poet who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016 for his contributions to the field of poetry through his song writing.



Louise Elisabeth Glück (born April 22, 1943) is an acclaimed American poet and essayist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2020 for her poetic voice and universal themes.

Gilbert Scott-Heron (1949–2011) was an American jazz poet, musician, and author, best known for his spoken-word performances and his influential poem “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”, which had a significant impact on hip-hop music.

Today’s American Poetry: Contemporary American poetry has found a prominent presence on the internet, including online journals, magazines, blogs, and websites. However, it is worth noting that many major newspapers and magazines are still hesitant to publish poetry.

In a 2017 survey, it was found that 11.7% of Americans had read poetry in the previous year, which is encouraging. While classic poetry continues to be widely read, modern American poets offer fresh perspectives on politics, society, and love that deeply resonate with readers. Many poets today are actively engaged in graduate creative writing programmes, which are gaining popularity and contributing to the professionalisation of poetry.

In the United States, there are now at least two prestigious national poetry prizes in addition to the Pulitzer Prize—the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, which offers US\$50,000, and the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, with a substantial \$75,000 prize.

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Section III

Women Poets

Throughout the history of European, British, and American poetry, the presence of women poets



has been extraordinary, dating back to **Sappho**, one of the earliest known poets in ancient times. Known as the “Tenth Muse” and “The Poetess”, Sappho was celebrated for her lyric poetry set to be sung. While most of her poetry has been lost to time, a few fragments remain. Here is a snippet from her poem “A Hymn to Venus”.

*O Venus, beauty of the skies,
To whom a thousand temples rise,
Gaily false in gentle smiles,
Full of love-perplexing wiles;
O goddess, from my heart remove
The wasting cares and pains of love.*

Moving to the 18th century, we see the emergence of notable women poets in England during the Restoration period, including **Aphra Behn, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Chudleigh, Anne Finch, Anne Killigrew, and Katherine Philips**. However, print publication opportunities for women poets were limited compared to men. Women poets often had to justify their writing, driven either by economic necessity or external pressure.

As we move into the late 18th century, women writers become increasingly active in all genres, and women’s poetry flourishes in the 1790s. Some notable poets of this era include Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Joanna Baillie, Susanna Blamire, Felicia Hemans, Mary Leapor, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Hannah More, and Mary Robinson.

Women poets also made significant contributions outside of Europe and the UK.



Phillis Wheatley, born in Africa and enslaved in North America, is considered the first African-American author of a published book of poetry. Despite her challenging life, she achieved fame with her poems published in London in 1773, earning praise from George Washington. The lines below are from one of her notable poems, “On being brought from Africa to America”.

*T’was mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there’s a God, that there’s a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.*

In the 19th century, several prominent female poets laid the foundation for women's poetry in the coming century. Leading figures included Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Dickinson, and Christina Rossetti.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, an English poet of the Victorian era, made a significant impact on contemporary writers, including American poets Poe and Dickinson. Her famous poem, "How Do I Love Thee?" (Sonnet 43, 1845), is still widely recognised today. She also wrote "Bianca among the Nightingales", a tragic love poem set in Italy, which includes the following lines.



*The cypress stood up like a church
That night we felt our love would hold,
And saintly moonlight seemed to search
And wash the whole world clean as gold;
The olives crystallised the vales'
Broad slopes until the hills grew strong:
The fireflies and the nightingales
Throbbled each to either, flame and song.*

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson, one of America's most important poets, wrote nearly 1,800 poems characterised by short lines, unconventional capitalisation, and themes of death and immortality. Her work continues to be celebrated for its unique style and profound themes. Consider these lines from her poem "Hope".



*"Hope" is the thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—
And never stops—at all—*

Christina Georgina Rossetti, an English writer known for her romantic, devotional, and children's poems, contributed significantly to English literature. Her poem "In the Bleak Midwinter" became a popular Christmas carol, and her work "Love Came Down at Christmas" is also widely sung. *Here is a passage from her poem "Remember"*.



*Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.*

The 20th century witnessed significant contributions from women in the field of poetry. Prominent female poets of the 20th century include Sylvia Plath, Maya Angelou, Mary Oliver, and others.

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963), an American short-story writer, novelist, and poet, is renowned for popularising confessional poetry. Besides her poetry, she gained equal recognition for her short stories and the semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*. Her notable works include *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960) and *Ariel* (1965).



The *Collected Poems*, published in 1981, received the Pulitzer Prize in 1982. Despite her life-long battle with clinical depression, Plath achieved both popularity and critical acclaim. Her life story inspired the 2003 film *Sylvia*.

Maya Angelou (1928–2014) was not only an American poet but also a prominent civil right activist who achieved widespread fame. Her literary contributions encompass seven autobiographies, three essay collections, several books of poetry, as well as plays, movies, and television shows spanning over five decades.

Angelou's recitation of her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at Bill Clinton's first inauguration in 1993 earned her a Grammy Award. She played an active role in the Civil Rights Movement, collaborating with figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Her life story, as one writer in the Guardian put it, inspires awe and gratitude. Angelou herself once said, "I make writing as much a part of my life as eating or listening to music." Here is one of her well-known poems.

When Great Trees Fall

*When great trees fall,
rocks on distant hills shudder,
lions hunker down
in tall grasses,
and even elephants
lumber after safety.
When great trees fall
in forests,
small things recoil into silence,
their senses
eroded beyond fear.
When Great Souls die,*



*the air around us becomes
light, rare, sterile.
We breathe, briefly.
Our eyes, briefly,
see with
a hurtful clarity.
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
examines,
gnaws on kind words
unsaid,
promised walks never taken.*

In 2011, President Barack Obama awarded Maya Angelou the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honour in the United States.

In **Latin America**, many women poets have left their mark on the world of poetry. **Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz**, known for her range, themes, wit, and creativity, gained fame in the 17th century.

Coming from Chile at the beginning of the 20th century, feminist poet Lucila Godoy Alcayaga, who wrote under the pseudonym Gabriela Mistral (and once taught the renowned Pablo Neruda), was another significant figure. The first Latin American poet to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, she often wrote on subjects related to women.

Other notable women poets from the region include Alejandra Pizarnik from Argentina, who excelled in prose poetry, and Delmira Agustini. Giannina Braschi, who wrote epic poetry covering subjects such as debt crises, national building, decolonisation, and revolution, is another noteworthy figure. Afro-Cuban poet Excilia Saldaña also made her mark with children's poetry.

Women poets writing in other languages are discussed in their respective sections. Women continue to hold a significant position in contemporary poetry worldwide. With increasing literacy rates and evolving gender roles, they contribute to poetry while seeking to discover new meanings in life.

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PART III : EXPLORING POETRY ACROSS LANGUAGES

In this segment, we delve into the rich history of poetry in major languages across different countries and continents.

I. Russian Poetry

A Russian writer once remarked, “Russia is a poetic nation, and anyone you meet will know a dozen poems by heart.” Indeed, literature has been a profound and expressive outlet for Russian creativity. Russian poets and writers have consistently voiced the conscience and soul of the people, often enduring hardships for their art.

The history of Russian poetry can be divided into several distinct phases, each marked by its unique character.

Folk Poetry: Poetry in Russia found its roots in folk traditions, expressed through songs, fairy tales, and epics. Folk poetry evolved through mythological, heroic, and historical stages, with Old Russian literature featuring masterpieces in Old East Slavic.

A *bylina*, derived from the word *byl* signifying actual events, is an epic of heroism that narrates the tales of *bogatyri*, the formidable heroes who defended the land of Rus against adversaries, working to unify it. In the later medieval era, these epic narratives were recited and sung by *skomorokhi*, itinerant minstrels who roamed the land. Over time, these epic tales gradually gave way to historical and lyrical songs, marking an evolution in Russian story-telling.

Church Influence and Early Literature: Christianity significantly influenced Slavic mythology, introducing written language and literature to Russia. Church scriptures played a crucial role in shaping the spiritual and moral landscape of the Russian people.

Middle Ages: Russian written poetry began to emerge independently in the mid-17th century. During the medieval period, Russian literature retained a predominantly religious character and utilised an adapted form of the Church Slavonic language. The late 17th century witnessed the infusion of Western European values into Russian culture, resulting in more cosmopolitan and urbane poetry, partly due to the reforms of Peter the Great (1689–1725). The earliest poets were court officials reliant on the tsar’s patronage.

The Golden Age of Poetry: The 19th century, often referred to as the “**Golden Era**” of Russian literature, witnessed profound changes in poetry, prose, and drama. Emperor Alexander-I’s reign (1801–1825) fostered artistic freedom and creativity. This period marked the pinnacle of Russian literature, particularly in poetry.

Alexander Pushkin played a central role in this movement, elevating Russian language and literature to new heights with works like *Eugene Onegin* (1833). A new generation of poets, including **Mikhail Lermontov, Yevgeny Baratynsky, Konstantin Batyushkov, Nikolay Nekrasov, Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy, Fyodor Tyutchev, and Afanasy Fet**, was

influenced by Pushkin. External influences, such as the poetry of Scottish writers Robert Burns and Lord Byron, left an indelible mark on Russian poets.

Listen, if stars are lit

it means – there is someone who needs it.

*It means – someone wants them to be,
that someone deems those specks of spit
magnificent*

– **Vladimir Mayakovsky**

*“We see joy’s shadow in our earthly dreaming,
Somewhere joy exists: There are no shadows without substance.”*

– **Nicholas Karamzin**

*“O men! A wretched race, worthy of tears and laughter!
Priests of the minute, worshippers of success!
How often a man passes by you,
Whose blind and exuberant age scolds you,
But whose high countenance in the coming generation
The poet will be delighted and amused.”*

– **Alexander Pushkin**

*“I sit in the dark. And it would be hard to figure out which is worse;
The dark inside or the darkness out.”*

– **Joseph Brodsky**

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837)



Alexander Pushkin

Alexander Pushkin is considered to be one of the most famous literary figures in Russian history. Born in a noble family, his life was cut short at the young age of 37 in Saint Petersburg, due to an injury sustained after a duel.

Pushkin was a prolific writer whose compositions were in many genres, from novels and short stories to poems and plays that are considered masterpieces.

Among them, his verse novel *Eugene Onegin* is the most famous.

Before Pushkin, Russian poetry was virtually non-existent. Pushkin is credited with developing the modern Russian language, as well as Russian literature. His style though simple, was carefully crafted. Instead of using pompous words, he preferred colloquial speech. He dwelt on a variety of subjects through his poetry—love and friendship, freedom, loyalty to the state, as well as art and life.

Eugene Onegin is considered a classic in Russian literature. This verse novel powerfully depicts the deadly inhumanity of social convention. Onegin's selfishness, vanity, and indifference are portrayed in the introduction. Even when he moves to the country, he maintains the same profile. He is unable to relate to the feelings of others and lacks empathy. In the latter part of the poem, he is depicted as a victim of his own pride and selfishness. Onegin kills his only friend, loses his love, finds no fulfillment in his life, and is doomed to loneliness forever.

Pushkin's "I Remember the Magic Moment" dedicated to his beloved Anna Kern is the most well-known Russian poem of all times. It has been translated into more than 210 languages. Here are a few lines from it.

My soul attained its waking moment:

*You're-appeared before my sight,
As though a brief and fleeting omen,
Pure phantom in enchanting light.
And now, my heart, with fascination,
Beats rapidly and finds revived
Devout faith and inspiration,
And tender tears and love and life.*

– Translated by Andrey Kneller

*"So quiet that you can hear
how the silence walks
dressed in white clouds. A young day enters the city.
Morning birds on his shoulders."*

– **Ekaterina Yakovina**

Great Russian Poets



Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799–1837)



Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966)



Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov (1899–1977)



Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996)

St Petersburg – the City of Russian Poets and Writers



One writer beautifully described St Petersburg, the city on the Neva River, “as a huge stone book, whose pages were created by great Russian poets and writers”. The Great Russian Empire has left its indelible stamps on the city’s streets, buildings and literature. When one walks along the river, it echoes with the poems and writings of great men and women who lived in the city during the 17th to the 20th centuries.

Café Stray Dog was a central point of St Petersburg’s cultural life in the Silver Age. Prominent landmarks include National Pushkin Museum; Literatorskie Mostki (a special section of the Volkovskoe Cemetery in St Petersburg, where many Russian and Soviet writers, musicians, actors, architects, scientists, and public figures are buried); the Dostoevsky Zone close to Sennaya Square, associated with the work of Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Aleksander Blok’s apartment, number 21, which has become a museum.

The Great Reforms: The 1860s and 1870s brought literary reforms that focused on social issues. Symbolism, a new movement in Russian poetry, emerged in the 1890s. This literary and spiritual movement prioritised beauty over logic. The first generation of Russian symbolists included **V. Bryusov** and **K. Balmont**.

The Silver Age: The pre-revolutionary period, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ushered in a new literary age known as the Silver Age. Prominent poets of this era included **Konstantin Balmont, Valery Bryusov, Alexander Blok, Anna Akhmatova, Nikolay Gumilyov, Sergei Yesenin, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Marina Tsvetaeva. Alexander Blok** was a leading figure of this movement, juxtaposing beauty with the grim realities of revolutionary Russia. With Blok’s passing, the Silver Age came to a close.

The Revolution in 1917 resulted in the division of Russian literature into domestic and emigrant literature, as many outstanding writers sought refuge abroad. However, literature retained its unity based on the traditions of classical Russian culture. Renowned authors such as **Ivan Bunin, Vladimir Nabokov, Ivan Shmelyov, Vladimir Khodasevich, Osip Mandelshtam, Mikhail Bulgakov, Mikhail Gorky,** and others continued to contribute to Russian literature’s global acclaim throughout the 20th century.

Post-Revolution Poetry: The early years of the Soviet regime following the October Revolution of 1917 witnessed the emergence of avant-garde literary groups. After the establishment of Bolshevik rule, poets like **Vladimir Mayakovsky** introduced innovations to poetry with works like “Ode to the Revolution” and “Left March” (both in 1918).

Josef Brodsky (1940–1996) emerged as one of the greatest poets of this era. Born in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) in 1940, Brodsky faced persecution from Soviet authorities and was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1972. He found refuge in the United States.

In the post-Revolution period, while the Soviet Union aimed for universal literacy and had a well-developed book printing industry, it also imposed strict ideological censorship. The Stalin years further stifled poetry, and some poets faced persecution, exile, or even death. The “Khrushchev thaw” brought a brief period of relief, making poetry a mass cultural phenomenon. However, this thaw was short-lived, with the 1970s seeing prominent authors banned from publishing due to their anti-Soviet sentiments. Official book publishing resumed only during the *perestroika* period of the 1980s.

The late 20th century presented challenges for Russian literature, with fewer distinct voices emerging. Although censorship was lifted, political and economic turmoil in the 1990s had a significant impact on the book market and literature. The fall of the Soviet Union reshaped the canon of Russian poetry.

The 21st Century: With the disappearance of censorship following the fall of the Soviet Union, a new generation of Russian authors emerged in the 21st century. However, these writers have had to compete with more popular forms of entertainment. Similar to trends worldwide, contemporary poetry in Russia retains a small but devoted readership.

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2. Poetry in the Middle East

Poetry has deep roots within Middle Eastern culture. While Europe was in its nascent stages of poetic expression, the Middle East already boasted a rich tradition of verse.

Today, when we refer to the “Middle East” as a geographical region, it’s important to note that the language and literature of Middle Eastern cultures, particularly Arabic, held significant influence across multiple continents. The history of Middle Eastern poetry can be divided into three distinct periods—pre-Islamic literature, literature composed during Islamic dynasties, and modern literature. Prior to the rise of novels and short stories in the modern era, poetry served as the cornerstone of Middle Eastern literary expression. The modern era in Middle Eastern literature commenced with Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt in 1798.

The earliest poetry in the Middle East was crafted by tribal poets from the Arabian peninsula, who committed tens of thousands of verses to memory. These poems were used to declare war between tribes, resolve disputes, and preserve legends and history.

One prevalent type of poem from this era was the *wuquf ‘ala al-atlal* or “stopping by ruins”, where wandering poets would pause amid ancient ruins to observe and reflect. Interestingly, these “ruin wandering” poems have taken on new significance today, as contemporary Middle Eastern poets use them to comment on the devastating effects of warfare on homes and families.

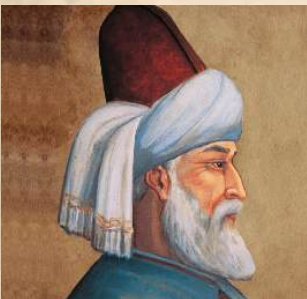
Poetry in the Middle East exhibits various forms and styles, including the following.

Qasidah: An ancient poetic form akin to an ode.

Ghazal: A highly structured verse form typically composed of five to fifteen couplets, often exploring themes of love and loss.

Nabati: Developed in nomadic Bedouin tribes, it employs colloquial language and an informal style.

The pre-eminent Middle Eastern poets include **Rumi, Omar Khayyam, Al Mutanabbi, Hafez,** and **Ibn Arabi.**



Rumi

Jall al-Din Muhammed Rumi, though originally from Greater Iran, is celebrated as one of the most influential Persian poets. His work, such as the *Rubaiyat*, contains some of the world’s most renowned poems and is considered the pinnacle of mystical poetry. Notably, his verses have inspired generations and continue to do so.

A few lines from two of Rumi's poems.

Enough Words?

*But that shadow has been serving you!
What hurts you, blesses you.
Darkness is your candle.
Your boundaries are your quest.
You must have shadow and light source both.
Listen, and lay your head under the tree of awe.*

When I Run After What I Think I Want

*When I run after what I think
When I run after what I think I want,
my days are a furnace of distress and anxiety,
if I sit in my own place of patience,
what I need flows to me, and without any pain,
from this, I understand that what I want also wants me,
and is looking for me and attracting me,
there's a great secret in this for all who can grasp.*

Omar Khayyam, another Persian poet and scientist, composed *rubaiyat* (quatrains) that were later translated into English by Edward Fitzgerald in the 19th century. His poetry delves into themes like life, religion, and Sufi philosophy.



Omar Khayyam

*"The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it"*

– **Omar Khayyam**

*"Blossoms rupture and rapture the air,
All hover and hammer,
Time intensified and time intolerable, sweetness ravelling rot."*

– **Osip Mandelstam**

*"I am the one whose literature can be seen (even) by the blind
The steed, the night and the desert all know me
And whose words are heard (even) by the deaf.
As do the sword, the spear, the scripture and the pen."*

– **Al-Mutanabbi**

Al Mutanabbi, an Iraqi poet from the Abbasid Caliphate, is regarded as one of the greatest poets in the Arabic language and has been translated into numerous languages.



Al Mutanabbi

Hafez, renowned for his ghazals (rhyming couplets), is a prominent name in Persian literature.

Khalil Gibran, a Lebanese poet, spent his life both in Lebanon and the United States, contributing to poetry and prose in both English and Arabic. His poems are considered part of an Arabic literary renaissance.

Ibn Arabi, a mystic, Islamic scholar, and poet, is celebrated as one of the eminent masters in Sufism, with his poetry revolving around themes of religion, humanity, and spiritual life.

Ahmed Shawqi, one of Egypt's greatest contemporary Arab poets, introduced epic poetry to the Arabic language. His themes spanned patriotism, nostalgia, religion, and the grandeur of Egyptian and Islamic history.

3. African Poetry

Modern African poetry carries a dual heritage, drawing from both pre-colonial and Western influences. It is characterised by its vastness and complexity due to the multitude of traditions stemming from Africa's 55 countries, as well as the continent's original tribal and linguistic diversity. The impact of slavery and colonisation has left a lasting imprint on African poetry, which is now expressed in English, Portuguese, French, as well as Creole or pidgin variations of these European languages, spoken and written across the continent.

African poetry has undergone distinct phases of evolution, encompassing pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras in most African nations. In the pre-colonial era, as in Nigeria, poetry was primarily an oral tradition, with a blurred distinction between poets and musicians who rendered poetry in musical forms.

The attainment of independence by many African nations in the 1950s and 1960s, accompanied by increased literacy rates, witnessed a dramatic surge in African literature composed in foreign and traditional African languages.

These literary works often grappled with seven central conflicts: the tension between Africa's past and present, tradition versus modernity, indigenous versus foreign influences, individualism versus community, socialism versus capitalism, development versus self-reliance, and the balance between African identity and humanity. Additionally, social issues such as corruption, economic disparities in newly independent countries, and the rights and roles of women were prominent themes during this period.

A notable and welcome trend in contemporary African poetry is the increasing prominence of female writers. Female authors are now better represented in published African literature compared to the pre-independence era.

Since the 1960s, African poetry has evolved to reflect political, economic, and cultural events, moving away from the persistent focus on colonialism that pre-occupied earlier generations of African poets. In modern African poetry, works often centre around the themes of healing and reconciliation, addressing the scars left by colonisation and conflict within countries and families.

Wole Soyinka, Nigerian writer, poet and playwright, who became the first post-independence African writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986.



Wole Soyinka,

Hanging Day

A hollow earth

Echoes footsteps of the grave procession.

Walls in sunspots

Lean to shadow of the shortening morn.

Bottoms Up

To the children we call our future

Who have no shoes to put on their feet

Who have barely any food to eat

Who believe in some unreal hope

But still dare to dream.

Wild and free.”– Ama Nuama

“Do not fear the past. It is painful, but it is real,

Blood was spilt and people died,

but love and unity had survived–

Do not fear the past.”

– Zuhura Seng’enge (Tanzania)

4. Chinese Poetry

Poetry has been an enduring and revered literary form in China for centuries, offering a platform for the expression of profound emotions, both publicly and privately. For over two millennia, it has provided insight into the inner lives of Chinese writers, captivating audiences of peers, readers, and scholars.

Classical Chinese poetry traces its origins back to the Han Dynasty, spanning from 206 BC to 220 AD. Chinese poetry, primarily divided into Classical and Modern forms, is composed, spoken, or chanted in the Chinese language. Traditional Chinese poetry consists of *shi*, *ci*, *qu*, and a literary form known as *fu* (prose-poetry), though modern times have seen the emergence

of free verse in Western style. Traditional Chinese poetry is characterised by its rhyme schemes. The influential anthologies *Shi Jing* and *Chu Ci* have left a profound impact on the Chinese poetic tradition. *Shi Jing*, or Classical Chinese Poetry, has been meticulously preserved for over two millennia. In contrast, *Chu Ci*, the Songs of Chu, originated from the state of Chu, featuring more lyrical and romantic verses.

During the Han Dynasty, *Chu Ci* poetry contributed to the development of the *fu* style, characterised by a blend of verse and prose. Additionally, the Han Dynasty saw the rise of *yuefu*, a folk-song style of poetry. The era bridging the late Han Dynasty and the early Six Dynasties period is known for Jian'an poetry, which further enriched the tradition.

*"I awake light-hearted this morning of spring,
everywhere round me the singing of birds –
But now I remember the night, the storm,
And I wonder how many blossoms were broken.*

– **Mèng Hàorán (689 740)**

*"Where, before me, are the ages that have gone?
And where, behind me, are the coming generations?
I think of heaven and earth, without limit, without end,
And I am all alone and my tears fall down."*

– **Chén Zǒng (661 702)**

Ode to the Goose

by Luo Binwang

Goose, goose, goose

Bend neck towards sky sing

White feather float green water

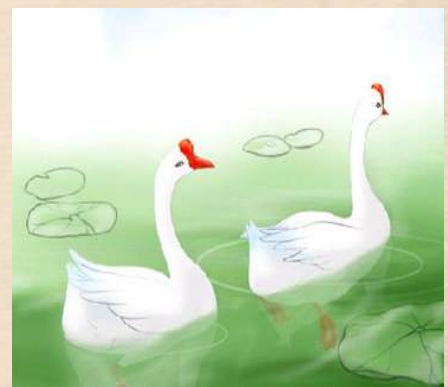
Red foot push clear wave

Goose, goose, goose,

You bend your neck towards the sky and sing.

Your white feathers float on the emerald water,

Your red feet push the clear waves.'



Li Bai (Li Po)

Li Bai is considered to be the greatest among the Chinese poets, and is famed as a genius and a romantic figure. He took traditional poetic forms to new heights during the period of Tang dynasty, which is often called the golden age of Chinese poetry. Around a thousand poems are attributed to him.



Li Bai

Li Bai's poems were mostly on friendship, nature, solitude, and the joys of drinking wine. Among the most famous are "Waking from Drunkenness on a Spring Day", "The Hard Road to Shu", and "Quiet Night Thought". He wrote poems about his own life.

His poetry is known for its clear imagery and conversational tone. His work has influenced a number of 20th century poets, including Ezra Pound and James Wright. Look at this poem.

Alone Looking at the Mountain

*All the birds have flown up and gone;
A lonely cloud floats leisurely by.
We never tire of looking at each other –
Only the mountain and I.
The birds have vanished down the sky.
Now the last cloud drains away.
We sit together, the mountain and me,
until only the mountain remains.*

The **Tang Dynasty (618–907)** stands as the golden age of Chinese poetry, boasting a proliferation of poets and poems, with approximately 50,000 poems surviving from this era. Poetry during the Tang Dynasty was integrated into almost every aspect of the literate class's professional and social life, even forming a part of the Imperial examinations for government posts. The poetry of the Tang Dynasty continues to exert influence to this day. "An Ode to the Goose", a brief Tang Dynasty poem, is often among the first poems taught to Chinese children due to its simplicity.

By the **Song Dynasty (960–1279)**, another form of poetry called *ci* emerged, characterised by set rhythms of existing tunes. During the **Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368)**, poetry adhered to fixed-tone patterns.

The transition from the Ming to Qing dynasties included the brief Shun dynasty. The **Qing Dynasty (1644 to 1912)** significantly contributed to the development of poetry criticism and the creation of essential poetry collections. The influence of both *shi* and *ci* extended beyond the imperial period, with even figures like Mao Zedong, the former Chairman of the Communist Party of China, adding his unique touch to Classical Chinese poetry.

Modern Chinese poetry, often referred to as “new poetry”, embraces a modern vernacular style, differing from the traditional Classical Chinese language. Poetry underwent a revolution during the May Fourth Movement of 1919 when vernacular styles, closer to spoken language, were embraced, breaking away from previous prescribed forms. Early 20th century poets sought to break free from past conventions by adopting Western models.

In the post-revolutionary Communist era, poets embraced more liberal running lines and direct diction, gaining widespread popularity and imitation. Contemporary Chinese poetry features influential poets like the Misty Poets, who employ oblique allusions and hermetic references.

5. Japanese Poetry

Japanese poetry boasts a rich history spanning over a thousand years. It is written, spoken, or chanted in the Japanese language, encompassing Old Japanese, Early Middle Japanese, Late Middle Japanese, Modern Japanese, as well as poetry written in the Chinese language within Japan.

The tradition of written Japanese poetry dates back to the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). Under the influence of Tang Dynasty Chinese poets, the Japanese began composing poetry in Chinese, known as *kanshi*, which thrived during the Heian period (794–1185). Japanese poetry became closely associated with pictorial painting, utilising ink and brush for both writing and drawing. The merger of *kanshi* poetry into the Japanese literary tradition took several centuries.

According to Japanese mythology, poetry began with celestial deities. The history of Japanese poetry progresses through various phases, including the semi-historical/mythological phase; early Old Japanese literature; the Nara period (710 to 794); the Heian period (794 to 1185); the Kamakura period (1185 to 1333); and beyond, often diverging from socio-political history.

Japanese poetry encompasses different forms, often collected into anthologies. Major forms include *tanka*, *haiku*, and *shi* (Western-style poetry), with modern poetry exploring experimental and traditional styles.

Waka: Traditional Japanese poetry known as *waka* dates back to ancient times. Aristocrats exchanged *waka* instead of letters, with women primarily contributing during the Heian period. Prominent *waka* poets include Kakinomoto Hitomaro (c.653–c.710).

Tanka: A modern name for classic Japanese poetry, *tanka* consists of five lines with a 5–7–5–7–7 meter. *Tanka* has recently experienced a revival in popularity.

Renga: Many traditional Japanese poems were collaborative, including the *renga* form, where poets contributed verses to a larger piece.

Renku: A type of collaborative poetry featuring alternating three-line and two-line stanzas written by different poets.

Haikai: A form of linked verse, *haikai* incorporates satire or puns and consists of over 100 verses.

Haibun: A combination of haiku and prose.

Haiku: The most famous form of Japanese poetry, haiku is known for its brevity, often comprising three lines. Renowned haiku poets include Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), Kobayashi Issa (1763–1828), Matsuo Basho (1644–1694), and Yosa Buson (1716–1784). Matsuo Basho, in particular, is celebrated for his travelogue *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, which remains influential. Japanese haiku often revolves around themes of nature and the seasons, reflecting the spirituality of Zen Buddhism.

Katauta: This concise three-line poem follows a syllabic metre of either 5-7-5 or 5-7-7. Often referred to as an incomplete poem, the *katauta* is typically one lover's address to another. When combined with the response from the other lover, these two *katauta* create a *sedoka*.

Sedoka: A *sedoka* poem is structured as a call and response. Each verse adheres to a 5-7-5 or 5-7-7 pattern.

Modern Japanese poetry after World War II is known as *gendai-shi* or contemporary poetry. It encompasses works created after the 1900s and encompasses a wide range of styles and genres, including experimental, sensual, dramatic, and erotic. Many contemporary poets today are female. Japanese contemporary poetry often diverges from traditional styles, embracing a more Western poetic style characterised by freer and more relaxed verse.

Haiku

“There seems to be no one on the empty mountain....

And yet I think I hear a voice,

Where sunlight, entering a grove,

Shines back to me from the green moss.

– **Wáng Wéi (701 761)**

Haiku

“I write, erase, rewrite

Erase again, and then

A poppy blooms.”

– **Katsushika Hokusai**

“Pine trees rise through cloud, soar up into the blue skies,

bush clover spangled with dewdrops, sways in the autumn breeze;

As I dip cold, pure water at the edge of the stream,

a solitary white crane comes lolloping my way”

– **Baisao**

An Old Silent Pond

A frog jumps into the pond,
splash! Silence again.



Basho is said to have composed this poem at a haiku gathering held at his hermitage Basho-an, which had a pond, in 1686, when he was 43 years old. The theme of poems to be read at the gathering was “frog”. Basho did not actually experience the scene. But he imagined the world of silence in his mind, which was broken by a tiny creature from outside.

“Frog” denotes the spring season. All other Japanese poets only wrote about the frog’s croaking. It was the first time that a poem used the sound of a splash that a frog made. These simple lines are both beautiful and tranquil. This haiku is one of the most *sabi* poems by Basho (*wabi* and *sabi* are words that express a sense of beauty, unique to Japan).

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6. Latin American Poetry

While poetry has a longstanding presence in the South American continent, it garnered international recognition in the 1960s. Latin American poetry encompasses works composed by authors from Latin America and is written in various languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Mapuche, Nahuatl, Quechua, Mazatec, Zapotec, Ladino, English, and Spanglish.

This fusion of Indigenous and foreign cultures has given rise to a unique literary tradition in the region. African traditions also significantly influenced Latin American poetry, with early examples such as Aztec poetry in Nahuatl collected by Spanish clergy during the early colonial period.

During colonial and pre-colonial periods, many notable works of poetry emerged in Latin America.

During the colonial era, the region’s poets followed European literary trends and styles. **Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz**, a Mexican nun, was a prominent figure known for her feminist perspectives and liberal ideas, although her writings promoting concepts of liberty and freedom were met with opposition by counter-reformists.



Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz.

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) described by Gabriel García Márquez as “the greatest poet of the 20th century in any language”, was not only a renowned poet but also a diplomat and politician. Neruda, whose real name was Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto, wrote in various forms, including surrealist poems, historical epics, political manifestos, autobiography, and passionate love poems. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature



Pablo Neruda

in 1971. His epic poem, *Canto General*, is a monumental work comprising 15 sections and 231 poems with over 15,000 lines. Neruda's poetry depicts Latin American history as an enduring struggle against oppression.

"Something started in my soul, fever or forgotten wings,

and I made my own way, deciphering that fire

and wrote the first faint line, faint without substance, pure nonsense, pure wisdom, of someone who knows nothing,

and suddenly I saw the heavens unfastened and open."

– **Pablo Neruda**

As an admirer pointed out, "Neruda's epic flows in a blank verse and piles metaphors upon metaphors with a lyrical style that favours excess." *Canto General* owes much to the treasures of the ballad tradition in Spanish. Here is a quote from Canto 11: The Heights of Macchu Picchu.

*Through the hazy splendour,
through the stone night, let me plunge my hand,
and let the aged heart of the forsaken beat in me
like a bird captive, for a thousand years!*

Give me silence, water, hope.

Give me struggle, iron, volcanoes.

Cling to my body like magnets.

Hasten to my veins and to my mouth.

Speak through my words and my blood.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Latin American poetry continued to emphasise ideals of liberty and revolution, celebrating the lands and indigenous inhabitants. Leaders and revolutionaries wrote poetry that resonated throughout the region, such as José Martí's famous poem, "Yo soy un hombre sincero".

Towards the end of the 19th century, Latin American poetry shifted away from European styles, giving rise to a distinctive Spanish-American tradition known as **Modernismo**. This literary movement, initiated by Rubén Darío with the publication of *Azul* in 1888, sought to rejuvenate poetic language and ultimately ended with Darío's death in 1916.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the avant-garde movement flourished. Notable poets of this period included **Cesar Gutiérrez Nájera, Juana Borrero, Delmira Agustini, Vallejo**, who inspired

later poets like **Alfonsina Storni** and Nobel laureate Mistral.

Throughout the 20th century, Latin American poetry continued to evolve. Towards the end of the millennium, it embraced multi-culturalism, emphasising poetry by women, Afro-Hispanics, indigenous communities, and other sub-cultures. Nobel Prize-winning poets such as Mistral, Neruda, and Octavio Paz incorporated surrealism into their work.

During this period, Latin American poets also delved into prose-poetry. Renowned practitioners of prose-poems included **Jorge Luis Borges** (“Everything and Nothing”), **Pablo Neruda** (“Passions and Impressions”), **Octavio Paz** (“Aguila o Sol? /Eagle or Sun?”), **Alejandra Pizarnik** (“Sex/Night”), **Giannina Braschi** (“Empire of Dreams”), and **Clarice Lispector** (“Água Viva”)

“I used to stand on the corner in San Diego with poems sticking out of my hip pocket, asking people if there was a place where I could read poems. The audience is half of the poem.”

– **Juan Felipe Herrera**

“Sunset is always disturbing, whether theatrical or muted, but still more disturbing is that last desperate glow, that turns the plain to rust

When on the horizon nothing is left of the pomp and clamour of the setting sun”

– **Jorge Luis Borges** in “Afterglow”.

Women Poets: Latin American poetry has been enriched by the contributions of many talented women poets. (For more details, please see Section 3 of Chapter 111 on women poets.)

Contemporary Latinx Poets: In a 2018 article on bookriot.com, American writer Christina Orlando highlighted the profound influence of Latinx cultures’ strong oral story-telling traditions on poetry. This tradition has given rise to a rich lineage of Latinx writers, transcending borders and politics.

Today, we are witnessing a poetic renaissance, marked by a notable shift toward diverse voices. Poets are exploring their identities in innovative ways, empowered by the internet to reach a broad readership. Contemporary Latinx poetry is characterised by its joyfulness, sensuality, indulgence, and vibrancy.

Orlando listed 15 prominent contemporary Latinx poets in her article, and they included the names below.



Juan Felipe Herrera

Juan Felipe Herrera, a proud Chicano and the 21st Poet Laureate of the United States from 2015 to 2017, stands as a testament to the vibrant Latinx poetic tradition.

Juan Felipe Herrera eloquently expressed the essence of poetry with the words: “I used to stand on the corner in San Diego with poems sticking out of my hip pocket, asking people if there was a place where I could read

poems. The audience is half of the poem.”

Ada Límon: Renowned for her exceptional work, Límon has received accolades from the New York Times, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the National Book Awards for her book *Bright Dead Things*.

Melissa Lozada: Lozada, the 2015 National Poetry Slam Champion, has made significant contributions to contemporary Latinx poetry.

José Olivarez: The son of Mexican immigrants, Olivarez has earned fellowships from several prestigious programmes for his outstanding poetry.

Javier Zamora: A recipient of the 2016 Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award, Zamora has made a significant impact on the contemporary Latinx poetry scene.

Eloisa Amezcua: Known for her collection *From the Inside Quietly*, Amezcua has left a lasting impression on the world of poetry.

Denise Frohman: Frohman’s work has graced prestigious platforms like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and ESPN, showcasing her poetic brilliance.

Vanessa Angélica Villarreal: Villarreal is a prominent figure in contemporary Latinx poetry, known for her impactful contributions.

Carmen Giménez Smith: Often referred to as the “Mom of Latino poetry”, Smith has been a driving force in the Latinx poetic community.

Analicia Sotelo: Sotelo is another influential contemporary Latinx poet, celebrated for her unique perspective.

Rosebud Ben-Oni: As a noted Jewish Latina poet, Ben-Oni has added her distinctive voice to the Latinx poetic landscape.

Roy Guzmán: Guzmán’s contributions have left a lasting impression on the world of contemporary Latinx poetry.

Yesenia Montilla: Montilla’s collection *The Pink Box* was listed for a PEN award in 2016, solidifying her place in the world of poetry.

Ariana Brown: Brown has achieved recognition by winning two Academy of American Poets Prizes and a collegiate national poetry slam championship in 2014.

Marcelo Hernandez Castillo: Castillo leads the Undocu poets' campaign, contributing significantly to contemporary Latinx poetry.

In addition to those mentioned above, other noteworthy contemporary Latinx poets include Elizabeth Acevedo, Alan Pelaez Lopez, David Thomas Martinez, Sonia Guiñansaca, Christopher Soto (Loma), Jessica Helen Lopez, and Kristina Rae Colón. These poets continue to enrich the tapestry of contemporary Latinx poetry with their unique voices and perspectives.

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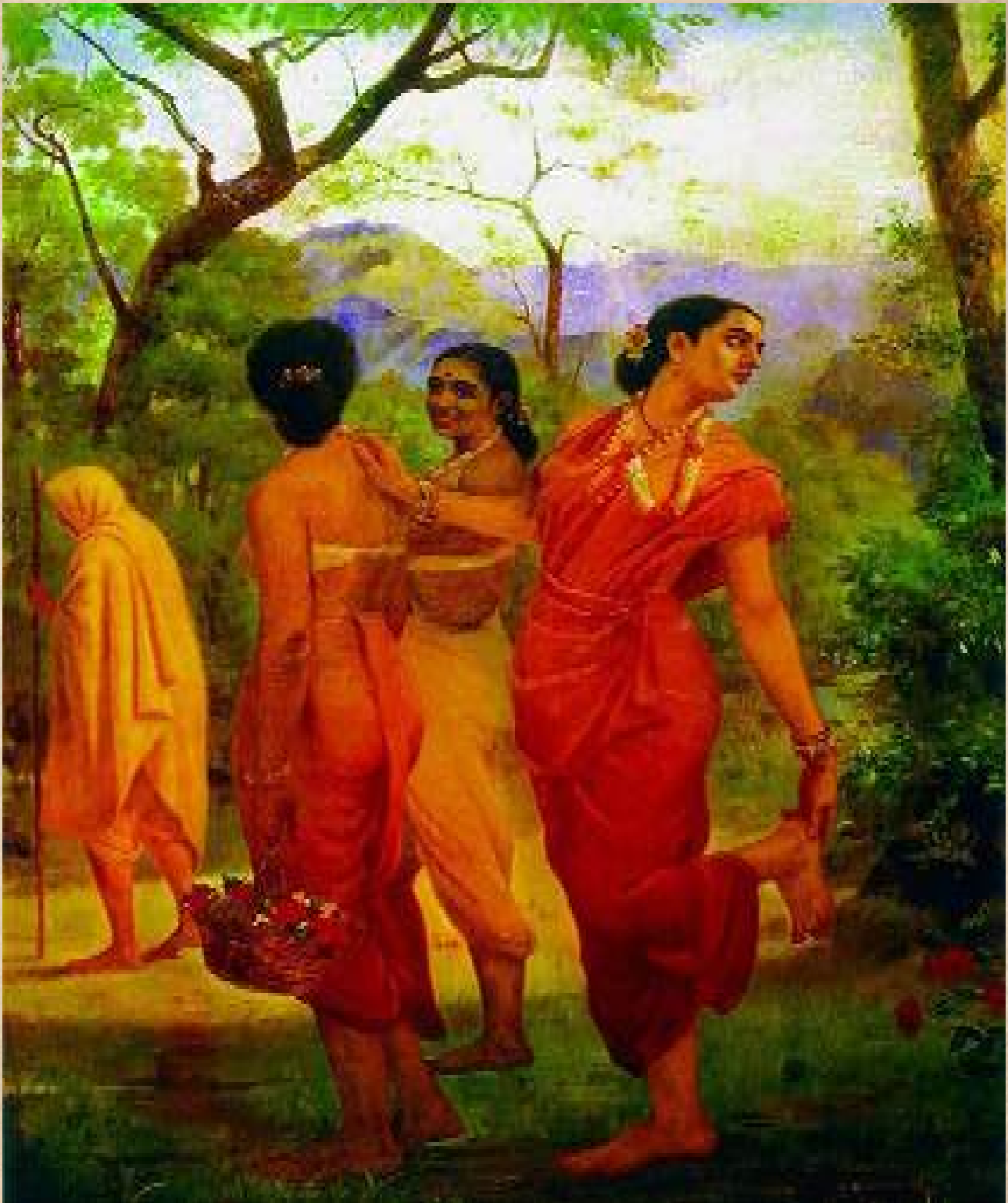
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SECTION-II

Part-I INDIAN POETRY

Mark Twain once remarked, "India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition."



India boasts one of the world's oldest civilisations, and its literary heritage includes a rich history of poetry dating back to ancient Vedic times.

The Indian subcontinent can be likened to an expansive and beautiful garden of literature, with a diverse array of trees, shrubs, and plants, all in full bloom. Poems have flourished in a multitude of Indian languages, including Vedic, Sanskrit, Classical Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam, Odia, Maithili, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Assamese, Urdu, Hindi, and numerous other regional and folk languages. Additionally, poetry in foreign languages, particularly Persian and English, has exerted a significant influence on Indian poetic traditions.

Through history, Indian poetry has evolved during three distinct periods.

Indian Epic Poetry: This period, which began around 3000 years ago, was dominated by the use of Prakrit and Sanskrit languages. Notable works from this era include the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*, originally composed in Sanskrit and later translated into



Valmiki



Vyas

various Indian languages. These epic tales profoundly influenced regional and folk poetry. The Itihasa and Puranas, which contain a wealth of stories related to Hindu deities, are also mentioned in the Atharva Veda.

Tamil Sangam Literature: In the South, five great epics emerged during the Tamil Sangam period (2nd century to 6th century). These include *Silappatikaram*, *Manimegalai*, *Civaka Cintamani*, *Kundalakesi*, and *Valayapathi*. While *Manimegalai* and *Kundalakesi* are Buddhist religious works, *Civaka Cintamani* and *Valayapathi* are Tamil Jain works. *Silappatikaram*, on the other hand, holds a neutral religious perspective. These epic poems, composed between the 1st and 10th centuries CE, serve as valuable historical evidence and represent some of the oldest surviving epic poems in the world.

Sanskrit Classical Period: The classical period of Sanskrit literature spans from the 3rd century BC to the 8th century AD. During this era, renowned playwrights such as Kalidasa and Bhasa emerged. *Mrichakatika*, one of the earliest known Sanskrit plays, is attributed to Shudraka and is believed to have been composed in the 2nd century BC. India also had several court poets who made significant contributions to poetry.

“Do not be led by others, awaken your own mind, amass your own experience, and decide for yourself your own path.”

– Atharva Veda

“Dharma is the foundation of universe”

– **Bhasa**

A Jewellery Store Named India

If you hold this

Dazzling emerald

Up to the sky,

It will shine a billion

Beautiful miracles

Painted from the tears

Of the Most-High.

Plucked from the lush gardens

Of a yellowish-green paradise,

Look inside this hypnotic gem

And a kaleidoscope of

Titillating,

Soul-raising

Sights and colours

Will tease and seduce

Your eyes and mind.

Tell me, sir.

Have you ever heard

A peacock sing?

Hold your ear

To this mystical stone

And you will hear

Sacred hymns flowing

To the vibrations

Of the perfumed

Wind.”

– **Suzy Kassem in *Rise Up and Salute the Sun***

The Vedas

The term Veda means “knowledge.” Vedas are considered among the oldest, if not the oldest, religious works in the world. There are four Vedas—Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda.

The Vedas have been orally transmitted since the 2nd millennium BCE. The mantras (chants), the oldest part of the Vedas, are considered the literal sounds of the Divine which, when recited or sung, recreate the primal vibrations of the universe. Even so, the works continue to be recited, studied, and venerated in the present and remain an important part of Hindu religious observances, festivals, and ceremonies.

The Prakrita and Sanskrita

The Prakrits are a group of vernacular Middle Indo-Aryan languages that were used in the Indian subcontinent from around the 3rd century BCE to the 8th century CE. The term excludes earlier inscriptions and the later Pali.

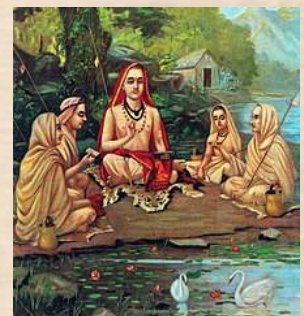
Prakrita literally means “natural”, as opposed to *Sanskrita* (Sanskrit), which literally means “constructed” or “refined”. Prakrits were considered the regional spoken (informal) languages of people, and Sanskrit was considered the standardised (formal) language used for literary, official, and religious purposes across Indian kingdoms.



Kalidasa

Kalidasa, often hailed as the greatest ancient Indian poet and playwright, composed celebrated works such as *Meghadutam*, *Ritusamharam*, and *Kumarasambhavam*. His *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* was among the first Sanskrit works translated into English and remains a masterpiece, admired for its tender expressions and creative imagination. Kalidasa’s influence extended beyond India and reached Western literature in the 18th century.

Other noteworthy poets from this period include **Bhartrhari**, **Bharavi**, **Banabhatta**, **Bhavabhuti**, and **Thiruvalluvar**, each contributing to the rich tapestry of Indian poetry. Adi Shankara, the founder of Advaita Vedanta, wrote commentaries on ancient Indian texts, including the *Brahmasutrabhasya*.



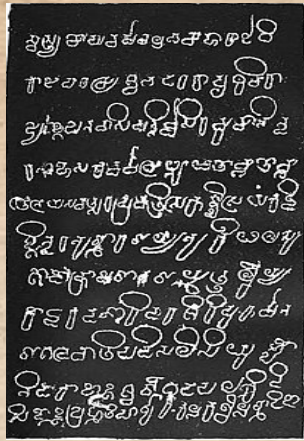
A roster of some of the notable court poets, their patrons, and their



Bhavabhuti

contributions could begin with **Amarasimha**, patronised by Chandragupta II. **Ashvaghosa**, supported by Kanishka, authored works like “Buddha Charitra” and “Saundarananda”.

Banabhatta, under the patronage of Harshvardhan, wrote “Kadambari” and “Harsha Charita”. **Bharavi**, with Yasodharman’s patronage, composed “Kiratarjuniyam”, an epic about Kirat and Arjun. **Bhavabhuti**, sponsored by Yasovarman, created works like “Malatimadhava” and “Mahaviracharita”.



Old Kannada inscription (876 AD) of Rashtrakuta King Amoghavarsha I at Veerabhadra temple in Kumsi

Harisena, patronised by Samudragupta II, wrote the “Prayag Prashasti”, which is found on the Allahabad Pillar inscription.

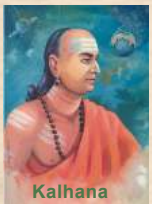
Shudraka’s Mrichchakatikam is another notable work. **Thiruvalluvar’s Thirukkural**, a Tamil epic, is known for its couplets or *kurals* (1330 rhyming Tamil couplets or aphorisms). **Vishakhadatta**, sponsored by Harshavardhan, wrote “Mudra Rakshas” and “Devichandraguptam”.

Amoghavarsha I, a Rashtrakuta emperor, authored the *Kavirajamarga*, the earliest surviving literary work in Kannada. **Rajashekhara**

composed the *Kavyamimamsa*, a poetical encyclopaedia on the science of applied poetics. Gunavarma I, an early Kannada poet, wrote two epic poems, “Shudraka” and “Harivamsha”.

Somadeva Bhatta entertained the queen Suraymati with his *Kathasaritsangraha*, a collection of stories.

Jayadev dramatised the love of Krishna and Radha in his lyrical poem “Gita Govinda”, conveying profound devotion to God.



Kalhana (12th Century CE) was a historian from Kashmir and he left a significant mark

with his masterpiece *Rajatarangini* (The River of Kings), composed in Sanskrit. This historical chronicle delves into the annals of the north-western Indian subcontinent, providing a captivating account of the kings of Kashmir.

Auvaiaar (12th Century CE) was a revered female poet-saint, who graced the Chola Kingdom during the Sangam period in the 12th century CE. She roamed the Tamil lands, offering solace to impoverished families and crafting heartfelt songs and poems for their upliftment.

Harihara (12th Century CE) was a distinguished Kannada poet and writer, who emerged as a literary luminary. Among his notable works, the “Girijakalyana”, composed in the champu metre, stands as a classic in the Kannada language.

“Trees bend low with ripened fruit;
clouds hang down with gentle rain;
noble people bow graciously.
This is the way of generous things.”

– **Bhartrhari**

Surdas teaches us that when the devotion is from heart, we don’t need eyes, just a kind heart is enough.

– **Unknown**

“I am not a Hindu, nor am a Muslim !! I am this body, a play of five elements; a drama of the spirit dancing with joy and sorrow.”

– **Sant Kabir Das**

*“This is bliss, This is bliss, This is bliss, I proclaim
The real happiness lies in the chant of Lord’s name.”*

– **Song by Purandara Dasa**

“Music transcends language and time. The fact that compositions of the Trinity of Carnatic music—Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri—are still revered today attests to the dictum.”

– **The Hindu**

Salutation of the Dawn

Listen to the exhortation of the dawn!

Look to this Day! For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all verities and realities of your existence.

The bliss of growth, the glory of action, the splendour of beauty;

For yesterday is but a dream,

And tomorrow is only a vision; But today well lived makes

Every yesterday a dream of happiness,

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well therefore to this day!

Such is the salutation of the dawn!

– **From the Complete Works of Kalidasa**

The Cloud Messenger

Meghadoot in Hindi or *Meghadootham* in Sanskrit by Kalidasa is a lyrical love poem in 115-120 stanzas, composed probably in the 5th century CE.

In this poem, the main character is a Yaksha (a genial nature spirit). He is banished from the Himalayan Kingdom of Alakapuri by its ruler Kubera for neglecting his duties. Separated from his wife, the Yaksha pines for his beloved on a lonely mountain peak. It is the start of the rainy season and he notices a cloud perched on the peak. He addresses the cloud, asking it to deliver a message to his beloved.

*Sudden, Himalayan breezes split open
the tightly shut leaf-buds on deodars,
and redolent of their oozing resin
blow south; I embrace those breezes
fondly imagining they have of late
touched your limbs, O perfect one!*

– **Meghaduta**, translation by M.R. Kale

The poem also provides a description of the sights on the cloud's journey to Alaka. Its beautiful descriptions of nature and delicate expressions of love in won the admiration of Goethe. The Yaksha's plight touches a universal chord.

Meghadoot was translated into English by Horace Hayman Wilson in 1813. The play *Maria Stuart* by Friedrich Schiller was inspired by the poem. It was also the inspiration for Gustav Holst's *The Cloud Messenger Op. 30* (1909–10).

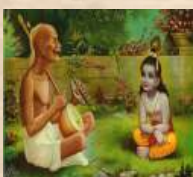
The Bhakti Movement

Indian poetry beautifully reflects the country's diverse spiritual traditions, with many poets drawing inspiration from mystical experiences.



Ravidas

Ravidas (1450–1520 CE) was an Indian mystic poet-saint of the Bhakti movement during the 15th and 16th centuries CE, and he left an indelible mark. His devotional verses found in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. **Ravidas** championed the removal of social divisions rooted in caste and gender, advocating unity in the pursuit of personal spiritual liberation.



Surdas

Surdas (c. 1478–1483 CE) is celebrated for his invaluable contributions to devotional poetry in India, predominantly hymns dedicated to Lord Krishna. A literary genius and gifted composer, Surdas is believed to have composed an astonishing 100,000 songs, though only 8,000 have been recovered.



Tulsidas

Tulsidas (1543–1623 CE), a prolific writer, crafted at least six major and six minor works, with *Ramcharitmanas* being his magnum opus. This epic poem narrates the captivating story of Lord Rama and is revered as one of the greatest works of Hindi literature.

Rahim (16th century CE) was really Abdul Rahim Khan-I-Khana and he shone as one of Akbar's Navaratnas or the "nine gems" in his court. His *dohe* or couplets, offering life lessons, remain a testament to his poetic prowess. Rahim also ventured into Hindu devotional poetry, showcasing his versatility.

Kabir (15th century CE), a revered saint of the 15th century, earned the admiration of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs alike. His poetry is marked by simplicity, profound metaphors, and moral teachings. Kabir's *dohe*, with their enduring popularity in India, continue to impart wisdom to the masses.

Narsinh Mehta (15th century CE), also known as Narsinh Bhagat, earned the title of the "Adi Kavi" of Gujarati literature. His works, predominantly in Gujarati, include the famous "Vaishnav Jan Toh", a bhajan that deeply resonated with Mahatma Gandhi.



Painting of Kabir weaving, c.1825

Mirabai (16th century CE), a 16th century Hindu mystic poet and a devoted follower of Lord Krishna, was born into royalty as a Rajput princess. Her religious hymns, known as bhajans, centre around Lord Krishna and garnered her widespread acclaim. Mirabai's legacy as a Bhakti saint continues to shine, particularly in the North Indian Hindu tradition.



Mirabai

Bhakti Movement in the South: The origins of the Bhakti Movement can be traced to the Tamil-speaking regions of India. This region has a rich history of influential philosophers such as Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, and Madhwacharya. Additionally, it saw the composition of the Shrimad Bhagavatam and the profound verses of the Alvar saints in praise of Krishna. Andal's "Thiruppavai" continues to be sung in Vaishnava temples to this day.

Telugu-origin poets and philosophers, including **Vallabhacharya**, **Rupa Goswami**, **Sanathana Goswami**, and **Gopal Bhatta**, thrived during this period. The Bhakti movement in South India showcased a deep inter-connection between religion, poetry, and music. Bhakti poetry, particularly in the South, gained immense popularity and widespread acceptance, often taking the form of musical poetry that could be sung or listened to.



Purandara Dasa

In Karnataka, **Purandara Dasa**, known as the "Pitamah of Carnatic music" and a devoted follower of Krishna, composed an astonishing 475,000 poems and songs. Some hundreds of these compositions in Kannada and Sanskrit have survived to this day and are performed in concerts.

Swami Haridas, the teacher of Miyan Tansen, is said to have been a student of Purandhara Dasa. In the 20th century, his songs gained popularity in both Hindustani and Carnatic classical music, thanks to legendary singers such as Pandit Bhimsen Joshi and M. S. Subbulakshmi.

In Kerala, **Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri** (1558–1643) composed the renowned epic poem *Narayaneeyam* in praise of Krishna. This work was popularised in Carnatic music by luminaries like Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavata in the 20th century and is still sung as devotional music in the famous Guruvayoor temple of Kerala.

There were several other poets like **Venkata Subramanian (1700–1765)**, **Narayana Teertha (1650–1745)**, **Sarangapani (17th century)** of Karverinagaram from Andhra, and



Swati Tirunal Rama Varma

Kanakadasa (1509–1609) from Karnataka who composed poems expressing devotion for Krishna. Many of these poems live on through various forms of classical dance and music, including Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, and Yakshagana.

Swati Tirunal Rama Varma (1813–1846), a celebrated Maharaja of the Kingdom of Travancore, was not only a brilliant ruler but also a gifted music

composer. He is credited with over four hundred classical compositions in both Carnatic and Hindustani styles.

The musical trinity of Carnatic music, comprising **Muthuswami Dikshitar (1776–1835)**,



Muthuswami Dikshitar



Tyagaraja



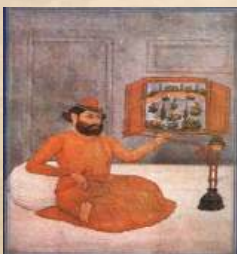
Syama Sastri

Tyagaraja (1767–1847), and **Syama Sastri (1762–1827)**, were legendary composers whose works continue to enrich the South Indian musical tradition. Their compositions are still sung with reverence in homes and concert halls.

Urdu Poetry

Urdu poetry has significantly influenced the poetry, music, culture, and traditions of the Indian subcontinent. It took its final form as a language during the 17th century when it was declared the official language of the court, although some poets had been composing Urdu poetry before that time.

We have a separate section on Urdu Poetry but we still mention some of the great Urdu poets of India here.



Mir Taqi Mir
spirituality.

Amir Khusrau (1253–1325 AD) was a great Urdu poet of the 13th century (see box) while **Nasiruddin Mahmud Dehvi (C.1274–1337)** was a 14th century mystic poet and Sufi saint of the Chishti Order. He was known as the “Illuminated Lamp of Delhi” by his followers.

Mir Taqi Mir (1722–1810) was an integral figure in developing the Urdu language, known for exploring themes of love and



Mirza Ghalib
(Ref:Free Press Journal)

Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869): *Mirza Asadullah Baig Khan*, popularly known as *Ghalib* is still regarded as ‘the loftiest poet Urdu has ever produced’. “He is

one of the major world poets across all languages, one of the most chronicled poets and a genius of his age". He was known as the "Poet of Poets". Ghalib wrote during the last years of the Mughal Empire in India.

"Such was his confidence in his freedom that he never spread his wings to check."

– **Urdu couplet**

"Lest we forget: It is easy to be human, very hard to be humane."

– **Mirza Ghalib**

*I have become you, and you me,
I am the body, you the soul;
So that no one can say hereafter,
That you are someone, and me someone else.
This earth, burnished by hearing the name,
is so certain of love,
that the sky bends unceasingly down,
to greet its own light.*

– **Mirza Ghalib**

Amir Khusrau



Amir Khusrau

Born in 1253, Sufi poet Amir Khusrau is called the father of Urdu literature even though his poetry was primarily composed in Persian. He is credited with having fused traditions from across the continent to create the qawwali style of song-writing and introduced ghazals to the Indian subcontinent.

His poetry took many forms, including ghazals, *masnavi*, *gata*, *rubai*—all of which soon became integral to poetry traditions in Urdu. Besides his contribution to literature, he was famous for his contributions to music forms. Amir Khusrau's eminent works include *Afzal Ul-Fawaid* (Greatest of Blessings), *Baqia-Naqia*, a compilation, and the romantic *Masnavi Duval Rani - Khizr Khan*.

Nawab Mirza Khan (1831–1905) was commonly known as Daagh Dehlvi (*daagh*, an Urdu noun, means stain, grief or taint while *Dehlvi* means belonging to or from Delhi). He was an outstanding Mughal poet famous for his pure Urdu ghazals and romantic songs, and belonged to the Delhi school of Urdu poetry.



Nawab Mirza Khan

Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) was a distinguished writer, philosopher, and politician, who was born in Sialkot, Punjab province, in British India. His



Sir Muhammad Iqbal

Urdu poetry is celebrated as one of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century, and it includes “Asrar-e-Khudi”, which earned him high praise after its publication. He played a role in conceiving the idea of Pakistan, and following the nation’s creation in 1947, he was honoured as its national poet. Here is a glimpse of his poetry.

Jawab-e-Shikwa [Response to the Complaint]

*Whatever comes from the heart is impactful,
It possesses no wings yet soars with might,
With divine origins, it seeks elegance,
Rising from dust, it reaches celestial heights.*



Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984) was born in British India, specifically Punjab, and he later became a prominent citizen of Pakistan. Many regard him as one of Urdu’s greatest poets. Faiz, who received the Nobel Prize nomination four times for his literary contributions, was honoured with the Lenin Peace Prize in 1962. In 1990, the Pakistan government bestowed upon him the nation’s highest civil award Nishan-e-Imtiaz.

Kaifi Azmi, a legendary modern era Urdu poet, was born on 19 May 1919 in Agra. He made a significant contribution by introducing Urdu poetry to the world of Hindi cinema. Here is an excerpt from his work.



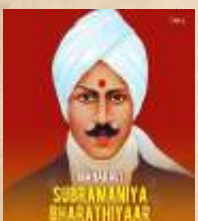
Nishan-e-Imtiaz.Kaifi Azmi

*Don’t fret, don’t unlatch the doors of compassion,
I’ll call out for a while, then quietly depart,
In this very alley where the moon once bloomed,
I’ll spend a sombre night and then move on.*

Pre-Independence and Independence Era

By the latter half of the 19th century, British rule was firmly established itself in India. The introduction of English education and exposure to British culture had a profound influence on Indian literature, particularly poetry. Many Indian poets were influenced by English Romantic poetry, which left its mark even on regional poetry.

The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed the emergence of towering literary figures in India. Some notable names include **Subramania Bharati, Iqbal, Aurobindo, Surya Kant Tripathi, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Mahadevi Verma, and Ramdhari Singh ‘Dinkar’**. Other renowned poets include **Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Manmohan Ghose, and Kanakadasa**.



Subramaniya Bharathiyar (1882–1921) was a Tamil writer, poet, journalist, Indian independence activist, social reformer, and polyglot. His poems inspired people during the struggle for independence.



Savitribai Jyotirao Phule

Savitribai Jyotirao Phule (1831–1897), a social reformer, educator, and poet from Maharashtra, alongside her husband, played a pivotal role in improving women’s education and pioneered India’s feminist movement in Maharashtra.



Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), apart from being one of India’s most important modern poets, was also a highly influential philosopher, yogi, and political figure. His poetry often revolved around themes of spirituality and mortality.



Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), known as the “Bard of Bengal”, is an iconic figure in world literature and the most famous modern Indian poet. His collection *Gitanjali*, published in 1910, won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Tagore was a prolific writer who, apart from numerous poems, also wrote drama, short stories and novels and even translated some of them to English. The major theme in his poetry is the essential unity of all creation, which is also the main theme of the Upanishads. Tagore composed the national anthems of India and Bangladesh and served as an inspiration for Sri Lanka’s national anthem.

“When mind is still, then truth gets her chance to be heard in the purity of the silence.”

– **Sri Aurobindo**

“Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add colour to my sunset sky.”

– **Rabindranath Tagore**

*I know, I know, my pride must be cast on the waters,
My soul must be cracked open by stabbing pain,
And tunes must be played on the flute,
By my hollowed-out heart.
And all that is stony in me
Must melt in tears.*

– **Rabindranath Tagore**

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

*It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.
I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.*

– **Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali***

Women Poets

In India, very few women poets made significant contributions to the field of poetry. Traditional society seldom encouraged women to pursue intellectual endeavours. It was the Indian Independence movement, along with Mahatma Gandhi's call, that brought women to the forefront. Here, we list only the most prominent women poets at the national level, while other women poets are covered under Hindi and regional poetry.

Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949), known as the “Nightingale of India”, holds a prominent place amongst the influential poets of modern India. Her literary journey began at the age of 13, and in 1905, she published her first collection of poems, *The Golden Threshold*, which received widespread acclaim. Besides her literary achievements, Naidu was a notable political leader and celebrated freedom fighter. Her poetry delved into various themes, including love, death, and patriotism, leaving a lasting impact on modern Indian literary traditions.



Sarojini Naidu

Amrita Pritam (1919–2005) was a renowned Punjabi novelist, essayist, and poet who wrote in both Punjabi and Hindi. She remains a significant figure in Punjabi literature and was honoured with the 1956 Sahitya Academy Award. With a literary portfolio comprising more than 100 books spanning poetry, fiction, biographies, essays, and an autobiography, her works have been translated into several South Asian and foreign languages.



Amrita Pritam

“When a man denies the power of women, he is denying his own subconscious.”

– **Amrita Pritam**

*“To quench my longing, I bent me low
By the streams of the spirits of Peace that flow
In that magical wood in the land of sleep.”*

– **Sarojini Naidu**

*Nay, do not grieve tho' life be full of sadness,
Dawn will not veil her splendour for your grief,
Nor spring deny their bright, appointed beauty
To lotus blossom and Ashoka leaf.
Nay, do not pine, tho' life be dark with trouble,
Time will not pause or tarry on his way;
Today that seems so long, so strange, so bitter,*

*Will soon be some forgotten yesterday.
Nay, do not weep; new hopes, new dreams, new faces,
The unspent joy of all the unborn years,
Will prove your heart a traitor to its sorrow,
And make your eyes unfaithful to their tears.*

– **Sarojini Naidu**

*“When the body perishes all perishes,
but the threads of memory
are woven of enduring atoms
I will pick these particles,
weave the threads,
and I will meet you, yet again.”*

– **Amrita Pritam**

Kamala Das (1934–2009), one of the leading Indian poets of the 20th century, earned the title “Mother of Modern Indian English Poetry”. She embraced Islam in 1999, adopting the name Kamala Surayya. Das’s open and honest exploration of female sexuality made her a controversial figure. She expressed herself in both English and Malayalam, her native language from Kerala. While known as Kamala Das to her English audience, she used the pen name Madhavikutty in Malayalam. Her poetry was both candid and profound.



Kamala Das

*You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless pathways of the sky.*
– From *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* by Kamala Das (1973)

*“It smelt of new rains and of tender
Shoots of plants – and its warmth was the warmth
Of earth groping for roots ... even my
Soul, I thought, must send its roots somewhere;*

– **Kamala Das**

Nissim Ezekiel (1924–2004) was an Indian Jewish poet, actor, playwright, editor, and art critic.



Nissim Ezekiel

He played a pivotal role in shaping post-colonial India's literary history, particularly Indian poetry in English. Ezekiel received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1983 for his poetry collection *Latter-Day Psalms*. He is best remembered for his poem "Night of the Scorpion", known for its simplicity and depth.

Night of the Scorpion

*I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.*

*The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times
to paralyze the Evil One.*

*... and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre,
the peace of understanding on each face.*

*My mother twisted through and through,
groaning on a mat.*

*My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing,
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.*

I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with an incantation.

*After twenty hours
it lost its sting.*

My mother only said

Thank God the scorpion picked on me

And spared my children.

Poetry and Films: Poetry has played a crucial role in Indian film music. In the early days of Indian cinema, the lyrics of film songs were poetic expressions of human emotions such as love, romance, sadness, and death. These lyrics resonated deeply with listeners, transcending age, gender, education, and social status. While contemporary film songs have evolved, their lyrical quality remains a memorable part of Indian cinematic history.

Legendary Lyricists of Hindi Film Music

Shailendra (1923–1966)

Shakeel Badayuni (1916–1970)

Kaifi Azmi (1914–2002)

Majrooh Sultanpuri (1919–2000)

Anand Bakshi (1920–2002)

Sahir Ludhianvi (1921–1980)

Gulzar (born 1934)

Nida Fazli (1938–2016)

(For more details please also refer to page 94)

Contemporary poets



Gulzar

Recognised by his pen name, **Gulzar** (born in 1934), Sampooran Singh Kalra is perhaps India's most renowned living poet. In addition to poetry collections and film direction, he is celebrated as a lyricist who has made significant contributions to the Indian film industry. Gulzar has received the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the highest honour in Indian cinema. He has also won an Oscar and a Grammy for his song "Jai Ho" in the film *Slumdog Millionaire*.

"Stay far from the crowd if you want to achieve something different. Because crowd often provides you strength, but it takes away your identity." – Gulzar



Vikram Seth

Vikram Seth (born in 1952) is a poet and novelist, whose works encompass children's fiction and non-fiction. His poetry collections *Mapping* and *Beastly Tales* are among his well-known works. Seth has received numerous prestigious awards, including the Padma Shri, Sahitya Academy Award, WH Smith Literary Award, and Crossword Book Award.

Young modern Indian poets: Identifying young poets in India is challenging due to the abundance of talent across both English and regional languages. Here are some prominent young poets who write in English.



Meena Kandasamy

Meena Kandasamy: A Chennai-based poet, writer, and translator, Kandasamy's debut book *Touch* received several accolades. Her works appear in various literary journals and publications.

Tishani Doshi: Born to Welsh and Gujarati parents in Tamil Nadu, Doshi's first book of poetry, *Countries of the Body*, won a Forward Prize for Best First Collection. She has published six books encompassing poetry and fiction.

Sonnet Mondal: Known as the "young Bard of India", Mondal has authored eight books of poetry, earning acclaim for his craftsmanship.

Akhil Katyal: A professor and poet, Katyal is the author of “Night Charge Extra”.

“Grief is the least biodegradable of objects.

Do not bury it.

Stash it between your fingers and in those inconsolable hours let it run

There will be nights when even steel dissolves with your touch.”

Harnidh Kaur: Currently pursuing a Masters in Public Policy, Harnidh Kaur gained recognition for her poem “Pantheon”, which created a sensation on social media.

Nabanita Kanungo: A teacher in Assam, Kanungo’s debut collection, *A Map of Ruins*, reflects her love for her hometown, Shillong.

Arundhathi Subramaniam: An editor, curator, writer, and journalist of literature and performance arts, Subramaniam’s book of poems, *On Cleaning Bookshelves*, was published in 2001.

It is worth noting that many modern poets in India prefer to remain anonymous and write poetry purely for the joy of it.

Here, we include a prize-winning poem by **Sudha Shrotria**, a former civil servant, poet, writer, and painter.

Stranger in the Street**



Sudha Shrotria

*Do not ask me the name
Of the place where I come from,
Do not ask me the name,
Of the place where I am going.
Do not judge me
By the colour of my hair,
Or by the clothes I wear,
Do not judge me
By the shape of my face,
Or by my lack of grace;*

*Look beyond the narrow lines,
You have drawn around you
With the passage of times;
For I may be rich or poor,
I may be strong or weak,
But if you endeavour to seek,
You will find something
Of me in you,
And you in me;
For you cry like me
When you feel the pain,
And I laugh like you
When I feel the joy,
Deep down we are much the same
For we care and we share
A bond greater than eternity.
It is the bond of humanity.*

**** Prize-winning poem: first published in Asian Age (2005)**

Contemporary Poetry: Present-day poetry diverges significantly from its predecessors. The current era, marked by profound technological advances, urbanisation, and a revolution in communication, has re-defined the landscape of poetry. Poets no longer occupy lofty pedestals, revered by a select few. Instead, poetry has become more decentralised, democratic, and accessible. However, the flip side of modern life is the prevalence of isolation and alienation, which is often mirrored in contemporary poetry.

One notable shift is the rise of marginalised communities, who are now expressing their experiences of injustice and oppression through poetry. In addition, we witness an increasing number of women articulating their innermost thoughts and emotions. Regrettably, today's poetry often lacks the soaring poetic imagination that once celebrated the beauty and enigma of nature.

References

These are websites that we found useful while compiling this. Please also search the web to know of what has come later.

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Part II : Hindi, Urdu and Regional Languages

We have already had a glimpse of the history of Hindi poetry and the great poets of different ages in the section on Indian Poetry. For readers to easily follow the poetic history in India's major languages, we have grouped together the country's states in the following manner.

Group A I – Hindi Poetry—Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan

Group A II – Urdu poetry

Group B – North-eastern poetry

Group C – West Bengal (Bengali) and Orissa (Oriya)

Group D – Maharashtra (Marathi), Gujarat (Gujarati), and Old Punjab (Punjabi)

Group E – Jammu and Kashmir (Kashmiri)

Group F – Telangana (Telugu), Tamil Nadu (Tamil), Karnataka (Kannada), and Kerala (Malayalam)

Group A I

Hindi Poetry

Hindi, the national language of India, has become widely understood and spoken across the country, thanks to Bollywood movies and the efforts of the Hindi Rajya Bhasha Prachar Samiti. It is often referred to as the vernacular speech of North India, from Punjab in the West to Bengal in the East. However, Hindi itself is as diverse as the River Ganga, with numerous dialects nourishing it.

Dialects of Hindi vary by region. In Bihar, Magahi, Bhojpuri, and Maithili are prominent dialects. In Uttar Pradesh, Hindi is the official language, spoken by over 80.16% of the population, with Bhojpuri as the second most common dialect. Other dialects in the state include Awadhi, Braj Bhasha, Bundeli, Bagheli, and Kannauji. Madhya Pradesh has eight Hindi dialects – Bundelkhandi, Nimadi, Bhagelkhandi, Malvi, Brij Bhasha, Bhili, Korku, and Gondi. Rajasthan's primary dialects are Mewati, Marwari, Jaipuri, and Malvi.

Hindi poetry has a rich history extending back over a thousand years, and it can be divided into four stages.

Adikal (Early Period) 11th–14th centuries: This era featured religious and heroic poetry. Notable poets included Gorakhnath and Jain poets such as Swayambhu and Sharang Dhar.

Bhaktikal (Devotional Period) 14th–18th centuries: The prominent poets, including Kabir, Guru Nanak, and Meera Bai, emphasised bhakti, or devotion to god, through their *sakhis* and *padas*.

Ritikal (Romantic Period) 18th–20th centuries: Brajbhasha became the popular dialect, and

Sanskrit rhetorical traditions influenced poetry.

Adhunikkal (Modern Period) 1937 onwards: This era saw the rise of Khari Boli, a dialect that replaced Brajbhasha, and it is divided into four phases—**Bharatendu Yug, the Renaissance Period, Dwivedi Yug, and Chhayavad Yug**. The Chhayavad movement featured renowned poets such as Jayshanker Prasad, Maithalisharan Gupta, and Surya Kant Tripathi “Nirala”.

Post-Chhayavad, new styles emerged, such as Pragativad (poetry of progress; 1943–1960), Hridayvad (poetry of passion), and Prayogvad (poetry of experiments). The post-World War II years saw a wave of despair and depression sweep the world and it also had an impact on literature. The main poets of the Pragativad stream were **Girijakumar Mathur, Prabhakar Machwe, and Bharat Bhushan Agarwal**. Others included **Bhagvati Charan Varma, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar and Narendra Sharma**. The Hridayvad and Prayogvad schools of this period had eminent poets such as **S.H. Vatsyayan “Agyeya”, Shivmangal Singh “Suman”, Girija Kumar Mathur, and Dharamvir Bharati**.

States such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan have produced significant poets in various dialects. Bihar has produced a number of poets and writers in its local dialects such as Bhojpuri, Maithili, Magahi, Angika, and Bajjika. **Bhikhari Thakur, Heera Dom, Viveki Rai, Satishwar Sahay Verma, Pandey Kapil** are prominent writers of Bhojpuri, and Vidyapati of Maithili.

The poets of Uttar Pradesh have made outstanding contributions, be it in Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu or the regional dialects. Many believe that Ved Vyas, to whom the epic *Mahabharatha* is attributed, to have been born on an island in the Yamuna near Kalpi, Uttar Pradesh. The contributions of mystic poets such as Surdas, Kabir and Tulsidas have to be acknowledged, as well as the work of greats such as Ghalib and Amir Khusrau. The more modern poets include stalwarts such as Kaifi Azmi and Harivanshrai Bachchan.

Madhya Pradesh has produced many noted poets such as **Pandit Makhanlal Chaturvedi (1889–1968), Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Rahat Indori, Harishanker Parasi, Nida Fazli, Bhagawan Dutt Sharma**, and others. Chaturvedi was an essayist, poet, playwright and journalist, whose poetic work *Him Taringini* won the first ever Sahitya Akademi Award for Hindi writing in 1955. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1963.

Poetry has played an important role in shaping the literary history of Rajasthan and it is often divided into five major types—Jain, Charan, Akhyan, Sant, and Laukik. Noted poets included **Magha, Hari Bhadra Suri, Udyotam Suri, Siddha Rishi, Vighra Raj Chauhan, Samadeva, Jayanak, and Maharana Khumbha**.

Throughout history, great Hindi poets have enriched the language and literature, especially in the 20th century. However, it is unfortunate that many of their works remain inaccessible to those not well-versed in Hindi due to limited English translations.

“As I write, I create myself again and again.”

– **Joy Harjo**

“Neither sin nor virtue exists in this world; it (depends on) the perspective with which we analyse the situation.”

– **Bhagawati Charan Verma**

“When the end draws near, the first thing a man loses is his wisdom.”

– **Ramdhari Singh Dinkar**

“The nature never tolerates even for a moment

The rejected stale and old broken crusts

The joy of nature takes the support and sustenance

Only from what is new and maiden.”

– **Jaishankar Prasad in Kamayani**

Prithvi Raj Raso

“The night came: the beam of moon arose.

The Lord of men descended from his steed and placed Sanjogta on another.

The blood- stained arrows fly: one pierced the casque of Chohan.

Then did the bard demand to wield the sword;

but his prince exclaimed, ‘strong are our swords,

oh bard, leave thou the fight, that we may live in song.”

– **Translated by James Todd, a British officer**



Prithvi Raj Raso

These lines are about an episode in the life of Prithviraj III of the Chauhan dynasty who lived in the 12th century. He kidnaps Sanjogita (Sanyukta), the daughter of Jaichand, the powerful ruler of Khanouj, from the middle of her wedding ceremony. While fleeing with the Princess, Prithviraj fights the army of king Jaichand, supported by his political advisor and (supposedly) the bard who wrote this poem.

Kamayani by Jaishankar Prasad

Kamayani is considered as one of the greatest literary works in Hindi literature. It is an allegorical epic poem that “dramatises the tradition, culture and philosophy of India”. It narrates a mytho-historical tale – the story of Mann and Shraddha, the progenitors of the human race after the Great Deluge, taken from our ancient religious scriptures. *Kamayani* is a reflection of Prasad and his times, dealing at length with the socio-political issues of the day and trying to provide

answers. It also signifies the epitome of the Chhayavadi school of Hindi poetry, which gained popularity in the late 19th and early 20th century.

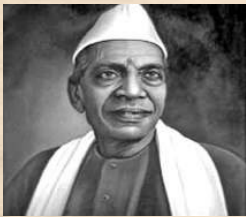
See how powerful and profound these lines from Canto I, Chinta (Thought) of *Kamayani* are.

*O first furrow of thought, O serpent of world's weald,
hissing like the first tremor of volcanic fire!
O fickle maiden of misery, O brow's line of loss!
Would you linger long? Would you slay this wayward
immortal? Would you delve into my depths?
Come oblivion! Sorrow, seize me! Silence, shroud me!
Begone awareness! Fill my void with languor!*

– Translated by Usha Kishore

According to the *Times of India*, the original handwritten manuscript of *Kamayani* is now in the National Archives in Delhi

Maithili Sharan Gupta (1886–1964): Born in Chirgaon, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, Maithili Sharan



Maithili Sharan Gupta

Gupta was a prominent figure in modern Hindi poetry. He played a pioneering role in the development of Khari Boli poetry and frequently wrote in this dialect. Mahatma Gandhi honoured him with the title “Rashtra Kavi” (national poet). Some of his notable works include “Rang Me Bhang”, published in 1910, and “Bharat Bharati”. He also served as an honorary member of the Rajya Sabha after India gained independence and received the Padma Bhushan

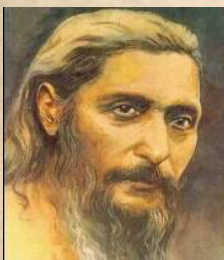
in 1954.

Jaishankar Prasad (1890–1937): Born in Benares, in the United Province of British India,



Jaishankar Prasad

Jaishankar Prasad was a prominent figure in modern Hindi literature and theatre. He used the pen name “Kaladhar”. While his initial collection of poetry, *Chitradhar*, was written in the Braj dialect of Hindi, his later works were composed in Sanskrit, Hindi, or the Khadi dialect. Mahadevi Verma once said about Prasad, “Whenever I remember our great poet Prasad, a particular image comes to my mind: ‘A fir tree stands on the slope of the Himalaya, straight and tall as the proud mountain peaks themselves’. After reading *Kamayani*, one feels that if Nobel Prizes could be awarded posthumously, *Kamayani* would definitely be eligible!”



Suryakant Tripathy “Nirala”

Suryakant Tripathy “Nirala” (1897–1961): A native of Medinipur, West Bengal, Suryakant Tripathy, known by the pen name Nirala (meaning “the unique one”), was a versatile artist who composed poems, wrote novels,

essays, and short stories, and also painted. He is credited with introducing free verse into modern Hindi prose. "He wrote in both free verse and traditional meters, never failing to mesmerize the reader." His poems have been translated into several languages, including translations by American novelist David Rubin. Notably, his poem "Saroj Smriti" is considered one of his greatest works, showcasing his deep emotions and sentiments for his daughter.



Sumitranandan Pant

Sumitranandan Pant (1900–1977): Born in Kausani-Almora, North-Western Provinces, British India, on 20 May 1900, Pant was one of the most celebrated Hindi poets of the 20th century. He was known for his romanticism, drawing inspiration from nature, people, the beauty, and the life of rural India. Pant was a prominent figure in the Chhayavadi school. He composed a total of 28 works, including poetry, verse plays, and essays.

His poetry reflected socialist, humanist, and philosophical themes.



Subhadra Kumari Chauhan

Subhadra Kumari Chauhan (1904–1948): Hailing from Nihalpur village in Allahabad, United Province, Chauhan actively participated in the freedom movement and became the first woman satyagrahi to court arrest in Nagpur. Her poetic works were deeply patriotic and inspiring. One of her most popular and widely sung poems in Hindi is "Jhansi ki Rani". Here is its opening stanza.

*"The thrones shook and royalties scowled,
Old India was re-invigorated with new youth
.....The old sword glistened again in 1857
This story we heard from the mouths of Bundel bards
Like a man, she fought; she was the Queen of Jhansi."*

Chhayavad Era

Chhayavad, which literally meant "shaded", refers to the years between 1918 and 1937, which were the heyday of neo-romanticism in Hindi literature. Poets focused on themes of love and nature, as well as a re-interpretation of the Indian tradition in a new form of mysticism. It was quite similar to the Romantic movement in England.

Jaishankar Prasad, Suryakant Tripathi "Nirala", Sumitranandan Pant, and Mahadevi Varma are considered the four pillars of Chhayavadi school. Other important figures of this literary movement include poets such as Ramdhari Singh "Dinkar" and Harivansh Rai Bachchan, among others.

When it began, Chhayavad was well received by readers and critics alike, but it was later on criticised for its excessive use of decorative language, romanticism, aloofness from contemporary social and economic problems, and strict rules on metre and rhyme.



Mahadevi Varma

Mahadevi Varma (1907–1987): One of the most illustrious Hindi poets, Varma

was born in Farukkabad, United Province, in 1907. She is one of the foremost poets of the Chhayavad movement, an era characterised by Neo-Romanticism in Hindi literature. Often referred to as the “modern Mira” and the grand dame of Hindi literature, her poems are marked by emotional depth and vivid natural imagery. In recognition of her contributions, she received the Padma Vibhushan in 1988. Her verses continue to be widely studied in schools.

Here is an excerpt from her poem “Tujh Me Priya”.

*Why an introduction, dear, you reside within me,
Reflections on starry nights, memories of life,
Life’s creations in brief moments, keen eyes perceive
Gentle footsteps!
I don’t possess much to cherish anymore,
You are the treasure that resides within me.*

Ramdhari Singh Dinkar (1908–1974): Known by his pen name “Dinkar”, Ramdhari Singh was a multi-faceted figure—a poet, essayist, freedom fighter, patriot, and scholar. Born on 23 September 1908 in Simaria, Bengal Presidency, British India, he was proficient in both Hindi and Maithili. Dinkar’s poetry during the pre-independence era was profoundly patriotic and inspiring. Works like “Kurukshehra” (1946), “Rashmirathi” (1952), and “Urvashi” (1961) earned him acclaim. He received numerous awards and honours and was notably influenced by poets such as Iqbal, Tagore, Keats, and Milton.



Ramdhari Singh Dinkar

Harivansh Rai Bachchan (né Srivastava; 1907–2003): Bachchan was a prominent poet and writer associated with the New Literary Movement of the early 20th century in Hindi literature.

He was born on 27 November 1907 in Babupatti, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, British India. His early work “Madhushala” remains his best-known creation. In recognition of his literary contributions, he was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 1976. Here is a snippet from “Madhushala”.



Harivansh Rai Bachchan

“Look at the vast expanse of the skies. When a star breaks, it remains broken forever. The universe never laments over the loss of its dear ones. What’s gone is gone.”

Shivmangal Singh “Suman” (1915–2002): A poet and academician who wrote in Hindi,



Shivmangal Singh

Shivmangal Singh was born on 5 August 1915 in Unnao, in the former United Province. His notable works include “Mitti Ki Bharaat”, “Hillool”, and “Jeevan Ke Gaan”. He received accolades such as the Sahitya Academy Award (1974), Padma Shri (1974), and Padma Bhushan (1999). Here is a sample of his poetry.

“The one who is ready to die for this journey, who is not afraid to drink in the joys and sorrows of life with a smile on his face is the one who lives the most. This elixir, this journey of life, is the most intoxicating of all.”

Hindi film music and poetry: There is a deep relation between film songs and poetry in India, especially in the Hindi language. During the golden era of Hindi cinema, legendary lyricists such as **Shailendra**, **Shakeel Badayuni**, **Kaifi Azmi**, **Majrooh Sultanpuri**, **Anand Bakshi**, and **Sahir Ludhianvi**, among others, crafted lyrical and enchanting poetry that immortalised the film songs of that period. The influence of Urdu, with its rhyme and lyricism, was paramount in shaping Hindi film music. Composers such as Naushad and Shankar-Jaikishan complemented the lyrics with melody, giving life to numerous timeless songs.

The Legendary Lyricists of Hindi Film Music



Shailendra (1923-1966); Shakeel Badayuni (1916-1970); Kaifi Azmi (1914-2002); Majrooh Sultanpuri (1919-2000);



Anand Bakshi (1920-2002) Sahir Ludhianvi (1921-1980); Gulzar (b. 1934); Nida Fazli (1938-2016)

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Group A II

Urdu Poetry

Urdu, which originated from the Persian and Turkish words for “camp”, has a rich tradition of poetry deeply integrated into the complex literary history of the Indian subcontinent.

The Urdu language itself is a fascinating amalgamation of various languages and dialects. During the reign of Delhi Sultanate in the late 12th century, the languages primarily spoken around Delhi were Brij Basha and Sauraseni, which began blending with Persian, the language of the Muslim rulers. Additionally, languages like Turkish and Arabic contributed to this linguistic fusion. While the fundamental grammar and structure of the original Indian languages remained intact, the vocabulary underwent a significant transformation. Many conventions of Urdu poetry were influenced by works in the Persian, Turkish, and Arabic languages.

Urdu poetry began to flourish in India during the 17th century, especially after it was declared the official language of the Mughal court. The 18th century witnessed a remarkable surge in Urdu poetry. It was during the reign of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan that it acquired the name of Urdu. Subsequently, Urdu was introduced to the southern region of India, notably through Hyderabad, in the Deccan plateau.

During a time when access to information was limited, Urdu became the primary means of communication, addressing prevailing social and political conditions. India also adopted the Arabic tradition of the *musha'ira*, where poets would gather to recite their poems.

During British colonial rule, notable Urdu writers, including Ghalib and Iqbal, received scholarships. After India gained independence in 1947, many prominent Urdu poets and scholars were divided along nationalistic lines. Despite this, Urdu poetry has continued to transcend cultures, languages, and politics, holding a position of significance in both India and Pakistan.

The Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), a literary group, was particularly active from the 1930s to the 1950s in promoting the Urdu language.

Types of Urdu Poetry

Marsiya: A poetic form of Urdu-Persian origin, this is typically recited to mourn someone's death. It comes from the customary practice of reciting a marsiya to commemorate and lament the death of Hazrat Hussein and 72 of his comrades during the siege of Karbala.

Masnavi: This is a poetic form found in Persian, Ottoman, and Urdu literature.

Qasida: This pre-Islamic Arabian poetic form has laudatory and elegiac themes.

Rubai: A poetic form in Urdu-Persian, consisting of quatrains.

Shayari: A dominant and popular form of poetry featuring short rhyming couplets, often conveying the beauty and meaning of life subtly.

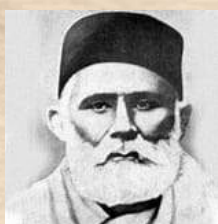
Ghazals: A form of love poetry comprised of sets of couplets (sher), often sung as short songs.

Urdu nazm: A type of ghazal with a smooth flow of rhymes, written in verses. Though they share similarities, both the ghazal and nazm are complementary.

Doha: A popular genre of Urdu poetry that typically conveys didactic messages.

Urdu Script: Urdu poetry is written in the standard Nasta'liq calligraphy style (Persian-Arabic script) in Pakistan and the Deccan region of India. However, in North India, the Devanagari script is followed. The 'Lakhnavi' spoken Urdu is considered the highest literary form of Urdu in India.

Urdu Poets and the Freedom Struggle: Urdu poetry played an inspiring role in the Indian freedom struggle. Poets like Altaf Hussain Hali, Brij Narain Chakbast, Hasrat Mohani, Zafar Ali Khan, Mohd Ali Jauhar, Allama Iqbal, Durga Sahai, Suroor Jahanabadi, and Trilok Chand Mehroom made significant contributions. Urdu, born on the streets of Delhi, became a language of love in the 19th century and a language of rebellion in the 20th and 21st centuries.



Altaf Hussain

Altaf Hussain (1837–1914), known as Hali, was one of the earliest poets to raise his voice for freedom. His poetry reflects a strong desire for independence.

Bismil Azimabadi (1901–1978) wrote a powerful verse in 1921 that became the anthem for the freedom struggle. It was hummed by Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru, and Sukhdev as they marched to the gallows.

Hasrat Mohani (1875–1951), known for coining the slogan “Inquilab Zindabad” (“Long live the revolution!”), was one of the first to demand complete independence for India in 1921.

Ali Sardar Jafri (1913–2000) was a poet, critic, and freedom fighter who penned inspiring poems even while behind bars. Look at these beautiful lines——



Ali Sardar Jafri

*Dance, O spirit of liberty, for life is eternally dancing,
The universe revolves in the orbit of times, in an eternal dance.*

Great Urdu Poets: We have already discussed the contributions of great poets such as Ghalib, Mir Taqi Mir, Amir Khusrau, and Iqbal in a previous chapter on Indian Poetry.

Post-Independence: Urdu is one of the officially recognised languages in India and also has the status of “additional official language” in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and the national capital region of Delhi. The wide usage of the Nastaliq script in written Hindustani led to Urdu being spoken and written as a distinct dialect.

Contemporary Urdu Poetry: Modern Urdu poetry departs from traditional rules and conventions, allowing poets to compose in the form of free verse. This new Urdu poetry is appreciated for its simplicity and accessibility.

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Indian Regional Poetry

A common thread connecting all regional poetry in India is the influence of the Sanskrit language, which played a significant role in shaping Indian vernacular languages. Interestingly, translations of the *Ramayana* exist in all major Indian languages. For example, the *Kamba Ramayana* (Tamil, 12th century), *Saptakanda Ramayana* by Madhav Kandali (Assamese, 14th century), *Kirtibasi Ramayana* or *Sriram Panchali* (Bengali, 15th century), *Jagmohan (Dandi) Ramayana* by Balram Das (Oriya, 15th century), *Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas (Awadhi, 16th century), and *Adhyatma Ramayanam* by Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan (Malayalam, early 17th Century).

Although each language has produced its own great poets and poetry, these literary treasures are often less known in other parts of the country due to limited translations into English and a declining readership for poetry.

Now, we explore the great poets and poetic traditions of different regions of India.

Group B

North-East Poetry

India's North-Eastern region, often considered remote and mysterious to the rest of the country, comprises seven states known as the "seven sisters"—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, and Mizoram. Sikkim, which became a state in 1975, is also a part of the North-East.

The North-east



Bologspot.com

- The term North-east is purely geographical, but it tends to homogenise an extremely heterogeneous group of people
- There exists no common history and heritage of the people in North-east India, except that the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Meghalaya were parts of former British Assam.
- Without any authorised script of their own, most preserved their myths and stories through oral traditions.
- People in the North-eastern states share a close proximity with nature, which is reflected in their poetry.

- The old, traditional, innocent way of life, so characteristic of this part of India, is slowly and steadily being eroded.
- The most prominent concern expressed in many poems is the feeling of loss and the all-pervasive shadow of violence—a land where “the ugly thud of the boots of both the extremists and the Indian Army” stands out as a reality
- Since the introduction of English and Hindi, a new generation of writers has emerged. “The troubled political climate, the beautiful landscape and the confluence of various ethnic groups have given rise to a body of writing that is completely different from Indian English literature”.

I. Assamese Poetry



Shikhir blog

Assam brings to mind images of monsoon floods, a cup of freshly brewed Assam tea, and pretty Assamese women welcoming the annual Bihu festival with flowers and offerings. This “Gateway to the North East” is rich in tradition and culture and also has given birth to several luminaries who have enriched its poetic history.

The earliest seeds of Assamese poetry can be found in folk songs. Assamese poetry is greatly indebted to the lyrical heritage of Assam’s folklore.

“Prahlada Charitra” by **Hema Saraswati** (13th century) is probably the earliest text in Assamese literature. However, the first great Assamese poet was **Madhava Kandali** (14th century), who made the earliest translation of the Sanskrit *Ramayana* and wrote *Devajit*, a narrative on Krishna. He was known as Kaviraja Kandali, the king of poets.



Shankaradeva

The Bhakti movement brought a literary upsurge, with notable poets like **Srimanta Shankaradeva** (1449–1568), a polymath and social-religious reformer who significantly influenced music, theatre, dance, and literary language in Assam. The poet wrote, “Never seek ye the caste of a brahmin (upper caste) or a chandal (lower caste). Have an equal eye on a donor and a thief. One who has an idea of sameness in between a rogue and a saint, know him, ye all, to be a true scholar” (“Kirtan Ghosa”).

Madhavadeva (1489–1596) was a saint, composer, poet, playwright and scholar. He was also a religious reformer. He is known particularly for his book of hymns, the *Naam Ghosa*, as well as a large selection of songs called *Borgeets*.

The following is a roll of other prominent Assamese poets.



Lakshminath
Bezbaruah

Lakshminath Bezbaruah (1864–1938): A key figure in the Jonaki Era of Assamese literature, he wrote essays, plays, fiction, poetry, and satires. His poem “O mur Apunar Desh” is the anthem of Assam.

Mofizuddin Ahmad Hazarika (1870–1958): Known for poetry books such as *Gyan Malini* and *Tottyia Parijat*.

Padmanath Gohain Baruah (1871–1946): Regarded as the “Pitamaha” of Assamese literature.

Hemchandra Goswami (1872–1928): A writer, poet, historian, teacher, and linguist who published the first Assamese dictionary.

Ananda Chandra Agarwala (1874–1940): Known for translating English poems into Assamese.

Hiteswar Barbarua (1876–1939): Known for long narrative poems in blank verse and sonnets.



Raghunath
Choudhury

Raghunath Choudhury (1879–1967): A prominent poet of the romantic era, known as the “poet of birds”.



Nalini Bala Devi

Nalini Bala Devi (1898–1977): Known for nationalistic and mystical poetry, she was the first woman Assamese poet to be awarded a Padma Shri.

Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1903–1951): A noted playwright, songwriter, poet, and filmmaker, revered as the “Rupkonwar of Assamese culture”.



Hem Barua

Hem Barua (1915–1977): Considered the father of modern Assamese poetry.



Birendrakumar
Bhattacharya

Birendrakumar Bhattacharya (1924–1997): The first Assamese writer to receive the Jnanpith Award for his novel *Mrityunjay*.



Nirmal Prabha
Bordoloi

Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi (1933–2004): A prominent figure in Assamese literature, Bordoloi was renowned as a poet, lyricist, and folklorist. Her contributions to Assamese literature earned her numerous accolades, including the Sahitya Academy Award in 1983 for her poetry collection *Sudirgha Din Aru Ritu* and the President’s Award in 1957 for children’s literature.

Nabakanta Barua (1926–2002): In the Assamese literary world, Barua, also known as “Akhud Kakaideo”, is a celebrated name. Writing under the pseudonym Seema Dutta, he added a unique dimension to modern Assamese poetry. Barua’s poems encompass diverse themes, including beauty, life, love, death, and mystery.



Nabakanta Barua

Hiren Bhattacharya (1932–2012): Popularly known as Hiruda, he was a prolific poet and lyricist.



Hiren Bhattacharya

His extensive body of work in Assamese literature earned him numerous awards and accolades. Some of his notable poetry collections include *Roudro Kamona*, *Kobitar Rod*, *Mur Prio Bornomala*, *Bhalpuwar Buka Mati*, and *Bhalpuwar Dikchou Batere*. He also has Assamese rhyme collections such as *Lora Dhemali* and *Akon Dhemali* to his credit.

Bhupen Hazarika (1926–2011): Known as the Bard of Brahmaputra, Hazarika was a multi-faceted talent, excelling as a playback singer, lyricist, musician, poet, actor, and filmmaker. He was affectionately referred to as “Xudha kontho” or “nectar-throated” due to his enchanting singing. Hazarika was not only a poet and singer but also a social reformer, humanist, and an advocate of love, passion, and universalism. His poems and songs emphasised humanity and universal brotherhood, earning him posthumous recognition with a Padma Vibhushan in 2012.



Bhupen Hazarika

The Wanderer

– Bhupen Hazarika

The world having embraced me as its own,

I've forgotten my own home.

I've become a wanderer.

I've become a wanderer.

From the land of the Ganges,

I visited the mighty Mississippi and saw the beautiful Volga.

From Ottawa through Austria, I arrived – covered in Paris's dust

From Ellora I took colour and gave it to the distant city Chicago,

I heard the ghazals of Ghalib, sitting inside the Tashkent minaret.

Sitting at Mark Twain's tombstone I talked about Gorky.

Again and again by the pull of the road I have made the road my home.

That's why I am a wanderer.

That's why I am a wanderer.

Though most wanderers appear aimless,

I travel with intention:

Wherever I go I soak my mind in the colour of the place.

I have seen countless rows of tall buildings touching the sky.

Under their shadow I have also seen many homeless folk

I have seen endless groves of roses and bakul flowers blossoming in the millions.

I have also seen buds withering due to neglect

Country after country, I have seen loveless unions breaking apart families.

The stranger becomes my own in my mind, and my own people become distant.

That's why I am a wanderer. I'm one wanderer. I'm a wanderer.

Bhupen Hazarika's songs have not only been translated into Bengali and Hindi, but also a number of other languages as well.

New Era Poets: **Mahendra Bora**, in his compilation *Natun Kavita* (New Poetry), presents a selection of works by twenty young poets critiquing contemporary social orders. **Homen Bargohain** is distinguished for his proficiency in both short stories and poetry. Other emerging poets like **Dinesh Goswami**, **Nilmani Phukan (Junior)**, **Bireswar Barua**, and **Mahim Bora** have introduced some novelty to themes, while employing new symbolism and imagery.

2. **Arunachal Pradesh**

Arunachal Pradesh, often referred to as the "Land of the Dawn-lit Mountains" or the "Land of the Rising Sun", is the eastern-most state of India. This region is home to diverse ethnic communities, each with its distinct language and culture. Its tribes are of Tibeto-Burman and indigenous origin. With 26 major tribes and hundreds of sub-tribes, Arunachal has more than 90 languages.

Traditionally, Arunachal Pradesh's literature was passed down orally through verse and song, with written references first appearing in Ahom *burunjis* (chronicles). The introduction of English and Hindi as mediums of instruction in 1972 led to a new generation of writers. Modern Arunachal Pradesh writers such as **Mamang Dai**, **Rita Chowdhury**, **Dibang**, **Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi**, **Tamo Mibang**, **Takop Zirido**, **Tony Koyu**, **Yabin Zirido**, **Taro Sindik**, **Jamuna Bini**, and **Joram Yalam** have made significant contributions to poetry.

Mamang Dai Mamang Dai is a poet and novelist from Arunachal Pradesh. Her mother tongue is Adi but she writes both in Adi and in English. She is one of the renowned tribal voices from the North-East. She was the first woman of the state to be selected to the civil services. But she gave it up for a career in journalism.



Mamang Dai

Mamang Dai recreated the pre-historic past of Arunachal Pradesh in *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and *The Hidden Land* (2003). One finds an amalgamation of traditional literature and creativity in her anthology *The Balm of Time, River Poems*.

"Dai's poetic world is one of river, forest and mountain, a limpid and lyrical reflection of the terrain of her home state. Nature here is mysterious, verdant with myth, dense with sacred memory. There is magic to be found everywhere: in the way lilies "navigating on a heartbeat . . . are shooting up like swordfish", in the quiet equipoise of "cool bamboo/ restored in sunlight", in the "speechless ardour" of mountains. And there is no doubt whatsoever that "the river has a soul".

The Voice of the Mountain

I am the desert and the rain.

From where I sit on the high platform

I can see the ferry lights crossing

criss-crossing the big river.

*I know the towns, the estuary mouth.
There, beyond the last bank
where the colour drains from heaven
I can outline the chapters of the world.
The wild bird that sits in the west.
The past that recreates itself
and particles of life that clutch and cling
For thousands of years.*

She writes about cultural amnesia in her poems and bewails it in “This Summer”.

*Begging the forgiveness of butterflies,
and beauty that we destroyed
in our hunt for life.*

- Mamag Dai

3. Meghalaya

Meghalaya, or the “Abode of the Clouds”, was historically ruled by the independent kingdoms of Jaintias, Khasis, and Garos. These kingdoms later became part of the North East province under British rule in the 19th century. At India’s independence in 1947, present-day Meghalaya comprised two districts of Assam with limited autonomy. It eventually gained statehood on 21 January 1972.

Meghalaya primarily speaks Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia languages, corresponding to the state’s main tribes. Additionally, Bengali, Assamese, and English are also used, with English serving as the official language.

Thomas Jones Elias (1816–1849) and **Soso Tham** (1873–1940) were two remarkable trail-



blazers in Khasi literature. Elias, a Welsh Christian missionary, dedicated his life to the Khasi people in Meghalaya and Bangladesh. He was not only a prominent poet but also a prolific essayist in the Khasi language. He immersed himself in Khasi culture, learning their language while living among them.

Elias is credited with transcribing the Khasi language into the Roman script. In 1842, he published a Khasi reader and translated a Welsh work, *Rhodd Mam*, into Khasi, making them the first-ever books written in the Khasi language. He also compiled a Khasi dictionary. The inscription on his gravestone fittingly says, “The founding father of the Khasi alphabet and literature”. Meghalaya celebrated his 50th death anniversary in 2016.

Soso Tham (1873–1940), often referred to as the “Robert Burns of the Khasi Highlands”, is fondly remembered for his exquisite poems. He emerged as a poet in the mid-19th century, a

time when formal education was scarce in the Khasi Hills' villages. Undeterred by challenges, he published his first book, *Ka Duitara Ksiar* (The Golden Harp), in 1925. This collection featured 46 Khasi poems and 14 translations of English poems. Though it initially received little appreciation, it remains one of the most distinguished works in the Khasi language.



Soso Tham

Soso Tham faced the hardship of having to personally sell his books door to door with limited success. His poems encapsulate the complexity, diversity, richness, and poignancy of the Northeast. Many of his verses, which touch the hearts of readers even today, reflect his tragic frustration. One such poignant poem reads,

*Quietly he lives, quietly he dies,
Amidst the wilderness.
Quietly in the grave let him rest,
Beneath the soft green grass.*

Soso Tham's writings have been largely lost or are untraceable today. He passed away on 18 December 1940, and this day is observed as U Soso Tham Day in Meghalaya.

Contemporary poets such as **Prof. Streamlet Dkhar** continue to make significant contributions to Khasi poetry. His remarkable work earned him recognition during a South Asian Literature and Culture Summit held in Bangladesh in 2018. Meghalaya also boasts notable Hindi poets such as **Nilmoni Phukan** and **Thangjam Ibopishak**. **Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang** and **Desmond Karmawphlang** are lyrical poets who write in both English and Khasi. The state now nurtures many young and talented English-language poets, carrying the legacy forward.

4. Mizoram

The "Land of the Mizos" is a state in India's north-east, with Aizawl as its capital. The state is often referred to as the "Song Bird of the East" and Mizos are said to possess a natural inclination towards music. Mizo Tawng is the principal language of the Mizo people, with both written and oral traditions. The Duhlian dialect, known as Lusei, evolved into the Mizo language, and while Mizo is of importance, English is widely used in administration and education.

Mizoram's poetic history can be divided into various periods—an **ancient period** of oral tradition, folklore and folktales; the **pre-Christianisation period** from 1860 to 1894); **the early period** from 1894 to 1920); **the middle period** from 1920 to 1970); and **the contemporary period** from 1970 to the present). Historically, all Mizo languages, including Pawi and Paite, remained unwritten until the early 20th century. Collections of Mizo poems serve as valuable sources of knowledge about ancient Mizoram.

One of the most renowned Mizo poets was **Awithangpa** (1885–1965). During this period, various other poets wrote songs used in Christian services within the Mizo tradition. Notable figures

include **Patea** (1894–1950) and **Saihnuna** (1894–1949), among others. Some poets composed both religious and secular poems, such as **R.L. Kamlala** (1902–1980) and **Damhauhva** (1909–1972).

Prominent poets from the later period include **Pu Rokunga**, renowned for his patriotic, festive, and nature-themed poems. He was honoured as the Poet of the Century by the Mizo Millennium Celebration Committee in 2000. Other notable poets include **Lalmanpuia**, **Lalzova Chhange**, **P. S. Chawngthu**, **Vankhama**, **V. Thangzama**, **Zirsangzela Hnamte**, and **Pastor Saikhuma**.

5. Nagaland

The Naga Hills were inhabited by the Naga people as early as 150 AD. The Nagas have a rich tradition of oral literature, originally having been hunters living in isolation from each other. Early writings about the Nagas are primarily anthropological, with government records dominating. Writing in the Naga language began with the efforts of American Baptist Missionaries in the 1860s.

The next phase was around 1919, following the British occupation and the Battle of Kohima in World War II. The third phase began the 1950s, but it was only in the 1970s, as more people became educated, that creative writing, including poetry, took off among the Nagas. The earlier years of conflict had not been conducive to people devoting time to writing.

While English is Nagaland's official language, diverse local dialects co-exist. Among the pioneering Naga writers are **Temsula Ao**, **Nini Lungalang**, **Easterine Kire**, and **Monalisa Changkija**, whose works are well received regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Temsüla Ao (born 1945) is a poet, short story writer, and ethnographer. She retired as a Professor of English at North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), where she taught since 1975. She has published five volumes of poetry and received numerous awards.



Nini Lungalang



Temsüla Ao

Nini Lungalang (1948–2019) has written two books of poems and been published in various anthologies and journals. Her notable works include *Monalisa* (1993).

Easterine Kire (born 1959) is a poet, writer, and novelist. She published her first book of poetry in 1982, titled *Kelhoukevira*, which was the first book of Naga poetry published in English. Her poetry has been translated into multiple languages.

Monalisa Changkija (born 1960) is a well-known journalist and poet. She began writing poetry and short stories during the long-running insurgency in Nagaland to protest against the violence and criticize the social conditions that led to the unrest.

Mmhonlumo Kikon (born 1978) is a politician, poet, and former social worker. He is also a member of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly and has published two books of poems since

2018.

Tialila Kikon (born 1998) authored *Dandelion Dreams*, a collection of contemporary poetry that explores the belief that life can still be beautiful despite the world's rejections, pain, and disillusionments.

Beni Sumer Yanthan (Yanbeni) is a poet and folklorist whose works illustrate the deep anguish of unfortunate Nagas who have been victims of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

Brother,

Your blood has drenched this earth

And soaked up our sins,

Your silent screams now hang above

This parched town

Where the mist gathers at dusk

6. Manipur



Loktak lake, Manipur (wikipedia)

Manipur, which was a princely state that came under British rule in the late 19th century, was unified with India in 1949. It became a Union Territory in 1956 and a fully-fledged state in 1972. The state has had a long history of insurgency and inter-ethnic violence.

The history of Manipuri poetry can be divided into three phases—**Early, Medieval, and Contemporary**. Manipuri poetry originated from oral literature and gradually transitioned to a written form when the Manipuri script developed between the 12th and 15th centuries.

The Early Period, up to the 17th century, focused on themes such as the gods, royalty, romantic events, heroic deeds, and nature, all written in old Manipuri. Authors and dates were not recorded during this period.

The Medieval Period, from the 17th to 18th centuries, witnessed a strong influence of Hinduism, with Manipuri adaptations of Hindu epics and the introduction of foreign words.

The 20th century marked a renaissance in Manipuri literature, with the influence of Romanticism in English literature. Modernism arrived after World War II, shifting the style of Manipuri poetry.



Prominent poets in early 1970s were **Nongthombam Shri Biren**, **Rajkumar Madhubir**, **Thangjam Ibopishak**, and **Yulembam Ibomcha**, who protested against social issues, religious

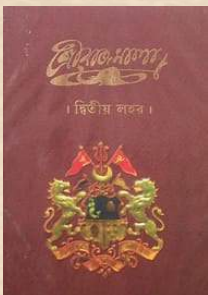
practices, politics, culture, and the morality of their time. In the mid-1990s, a new trend of post-modernism emerged in Manipuri poetry.

7. Tripura



The third smallest state in India, Tripura is home to a diverse population consisting of 19 indigenous tribal groups and a substantial Bengali-speaking community. Its history is marked by various phases of influence and governance.

In the early 17th century, Tripura came under Mughal rule, but after the British defeated the Mughals, it became a princely protectorate under the British. Throughout this period, the Manikya dynasty continued to rule the region. On 1 July 1963, Tripura became a Union Territory, and it achieved full statehood on 1 January 1972.



Tripura boasts a rich heritage of myths and legends. The native language, Kokborok, belonging to the Sino-Tibetan language group, was dominant until the 19th century when it adopted the Bengali script. **Rajmala**, the first chronicle of the Kings of Tripura, was originally written in Kokborok in the 15th century under Dharma Manikya and later translated into Bengali. Kokborok writing saw a revival at the end of the 19th century after a long period of stagnation.

Gakulananda Gitiswami (1896–1962) stands as Tripura’s greatest poet and creative soul. He was a poet, writer, and social reformer. One of his renowned poems, “Matribandana” or “Homage to Mother”, reflects on embracing change and recognising women’s strength through the ages.



Gakulananda Gitiswami

“It will not serve any purpose if one clings to age old customs. The customs of Satya Yuga and Treta Yuga will not hold good in Kali Yuga.

One should not turn a deaf ear to the demands of time, because when fire starts burning the forests, it burns both dry and green timber at the same time.”

On women’s power, he wrote,

“In Yuga after Yuga women excelled. In strength it was Bhabani (Durga), in learning it was Binapani, in fortitude it was Mother Earth and in devotion the Gopikas of Brij. Being part and parcel of them, how you have forgotten your own strength?”

The introduction of the *Smai Kwtal*, a translation of the New Testament of the Bible, in 1976 marked an important moment in Tripura’s literature. With the Tripura government adopting Kokborok as a state language in 1979, there has been a revival in Kokborok literature, culminating in the publication of a Kokborok dictionary and the re-publication of the *Rajmala* in Kokborok. Renowned indigenous poet Chandra Kanta Murasingh received the Sahitya Academy award in 1996, signifying the strength of the Kokborok literary tradition.

8. Sikkim



Sikkim Lake

A multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural state, Sikkim recognises 11 official languages, including Limboo, Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali, Tamang, Rai, Gurung, Manger, Sherpa, Newari, and Sunuwar. The Limboo language, known as “Yakthung Sappan”, holds significance among the Limboo tribe and efforts are on to preserve their oral literature, including legends, folklore, sermons, and moral exhortations.



Bhanubhakta Acharya

While Limboo writing began in the first half of the 20th century with the publication of key works, the language has faced challenges due to external influences and Western culture. However, its cultural importance remains.

Nepali is the dominant language for written works in Sikkim, and poets like **Bhanubhakta Acharya** (1814–1868) have played a crucial role in Nepali literature. Acharya is honoured as the “Adikavi” for translating the epic Ramayana from Sanskrit to Nepali.

Prominent poets from Sikkim include **Gadul Singh Lama**, popularly known as Sanu Lama, who has made significant contributions to Nepali literature. His works, written in multiple languages, have received prestigious awards, including the Sahitya Academy Award and Padma Shri.

Kedar Nath Gurung, another distinguished poet from Sikkim, has authored numerous publications, including poetry collections, earning him accolades like the Padma Shri in 2012. Sikkim’s poetry landscape also features poets such as **S. Mahinda, Kazi Dawa Samdup, Gyatsho Tshering, and Tanka B. Subba.**



Kedar Nath Gurung

The 21st century has witnessed a growing number of young poets in Sikkim expressing themselves in English, reflecting the impact of English education on the state’s literary scene.

In the Northeast region, a new generation of poets has now emerged, contributing fresh perspectives and personal reflections through their poetry. These poets include Bazik Thlana from Mizoram; Tialila Kikon, Emisen Jamir, and Wedekhro Naro from Nagaland; Michelle Rungsung from Manipur, and Chirmi Shimray and Yuimi Vashum from Manipur.

She is Poetry



By **Wedekhro Naro** from Nagaland

Wedekhro Naro

*“Then define her, so I may see, she asked,
“I can’t because she is poetry”, I replied.*

She is invisible

Like the early morning breeze

That refreshes your soul.

You can only feel it.

She is untouchable,

like the wind that blows

the seeds to the fertile land.

you can only feel it

She is eternal

She is poetry.

Presence in Absence



By **Bazik Thlana** from Mizoram

Bazik Thlana

Presence in absence

Absence in Presence

Remnants of old and new

Some lost, some given away

Some abandoned and some outgrown

An attempt to capture and preserve them

In jars and photographs and marks

With brushes and ink

Memories hanging by a thread

The void is not always empty

The missing are not always missed

The missed are not always missing.

– Bazik Thlana from Mizoram

An Eye-Identity

By Bazik Thlana from Mizoram

The human eyes are the windows to his soul

a window for looking in, looking out and illumination

the windows to my soul are framed by small and narrow panes;

polite passers-by in Delhi have

sometimes asked me if I could see clearly through them

they gaze,

they stare,

they pre-suppose

yet again my entity has been summed up by my eye-identity

a Chink - a flaw in the armour of unified India?

a chink in the chain of uniformity?

i'm taking it back

a Chink - it's narrow and slanted:

it'll do to let the light in

if only they'd look in.

The Wait



Vancouver Shullai

By Vancouver Shullai from Shillon

How to love a broken man

I am thirteen years of ignorance

Five years of mistake and three years

Of telling of myself not to do them again

I am Khasi, with no Khasi name

Catholic, with no catholic name

I am christened with imagination.

Watered with Precision

And salted with Detail.

Promise Me That

By Nongwangam Chinir from Manipur



Nongwangam

Promise me that

You won't let them win

That you won't let injustice make you cruel,

That when you sit on that throne

And all dukes bow before you,

And at your command legions move-

You will never forget the child in you that built

Castles for turtles and chased after fireflies.

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Group C I

Bengali Poetry

The Bengali language is renowned for its lyrical beauty, and India's national anthem, "Jana Gana Mana", and national song, "Vande Mataram", are in Bengali. Bengali literature has a rich tradition of poets spanning various centuries, making it a language of profound significance in Indian literature.

The history of Bengali poetry can be divided into three main stages of development—**Charyapad** (the oldest poetry), the **Medieval period**, and the **Modern age** from the 1930s onwards. Charyapad, dating back to the 10th and 11th centuries, consists of Buddhist mystic songs, which have deep historical roots in the region.

During the Medieval period, poets like **Vidyapati**, **Bau**, and **Chandidas** emerged, and their works continue to be celebrated for their philosophical and erotic themes. The Late Middle Period saw the influence of Chaitanya and the development of Vaishnava literature. Vaishnava poets like **Govind Das** and **Gyan Das** made significant contributions to Bengali literature.

During the 15th century (1607–1680), two renowned Muslim poets in Bengali, **Daulat Qazi** and **Alaol**, lived in Myanmar. A noteworthy work from the 16th century is "Chandimangal" by **Mukunda Chakravarti**, along with other religious texts such as "Manasamangal", "Dharmamangal", and "Phullaketu".

In the modern age, Bengali poetry saw the emergence of influential poets during both the pre-colonial and colonial periods. These poets left a lasting impact on Bengali literature. Notable poets from this era include **Amiya Chakraborty** (1901–1966), **Jibanananda Das** (1899-1954), **Buddhadeb Basu** (1906–1964), **Bishnu Dey** (1909–1962), and **Sudhindranath Dutta** (1901–1960). Modernist poets with pro-socialist views, such as **Sukanta Bhattacharya**, **Samar Sen**, and **Dipankar Saha Deep**, also made their mark.

The transition between pre-colonial and modern poetry was marked by **Bharatchandra Ray** (1712–1760), an 18th century Bengali and Sanskrit court poet and song composer. Prominent poets after his time include **Iswar Gupta** (1812–1859), **Michael Madhusudan Dutta** (1834–1873), **Biharilal Chakravarti** (1834–94), **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), **Kazi Nazrul Islam** (1899–1976), and **Jatindramohan Bagchi** (1878–1948).

The Krittibas group of poets, which included **Shakti Chattopadhyay** (1933–1995), **Sankha Ghosh** (1932–2021), **Tarapada Ray** (1936–2007), and **Sunil Gangopadhyay** (1935–2012), played a pivotal role in reshaping Bengali poetry during the 1930s. The "little magazines" movement, initiated by these poets, contributed significantly to the evolution of Bengali poetry.

Bengali poetry in the post-World War II era was enriched by poets like **Shakti Chattopadhyay**

(1933–1995), **Sunil Gangopadhyay** (1934–2012), **Dinesh Das** (1913–1985), **Sukanta Bhattacharya** (1926–1947), **Arun Mitra** (1909–2000), **Nirendranath Chakravarty** (1924–2018), **Subhas Mukhopadhyay** (1919–2003), **Abul Kasem Rahimuddin**, **Krishna Dhar** (born 1928), and **Dipankar Saha Deep** (born 2000).

During this period, notable Islamic poets included **Syed Ismail Hossain Siraji** (1880–1931), **Mohammed Mozammel Haque** (1860–1933), **Golam Mostofa** (1897–1964), **Talim Hossain** (1918–1999), **Abdul Kadir** (1906–1984), and **Farrukh Ahmed** (1918–1974).

The Hungry Generation, a literary movement in Bengali literature during the 1960s, was initiated by four poets—**Shakti Chattopadhyay**, **Malay Roy Choudhury**, **Samir Roychoudhury**, and **Debi Roy** (Haradhon Dhara). This movement had a significant impact on the literary landscape of Kolkata.

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976)



Kazi Nazrul Islam

One of the greatest poets in Bengali literature, Kazi Nazrul Islam was an Indian who later became a Bangladeshi. poet. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan by India in 1960 and Bangladesh declared him a national poet in 1972.

A polymath, Nazrul Islam not only wrote poetry, but also produced music, novels, stories, and essays. His writings explored themes such as freedom, oppression, equality, justice, humanity, love, and revolution. He stood for communal harmony, and opposed all forms of bigotry and fundamentalism. He was instrumental in introducing Bengali ghazals and extensively used Arabic, Persian and Urdu words in his works.

Nazrul Islam wrote and composed music for nearly 4,000 songs, collectively known as *Nazrul Giti*. In 1942, at the age of 43, he began to suffer from an unknown neuro-degenerative disease, losing his voice and memory.

Nazrul was arrested on 23 January 1923 and charged with sedition. The result was his most famous poem “Bidrohi”.

Bidrohi (The Rebel)

*I am the burning volcano in the bosom of the earth,
I am the wildfire of the woods,
I am Hell's mad terrific sea of wrath!
I ride on the wings of lightning with joy and profundity,
I scatter misery and fear all around,
I bring earthquakes on this world! “
I am the rebel eternal,
I raise my head beyond this world,
High, ever erect and alone!*

– Translated by Kabir Choudhary.

Sunil Gangopadhyay (1934–2012)



Sunil Gangopadhyay

Sunil Gangopadhyay or Sunil Ganguly was not just a Bengali poet but also a historian and novelist. He was the founder-editor of *Krittibas*, a Bengali poetry magazine published from 1953 that became a platform for a new generation of poets experimenting with many new forms of poetry. He received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1985.

His “Nikhilesh and Neera” series of poems have been extremely popular. These lines are from the poem “Ephemeral”.

*You know Neera,
that the white pigeons that fly in the evening sky,
even they are obscured by darkness!
like the light of our eyes,
and like all worldly sorrows
It's only the misery of man
that stretches beyond his lifetime.”*

– **Sunil Gangopadhyay**

*“We died so many times over and over again
in many cities, bazaars, waterways,
amidst blood, fire, blurred decadence,
in the darkness of inauspicious moment.
Even then, we pined for light, courage, and life.”*

– **Jibananandadas**

*“The evening, blushing with colours,
signs itself out on an exhilarating note,
in the deep tune of a song,”*

– **Bishnu Dey**

*“With as much pain as a human being becomes a woman,
That much pain makes a woman a poet.
A word takes a long year to be made,
a poem an entire life.”*

– **Taslima Nazrin**

After the Partition of India in 1947, Bengali poets were divided along nationalistic lines. In West Bengal, literary culture continued to thrive. In East Bengal, poets drew inspiration from Kazi Nazrul Islam and other prominent figures. Poets like **Farrukh Ahmad**, **Talim Hossain**, **Golam Mostofa**, and **Raushan Yazdani** gained popularity. The Bangladesh liberation war became a recurring theme in their works, with **AI Mahmud** emerging as one of the greatest Bengali poets of the 20th century.



Taslima Nasrin

Bengali poets also made their mark on the global stage. **Taslima Nasrin** (born 1962), a Bangladeshi-Swedish writer, physician, feminist, secular humanist, and activist, is a renowned figure known for her writings on women's oppression and her critical views on religion. Some of her books are banned in Bangladesh.

Contemporary Bengali poetry continues to flourish with poets like **Sanghamitra Halder**, **Indranil Ghosh**, **Anupam Mukhopadhyay**, **Paulami Sengupta**, **Arnab Roy**, **Souva Chattopadhyay**, **Pushpanjana Karmakar**, and **Rangit Mitra** contributing to its rich legacy.

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Group C II

Oriya Poetry

Orissa, once a vast empire during ancient and medieval times, extended from the Ganga in the north to the Godavari in the south. It was part of the Bengal and Madras Presidencies during British rule, and in 1936, it became the present-day state of Orissa after separating from Bihar.

The modern Oriya language is a fusion of Pali and Sanskrit (about 70%), Hindustani (around 2%), and tongues of Adivasi origin (28%). Orissa's oral literature is rich, boasting numerous myths, legends, and folklore.

Early Poetry: The Oriya language has ancient roots dating back to before the third century B.C., which is supported by inscriptions from Ashoka (third century B.C.) and Kharabela (first century B.C.). Between the third century B.C. and 700 A.D., Oriya's foundations as a literary medium were established. The 7th century A.D. marked the emergence of Oriya poetry, especially with the development of Charyapada/Caryagiti literature in the 10th and 12th centuries, initiated by Vajrayana Buddhist poets.

Old Oriya Period: Historians classify the period from the 10th century to the 14th century as the Old Oriya period, during which Oriya began to evolve as a distinct language. This period runs up to Oriya literature's origins during **Sarla Das'** time in the 15th century.



Sarla Das

Das, known for three major works—*Mahabharatha Kabya*, *Bilanka Ramayana*, and *Chandi Purana*—is hailed as the Vyasa of Orissa and the founder of Oriya literature. Additionally, five saint-poets, known as Panchasakha, made significant contributions during this era. **Jagannath Das** (1492–1552), who wrote the Oriya *Bhagabat*, was the most famous among them.

Medieval Oriya Poetry: Medieval Oriya poetry thrived between the 14th and 18th centuries, encompassing the Bhakti movement during the 16th century. Works from this time included *kavyas* (romantic/narrative poems), *puranas* (narrative poems based on themes from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharatha*, the *Bhagavata*, and folklore), *bhajans* (devotional poems), and various other poetic forms.

Age of Ornate Poetry: The ornate poetry era, or Riti Yuga or Alanakar Yuga, in Oriya began in the 16th century and extended into the mid-17th century. The *bhakti rasa* was replaced by the *sringara rasa* during this period. Notable poet **Upendra Bhanja** (1680–1720), known as the Emperor of Poets, made significant contributions, leading to this time also being called the Bhanja Yuga.



Upendra Bhanja

Giti Kabita: Towards the end of the 18th century, ornate poetry gave way to the age of Oriya lyrical poetry, known as *giti kabita*. Prominent lyrical poets included **Kabisurya Balladev Rath** (1789–1845), **Kishore Chandranan Champu** (1789–1845), **Gopal Krishna** (1785–1862), **Gaurhari** (Born 1960), **Gauracharan** (1814–1890), **Banamali** (1720–1793), and **Haribandhu Bebarta** (Born 1826), who was renowned as “Kavya Surya”, was a notable musical poet of this time.

Modern Oriya Literature: Oriya literature experienced a renaissance after 1850, coinciding with the introduction of English education and the printing press by the British in Orissa. This phase of Oriya literature was influenced by Western education and introduced Oriya writers to different world-views.

Radhanath Roy (1848–1908) is considered the first modern poet to break away from medieval traditions, and he wrote nine *kavyas* inspired by Greek sources. Other poets of this period included **Madhu Sudan Rao** (1853–1912), **Gangadhara Meher** (1862–1924), **Nanda Kishore Bal** (1875–1928), and **Fakir Mohan Senapati** (1843–1918).

In Your World

“... on the soft leaves of a thorny bush
sleeps my sorrow

There might be the colour of my desire
in a sparkling dew drop of your dawn.”

– **Mamta Dash**

“The yellowed diary’s notes whisper in vernacular.
They sound the forgotten posture,

the cramped cry that forces me to hear that voice.

Now I stumble back in your black-paged wake.”

– **Jayanta Mahapatra**

“The doves of my eyes rise to the sky’s steel body,

And they return daily-struck back—to this earth,

This earth of yours

Where you wait lonely to snatch out

The mystery of life

And the meaning of its death, and disease.”

– **G.P. Mohanty**

The early 20th century witnessed the emergence of a group of poets led by **Gopabandhu Das** (1877–1928) who were primarily concerned with patriotism. **Kali Charan Patnaik** (1898–1978) gained recognition as a poet, while **Mayadhar Manasingha** (1905–1973) was widely recognised as a poet, critic, and educationist.

Prominent poets of the 20th century and post-independence period include **Guru Prasad Mohanty** (born 1924), **Ramakanta Rath** (born 1934), **Sitakant Mahapatra** (born 1937), **Jagannath Prasad Das** (born 1936), **Soubhgya Kumar Mishra** (born 1941), **Devdas Chhotray** (born 1946), **Rajendra Kishore Panda** (born 1944), and **Hara Prasad Das** (born 1945). Many of these poets have received literary awards and recognition.

Sitakant Mahapatra (b. 1937) is one of the major voices in contemporary Oriya poetry. He is



Sitakant Mahapatra

the most widely translated poet in Odia. His notable works are, *Sabdar Akash* (1971) (The Sky of Words), *Samudra* (1977) and *Anek Sharat* (1981). He won the State Sahitya Academy awards in 1971 and 1984, Central Sahitya Academy award in 1974, *Jnanpith in the year 1993*. He was honoured with Padma Bhushan in 2003 and Padma Vibhushan in 2010. He also received the SAARC Literary award in 2015 and the Tagore Peace Award in 2017.

Guru Prasad Mohanty’s ‘Kala-Purusha’, is a land mark in modern Odia Poetry. Though based on T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, *‘Kala-Purusha’* reads like an original poem.

Sachidananda Roy (1916 –2004), winner of Jnanpith in 1986 wrote on a wide range of

subjects. Routray has recently published a few poems with religion as their theme.

It is interesting that a poet, who was inspired by Marxism in this youth, has chosen Lord Jagannatha as a theme in his old age.



Sachidananda Routray

Some of the other important poets of modern period are **Brajanath Rath**, **Sourindra Barik**, **Nrusingha Kumar Rath**, **Prasanna Kumar Mishra**, **Hara**

Prasad Paricha Patnaik and Phani Mohanty.

Women Poets: The post-independence period saw the emergence of several women poets in Oriya literature, including **Manorama Mohapatra Biswal, Pratibha Satpathy, Brahmotri Mohanty,** and **Sucheta Mishra,** who brought lyricism, grace, and a feminine perspective to modern Oriya poetry. Poets like **Mamata Dash, Giribala Mohanty** and **Pravasini Mahakud** **Aparna Mohanty, Sucheta Mishra, Chirashree Indra Singh, Swapna Mishra** and several younger women poets have been writing to assert the identity of women.

Odia Poetry Today: In the 21st century, Odia poetry has undergone changes in both form and content. It has shifted its focus to address issues concerning farmers, Dalits, tribal people, and women, making it more relatable to readers than ever before. Poets such as **Biraja Bal, Saroj Mohanty, Kedar Mishra, Bharat Majhi, Durga Prasad Panda, Ajay Pradhan, Pabitrāmohan Dash,** and **Hemanta Dalpati Biraja Bal,** among others, explore these contemporary themes.

Additionally, Dalit poetry has gained prominence in Odia literature since the early 21st century, giving voice to the experiences and frustrations of those subjected to caste discrimination for centuries. Poets such as **Basudev Sunani, Pitambara Tarai,** and **Akhila Nayak** have used their verses to address these issues and inequalities. Basudev Sunani writes,

No-one has been able to decide

if untouchability

is a colour or a touch,

a feeling or an ideal;

whether it resides

in one who touches

or the one who is touched.

– Odisha Dalit Sahitya & Art Academy, 2001

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Group D- Western Regional Poetry

I. Marathi Poetry

Marathi literature, along with Bengali literature, holds the distinction of being one of the oldest among Indo-Aryan literary traditions, with its roots dating back to around 1000 CE.

Ancient Period: Maharashtri, an Indo-Aryan language that sprang from Vedic Sanskrit, can be traced back to approximately the 3rd century BCE. However, actual literary records in Marathi began to appear much later, only by the late 13th century.

During this period, two poet-saints, **Namdev** (1270) and **Dhyaneshwar** (1275–1296), played



Namdev



Dhyaneshwar

a crucial role by composing some of the earliest religious poetry in Marathi. Namdev, known for his devotion, composed religious songs in both Marathi and Hindi, some of which have found their way into the Sikh holy scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*. Another notable figure was Mukundaraja.

Jnanadeva, also called Jnaneshvara (1275 -1296), is renowned for his mystical poetry and his translation and commentary, known as the *Jnaneshvari*, on the *Bhagavad Gita*, presented in Marathi verse.



Jnanadeva

Saint-poet **Eknath** (1533 -1599) emerged as a prominent figure during Sultanate rule and was the chief successor of Dhyaneshwar. **Mukteshwar** (1574 -1645), Eknath's grandson, contributed with works including a translation of the epic *Mahabharatha*.

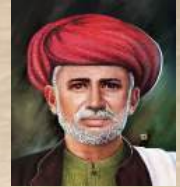
This early phase of Marathi literature primarily revolved around religious and philosophical themes, predominantly authored by poet-saints. **Bhaskarabhatta Borikar**, belonging to the Mahanubhava sect, is regarded as the first poet to compose hymns in Marathi.

16th to 19th Centuries: The 17th century witnessed the rise of notable poets such as **Tukaram**, **Mukteshwar**, **Ramdas**, **Vaman Pandit**, **Raghnath Pandit**, and **Shridhar Pandit**. In the 18th century, **Moropant** gained recognition for his epic work *Aryabhaarata*, the first of its kind in Marathi literature. In the century that followed, prominent poets such as **Parasharam**, **Honaji Bala**, **Anantaphandi**, **Ram Joshi**, and **Prabhakar** contributed significantly to Marathi literature.

Colonial Period: During the British colonial period, efforts by Christian missionaries led to the standardisation of Marathi grammar. Mid-19th century poets such as **Krushnashastry Chiplunkar**, **Kunte**, **Lembhe**, and **Mogare** were influenced by both Sanskrit and English poetry. The work of poets such as **Keshavasuta** and **Rev Tilak Narayan Waman Tilak** in the late 19th century displayed the influence of English poets such as Wordsworth and Tennyson.

Modern Period: The modern period in Marathi poetry commenced with **Kesavasut**, who was influenced by 19th-century British Romanticism and liberalism. He initiated a revolt against traditional Marathi poetry and established a new school, which lasted until the 1920s. Following this, the **Ravikiran Mandal**, a group of poets, asserted that poetry was not limited to the elite but was an integral part of everyday life. Prominent poets from this period include **Madhav Tryambak Patwardhan** and **Yashwant Dinkar Pendharkar**.

Post-1945, Marathi poetry adopted a subjective and personal style, often using colloquial language. This shift was influenced by **Mahatma Jyotiba Phule**, and poets such as **Keshavsuta**, **Mahatma Phule Balakavi**, **Govindagraj**, and **Ravi Kiran Mandal**, who drew inspiration from Romantic and Victorian English poetry.



Jyotiba Phule

Povadas

In the 17th century, secular poetry took on various forms in Marathi literature. *Povadas* emerged as ballads celebrating valour and warfare, while *lavanis* explored themes of romance and sensuality.

The term *powada* in old Marathi means “to extol” or “to glorify”. Those who perform *povadas* are referred to as *shahirs* in Marathi.



Povadas

Povadas originally had its roots in the Gondhal (Gondhia) caste, which is a Dalit community. However, in the post-Shivaji era, this art form transcended caste boundaries and was embraced by people from various backgrounds.

“The Hindu worships at the temple, the Muslim at the mosque. Namdev serves that Lord, who is not limited to either the temple or the mosque.”

– Guru Namdev

“Words are the only jewels I possess

Words are the only clothes I wear

Words are the only food that sustains my life

Words are the only wealth I distribute to people.”

– Tukaram

In the 1940s, avant-garde modernist poet **B.S. Mardhekar** initiated a significant transformation in Marathi poetry. The mid-1950s witnessed the emergence of poets from the “little magazine” movement, who explored non-conformist, radical, and experimental themes, contributing to the Dalit literary movement.

A pivotal change in Marathi poetry began in the 1990s, marked by the arrival of poets like **Shridhar Tilve**, who is celebrated as one of the leading contemporary writers in Marathi literature. Today, a new wave of contemporary Marathi poetry is led by non-urban poets such as **Arun**

Kale, Bhujang Meshram, Pravin Bandekar, Sandip Desai, and Avinash Chavan, who continue to shape and redefine the landscape of Marathi poetry.

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2. Gujarati Poetry

Gujarati literature has a rich heritage dating back to the 11th century. In its early stages, literature in the region was primarily in Sanskrit and Prakrit languages before Gujarati acquired its distinct linguistic identity.

The Middle Age (12th to 19th century): The Middle Age was marked by the dominance of poetry. Notable poets of this era included **Narsingh Mehta, Mirabai, Akho, Premanand, Shamal, Dayaram**, and others. Religious themes were central to the literature of this period, with Narsingh Mehta being a renowned poet-saint. His composition “Vaishnav Jan To” became popular among freedom fighters and remains an iconic hymn.

Vaishnav Jan Toh – Gandhi’s Favourite Bhajan

By Narsingh Mehta

One who is a Vaishnav (Devotee of Vishnu)

Knows the pain of others

Does good to others

without letting pride enter his mind.

A Vaishnav, tolerates and praises the entire world.

Does not speak ill of others

Keeps his promises, actions and thoughts pure

your mother is blessed indeed.

A Vaishnav sees everything equally, rejects greed and avarice

respects women as he respects his own mother

though his tongue may tire he will utter no untruth

Never touches the property of others.

A Vaishnav does not succumb to worldly attachments

he has renounced lust of all types and anger



Narsingh Mehta

*The poet Narsi will like to see such a person by whose virtue,
the entire family gets salvation.*

*“If anywhere there is god it must be man of love,
If he’ll separate from love than he’ll lose by love.”*

– **Kalapi**

“Hair cutting is not a barber’s religion, but business. Stitching leather is not a religion of cobbler, it is a business. Similarly, worshipping is not Brahmin’s religion, but business.”

– **Mahatma Phule**

The Modern Age (19th century onwards): The modern phase of Gujarati literature began with a series of distinct stages. The **Narmad Age** (1850–1885) saw poets motivated by the theme of social reformation. Prominent figures include **Narmad, Dalpatram, Govardhanram Tripathi, Jhaverchand Meghani**, and others. The Pundit Age or **Govardhan Age** (1885 to 1915) that followed was marked by the activities of new graduates from universities that were just finding their feet. Poets such as **Manilal Dwivedi, Balashankar Kantharia, Narsinhrao Divetia**, and others contributed to Gujarati literature.

The Gandhi Age (1915 to 1950), named after Mahatma Gandhi, saw poets such as **Sundaram, Umashankar Joshi, Zaverchand Meghani, and Snehrashmi** unfurl their wings. Their work often reflected Gandhi’s ideals, leading to a shift towards simplicity in the style of poetry. In contemporary times, poets such as **Udayan Thakkar, Manisha Joshi, Niranjana Bhagat, Labhshankar Thakar, and Sitanshu Yashaschandra** have kept the poetic legacy alive. Gujarati poetry continues to evolve and adapt to the changing times.

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Group D III

3. Punjabi Poetry

Punjabi poetry has a rich history rooted in distinct traditions. The chief among them is Sikh poetic traditions. Punjabi literature evolved alongside the development of the Gurmukhi script, particularly with the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, composed Punjabi verse influenced by Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and other languages. Sikh gurus played a significant role in shaping Punjabi poetry.

The next important stream was Sufi poetic traditions: The 16th and 17th centuries saw the rise of Sufi poetry in Punjabi. Poets such as **Shah Hussain**, **Sultan Bahu**, **Bulleh Shah**, and others composed lyrical and simple verses, drawing inspiration from daily life and using the Kafi style.

Kissa (Quissa) Poetry

A major form of poetry in Punjabi is *kissa* or *quissa* (an Arabic word), which is a fusion of languages spoken by the Punjabi people and migrants from the Middle East. The first available *kissa* in Punjabi is attributed to Damodar author of *Heer*, written in the dialect of Jhang.

Most of the Punjabi *kissa* were written by Muslim poets who wandered the land. **Waris Shah** (1735–1784), **Bulleh Shah** (1680–1758), **Hafiz Barkhudar** (1658–1707), **Hashim Shah** (1753–1823), **Ahmed Yaar** (1768–1845), **Imam Bakhsh** (1830–1907) and **Kadir Yaar** (1802–1892) are among the most famous *kissa* poets.

The *kissa* poets wrote on number of religious and social themes concerned with the life of the people in the Punjab. The Sufi tradition and the *kissa* tradition run parallel, “interacting with each other to constitute the most comprehensive strong tradition of Punjab poetry, deeply rooted in socio-cultural life of Punjab”. It ran unabated to the end of the 19th century.

“Those Who have loved are those that have found God.”

– **Guru Nanak**

*“Look further on ahead, there
Between truth and falsehood.
A little empty space.”*

– **Amrita Pritam**

*“Give me, O Lord, A few more songs.
My fire is dying, Give me a spark.
At a very young age I exhausted every sorrow.
For my youth give me a fresh pain.”*

–**Shiv Kumar Batalvi**

Another contributory branch was *vaar* poetry. Punjabi literature includes heroic ballads known as *vaar*, with notable works like Guru Gobind Singh's "Chandi di Var" and the semi-historical "Nadir Shah Di Vaar" by Najabat. The "Jangnama", or "War Chronicle", was introduced during the Mughal period, recounting significant historical events.

In the modern era, poets like **Bhai Vir Singh, Puran Singh, Dhani Ram "Chatrik", and Amrita Pritam** brought new dimensions to Punjabi poetry. The 20th century saw a diverse range of poets, including **Diwan Singh, Ustad Daman, Darshan Singh Awara, Shiv Kumar Batalvi**, and many more.

Post-independence, Punjabi poetry has continued to evolve, reflecting themes of revolution, violence, and social change. Poets such as **Jaswant Singh Rahi, Surjit Patar, and Manjit Tiwana** have made significant contributions. The Punjabi diaspora has also contributed to the literature, addressing themes such as the freedom movement and progressiveness. Overall, Punjabi poetry remains vibrant, reflecting its diverse cultural and historical influences.

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Group E

I. Kashmiri Poetry



Kashmir, often referred to as a "Paradise on Earth", boasts a rich literary heritage that has given rise to numerous celebrated poets and writers. It has been rightly noted that when the lyrical beauty of Kashmir blends with poetry, listeners or readers are in for an exquisite treat.

Despite being a region marked by conflicts and violence, Kashmir has nurtured a host of great poets, including many women poets. For many, poetry has served as an escape from the daily violence and turmoil that surrounds them.

Kashmiri, one of the primary languages spoken in the Jammu and Kashmir region, has its roots in Sanskrit and has significantly contributed to the region's cultural heritage. The literary history of Kashmir can be broadly categorised into periods such as the **Ancient** (up to the 13th century), **Medieval** (c. 1320 -1586), the **Mughal era** (1586 -1752), **Afghan and Sikh period** (1753 - 1947), and the **Post-partition Era** (1947 onwards).



Kalhana

Kashmiri literature traces its origins back 2,500 years, commencing with texts in Sanskrit and other languages. Some of the oldest literary works from Kashmir are written in Sanskrit. **Kalhana**, renowned for his work *Rajatarangini*, was an ancient

Sanskrit writer. Other early names include Patanjali, the author of the *Mahabhashya* commentary on Panini's grammar. In the realm of Kashmiri language and literature, original works emerged 750 years ago with the contributions of three great poets-Shiti Kanth (c. 1250), **Lal Ded** (1320 -1392), and **Sheikh Noor-ud-Din** (1377-1438). **Shiti Kanth** composed "Mahayana Prakash" in the 12th century. **Lal Ded** and her contemporary Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani are iconic figures in Kashmiri literature.



Charar-e-Sharief shrine-The resting place



Habba Khatoon: (1554 -1609): is celebrated as the "Nightingale of Kashmir". She was the wife of Kashmir's king, Muslim Yusuf Shah Chak, and is revered as the last independent poet queen of Kashmir. She is credited with introducing the *loal* (lyric) to Kashmiri poetry.

Habba Khatoon

Gani Kashmiri (1630-1669) is regarded as the greatest Persian writer of the Mughal era, with Ghalib himself translating many of his couplets into Urdu.

Mahmud Gami (1765-1855) was a renowned poet who introduced Persian forms such as the *masnavi* and ghazal into Kashmiri literature. His ghazals, based on Sufi and love themes, are particularly note-worthy.

Paramananda (1791-1864) was a famous saint-poet and philosopher of Kashmir, known for his works like "Radhaswaymvara", "Sudamacharita", and "Sivalagan".

Rasool Mir (1840-1870) is often credited with introducing the ghazal to Kashmiri poetry and his work is considered the epitome of romantic poetry in Kashmir.

Nandalal Kaul (1870-1940) was a renowned poet and dramatist, known for works like "Satach Kahwath", "Ramun Raj", "Dayalal", and "Prahlada Bhagat".

Pirzada Ghulam Ahmad Mahjor (1885-1954), popularly known as Mehjoor, was one of the earliest nationalistic poets of Kashmir who penned many lyrical and patriotic poems with political themes.

Zinda Kaul (1884-1965), known as Masterji, was a versatile writer, poet, and teacher who composed works in Persian, Hindi, Urdu, and Kashmiri. He was the first Kashmiri poet to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1956 for his book of poetry *Sumran*.



Lal Ded

Lal Ded (1320-1392), also known as "Lalla" or Lalleswari, was one of the foremost poets of Kashmir. She was a mystic who belonged to the school of Kashmiri Shaivism. She created a style of poetry, which is known as *vatsune*. Here, she rejoices in the collapse of such restrictive identities as "I" and "You" when confronted with the presence of the Divine.

*Wrapped up in Yourself,
You hid from me.
All day I looked for You
and when I found You hiding inside me,
I ran wild, playing now me, now You.*

Her philosophy?

*Wear just enough to keep the cold out,
Eat just enough to keep hunger from your door.
Mind, dream yourself beyond Self and Other.
Remember, this body is just picking for jungle crows.*

Rahman Rahi

Among contemporary Kashmiri writers, **Rahman Rahi** (born 1925) is considered to be the best poet. His writings have been translated into many languages, including English. He has received many honours and awards, including the Sahitya Academy Award in 1961 and Padma Shri in 2000. He became the first Kashmiri writer to receive the Jnanpith Award in 2007.

Quoted here is a translation of his poem "Inklings from the Dark", translated by Ghulam Rasool Malik. It is one of Rahi's most powerful Kashmiri poems. The poem expresses "a gradual shift from despair and sadness to hope and a promise of happiness".

*Yesternight, my sleep driven off and the thread of my fancies slit,
I espied an eagle in the wild shadows of my mind:
On its beak, in the same old fashion, smouldered the blood of the dove
Whose feathers were shed by hilltops into the atmosphere.
Turning my head on the pillow, I sighted a deep, dark chasm.
My lips froze dry as whisperings reached me from outside the window.
The snowflakes were sailing into the shelter of the crevices.
Not a mouse did creep from under the box to the store-cabinet.
In place of my upper garment, a cat hung by the hanger.
Rubbing my eyes, I tried to pull the quilt up to my cold back
But O, the Kangri shook and the cold, hapless ashes kissed my feet
While the owl hooted outside, "O woe to you, O woe!"*

The Stars Speak to Man

*There is a restlessness in the heart, there is a veil over our dreams
All this is an illusion. When will you wake up?*

*The heartbroken, the dejected, my friends and well-wishers
How you destroy human hearts in the name of the human?*

– **Abdul Ahad Azad**

“Oh Peace, come here.

Oh Peace, stay here.

Oh Peace, have a home here.”

– **Kudzai Mhangwa**

*“With deep-seated grief and pain in every fibre,
I wonder when love carved its image in my heart!”*

– **Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor**

Twentieth and 21st century poets include **Abdul Ahad Azad** (1903–1948), often referred to as the “John Keats of Kashmir”, who brought significant changes to Kashmiri poetry with his modernist poems.

Ghulam Rasool Nazki (1910–1998), a teacher, poet, writer, and broadcaster, was recognised for his contributions in Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and Kashmiri languages, and he won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1987.

Dina Nath Nadim (1916–1988) led the progressive writer’s movement in Kashmir and received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1986 for his collection of poems, *Shihul-Kul*. **Amin Kamil** (1924–2014) was a major contributor to the Kashmiri ghazal and was instrumental in modernising the Kashmiri alphabet. He was honoured with the Sahitya Academy Award in 1967 and the Padma Shri in 2005.

Padma Sachdev (1940–2021), a poet and novelist, made significant contributions to the Dogri language and also wrote in Hindi. She received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1971 and the Padma Shri in 2001.

Naseem Shafaie (born 1952) became the first Kashmiri woman to receive the Sahitya Academy Award in 2011 for her significant contributions to Kashmiri and Urdu poetry.

*I asked the rose, where is your scent?
It said, “The autumn took it away.”
I asked the spring, why the lines on your forehead?
It said, “For my wounds have been salted.”
So I left the garden that once bloomed
And since then,
I wander, aimless.*

Aga Shahid Ali (1949-2001) is renowned as a Kashmiri poet who wrote in English. **Nighat Sahiba** (born 1983) is a contemporary poet who writes in Kashmiri and Urdu, addressing themes of conflict, rebellion, romance, feminism, pain, and existentialism.

Kashmiri poetry continues to flourish through the voices of these poets, reflecting the unique cultural and historical tapestry of the region.

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Group F I – South Indian Poetry

I. Telugu Poetry

Telugu, a classical Dravidian language, is the most widely spoken among the Dravidian language family. Its vibrant presence extends across Andhra Pradesh, as well as the newly formed state of Telangana following the bifurcation of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. Additionally, Telugu is spoken by a linguistic minority in various states and enjoys a global reach through the Telugu diaspora.

Much like other languages, the history of Telugu poetry is divided into distinct periods. In the **Pre-Nannayya Period** (before 1020 AD), Telugu literature primarily revolved around religious themes. Inscriptions dating back to 575 AD serve as the earliest records of Telugu writing.

Historians point to the **Addanki inscription** (848 AD), which featured a Telugu poem, and the **Bezawada** inscription (934 AD), which contained five poems. **Malliya Rechana** (940 CE) authored the first Telugu poetic prosody book, *Kavijanasrayam*. Unfortunately, an earlier prosody book by Rechana's guru, *Vaadindra Chudamani*, has not survived.

During the **Age of the Puranas** (1020-1400 CE), the *kavi trayam* or trinity of poets—**Nannayya**, **Tikkana**, and **Yerrapragada**—flourished. Nannayya (11th century) holds the distinction of composing the first Telugu literary work (*adi kavyam*) with his *Andhra Mahabharatam*, which Tikkana Somayaji (1205-1288 CE) later completed.

The Prabandha Period (1400-1600 CE) saw **Srinatha** (1365-1441), who was celebrated as the “Kavi Sarvabhowma” (“the emperor among poets”), popularising the Prabandha style of composition. **Bammera Potanaamatya** (1450-1510) was renowned for translating the *Bhagavata Purana* from Sanskrit to Telugu. In this period, **Annamayya** (1408-1503) earned the title “Pada-kavita Pitaamaha” of Telugu language. **Tallapaka Tirumalamma**, the wife of Annamacharya, who wrote *Subhadra Kalyanam*, is considered the first female poet in Telugu literature.



Krishnadevaraya

Krishnadevaraya (1471-1529), the ruler of the Vijayanagara Kingdom, presided over the golden age of Telugu literature. During his reign, a group of eight poets,

known as the **Ashtadiggajalu**, flourished. Among them, **Allasani Peddana** (15th or 16th centuries) stood out. **Dhurjati** (15th and 16th centuries) was another notable poet of this era, while **Vikata Kavi** (16th century) was celebrated for his brilliance and wit. **Garlapati** wrote “Tenali Ramakrishna”, popularly known as Tenali Rama.

During the late 18th century, in the **Post-Prabandha Period** (1600–1850), **Kasula Purushottama**(CE 1798) emerged as a major Telugu poet. **Mulugu Papayya**, also known as **Sangameswara Sastry** (1778–1852), was a Telugu and Sanskrit scholar acclaimed for translating the *Devi Bhagavatam* from Sanskrit to Telugu. **Kshetrayya** (1600–1680) made significant contributions as a poet and composer of Carnatic music.

The advent of modern Telugu poetry is often attributed to **Gurazada Venkata Appa Rao** (1862–1915) and **Rayaprolu Subba Rao** (1892–1984). Appa Rao’s “Mutyalu Saralu” introduced a new poetic vision, ushering in an era of lyrical poetry in Telugu. Subba Rao left an indelible mark on Telugu literature over five decades, drawing inspiration from English poetry and Bengal’s literary movements, giving rise to the *bhava kavitvam* movement.



Gurazada Venkata Appa Rao

Other pioneers of modern Telugu literature included romantic poets such as **Abburi Ramakrishnarao** (1896–1979), **Nanduri Subbarao** (1896–1979), **Vedula Satyanarayana Sastri** (1925–2004), and **Nayani Subbarao** (1899–1978). This period also saw the emergence of Vajjala Kalidasu, who wrote the historical poem “Andhra Mahavishnuvu” (1928) in couplet form, and Subrayudu’s devotional work “Bhakta Chintamani” (1893).



Rayaprolu Subba Rao

Dream

“She slept just like that
As though someone bundled up
A long drawn dream and
Forgot to take it while leaving”

–**Shiva Reddy**

“The great tree which is the country
Should bloom the flowers of love
Drenched in the perspiration of men
The crops of wealth should yield.”

– **Gurazada Appa Rao**

“Don’t cry, don’t cry. The wheels of the chariot of Jagannath are coming; they are coming! The apocalyptic chant of the chariot wheels! Come, realise your dreams, Rule your new world!”

– **Srirangam Srinivasa Rao**

In the latter half of the 20th century, *bhava kavitvam* gradually waned, giving way to progressive

poetry or *abhyudaya kavitvam*, which focused on social commitment. Poets such as **Sistla Umamaheswara Rao**, **Srirangam Srinivasa Rao** (Sri Sri), **Pattabhirami Reddy**, and **Srirangam Narayanababu** rose to prominence in the 1940s.



Sistla
Umamaheswara
Rao

Sri Sri, known for his anthology *Maha Prasthanam* (The Great Journey), addressed human rights issues and won wide-spread recognition. He wrote about a new generation that searched for beauty and justice, but could find only cruelty, oppression and deceit:

*Sulphurous fumes strewn over our eyes
False frankincense burnt in our hearts,
Thorns on our way, and whenever we think
thousand devils dancing before us.
Is this what the world has done to us?*

The progressive movement lost some of its momentum by 1955 with the decline of general interest in communism and a number of new trends developed in the post-1955 period. The influence of European avant-garde writing was visible. Prose poetry, or *vachana kavitvam*, became the new form, and it dealt with the problems of the common people in an everyday language and idiom. **Tilak**, **Narayana Reddy**, **Aluri Bairagi**, **Varavara Rao**, and **Guntur Seshendra Sarma** wrote poetry of this genre.

The 1960s witnessed a surge in revolutionary poetry by the **Digambara poets**, along with the establishment of the **Revolutionary Writers' Association** (Virasam) in 1970. **Kavisena**, another group, emerged in 1977. Concurrently, traditional poetry continued to coexist.

Viswanatha Sathyanarayana (1895–1976) straddled the traditional and modern realms of poetry, contributing significantly to both. His “Srimad Ramayana Kalpa Vruksham” of 1962 was



Viswanatha
Sathyanarayana

composed in the traditional form. He became the first Telugu writer to receive the Jnanpith Award in 1971, along with a Kendra Sahitya Academy Award and Padma Bhushan in 1970.

Among the traditionalists, **Madhunapanthula Satyanarayana Sastri** is renowned for his work *Andhrapuranam* (1954), which presents the history of Andhra in poetic form. In contemporary Telugu poetry, **K. Siva Reddy** stands as a prominent figure. He has published eleven poetry collections and earned several accolades, including the Sahitya Academy Award in 1990.

Contemporary Telugu poetry reflects the societal struggles that have long been a part of Telugu culture. Beyond the class-based conflicts, the past 25 years have witnessed the mobilisation of women, Dalits, and Muslims, mirroring the emergence of a more democratic and compassionate society. Present-day Telugu poetry is characterised by the voices of feminist,

Dalit, and Muslim poets.

Starting in 1985, feminist poetry emerged as a powerful form of dissent against patriarchal norms, and by 1990, it had firmly established itself as a distinct genre within Telugu literature. In addition, Dalit poetry has gained unprecedented attention and recognition.

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Group F II

Tamil Poetry

The history of Tamil language and literature is adorned with an array of remarkable poets at all times. Remembering their names, let alone tracking their individual contributions, can be quite challenging.

Tamil is a classical Dravidian language spoken in Southern India and Sri Lanka. It evolved independently from Sanskrit and the languages derived from it. Dravidian languages, including Tamil, have consistently asserted their distinct origins and historical significance.

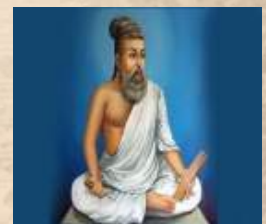
The Early Period of Tamil Nadu boasts a rich literary tradition spanning more than 2,000 years. Aside from Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Pali, Tamil stands as the oldest literature in India. While some stone inscriptions date back to the 3rd century BC, the inception of Tamil literature is generally estimated to be around the 1st century AD.

Much of the early poetry was centered around religion and epic narratives. **The Sangam period**, pre-dating 300 BCE, witnessed the flourishing of Tamil poetry, giving birth to some of the grandest Tamil literary classics, such as *Kamba Ramayanam* and *Periya Puranam*.

Following the Sangam period, there emerged the early epics and moral literature, composed by poets and authors from Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Jain, and Buddhist backgrounds, extending up to the 5th century CE. Note-worthy works from this period include the twin epics ***Silappatikaram*** (“The Lay of the Anklet”) and ***Manimekalai*** (“The Girdle of Gems”), along with ***Tirukkural***, a collection of aphorisms covering topics like love, kingship, and ethics. Sattanar, a contemporary of Ilango Adigal, authored *Manimekalai*.

Tirukkural

Considered one of the greatest works ever written on ethics and morality, the *Tirukkural* (Sacred Verses), the *Kural* for short, is a classic Tamil language text consisting of 1,330 short couplets, or *kurals*, of seven words each. The book is a comprehensive manual of ethics, polity and love. It is known for its universality and secular nature.



Thiru Valluvar

The text is divided into three books with teachings on virtue (*aram*), wealth (*porul*) and love (inbam), respectively. Its authorship is traditionally attributed to Valluvar (Thiruvalluvar).

The text has been dated variously from 300 BCE to 5th century CE. The traditional accounts describe it as the last work of the third Sangam, but linguistic analysis suggests a later date of 450 to 500 CE and that it was composed after the Sangam period,

*“At the time of birth life doesn’t turn back even if ordered
At the time of death it doesn’t stay back even if ordered.”*

– Nanmanik Kadigai (old Tamil poetry)

“My lord, even if I attain infinite eternal bliss

That’s neither curtailed nor drawn out,

If compared, will it ever match the rapture

Of the short span of time spent as your servitor?”

– **Nammalvar (Thirumozhi)**

The Bhakti Period, ranging from the 6th to the 12th centuries, witnessed the emergence of bhakti poetry, which delved into matters of religion and personal devotion. The hymns of the **Alvars** and the **Nayanars** epitomise this genre. Both Sangam literature and Bhakti literature serve as prime examples of classical Tamil poetry.

The Medieval Period, spanning from the 12th to the 16th centuries, saw the golden era of the imperial Cholas. During this time, many poets received patronage from the Chola and Pandya empires, leading to the creation of grand Tamil literary classics such as **Kamba Ramayanam** and **Periya Puranam**. **Avvaiyar**, a contemporary of Kamban, gained fame for her writings, especially those for young children, including “Athichoodi” and “Konraiventhan”.

In the later medieval period, numerous minor literary works surfaced, and contributions came from Muslim and European authors as well.

Sangam Literature

The Sangam age is considered the golden era of Tamil language and it produced the earliest known literary works of South India. The term *sangam* signifies a gathering, a meeting of minds, or even an academic institution.

This remarkable body of literature delves into a wide array of themes, encompassing love, traditions, loss, warfare, governance, and commerce. According to Tamil tradition, the roots of Sangam poetry date back over twelve millennia, with composition occurring in three successive poetic assemblies (*sangams*) in and around Madurai and Kapatapuram, the capitals of the Pandya dynasty.

These assemblies are believed to have taken place more than 4,440 years, 3,700 years, and 1,850 years before the common era, although modern estimates place them between the 3rd and 2nd centuries CE. This rich literary heritage is attributed to 473 poets, including 102 anonymous ones and 27 women poets.

The classification of Sangam literature, based on chronology, includes the Eighteen Greater Text Series (*Pathinenmaelkanakku*), consisting of the Eight Anthologies (*Ettuthokai*) and the Ten Idylls (*Pattupattu*). Furthermore, it incorporates the Five Great Epics and the *Tolkaappiyam*, an ancient and extant Tamil grammar text. Unfortunately, a significant portion of Tamil literature from the Sangam period has been lost to the sands of time.

“Dharma will protect your Head.”

– **Thirukkural**

“Great wealth, like a crowd at a concert,
Gathers and melts.”

– **Tiruvalluvar**

“Destroy the world if even a single person doesn’t have food.”

– **Subramanya Bharati**

The Modern Era in Tamil literature primarily encompasses the 18th and 19th centuries. During this period, Tamil society underwent significant changes under Western influence. A resurgence in Tamil literature began in the late 19th century, making poetry more accessible to the general public.

Until the early 20th century, poetry adhered to classical traditions. Prominent poets such as **Bharathiyar**, **Namakkal Kavingar**, **Barathidasan**, **Vaanidasan**, and **Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram** were known for their classical Tamil poetry.

The modern Tamil literary movement was initiated by **Subramania Bharathi** (1822–1921), a multi-faceted Indian nationalist poet and author. **Naa Pichamurti** (1900–1976), another founding figure of the new poetry movement, introduced free verse to Tamil poetry.



Subramania Bharathi

Kanakasabai Subburathinam, popularly known as **Bharathidasan** (1891–1964), was one of the most renowned poets of the 20th century. His extensive body of work focused on socio-political issues and celebrated the greatness of Tamil culture and language. His verses played a pivotal role in inspiring the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. His composition, the *Invocation to Goddess Tamil*, serves as the state anthem of Puducherry.

Sundara Ramaswamy (1931–2005), affectionately known as Suraa, was a highly versatile contemporary Tamil writer who brought a new wave to Tamil literature. Writing under the

pseudonym Pasuviah, he contributed significantly to Tamil poetry.

The advent of the 20th century saw the emergence of new poets, such as **Naa Pichamurty** and **K.P. Rajagopalan**, who experimented with prose poetry called *vachana kavidhai*. In 2008-09, the Tamil *pudhukkavidhai* (new poetry) movement celebrated its golden jubilee year. Poets such as **Shanmuga Subbiah**, **Narano Jayaraman**, **T.S. Venugopalan**, **Pasappal Rajagopal**, **Nakulan**, and **S. Vaitheeswaran** were pioneers of this movement.

Modern Tamil Poetry encompasses various styles, including *vasana kavithai* (prose-like and conversational in tone), *yappilla kavithai* (poetry that does not adhere to the rules), and *kattiladangaa kavithai* (free verse).

Literary critics such as **Ka. Na. Subramanyam** and **C.S. Chellappa** were advocates of *pudhukkavidhai*, not very appreciative of traditional verse-making. Even poets such as **Abdul Rahman**, **Meera**, **Sirpi**, **Mu Mehtha**, and **Tamilanban**, who championed traditional verse-making (“Marapu”), began to explore new poetry.

In the 1970s, a group of poets called “**Vanambadi**”, comprising individuals like **Sirpi**, **Puviyarasu**, **Gnanai**, and **Agniputhran**, adopted a free-verse style of poetry and described themselves as “the skylarks singing in praise of humanity”, solidifying *pudhukkavidhai* as the dominant mode of poetry of the day.

Sirpi Balasubramaniam, a distinguished recipient of the Sahitya Academy Award, played a pivotal role as one of the founders of this movement during the 1970s. S Abdul Rahman, often hailed as the “emperor among poets”, was also an influential member of this literary wave and has been honoured with numerous literary accolades.

During the 1960s and 1970s, much like in other Indian languages such as Bengali, a vibrant little magazine and small press movement emerged in the Tamil language. These publications, with names like “Ezuthu”, “Nadai”, “Vanambadi”, “Ka Cha Da Tha Pa Ra”, “Kanayazhi”, and “zha”, among others, made significant contributions to Tamil literature.

By 1983, the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic conflict had profoundly impacted Tamil poetry. Sri Lankan poets **Cheran** and **V.I.S Jayapalan** began documenting the tragedies and new challenges faced by the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. In 1984, a notable anthology of Sri Lankan Tamil poetry titled *Maranathul Vazhvom* (“We Live Amidst Death”), compiled by **M. A. Nuhman**, **Cheran**, and **Jesurajah**, was published.

Another notable development in the 1980s was the influence of African and Afro-American poetry and prose on Tamil poetry, primarily through the work of Indran Amirtanayagam. His translation work, “Araikul Vandha Africa Vanam” (“The African Sky that Came Inside my Room”), left a lasting impact on the style of Tamil poetry during that decade.

Dalit literature in Tamil started relatively later compared to its counterparts in Marathi or Kannada. However, during the centenary celebration of Babasaheb Ambedkar in 1991, Tamil Dalit poetry

gained momentum. Several compilations of Tamil Dalit poetry, translated into English, began to appear. Notable works include the *Oxford India Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing* (2012), edited by Ravikumar and R. Azhagarasan, and *No Alphabet in Sight* (Penguin Books, 2011), edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu.

The 1980s also witnessed the emergence of a new generation of Tamil women poets who infused feminist perspectives into their work. Poets such as **Malathy Maithrey**, **Kutti Revathi**, **Sugirtharani**, **Salma**, **Leena Manimekalai**, and **Puthiya Madhavi** explored themes such as gender dynamics, power structures, class, and social and family relationships. Additionally, poets such as **Ilambirai**, **Thamizhatchi Thangapandian**, **Thenmozhi Dass**, **Uma Maheswari**, and **Brindha** delved into subjects like maternal love, appreciation of nature, and rural life.

As the 1990s progressed, the trend of inter-weaving personal experiences with socio-political issues began to evolve. **Manushya Puthiran**, a significant voice in the new generation of Tamil poets, received the Sanskriti National Award in 2002 for his poetic contributions as a young writer.

Contemporary Tamil Poetry continues to evolve with the introduction of fresh voices such as **Yuvan Chandrashekar**, **Ramesh Prem**, **Sankara Ramasubramanian**, **N.D. Rajkumar**, and **Yavanika Sriram**.

A remarkable aspect of contemporary Tamil poetry is the emergence of a global Tamil poetry movement. Today's Tamil poetry incorporates new symbols, imagery, and expressions with Western influences, and diverse landscapes and geographies. It features descriptions of pine trees in place of neem trees and palm trees, and introduces new avian and animal species, offering readers a fusion of cultural and geographical perspectives.

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Group F III

Kannada Poetry

Kannada is a classical Dravidian language, primarily spoken by the people of Karnataka and written using the Kannada script. The earliest traces of Kannada poetry can be dated back to the 5th century A.D, although no written records of those early works exist. The first documented Kannada poetry is found in the Kappe Arabhatta dating to 700 C.E.

Pampa stands out as the first renowned Kannada poet, composing his works in Old Kannada. His *Vikramarjuna Vijaya*, alongside the significant *Adipurana*, are hailed as classics of early Kannada poetry.

During the **Middle Ages**, around the 12th century, Kannada poetry took on a form resembling haiku. Known as *vachanas*, these three-line verses offered insights into the society of the time.

In the 15th century, during the **Bhakti movement**, saints, or *dasas*, crafted *padas*—poems of 10 to 20 lines—in praise of God. This style of poetry could be easily adapted into musical compositions, eventually evolving into the intricate form of Carnatic music.

The Renaissance or Navodaya of Kannada literature, spanning 1925 to 1950, marked the resurgence of Kannada poetry. Before this, Kannada poetry had been in a dormant state for a long while. During this renaissance, celebrated poets such as **Srikanthaiah** (1884–1946), **Kuvempu** (1904–1994), **D.R. Bendre** (1896–1981), and **Shivaram Karanth** (1902–1997) found inspiration in English Romantic poetry. Srikanthaiah, a luminary in Kannada literature, initiated this revival by translating Romantic English poems. Bendre, for instance, composed verses heavily influenced by English Romanticism, as seen in his collection *Sakhigita* (1937)

Kannada Jnanpith Award Winners

Karnataka holds a record of producing eight Jnanpith award laureates, the highest among the Dravidian languages in India, with six of them being distinguished poets.

Masti Venkatesha Iyengar (1891–1986), a member of the Mysore Civil Service, professor, and poet, earned the Jnanpith Award in 1983 for his thought-provoking poems on various philosophical, aesthetic, and social themes. He authored the epic *Shree Ram Pattabhisheka*, centered around the coronation of Lord Rama.

Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre (1896–1981), a celebrated Kannada lyric poet of the 20th century, was bestowed with several awards, including the Sahitya Academy Award (1958), Kelkar Prize (1965), Padma Shri (1968), and the Jnanpith Award (1974).

Kuppali Venkatappa Puttappa, commonly known as Kuvempu (1904–1994), an acclaimed playwright, poet, novelist, critic, thinker, and professor, was honored with the Padma Bhushan (1958), Padma Vibhushan (1988), Jnanpith (1967), and Karnataka Ratna (1992). His contribution to “Vishwa Maanavataa Vaada” (universal humanism) and penning the Karnataka state anthem make him a unique figure in Kannada literature.

V.K. Gokak (1909–1992), a renowned professor and writer, received the Central Sahitya Akademi award in 1961 and the Jnanpith award in 1990 for his epic narrative *Bharatha Sindhu Rashmi*.

K. Shivaram Karanth (1902–1997), a multi-faceted talent who has written novels, plays, and poems and combined it with environmentalism and film direction, was honoured with the Sahitya Academy Award (1959) and the Jnanpith Award (1978).

Chandrashekhara Kambara (born 1937), a versatile poet, playwright, and professor, has claimed prestigious accolades like the Jnanpith Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Shri, and the Pampa Award.

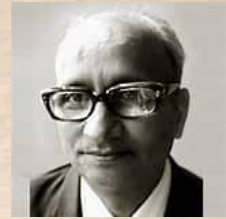
“Every child is a Universal Man at birth. We reduce him into a ‘Little Man’ as he grows up. The duty of education should be to make him ‘The Universal Man’ once again.”

– Kuvempu

*“A bright red lotus has bloomed today
To passers-by, what a fragrant Entree!
The wind, the bees, or the gentle spray:
Who needs an invitation to a party, eh?”*

– G.K. Adiga

The Modernist or Navya phase, which began in the 1950s and continued until around 1980, saw Kannada poetry entering a new phase. Numerous works from this era reflect India’s changing society. Notable among them is **V.K. Gokak’s** poetry collection titled *Navya Kavitegalu* published in 1950. The Navya Sahitya Movement in Kannada Literature was spear-headed by **Gopalakrishna Adiga** (1918–1992). In contrast to the Romanticism of the Navodaya writers, Navya literature was characterised by disillusionment, portraying the “angst of the times”. This genre emphasised a sophisticated use of language and innovative writing techniques.



Gopalakrishna Adiga

D.R. Bendre (1896–1981) is generally considered the greatest Kannada lyric poet of the 20th century and he received the Jnanpith award in 1973.

Dissolution – Creation

*Like a cloud of smoke that scattering disappears,
the remembered form dissolves; a pall begins
to rise and spread; like form is lost within
a dream, a formless darkness fills all space;
the mind is dense and thick, and time itself
is lost, unknowable; unmoving, the
mind has turned upon itself; what world is
this that lies ahead? An uncreating
sight, a picture! Unpicture. Do I exist?
What else exists? A spreading moor of silence!
Like a deadened body gaining breath, the
darkness around responds; born of the*



D.R. Bendre

*holy river stone, the melody of Krishna's
flute is making every fibre of the body
dance; it wears a peacock's mask. And every-
where are eyes on eyes! Like the widower
given back his bride, the mind is a happy home.*

In the last five decades, Kannada poetry has been closely intertwined with societal issues. The emergence of Dalit poetry and women's poetry, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century, is noteworthy. **Siddalingaiah** (1954–2021) is renowned as one of the pioneers of Dalit Kannada poetry. He played a pivotal role in initiating the Dalit Bandaya movement in Kannada. Tragically, he passed away due to Covid-19 in 2021.



Siddalingaiah

Kannada Dalit poetry drew inspiration from the American Black movement, the Marathi Dalit Panthers movement, and the Digambara literary movement in Telugu. Additionally, a genre of feminine poetry emerged as a protest against the patriarchal society's discriminatory treatment of women.

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Group F IV

Malayalam Poetry

Kerala, renowned for its high literacy rate, is graced by nature's beauty, and this is reflected vividly in its literature and poetry.

The Malayalam calendar traces its roots back to the year 825 CE. The Kollam Syrian copper plates from 849/850 CE stand as the oldest inscriptions written in Old Malayalam. Malayalam has its roots in the Sangam literature, with eminent poets of classical Tamil, such as **Paranar** (1st century CE), **Ilango Adigal** (2nd–3rd century CE), and **Kulasekhara Alvar** (9th century CE believed to be from Kerala).



The earliest instances of Malayalam literature are in the form of indigenous ballads and folk songs. However, the influence of Sanskrit, the language of scholarship, and Tamil, the language of administration, played pivotal roles in Malayalam's development. Among the earliest known literary works in Malayalam are the epic poems *Ramacharitam* and *Thirunizhalmala*, written in Old Malayalam. *Ramacharitam*, penned by **Cheeraman** in 1198 CE, consists of 1,814 poems based on the Yuddha *kanda* of the *Ramayana* and bears significant Tamil influence,

In the subsequent period, alongside popular *pattu* (song) literature, poetry composed in the **Manipravalam** style—a blending of Malayalam and Sanskrit—flourished. The *Lilathilakam*, a 14th century Sanskrit treatise on Malayalam grammar and poetics, elaborates on this style. Manipravalam produced *sandesa kavyas* (message poems), inspired by Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*. The exquisite *Unnunili Sandesam*, likely authored in the 14th century, stands as a prime example.

By the 13th century CE, Old Malayalam had evolved into **Middle Malayalam** (Madhyakaala Malayalam). During this time, Malayalam literature distinctly diverged from Tamil literature. Notable poets from the **Niranam family** in Central Travancore flourished in the late 14th and 15th centuries.

Their works included translations of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*, such as *Kannassa Ramayanam* and *Kannassa Bharatham* by Rama Panikkar. Additionally, the *Champu Kavyas* by Punam Nambudiri, who was a part of the *Pathinettara Kavikal* (Eighteen and a half poets) in the Zamorin of Calicut's court, were influenced by Manipravalam.

Middle Malayalam gave way to **Modern Malayalam** by the 15th century CE. Malayalam literature, in its present form, owes much to poets such as **Cherusseri Namboothiri**, **Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan**, and **Poonthanam Nambudiri** from the 15th and 16th centuries CE. *Krishnagatha*, attributed to Cherusseri, who served as the court poet of King Udaya Varman Kolathiri, is written in modern Malayalam.



Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan



Cherusseri



Poonthanam Nambudiri

(www.veethi.com)

Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan, known as the father of Malayalam literature, is believed to have lived in the 16th century. He was a Bhakti poet, and his poems, categorised as *kilippattu*, include the *Adhyatma Ramayanam*, still revered in Kerala.

Malayalam poetry shares close ties with dance and theatre. **Kunjan Nambiar** (1705–1770) and **Unnayi Variyar**, his contemporary, were prominent poets of that era. Nambiar introduced *thullal*, a unique art form combining recitation and dance, narrating mythological stories in a satirical manner.

Kerala is also known for **Kathakali**, where verses belong to a literary genre called *attakatha*, developed from the 15th century, featuring themes from the Puranas. *Nalacharitam* by Unnayi Variyar is regarded as a masterpiece in Kathakali.

Muhyadheen Mala, developed in the 16th-17th centuries CE, contributed to Arabi Malayalam literature, eventually leading to Mappila songs. These works remain closely tied to the modern

Malayalam language.

*“My salutations to that Narayana,
For being the great teacher,
Who stood as a person, to make me know,
That truth which is revealed by the sound of Om,
Though split in to three forms of trinity,
As soon as it was born,
Is only an illusion created by my ego”*

– **Ezhuthachan**

*“We create heaven for ourselves;
We also create hell for ourselves.”*

– **Ulloor**

“Come what may, I want to savour this wine of life.”

– **Changampuzha**

*“As I shed a tear for others, There rise within me a thousand suns.
As I expend a smile for others, Shines within me a full moon, eternal and serene.
I never knew of this heavenly bliss before;
Lamenting over that great loss again and again I weep.”*

– **Akkitham**

The **post-independence era** marked the transition to modernism and post-modernism in Malayalam literature. The **Venmani school of poets** in the 19th century discarded classical styles, and **Venmani Mahan Nambudiripad** (1844–1893) led this movement. In the early 20th century, Malayalam poetry shifted toward modernism with poets like **K.C.Kesava Pillai** and **V. C. Balakrishna Panicker**, who delved into individual experiences and human emotions. The great triumvirate of **Vallathol Narayana Menon**, **Kumaran Asan**, and **Ullur Parameswara Iyer** made significant contributions during this era. Vallathol was a nationalist poet who wrote about the Indian freedom movement and against the caste system. Asan transformed Malayalam poetry from the meta-physical to the lyrical. Ullur authored *Umakeralam*, a notable mahakavya. **P. Kunjiraman Nair** (1905–1978), affectionately known as “P”, was renowned for his romantic poetry that beautifully portrayed the natural wonders of Kerala and the intricacies of his life and era. He lived a bohemian lifestyle, wandering through Kerala, residing in various localities, connecting with its people,



K.C.Kesava Pillai



Vallathol Narayana Menon

and incorporating their experiences into his life and literary works.

His autobiography, *Kaviyude Kaalpaadukal* (The Footprints of a Poet), remains one of his most celebrated works in Malayalam literature. Some of his well-known poems include “Thamarathoni”, “Kaliyachan”, “Vayalkarayil”, “Ratholsavam”, and “Pookkalam”. Nair received the inaugural Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Poetry in 1959 and the Central Sahitya Academy Award in 1967.



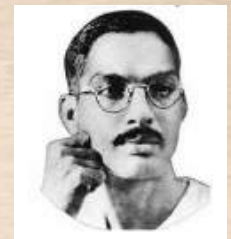
P. Kunjiraman Nair

Edappally Raghavan Pillai (1909 -1936), along with his close friend Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, revered as the greatest romantic poets in Malayalam literature, often compared to Shelley and Keats in English poetry. Some of Pillai’s well-known poems include “Sudha”, “Chillikkashu”, “Thushara Haaram” (1935), “Nava Saurabham” (1936), “Hridhaya Smitham” (1936), and “Maninaadam” (1944). Unfortunately, the poet took his own life at the age of 27.



Edappally Raghavan Pillai

Changampuzha (1911–1948) is renowned for his romantic poem “Ramanan”, a pastoral elegy dedicated to his friend Edappally Raghavan Pillai following his untimely demise. Written in 1936, it became a bestseller in Malayalam literature, captivating the youth of its time. Changampuzha is credited with popularising poetry among the masses through his simple and heartfelt style. He passed away at the age of 36 due to tuberculosis.



Changampuzha

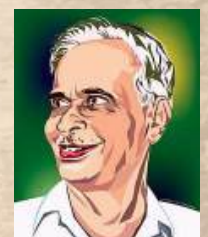
In the latter half of the 20th century, poets and writers such as **G. Sankara Kurup and Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri** made invaluable contributions to modern Malayalam literature.

G. Shankara Kurup (1901–1978), affectionately known as Mahakavi G, was a poet, essayist, and literary critic. He was the very first recipient of the Jnanpith Award for his masterpiece *Odakkuzhal* (The Flute). Kurup served as a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha from 1968 to 1972 and was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 1967. He received numerous awards, including the Central and Kerala Sahitya Academy Awards and the Soviet Land Nehru Award. Some of his major works include “Poojapushpam”, “Nimisham”, “Navathidhi”, “Ithalukal”, “Pathikante Paattu”, “Muthukal”, “Anthardaham”, “Chenkathirukal”, “Vishwadarshanam”, “Madhuras”, “Soumyam Deeptham”, and “Sandhya Ragam”.



G. Sankara Kurup

Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon (1911–1985) is known for his works such as “Kudiyozhikkal”, “Kannikkoythu”, and “Mambazham”. “Kudiyozhikkal” (Eviction of the Tenant) is considered his magnum opus. He received several honours, including the Sahitya Academy Award, Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for Poetry, Vayalar Award, and Odakkuzhal Award.



Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon

Olappamanna Mana Subramanian Namboothirippad (1923–2000)

authored 20 books of poetry, with his poems known for their explicit social themes. Some of his notable works include *Theethailam*, *Panchali*, *Nangemakutty*, and *Amba*, an *attakatha* for Kathakali. He received several accolades, including the Kerala and Kendra Sahitya Academy Awards, Government of Madras Poetry Prize, Odakkuzhal Award, N. V. Puraskaram, Asan Smaraka Kavitha Puraskaram, and Ulloor Award.



Olappamanna Mana
Subramanian Namboothirippad

Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri (1926 – 2020), popularly known as Akkitham, was celebrated for his simple and lucid writing style. His works explored themes of profound love and compassion. Some of his prominent works include *Irupatham Noottandinte Ithihasam* (Epic of the 20th Century), *Balidarshanam* (The Vision of Bali), and *Nimisha Kshetram* (Holy Moment).



Akkitham Achuthan
Namboothiri

Akkitham was honoured with the Jnanpith Award in 2019, and received other prestigious awards such as the Padma Shri, Ezhuthachan Award, Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Poetry, Odakkuzhal Award, Vallathol Award, Vayalar Award, Aasan Prize, and O.N. V. Literary Award.

Prof. O.N.V. Kurup (1931–2016), affectionately known as ONV, was one of Kerala's most eminent poets and lyricists. Beyond his teaching career, ONV's poetic works in Malayalam have profoundly resonated with readers, serving both as a source of both entertainment and inspiration. Some of ONV's notable works include *Dahikunna Panapatram* (The Thirsty Chalice), a collection of his poems from 1946 to 1956, as well as *Marubhumi*, *Nilakkannukal*, *Mayilppili*, *Oru Tulli Velicham*, *Agni Salabhangal*, *Aksharam*, *Karutta Pakshiyude Pattu*, *Uppu*, and *Bhumikku Oru Charamagitam*. He was honoured with the Jnanpith Award in 2007, the Padma Shri in 1998, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2011.



Prof. O.N.V. Kurup

Bhoomikkoru Charamageetham (A Requiem for Earth)

ONV, towards the end of his life wrote "Bhoomikkoru Charamageetham". The poem came straight from his heart, reflecting his deep love and concern for Mother Earth. It is an outcry against the exploitation of Nature and Earth by humans in the name of development and it has gone on to become one of the most popular poems in Malayalam.

It is said that an ominous thought occurred to ONV after a visit to an exhibition of lunar material—what if Earth becomes a wasteland like the moon? He felt that after drinking Mother Earth's milk, humans had also begun to suck her blood.

Thus begins the requiem with an epigraph.

*A song of praise
For this earth
For its surge of life
For poetry, the essence of its beauty... Mother Earth
still alive,
in the imminence of your death,
may your soul rest in peace!
This song I inscribe in my heart today
is a requiem to you (and to me)!
When tomorrow you lie benumbed
in the shadow of the enveloping
dark poison-flower of death, none will be left here,
me either,
to mourn, to wet your dead lips
with our tears!*

Following the departure of Sankara Kurup, Idassery, and Kunjiraman Nair, a new generation of poets emerged, leading Malayalam poetry in a fresh direction. These post-modernists ushered in an era marked by **Ayyappa Panicker's** publication of the long poem "Kuruskhetra" in 1961 (1930–2006). "Kuruskhetra" echoes themes from "The Waste Land" and *Bhagavad Gita*, weaving together diverse threads of Indian post-modernity.

Panicker, a poet, literary critic, academic, and scholar, brought forth lines like,

*"When those pure white balls of cotton
skim across the blue sky
It's a lovely sight we see!
Makes you stand and stare.
Where else would you find such beauty in whiteness?"*



Ayyappa Panicker

Kunjunni (1927–2009), fondly known as Kunjunni Mash, gained recognition for his haiku-style short poems imbued with philosophical depth, resonating with both children and adults alike. Other prominent post-modernists in Malayalam poetry include **Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan**, **M. Govindan**, **A. Ayyappan**, **O. V. Usha**, **Chemmanam Chacko**, **Cherian K. Cherian**, **N.N. Kakkad**, **Madhavan Ayyappath**, **K.G. Sankara Pillai**, and **Vinayachandran**.

In the realm of women poets, Kerala has seen quite a few who have carved a niche for themselves. Notable among them are **Balamani Amma**, **Kamala Das**, her renowned daughter, **Sugatha Kumari**, and **Vijayalaxmi**.

Nalapat Balamani Amma (1909–2004), affectionately known as the mother and grandmother of Malayalam poets, expressed her love for children through her poetry. Works such as *Amma* (Mother), *Muthassi* (Grandmother), and *Mazhuvinte Katha* (The Story of the Axe) showcase her talent. She received numerous accolades, including the Padma Bhushan, Saraswati Samman, Sahitya Academy Award, and Ezhuthachan Award.



Balamani Amma

Kamala Das (1934–2009) was a nationally renowned poet and writer, earning international acclaim and recognition for her literary contributions.

Sugathakumari (1934–2020), known for her poetic activism, pioneered environmental and feminist causes in Kerala. Her notable works include *Muthuchippikal*, *Pathirapookkal*, *Krishna Kavithakal*, *Ratrimazha*, and *Manalezhuthu*. Her contributions earned her several awards, including the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, Kendra Sahitya Academy Award, and Padma Shri in 2006.



Sugathakumari

Vijayalaxmi (b. 1960), wife of poet Balachandran Chullikadu, is a poet in her own right. She has received multiple awards, including the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1994. Modern women poets like **Anita Thampi**, **Kavitha Balakrishnan**, and **Sahira Thangal** have also left their mark on contemporary Malayalam poetry.

“I know, somewhere unknown to me,
You dwell, oh soul mate.
I sing for you,
You wait for my song,
Pained, when it is still.”

– **Sugathakumari**

“*On a dining table*
in this midday heat,
deep within each grain of rice
in this meal that we eat together,
innumerable paddy fields.”

– **Anita Thampi**

*“Stammer is no handicap.
It is a mode of speech.
Stammer is the silence that falls
between the word and its meaning.”*

– **K. Satchidanandan**

*“My dreams are
the texture of the earth
softened by the monsoon
a clairvoyant fragrance rises
from the green sprouts
pushing their way through-out”*

– **Vijayalaxmi**



K. Satchidanandan

Malayalam poetry thrives today on contributions from poets such as **K. Satchidanandan** (born 1946) and **Chullikkad** (born 1957). Satchidanandan, a pioneer of modern Malayalam poetry, excels as a bilingual literary critic, playwright, editor, columnist, and translator. His poems have garnered national and international acclaim. Chullikkad, a poet, orator, lyricist, and film actor, shares the stage with him, crafting a poetry distinct from what went before and elevating the art form.



Balachandran
Chullikkad

It is worth noting that unlike in many other states of India, poetry in Kerala enjoys widespread popularity and is deeply rooted in the masses. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors, including the high literacy rate that encourages a larger readership. Additionally, Kerala has a rich history of using poetry and lyrics as powerful mediums for conveying messages, whether in the form of slogans, theme songs, theatrical performances, or film songs.

One unique tradition that contributed to the popularity of poetry in Kerala is the **katha prasangam**, a practice of narrating stories in verse during festivals, celebrations, and mass gatherings. This form of story-telling not only entertained but also educated the masses, especially during the late 1950s and 1960s.

Prominent poets such as ONV and **Vayalar Rama Varma** played a crucial role in bringing poetry closer to the ordinary people in Kerala through their vibrant and relatable lyrics. With left-leaning ideologies, they shared their vision of equality and brotherhood, contributing significantly to the communist movement in Kerala. Other great lyricists, such as **P. Bhaskaran**, **Sree Kumaran Thampi**, **Kaithapram**, **Girish Puthencherry**, **Yusafali Kecheri**, **Rafeeq Ahmed**, and **Harinarayanan**, have also left their mark on the world of Malayalam lyrics.

The role of journals and weeklies in promoting poetry deserves special recognition, with *Mathrubhumi* Weekly leading the way. Even today, this publication continues to feature poems by all great writers, making it a vital platform for showcasing poetic talent.

To sum up, it is worth recalling what poet Satchidanandan observed about Malayalam poetry in an article headlined “Malayalam Poetry Today”.

“More than any other genre in Malayalam literature, poetry has articulated the profound contradictions of the Malayalee psyche, its moral trepidations and its desire for liberation from the oppressive ideologies of discrimination like those of class, caste and gender. Poetry has insistently refused to be a mere entertainer or a leisure pastime, involving itself seriously in social struggles and sharing the agonies and aspirations of individuals of all social layers and persuasions. This is also the reason for its unique vibrancy and popularity that we seldom find in most other languages of India.”

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Part - III

PERSONALITY

Kumaranasan

In this section, we focus on **Kumaranasan**, a renowned poet from Kerala, India. Our intention is to highlight that there are exceptional poems and poets worth celebrating in every regional, or even local, language in India.



Kumaranasan

Kumaranasan (1873–1924) was one of the *mahakavis* (great poets) in 20th century Malayalam literature. His poetry is often likened to the works of poets such as Keats and Shelley in English.

He was born on 12 April 1873 in Kayikkara village in Trivandrum district, Kerala. His father, a trader in coir and copra, had a strong inclination toward Malayalam and Tamil literature, classical music, and Kathakali. These interests played a pivotal role in shaping Asan's love for literature and the arts.

Although he initially worked as a teacher and later as an accountant in a local grocery store, he eventually left both jobs to study Sanskrit. He also delved into Tarka Sastra and English.

Asan's life took a significant turn when he met Sri Narayana Guru, a great spiritual leader and social reformer of Kerala. This encounter had a profound influence on his poetry. Asan went on to become the Secretary of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) in 1904. He also founded the Malayalam literary journal Vivekodayam and served as its editor.

In 1913, Asan was elected to the Sri Moolam Praja Sabha, India's first popularly elected legislature. Later, he settled in Thonnakkal, a village on the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram, with his wife Bhanumathamma, an active social worker whom he had married in 1917.

Tragically, Asan's life was cut short when he drowned on 6 January 1924, at the age of 51, in a boating accident on the River Pallana.

Asan was a prolific writer whose contributions were substantial despite his relatively short life. His poems explored a wide range of themes, including the meaning of life, immortality, love, devotion, womanhood, and social issues such as caste inequality and untouchability. His poems were characterised by their moral and spiritual content, as well as their dramatic context.

Some of his notable works include "**Subramanya Sathakam**" and "**Sankara Sathakam**", which were devotional poems, while later works addressed social issues. He also wrote *khanda kavyas* (poems having only one section) like "**Nalini**", "**Leela**", "**Chintaavishtayaya Sita**", "**Duravastha**", "**Chandaalabhikshuki**", and "**Karuna**". Additionally, he authored two epics—***Buddha Charitham*** in five volumes and ***Balaramayanam*** in three volumes.

One of Asan's most celebrated poems is "Chintavishtayaya Sita" (Sita in Contemplation), where he portrays Sita from the Ramayana, abandoned by her husband Ram. This poignant poem depicts Sita sitting alone in Valmiki's ashram, lost in deep thought and sorrow as she reflects on

her past life with Rama. Asan employs lyrical expressions to vividly depict the pensive Sita.

Sita expresses righteous indignation at what she perceives as injustices committed by Rama but soon regrets her criticism, attributing them to her state of confusion. Towards the end of the poem, Sita bids farewell to everything around her before returning to mother-nature. The poem champions the cause of a woman of spotless character who is subjected to unjust treatment by a patriarchal society, and its original concept and emotional depth make it exceptional.

Another masterpiece by Asan is “**Veena Poovu**” (The Fallen Flower), praised for its beautiful parallels drawn between human death rituals and nature’s ways. The poem touches on the themes of transience and beauty, making it a remarkable piece of his work.

Asan’s poems also explored Buddhist legends. “**Chandala Bhikshuki**” tells the story of Ananda, a disciple of Buddha, who, while wandering as a mendicant, asks an untouchable Chandala woman for water without considering her caste. This act of compassion and equality leads to the woman’s enlightenment, and she eventually becomes a nun.

“**Karuna**” is another poem based on a Buddhist tale, focusing on sensory attraction and its consequences. Vasavadutta, a courtesan, is captivated by the radiance of the Buddhist monk Upagupta, but he declines her advances. Years later, Vasavadutta meets a tragic fate, and Upagupta’s compassion provides solace in her final moments.

Asan, belonging to the Ezhava community, one of the backward communities in Kerala, challenged the literary and cultural dominance of the upper castes. He excelled in Sanskrit, a domain traditionally reserved for upper-caste poets, but he broke free from convention to introduce a new style of poetry that combined emotional appeal with spiritual depth.

Asan’s poetry often featured strong female characters, influenced by women in Buddhist tales, depicting them as dignified, courageous individuals who defied discrimination and tradition. His poems championed the cause of love, particularly an ethereal form of love explored in works like “Nalini”, “Leela”, “Karuna”, and “Chandala Bhikshuki”, where women discover the true nature of love and fulfilment.

Asan’s work drew strength from Buddhism and the teachings of **Sri Narayana Guru**, enabling him to confront feudalism and the caste system in his poetry. For example, “**Duravastha**” portrays the marriage of Savitri, a Brahmin woman, to Chathan, a youth from a marginalised caste, challenging social norms. Despite facing criticism, Asan’s courage and poetic greatness helped him navigate these challenges.

To honour Asan’s legacy, the Government of Kerala has established the Kumaranasan National Institute of Culture (KANIC) as a memorial. The institute houses an archive, a museum, and a publications division, showcasing various memorabilia, personal belongings, works, manuscripts, and mural paintings inspired by Asan’s poems. Visitors can also see the modest twin huts where Asan lived and worked, gaining insight into the simplicity of his life.

As you look out of his humble home, you might imagine the characters from his poems coming to life—the pensive Sita under the moonlight, Vasavadutta awaiting her fate in the woods, or Bhikshu Ananda showing compassion to an untouchable woman.

*“Freedom alone is nectar,
Freedom itself is life;
Slavery for the proud,
is more fearsome than death”*

– **Kumaranasan**

*“From heaven, God send thee to earth
To bring ecstasy and rapture to the world
I worship you this year
Don’t leave me alone, spring!”*

– **Kumaranasan**

*“Beautiful moonlight spreads on tiny flowers
Lovingly showered from the boundless sky
Hanging way up, the full moon
Appears just a yard away.”*

– **Kumaranasan**

*“As the zeal in me subdues
Leaving the senses and body
God, I will come to you
Like a flower falling on earth”*

– **Kumaranasan**

Veena Poovu (The Fallen Flower)

Kumaranasan wrote “Veena Poovu” in 1907 and it is considered a literary classic that ushered in a renaissance in Malayalam literature.

This classical poem is an allegory on the transience of life, symbolised by the various stages in the life of a flower. Ironically, in a way, it depicts the very life of the poet himself, whose death was untimely. It is said that the poet was inspired to write this poem by a fallen flower he noticed on the ground, one day, while walking.



Chandalabhikshuki - a mural at Thonnakkal Asan Smarakam



The poet says in the very first stanza of the poem, “Alas! the flower that once reigned supreme as a queen in its pristine glory, has now faded and fallen to the ground”. That prompts him to reflect on the ephemeral nature of life and fortune.

*“The mother plant with loving care,
Enfolded your infant charm in calyx soft;
The gentle breeze came rocking you to sleep
To the lullaby of the murmuring leaves”.*

The poet moves on to the next stage of its life-youth-where it transforms into a resplendent bloom. By now “its body acquired a certain grace and beauty, expression changing in the face, cheeks glowing, with a new smile playing upon it”. The poet goes on to say that there is no parallel to this radiance and beauty-even a monk who has renounced the world or a coward running away from his worst enemy would stop and stare.

In the last few stanzas, the poem reaches its philosophical height, with a message on mortality.

*“Behold O eyes, this flower will
Wither, dissolve into dust and be soon forgotten;
Know that this is the fate of all; What avail are tears?
Alas! Earthly life is but a dream.”*

– Based on translation by the Kumaran Asan National Institute of Culture (KANIC)

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SECTION-III: POETRY ALIVE OR DEAD?

I. POETRY & SCIENCE

Is poetry dead or alive in this technological era? This question is a complex one to answer. In the following analysis, we explore the perspectives of two great poets, **Edgar Allan Poe** and **John Keats**, who offer contrasting views on the vitality of poetry in the face of science and technology.

“**Sonnet – To Science**” is one of Poe’s early poems, penned when he was just 20. Poe, who had a deep interest in science, expresses his lament over the potential negative impact of scientific progress on poetry and creativity. He criticises science for eroding the imaginative and magical elements of the world. In the latter part, he alludes to mythology to illustrate how old myths about nature have lost their power, making it harder for poets to dream freely.

Sonnet – To Science

*Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet’s heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree.*

On the other hand, Keats, in “**The Poetry of Earth Is Never Dead**”, believes that poetry remains alive and vibrant. He draws parallels between the poetry of the natural world and human poetry. Nature’s expressions are eternal, from the chirping of birds in spring to the songs of crickets in winter. Keats argues that as long as nature thrives, poetry will never die because it’s an intrinsic part of human expression and emotion.

The Poetry of Earth Is Never Dead

*The poetry of earth is never dead;
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead.
That is the grasshopper's, – he takes the lead
In summer luxury, – he has never done
With his delights; for, when tired out with fun,
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never.
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems, to one in drowsiness half lost,
The grasshopper's among some grassy hills.*

In earlier times, poetry provided meaning and an escape from daily life's drudgery. However, the theme, form, and content of poetry have evolved over the centuries. Poetry has shifted from idealised and historical themes to contemporary issues such as urbanisation and alienation.

Modern and post-modern poetry reflect changes in society and thought. Modern poetry employs everyday language, covers a broad range of subjects, and resists a singular style or definition. It is accessible to anyone and has erased the distinctions between high culture and mass culture. However, some critics worry that poetry is now commodified, with a focus on marketing over creativity.

In the modern era, the evolution of poetry parallels human progress. However, when technology replaces human activities and surreal images bombard us through mass media, poetry's ability to connect with our souls is questioned. The concept of poetry being both dead and alive, akin to Schrödinger's cat, raises the idea that poetry may still survive, but with a changed vitality.

So, is poetry dead or alive in the technological era? The answer may depend on how we perceive and engage with it. Poetry remains a dynamic and evolving art form, continually shaped by the changing world around us.

Can science and poetry coexist harmoniously? Science and technology have brought immense wealth and prosperity to our lives, transforming not just our lifestyles, but also our modes of thought and imagination. Science, by systematically exploring new knowledge through

observation and experimentation, and technology, by applying scientific knowledge for practical purposes, have made significant impacts.

While the intrusion of technology into the realm of poetry may be a concern for some, others draw inspiration from science to craft poetic works. In a world perceived as inter-connected, can poetry and science be different facets of the same ever-evolving vision?

Compared to technology, the progress made by science tends to be slower and more abrupt. Technology can instantly disrupt our established lives, while science has the potential to change technology itself.

Poe's poem "Sonnet – To Science" characterises science as something that "alterest all things with thy peering eyes". Nevertheless, science has also been a source of inspiration for some of the most beautiful poetry, as evidenced by the following poems.

Keats, the renowned poet, famously expressed his apprehension about Isaac Newton unravelling the rainbow through his experiments with the colour spectrum. On the contrary, scientist Michael Faraday remarked, "I am no poet, but if you think for yourselves, as I proceed, the facts will form a poem in your minds." Metaphysical poets such as John Donne and Andrew Marvell incorporated scientific concepts into their poetry nearly four centuries ago, and poets over the last few centuries have continued to explore themes related to science in their works.

For example, **Sarah Howe**, a Chinese-British poet, wrote a sonnet called "Relativity" commissioned for the 2015 National Poetry Day. This poem delves into scientific ideas, specifically those related to Einstein's General Theory of Relativity and its impact on subsequent physics. It was dedicated to Stephen Hawking, who listened to a reading of the poem.

Relativity

*When we wake up brushed by panic in the dark
our pupils grope for the shape of things we know.
Photons loosed from slits like greyhounds at the track
reveal light's doubleness in their cast shadows
that stripe a dimmed lab's wall-particles no more-
and with a wave bid all certainties goodbye.
For what's sure in a universe that dopplers
away like a siren's midnight cry? They say
a flash seen from on and off a hurtling train
will explain why time dilates like a perfect
afternoon; predicts black holes where parallel lines*



*will meet, whose stark horizon even starlight,
bent in its tracks, can't resist. If we can think
this far, might not our eyes adjust to the dark?*

Science can enable us to witness the enchantment of the natural world. In a brief poem, Walt Whitman describes how, after attending a scientific lecture brimming with statistics, he ventured outside alone and allowed his mind to be captivated by the wonders of the night sky.



When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

*When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself ...
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.*

Emily Dickinson, in another poem, explores the boundaries of science in understanding and explaining the world. She suggests that there exists a "light" in spring that cannot be found during any other time of the year, a "colour" in solitary fields that transcends the grasp of science, but is keenly felt by human nature.

*A Light exists in Spring
Not present on the Year
At any other period –
When March is scarcely here
A Colour stands abroad
On Solitary Fields
That Science cannot overtake
But Human Nature feels.*

So, while there may be apprehension about the intersection of science and poetry, these examples show that they can co-exist and even inspire each other, creating a richer and more complex world of thought and creativity.

Can poetry and science ever find harmony? While scientists and poets may dwell in distinct disciplines, they share the common goal of conveying the beauty of the world that surrounds us. If truth equates to beauty and beauty equates to truth, it naturally follows that the truth sought by scientists and the beauty explored by poets are essentially one and the same.

Imagination and creativity are not limited solely to poets. The theories of Universal Gravitation and Relativity, as envisioned by scientists such as Issac Newton and Albert Einstein, required an intuitive understanding, vivid imagination, profound insight, and creative genius akin to that of great poets.

This leads us to ponder the dual nature of our perception of the world. Do we view nature through the eyes of a poet or a scientist? The following poem delves into the unity of nature.

The Duality

*In the ceaseless motion of molecules,
Is it the cosmic dance of Shiva,
Or merely Brownian Movement's caprice?
A baby's sweet, divine smile,
Is it but a neural play of strings?
Do the sea's tumultuous waves bemoan nature's fate,
Or merely dance to the Moon's gravitational tune?
The stars that twinkle high above,
Are they heavenly lights adorning the firmament,
Or simply gaseous clouds of distant dreams?
As we witness golden leaves flutter in the breeze,
Are they leaves or a cascade of pulsating photons?
Is the universe's vast expansion surreal,
Or is it, in fact, the essence of reality?*

Poetry and science, at their core, represent the duality of existence—the same truth perceived through two distinct lenses.

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II. POETRY & TECHNOLOGY

Is the impact of technology on poetry and literature positive or negative?

Einstein once expressed his concern about the day when technology would intertwine with our humanity. Similarly, a modern poet penned a thought-provoking poem under the title “Technology Takes Over”, suggesting that while we may celebrate technology for making our lives easier, we may also be overlooking the potential troubles it brings. The poem goes on to say,

*We've seen the movies,
The ones that predict the day when technology takes over,
When machines develop minds and robots breathe air,
When humanity is subjugated by the electric foot.
I fear that day,
And that day has already begun.*

Ravindra K. Kapoor from India reminisces about a world untouched by technology.

Before The Technology Took Over

*How beautiful were those days
When tech had not yet reached us,
Spoiling our minds and hearts,
When life was simple and pure....
When television hadn't stolen
Leisure hours from each of us,
And we used to dance and sing
To the tunes that touched our hearts.
When mobiles hadn't disrupted our minds,
Depriving us of our peace of mind,
And computers were a distant concept,
And the internet hadn't tainted our minds.*

In the digital age, poetry has faced unique challenges. Author and consultant **K.M. Barkley**, notes that the digital age has ushered in a time of shrinking attention spans and shifting focus. With 140-character communication on Twitter, visual content on Pinterest, and classrooms leaning toward easier reading and grading, poetry is often considered an underutilised and underestimated medium.

Traditional memorisation of poems, once a valued practice, has been sidelined as outdated in favour of modern works. Barkley even suggests that many doubt the authenticity of contemporary

poetry, comparing it to the scepticism that surrounds art by Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock's paintings, or Samuel Beckett's fiction.

While technology has brought its share of challenges, we must also recognise its positive impact. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become essential tools for sharing and discussing favourite poems and verses. Various technological resources, such as Edutopia, Evernote, Animoto, Voice Thread, and Kidblog, empower students to create and share their poetry. Technology also plays a vital role in preserving our poetic heritage by digitising ancient manuscripts and classical works.

Technology

*I wake up each morning
when my android makes noise.
Technically speaking,
he's just one of my toys.
Call me lazy,
but I try to save time.
Microwaving my breakfast,
is not a real crime.
Before I dance,
with my electric toothbrush.*

My Generation

*My generation is the technology generation
We are connected 100% of the time
My generation is the "selfie" generation
A generation of self- love and positivity
My generation believes you can love someone
Even if they're thousands of miles away
My generation is the download generation*

*Straight for the inbox,
I dive in a rush.
With the click of a mouse,
I outsource my work.
Through Amazon reviews,
I search for my perk.
I return to my office,
My game has arrived.
My ancestors were truly,
technology- deprived.*

*By Martin Dejnicky
blog. tree. cards*

*Music from every era is at our fingertips
They'll tell you all this is bad
They'll say we're a generation ruled by technology
And we are, but that's not a bad thing
My generation checks social media
And hears about news before CNN or Fox
My generation uses pictures and videos
To dispute the lies we're being fed
My generation has the power to change the world*

Jessica Evans (Hello poetry)

Technology is not merely a double-edged sword; it can also be a shield. Approximately 7,000 languages are spoken worldwide, with nearly half of them at risk of disappearing. Technology is essential to safeguarding these endangered languages from extinction.

Today's generation is tech-savvy, surrounded by gadgets and tools that shape their daily lives. They view their predecessors as technologically deprived. Opinions about technology's influence on their lives vary, with some embracing it while others remain critical. **Martin Dejnicky's** poem illustrates how technology pervades our daily existence and leads him to conclude that his predecessors were deprived of its benefits.

Jessica Evans, in *My Generation*, proudly asserts her place in a technology-powered era. Druzzayne Rika, in *Technology, Friend and Foe*, explores the dual nature of technology, but ultimately embraces it. **Ryan Unger's** *I Finally Understand* acknowledges the comforts brought by technology, while contemplating his grandmother's wisdom about the past's prosperity.

The impact of fast-paced technology bewilders the older generation, accustomed to a slower pace of life, and even some from the younger generation express concerns about technology's disruptive influence. Nonetheless, in the modern world, most of us have embraced the convenience and comfort provided by new technologies. We understand that there is no turning back; technology flows in one direction, like the arrow of time.

Some argue that we have chosen a particular way of life, and technology is just a tool. Should we blame technology for our problems, or is the responsibility ours? Others believe that anyone can withdraw into a quieter world to dedicate time to poetry and intellectual pursuits, as long as they can afford it. For many, however, there seems to be no option, but to go with the flow. Poetry alone cannot be an exception.

III. POETRY & ECONOMICS

Do Poetry and economics have any common ground, or are they fundamentally at odds, like chalk and cheese? Economics often conjures images of dry statistics and lifeless mathematical models of the economy, while poetry thrives on human emotions, imagination, and creativity. On the surface, it may seem unlikely that these two worlds could intersect.

Brendan Markey-Towler, an independent economist, challenges this notion. He argues that “poetry and economics have more in common than one might think, and they can complement each other in surprising ways”. According to him, experiencing poetry can provide economists with a deeper understanding of human existence, which is the very subject of their economic studies.

Some economists believe that human beings are fundamentally driven by their fears, hopes, desires, needs, and loves. Poetry bridges the gap between reason and emotion, infusing economics with the vital component of human sentiment. While there is a place for economists to act as dispassionate, detached scientists, the finest economists are those who possess a deep understanding of human desires and needs.

Markey-Towler stresses that while statistics and mathematics are essential tools for reasoning, the subject of that reasoning is the very essence of poetry-humanity.

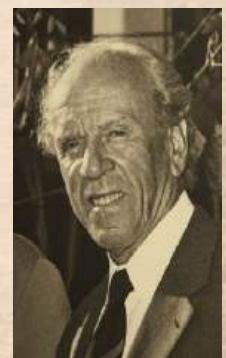
Art and science: Throughout history, artists and scientists have operated in separate cultural spheres. Plato, for example, valued intellect and logical reasoning, while dismissing art for its emotional, imaginative, and potentially inaccurate aspects, leading to a separation of art and science in Western civilization. Prominent economists such as John Stuart Mill noted that this detachment from the cultivation of feelings resulted in an undervaluing of poetry and imagination as fundamental aspects of human nature.



Plato

Australia’s unique perspective: In Australia, many believe that the influence of poets on economists has greatly benefited the country. Poets such as Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, and Les Murray are credited with inspiring passion and compassion in Australian economists.

One notable example is **H.C. “Nugget” Coombs**, an Australian economist who played a pivotal role in the country’s post-war reconstruction. **Judith Arundell Wright**, an Australian poet, environmentalist, and advocate for Aboriginal land rights, greatly influenced Coombs. Their relationship is exemplified in the first stanza of Wright’s poem “A Human Pattern” from her collection *“The Company of Lovers”*.



H.C. Coombs

Contributions of poets to economics: In his book *The Poets Guide to Economics*, John Ramsden examines the contributions of 11 poets to economics, including **Defoe, Swift, Coleridge, Scott, Shelley, de Quincey, Ruskin, Morris, Shaw, Belloc, and Pound**. Although their economic theories have been largely forgotten, the author contends that the poets' views on economics were often visionary and idealistic, grounded in real insight, and occasionally ahead of their time.

Haiku economics: **Stephen T. Ziliak**, an American economics professor, introduces the concept of "haiku economics". He argues that the haiku, a succinct form of poetry originating from 17th century Japan, is the most efficient means of economic expression. Ziliak emphasises that technical efficiency is not the sole objective of haiku; rather, it enlightens and encourages open discussion. He posits that economists have much to learn from poets about precision, efficiency, objectivity, and maximisation.

Behavioural economics: The rise of behavioural economics as a subfield of economics is a recent phenomenon. This methodology combines insights from psychology with economic analysis to explain decision-making based on human behaviour. Behavioural economics departs from the traditional assumption that all individuals are rational and selfish, recognising that this is not always the case in practice. It addresses biases and tendencies that affect choices and provides tools to make better decisions.

Notably, several Nobel Prize winners in economics have emerged from the field of behavioural economics in recent years. Some of the concepts they have developed, emphasising the role of human behaviour and emotions in economic decision-making, may be of great interest to readers.

Here are a few compelling poems that delve into the intriguing relationship between poetry and economics.

*It's hard to give a break
To those who like to take.
I pay my bills
To fund their thrills
No bread? Eat some of my cake.*

*-By Nathaniel Mayo
(Credit: pinterest.com)*

Lamentations of the Confounded Economist

-By Gardan Snyder

*Supply and Demand
The invisible Hand
Isn't this the way the economy shrinks and expands?
Are your goods elastic
Or inelastic static*

*When you raise your price is it sweet or tragic?
Does your income waver
As you look for labor
Is it the inferior goods you favor?
Is there a substitute
For the pricey things you choose
Will the demand curve shift when you get a clue?*

1. **A CONVERSATION**

*The poet and the economist
Discussed their times to know what is best.
Said the poet looking worried,
'Many are those below the poverty-line buried'.
E: "No problem you relax and sit'
Then I can pull the line down a bit'.
P: "Most laborers are without any work,
Out of despair they have gone berserk",
E: "They are just numbers on my Table
Those should soon be stable",*

2.

*P: What about those without a roof?
E: Let me sample and see your proof."
P: "Farmers do not get the right price,
E: "To decide that market is the best place".
P: "Shops and businesses do not have capital,
E: "When they squander, that is natural".
P: "Alas! they will soon be sucked in by the quick sand"
E: "Know that states do not have any magic wand
E: Wait patiently for the invisible hand!"*

(Credit: Life Stream Team)

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These are websites that we found useful while compiling this. Please also search the web to know of what has come later.

www.poetryfoundation.org; medium.com, www.sciencedirect.com; poets.org;; allpoetry.com, www.enlightenmenteconomics.com, www.beastglobal.com

IV. Poetry and Music

This section delves into the connection between poetry and music. The saying, “A poem set to music is a song, while a song that does not involve music is a poem”, captures the intertwined relationship between these two art forms. Many music composers, singers, and artists present song lyrics as poetry, demonstrating the crossover between the two creative realms. Contemporary poets continue to draw inspiration from diverse musical traditions, such as jazz, rap, hip-hop, folk songs, and country music.

Throughout history, we have witnessed the origins of poetry intertwined with musical traditions. For instance, the Vedas, ancient Indian scriptures dating back to the 2nd millennium BCE, have been orally transmitted and are said to capture the “literal sounds of the Divine”. These mantras, considered to be the oldest part of the Vedas, are believed to recreate the primal vibrations of the universe when recited or sung.



The first song of the Classic of Poetry, handwritten by the Qianlong Emperor, with accompanying painting (en.wikipedia.org)

Shijing, (means the Odes, Songs or Poetry) is the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry comprising 305 works dating from the 11th to 7th centuries BCE.

In the Western world, poetry and music have shared a deep connection for thousands of years. In antiquity, poems were often sung, with the first lyric poets in ancient Greece performing their work accompanied by a lyre. The lyrical compositions of Provençal troubadours in medieval southern Europe had a lasting influence on European poetry. The ballad form has remained a common format for both poems and songs. The links between poetry and music extend across cultures and regions, including the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and the Far East.

Renowned poets have also been inspired to write about music. Poe described poetry as the “rhythmical creation of beauty”, emphasising the role of rhythm in poetic expression. Notable poets such as **Dickinson, Shakespeare, Shelley, and Whitman** explored themes related to music in their works. In more recent times, poets like **W.H. Auden, J.D. McClatchy, and Eileen Myles** have successfully written opera libretti, further blurring the lines between poetry and music.

The history of music is divided into distinct periods, including the **Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Modern eras**. While many composers continued to work within established forms during the 20th century, there was also a surge of experimentation with new musical styles and forms that challenged the conventions of earlier periods. The invention of electronic instruments and new technologies revolutionised music, allowing for greater freedom and experimentation in song writing, singing, synthesising, and recording.

These innovations liberated music from the confines of clubs and theatres, making it more accessible to the general public. As a result, various musical genres, including pop, jazz, hip

hop, romantic music, folk music, blues, atonal music, aleatoric music, film music, art music, opera, electronic music, symphony, and rock and roll, have flourished in the modern era.

The music industry has produced numerous songs with poetic lyrics, covering a wide range of themes and emotions, from nostalgia and love songs to odes, blues, anthems, and more. This fusion of music and poetry has enriched both art forms, creating a dynamic and ever-evolving cultural landscape.



The Beatles in 1964;
clockwise from top left: John Lennon,
Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr
and George Harrison

Rock music: The **Beatles** are widely recognised as the most influential band in history, playing an integral role in the development of 1960s counterculture and the elevation of popular music into an art form. The primary songwriters of the band were **John Lennon** and **Paul McCartney**, and they became central figures during the era of Beatlemania.

During the mid-1960s, numerous rock bands, including the **Rolling Stones**, **Pink Floyd**, **Queen**, and **Aerosmith**, emerged with diverse musical styles. These bands gained popularity not just for their music and performances, but also for their simple and evocative lyrics that resonated with the masses. The Beatles, in particular,

expressed their concerns for world peace through songs like “Give Peace a Chance”, “Imagine”, and “Happy Christmas (War is Over)”.

Social relevance: Many songs from the mid-20th century addressed social and cultural issues of the time. Rock music played a significant role in promoting the civil rights movement in the US. Notable singers and songwriters, including **Joan Baez** and **Bob Dylan**, actively participated in this movement. Music artists also composed songs advocating for world peace and opposing the Vietnam War, which garnered immense popularity. Protesters included songwriters and singers such as **Dylan**, **Country Joe**, **The Fish**, **Crosby, Stills, Nash, Young**, **Janis Joplin**, **Baez**, and **Jimi Hendrix**. This period also marked a time when women strove for a better place in society.

Bob Dylan (B.1941) is often regarded as one of the greatest songwriters of all time, with his songs like “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “The Times They Are a-Changin’” becoming anthems for the civil rights and anti-war movements. His work was considered to be a significant political voice in America during the 1960s.

Blowin' in the Wind

*How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
Yes, 'n' how many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they're forever banned?
Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist
Before they're allowed to be free?
Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head
Pretending he just doesn't see?
How many times must a man look up
Before he can see the sky?
Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?
Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind!*



Bob Dylan

Dylan's influence has extended over more than six decades, with a legacy that has included tens of millions of albums sold, more than 500 songs recorded by more than 2,000 artists, and a profound impact on popular music and American culture. He has received numerous awards, including the Nobel Prize for literature in 2016.

Michael Jackson, often referred to as the “King of Pop”, was another influential cultural figure of the 20th century. He made important contributions to music with songs like “Earth Song”, which highlighted the global environmental crisis.

Earth Song [Verse 2]

*What have we done to the world?
Look what we've done
What about all the peace that you pledge your only son?
What about flowering fields?
Is there a time?
What about all the dreams that you said was yours and mine?
[Pre-Chorus 2]
Did you ever stop to notice
All the children dead from war?
Did you ever stop to notice
This crying Earth, these weeping shores?*



Michael Jackson

In addition to Dylan and Jackson, many other talented singers and songwriters achieved acclaim throughout the 20th century. Some notable names include **Quincy Jones, Paul McCartney, Dolly Parton, Elton John, Stevie Nicks, Prince, Bryan Adams, Jon Bon Jovi, Jay-Z, Ricky Martin, and Nas**. All these artists have left a significant impact on the world of music with their iconic works and have been celebrated for their contributions to various genres and music styles.

Indian Music and Poetry

Indian poetry, like that in many other countries, has deep roots in music. The earlier section on Indian poetry showed how the Vedas, hymns, and chants evolved into musical forms. Remarkably, the Vedas are still recited across India, whether in temples, by the river banks, or in people's homes, signifying the continuous thread of Indian civilization from ancient times to the present day.

The earliest poetry in India was predominantly devotional, dedicated to praising gods and goddesses. Many of these verses were either recited or sung. As time passed, we encountered *dohas* or couplets, popularised by revered poets such as **Kabir, Tulsidas, Rahim, and Nanak**. These couplets represent an ancient lyrical format in Indian poetry. **Meera Bai**, known for her devotional music, remains a celebrated figure.

Urdu poetry, too, evolved into various musical forms during the British colonial era. Both before and after gaining independence, many poets, including the likes of **Subramanya Bharati** and **Tagore**, composed poetry in musical formats.

In **South India**, poetry and music share a deep and intimate relationship. Early poems in the region were primarily of devotional nature, and music played a pivotal role. The influence of music in South India, exemplified by **Purandara Das** and **Avvaiyar**, has shaped the life and culture of the people.

Carnatic music, boasting a trinity of outstanding composers in **Swati Tirunal, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Shyama Sastri**, is renowned not just for its musical compositions, but also for its lyrical content. Even today, in India, poetry continues to be recited and set to music.

Indian music took a significant turn with the advent of motion pictures. Music has been an integral part of Hindi and regional language films. We have earlier mentioned the iconic names of Hindi music lyricists such as **Sahir Ludhianvi, Gulzar**, and many more. In South India, lyricists such as **P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar Rama Varma, ONV, and Kannadasan** breathed life into music through their lyrical poetry.

Sung by legendary voices like **Lata Mangeshkar, Geeta Dutt, Asha Bhosle, Mohammed Rafi, Mukesh, and Kishore Kumar**, Hindi songs have continually captured hearts and minds in the country and abroad.

The beauty of Indian film music lies not only in its melodies but also in its lyrics. Movie songs express our daily moods and feelings, providing an outlet for our emotions. For instance, in joy,

in love, or in sorrow, there is always a movie song that mirrors our mood. Some lyrics are sheer poetry, like, for instance, “Yesterday you came to me as a beautiful tune, hiding in my flute, with the intoxication of my fingers’ touch, you came out as a love song”.

No one captures the essence of loneliness quite like a talented lyricist and one could say the same about almost every emotion on the spectrum from agony to ecstasy. There is no dearth of examples to prove this.

Iconic actress Meenakumari made the Hindi film **Pakeezah** immortal with her mesmerising performance. The famous song “**Chalte Chalte**” from the movie resonates with poetic beauty.

*While walking, while walking
I met someone by chance
Walking around the path
Right there it stood still
This night of mine, which is fading away
What I was unable to say
The world is saying that
A story has been created
From those words of mine
The night of waiting
Will after all shorten soon
These lamps are dying
As they burn alongside me.*

India has also ventured into pop music, although it often appears to be an imitation of Western pop, lacking substantial lyrical content.

Thus, we witness the seamless blending of poetry (lyrics) and music in great songs worldwide, where music and poetry are so harmoniously intertwined that they become indistinguishable from each other. Music devoid of poetry is lifeless, while music enriched with beautiful poetry transcends into the divine.

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SECTION-IV

The Inspiration for Poetry

I. Poems with a social message

POEM: THE OWL

Here is a blog by one of our team members on the poem “The Owl” by **Edward Thomas**, a British poet, essayist, and novelist. In today’s world, where the pursuit of personal happiness and selfish desires often takes precedence, this simple poem serves as a reminder of the struggles faced by those less fortunate.



As in any other year, this year also marked the celebration of Diwali, the festival of light, with its resplendent illuminations, crackling fireworks, spontaneous joy, and excitement. Buildings were adorned with modern LED lights in various designs, alongside traditional lamps. Men and women dressed in their finest attire, and children were engrossed in lighting fireworks. Sweetshops were bustling with activity, offering an array of colourful and flavourful sweets. Amid the revelry, the sharp cry of a street vendor, trying to sell his remaining wares late in the day, poignantly pierced the air.

Sadly, no one seemed to notice the vendor or the underprivileged children playing in the streets in their tattered clothing, with burnt-out firecracker stubs. The festival-goers appeared to have neither the thought, nor the time, nor the inclination to share their joy with those less fortunate. This cry of the street vendor served as a poignant reminder of the poem “The Owl” by Thomas.

In my younger years, I had not yet discovered Thomas or his poetry. My introduction to his work occurred when I read a feature titled “Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, and the Road to War” by Mathew Hollis, published in the *Guardian* on 29 July 2011. Since that day, the poem “The Owl” has held a special place in my heart.

Philip Edward Thomas (1878–1917) was an Anglo-Welsh poet and essayist known for his quiet and introspective nature. Although he is considered a war poet, few of his poems directly



Philip Edward Thomas

address his wartime experiences. Thomas was a fervent opponent of war and expressed his anti-war sentiments through his poetry. However, his deep love for the English countryside and his desire to stand in solidarity with fellow countrymen who were fighting in World War I ultimately led him to enlist, resulting in his tragic death during the conflict.

Thomas shared a close friendship with **Robert Frost**, the renowned American poet. It is said that Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” influenced Thomas’s decision to join the war.



Edward Thomas with Robert Frost (Credit: The Guardian)

“The Owl” is a simple poem that lacks any apparent lyrical qualities or grand ideas. So, what is it about this poem that evokes a sense of disquiet? The cry of an owl on a cold winter night pierces not only our ears, but also our hearts and souls. For the poet, the owl’s cry was “telling me plain what I escaped and others could not, that night”.

Now, let us take a closer look at the poem.

THE OWL

*Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved,
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the north wind; tired, yet so that rest
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.
Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.
All of the night was quite barred out except
An owl’s cry, a most melancholy cry.
Shaken out long and clear upon the hill
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,
But one telling me plain what I escaped
And others could not, that night, as in I went.
And salted was my food, and my repose,
Salted and sobered too, by the bird’s voice
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.*

The poem depicts a soldier who arrives at an inn, hungry and cold, but not to the point of starvation. He experiences warmth and comfort within, resting beneath a sturdy roof. However, amid this tranquillity, the soldier is jolted by the melancholic cry of an owl, a stark contrast to the jovial atmosphere within. This cry serves as a poignant reminder of less fortunate individuals, including soldiers and the impoverished, who lie under the stars, unable to experience such comforts.

The soldier, symbolising the poet himself, has the means to satisfy his basic needs. Yet, it is the haunting cry of the owl that awakens his conscience, compelling him to remember and empathise with those less fortunate. This shared feeling and moral compass likely drove him to enlist in the war and make the ultimate sacrifice for a common cause.

This poem reaffirms the notion that true happiness can only be attained when one cares for the well-being of others, both sentient and non-sentient beings. In today’s world, owls are rapidly disappearing due to habitat loss, and soon, there may be no owl left to serve as a reminder of our moral duty, except for the owl within our conscience.

(Note: This blog is based on a write-up by the author on a similar topic, originally published in the annual issues of Life Stream e-magazine in 2012 and 2013.)

II. TRAVEL- Poems & Places

Exploring the Lake District



Photo by Anup Sinha

Are there places on Earth known for their poets and poems? The Lake District is unquestionably one of them.

Nestled in the mountainous region of North West England, the Lake District is renowned for its pristine lakes, lush forests, majestic mountains, and the enduring legacies of poets like **William Wordsworth** and other **Lake Poets**, as

well as the artistic influences of luminaries such as **Beatrix Potter** and **John Ruskin**.

Each year, the Lake District attracts a staggering 16 million visitors who seek respite in its stunning natural beauty, ever-changing landscapes, and invigorating mountain air. This picturesque destination offers activities for every member of the family, delightful dining options, and charming accommodations. While most come to immerse themselves in the serene landscapes and embark on memorable walks, many also explore specific attractions or partake in various outdoor activities.

After spending over a year confined within the four walls of my home due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I eagerly anticipated a visit to what William Wordsworth once famously described as “the loveliest spot that man hath ever found”. In May 2021, I had the pleasure of making that journey.

The Lake District has been a wellspring of inspiration for countless Lake Poets, including **Wordsworth**, **Robert Southey**, and **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, during the Romantic Period of the 19th century. Wordsworth’s work, especially his *Guide to the Lakes*, penned at Allan Bank villa in Grasmere village, offers compelling insights into the region.



Dove Cottage (Town End, Grasmere, Credit: Pinterest)

Notably, Wordsworth initially derided Allan Bank as “a temple of abomination” when it disrupted his scenic view down the Eastdale Valley during its construction in 1805. However, owing to his growing family’s requirements and the need for a larger dwelling, he eventually leased the villa and its vast 11.84-acre grounds in 1808. The owner, in collaboration with Wordsworth, meticulously designed the gardens and

grounds to his preferences. During my visit, I had the privilege of witnessing the same vistas that had ignited the creative spark in the poets who once resided there.

The Lake District shares an intimate connection with English literature of the 18th and 19th centuries. Toward the end of the 18th century, the region captivated a cadre of young poets, most notably Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, who would later become known as the Lake Poets.

Though **Thomas Gray** was the first to bring this region to wider attention, it was the poetry of Wordsworth that truly captured the public's imagination and drew it to the scenic beauty of the



Wordsworth



Southey



Coleridge

area. Out of his eighty years, Wordsworth spent sixty amid the lakes and mountains of the Lake District.

Coleridge, a close friend of Wordsworth, resided for a significant period in Keswick and also spent time with Wordsworth in this stunning part of England. Southey, Coleridge's brother-in-law and the Poet Laureate for thirty years, enjoyed a 40-year residency in Keswick from 1803 to 1843. While his writings encompassed both poetry and prose, he did not entirely align with Wordsworth's vision of the Lake District.

In 1951, the **Lake District National Park** was established, covering an expanse of 2,362 square kilometres. The area's rich cultural heritage, abundant wildlife, and breathtaking scenery are celebrated within the park, which was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2017. As the park's website aptly puts it, "Ice and fire carved the highest mountains and deepest lakes. Humans brought life and love."

For avid walkers and hikers, a visit to Loughrigg Fell, just 2.2 miles away, is a must. This relatively easy hike offers breathtaking views and is suitable for a two to three-hour walk. To fully savour the stunning vistas, I recommend embarking on the longer four-hour route.



(Photo Credits: Anup Sinha)

For those seeking more challenging adventures, **Helvellyn Mountain** awaits. As the third-highest point in England at 3,118 feet, it is a substantial climb that can take between six to eight hours. However, it is essential to note that even in the summer conditions at the summit can be treacherous, as evidenced by 12 tragic incidents in 2019 and 26 in 2022. My ascent of Helvellyn from **Thirlmere**, a valley celebrated for its expansive reservoir that supplies water to Manchester, afforded me a memorable perspective of Lake District's finest landscapes.

It was in these very valleys that Wordsworth famously "wandered lonely as a cloud". His cherished valley was Dunnerdale, nestled in the southwest of the Lake District.

I highly recommend a visit to **Aria Force**, the Lake District's most renowned waterfall. It offers a glimpse of a meticulously landscaped Victorian park with dramatic waterfalls, an arboretum, and captivating rock formations. The principal waterfall descends a spectacular 70 feet from beneath a stone footbridge.

Windermere Lake Cruises offer a popular way to explore the 10.5 miles of Windermere by boat. Your journey can commence at Bowness, Ambleside, or Lakeside. This spectacular voyage offers travellers a magnificent three and a half-hour round-trip, with views of mountains, secluded bays, and many wooded islands. You have the option to disembark at any of the stops and explore the surroundings.



I visited the operational **Stott Park Bobbin Mill**, which produces a quarter of a million bobbins a week, which was vital to the Lancashire spinning and weaving industries. Visitors can witness the entire journey from tree to bobbin first hand during production on the original belt-driven machinery.



After taking in the views from the mountain tops, I found that adrenaline-filled walks on the mountain ranges were a more satisfying way to spend my week in the Lake District. There are numerous picturesque picnic spots available. I embarked on the "**Wordsworth Walk**", circling the lovely lake of **Rydal Water** in two hours. The walk began at **White Moss House**, the only residence Wordsworth ever purchased. I could envision how, during these walks, he and his sister **Dorothy** encountered an endless array of smiling daffodils that inspired him to pen the famous poem "**I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud**".



Ullswater from Gobarow Park, J.M.W. Turner, water colour, 1819

Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", was inspired by the sight of *daffodils* on the shores of Ullswater. It is one of the most famous in the English language. Wordsworth took a walk along with his sister Dorothy around Glencoyne Bay, Ullswater, in the Lake District. This is what she wrote in her journal. "When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow

park, we saw a few daffodils close to the water side – But as we went along there were more, and yet more, and, at last under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful, they grew among the mossy stones about, and about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness, and the rest tossed and reeled and danced and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake, they looked so gay ever glancing ever changing." -

Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journal* Thursday, 15 April 1802

Ref: [www. tripadvisor.in](http://www.tripadvisor.in)

My thoughts about Wordsworth led me to Coleridge. **Coleridge** met Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy in 1795. In addition to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Coleridge composed the symbolic poem "Kubla Khan" and the first part of the narrative poem "**Christabel**". Together, they published a joint volume of poetry, "**Lyrical Ballads**", which marked the beginning of the English Romantic Age.

Daffodils

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake,
beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze*

.....
*Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance*

.....
*For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils. - Wordsworth (1802)*



To Nature

*It may indeed be fantasy when I
Essay to draw from all created things
Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely clings;
And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie
Lessons of love and earnest piety.
So let it be; and if the wide world rings
In mock of this belief, it brings
Nor fear, nor grief, nor vain perplexity.
So will I build my altar in the fields,
And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be,
And the sweet fragrance that the wild flower yields
Shall be the incense I will yield to Thee,
Thee only God! and thou shalt not despise
Even me, the priest of this poor sacrifice.*

- **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

www.poemofquotes.com

I also explored the other fascinating tourist attractions in the district. **Keswick**, located in the northern part of the Lake District, is a lively market town with excellent amenities, nightlife, and cafes. Dating back to around 3000 BC, it boasts **Castle Rigg Stone Circle**, perched on a moor with spectacular views of the surrounding landscape. The Derwent Pencil Museum demonstrates why Keswick was once the world centre of pencil manufacturing.

Keswick is associated with Southey, whose “**The Cataract of Lodore**” (1820) describes the Lodore Falls on the Watendlath, Keswick. The poem vividly depicts the falls, allowing the reader to feel as if witnessing it in person.

The Lodore Falls are created by the waters of Watendlath Tarn cascading over large boulders for about 100 feet. The primary drop of the falls is approximately 28 metres. The falls appear most spectacular after a heavy rainfall but can be reduced to a trickle during prolonged dry spells. The poet Coleridge also briefly resided in Keswick.



(Photo Credit: Anup Sinha)

Just five and a half miles from the **Lake District National Park** border, Whitehaven's coastline stretches from the 18th century harbour of Whitehaven toward the sandstone cliffs of St Bees Head. **Whitehaven** was the site of England's first under-sea coalmine and had the world's deepest mines by the 1730s.

There is an abundance of sights and activities in the 2,362 square kilometres of the Lake District. On my way back, I could not agree more with the saying, “You may leave the Lake District, but once you've been, it'll never leave you.”

The Cataract of Lodore

*From its sources which well
In the tarn on the fell;
From its fountainsIn the mountains,
Its rills and its gills;
Through moss and through brake,
It runs and it creeps
For a while, till it sleeps
In its own little lake.*

*And thence at departing,
Awakening and starting,
It runs through the reeds,
And away it proceeds,
Through meadow and glade,
In sun and in shade,
And through the wood-shelter,
Among crags in its flurry,
Helter-skelter,Hurry-scurry.*

*2. Here it comes sparkling,
And there it lies darkling;
Now smoking and frothing
Its tumult and wrath in,
Till, in this rapid race
On which it is bent,
It reaches the place
Of its steep descent.
The cataract strong
Then plunges along,
Striking and raging
As if a war waging
Its caverns and rocks among;
Rising and leaping,
Sinking and creeping,
Swelling and sweeping,
Showering and springing,
Flying and flinging,
Writhing and ringing,
Eddying and whisking,*



*Spouting and frisking,
Turning and twisting,
Around and around
With endless rebound.*

- Robert Southey

(allpoetry.com)

I plan to revisit this ever-changing romantic landscape, bask in its spectacular scenery, wildlife, history, and culture, and read and re-read the beautiful poems by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other great poets inspired by its pristine beauty.

References

These are websites that we found useful while compiling this. Please also search the web to know of what has come later.

en.wikipedia.org, www.britannica.com, www.lakedistricts.co.uk, poemanalysis.com, www.bbc.co.uk, www.poemofquotes.com, allpoetry.com

III. Food Poetry: Poems Inspired by Food

Food, with its captivating sight, fragrance, colours, and flavours, often serves as a muse for poets, inspiring them to craft verses. Great and not-so-great poets alike have penned poems celebrating cooking, eating, sharing their favourite dishes, and cherished food memories. Here, we highlight some interesting food-related poems we have selected from various sources.

Goblin Market

– Christina Georgina Rossetti

Rossetti (1830–1894) was an English writer known for her romantic, devotional, and children's poems. Here is an excerpt from "Goblin Market", one of her famous works.

*Morning and evening,
Maids heard the goblins cry:
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpeck'd cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheek'd peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,*



Christina Georgina Rossetti

*Crab-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries; —
All ripe together
In summer weather.*



(Credit: tiquet.com)

The Pumpkin – John Greenleaf Whittier

Whittier (1807–1892) was an American Quaker poet and an advocate for the abolition of slavery in the United States. Here is an excerpt from his 19th century poem

“The Pumpkin”

*Then thanks for thy present! none sweeter or better
E'er smoked from an oven or circled a platter!
Fairer hands never wrought at a pastry more fine,
Brighter eyes never watched o'er its baking, than thine!*



Ode To Onion – Pablo Neruda

Neruda (1904–1973) was a Chilean poet, diplomat, and politician who won the 1971 Nobel Prize in Literature. Here's a snippet from “Ode to Onion”.

*Onion,
luminous flask,
your beauty formed
petal by petal.*



Poem on cooking: How I Shall Dine ? – Jonathan Swift

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), the renowned satirist, author, essayist, and poet, wrote a rare poem on cooking mutton. Here is an excerpt: -

*Gently blow and stir the fire,
Lay the mutton down to roast,
Dress it nicely I desire,
In the dripping put a toast,
That I hunger may remove:
Mutton is the meat I love.*

Fame is a Fickle Food

– Emily Dickinson

*Fame is a fickle food
Upon a shifting plate
Whose table once a
Guest but not
The second time is set.*

Maya Angelou (1928–2014), one of the best-known American poets, also authored several recipe books, starting with *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table* (2004). In her poem “The Health-Food Diner”, Angelou lists nutritious vegetables offered by the diner but admits her insatiable craving for steak, revealing her unapologetic carnivorous side.

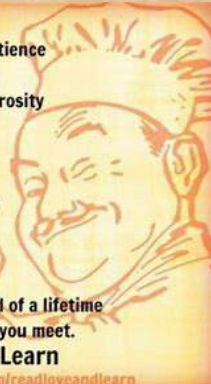
***The health food diner*-Maya Angelou**

*No sprouted wheat and soya shoots
and Brussels in a cake,
carrot straw and spinach raw,
(today, I need a steak).
Not thick brown rice and rice pilaw
or mushrooms creamed on toast,
turnips mashed and parsnips hashed,
(I'm dreaming of a roast).
Health-food folks around the world
are thinned by anxious zeal,
they look for help in seafood kelp
(I count on breaded veal).
No smoking signs, raw mustard greens,
zucchini by the ton,
uncooked kale and bodies frail
Are sure to make me run*

(interestinliterature.com)

Here are three funny poems inspired by thoughts on food:-

Happiness Recipe
2 Heaped cups of patience
1 Heart full of love
2 Hands full of generosity
A Dash of laughter
1 Head full of understanding
Sprinkle generously with kindness
Add plenty of faith and mix well.
Spread over a period of a lifetime
And serve everyone you meet.
Read, Love and Learn
facebook.com/readloveandlearn



Italian food - by Shel Silverstein

*Oh, how I love Italian food.
I eat it all the time,
Not just 'cause how good it tastes
But 'cause how good it rhymes.
Minestrone, cannelloni,
Macaroni, rigatoni,
Spaghettini, scallopini,
Escarole, braciolo,
Insalata, cremolata, manicotti,*

*Marinara, carbonara,
Shrimp francese, Bolognese,
Ravioli, mostaccioli,
Mozzarella, tagliatelle,
Fried zucchini, rollatini,
Fettuccine, green linguine,
Tortellini, Tetrazzini,
Oops—I think I split my jeani.*

(www.TheSilverPen.com)

Cooking Your Food

Rice, butter, salt and pepper!
The muse in your kitchen,
Cooking your food,
With the spices of love and,
The romance of nature.

Edward Kofi Louis

These poems celebrate the enchanting relationship between poetry and food, showcasing the diverse ways in which culinary experiences have inspired poets to craft verses.

References These are websites that we found useful while compiling this. Please also search the web to know of what has come later.

en.wikipedia.org; poemssearcher.com; interestinliterature.com;

IV. Poetry and the Universe



The early cosmos Credit: NASA

Poetry and the Universe have been intertwined throughout history, captivating poets with the majestic beauty of the night sky. Here are some poems that reflect the profound impact of the universe on poets:

1. The Light of Stars

– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

*The night is come, but not too soon;
And sinking silently,
All silently, the little moon
Drops down behind the sky.
There is no light in earth or heaven
But the cold light of stars;
And earnest thoughts within me rise,
When I behold afar,
Suspended in the evening skies,
The shield of that red star.*

Longfellow's poem evokes the "cold night" of the stars, inviting us to contemplate the vast, dark expanse of space illuminated by distant stars. Although written in 1838, the poem was published posthumously in 1891.

2. I Saw No Way

– Emily Dickinson

*I saw no Way –
The Heavens were stitched –
I felt the Columns close –
The Earth reversed her Hemispheres –
I touched the Universe –
And back it slid-and I alone –
A Speck upon a Ball –
Went out upon Circumference –
Beyond the Dip of Bell –*

In this poem, Dickinson highlights the insignificance of Earth and humanity when contrasted with the vastness of the Universe.

3. **Bright Star**

– **John Keats**

*Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art-
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,*

Keats' sonnet, composed between 1818 and 1819, speaks of enduring love and likens it to the unwavering brightness of the North Star.

4. **A Night Piece**

– **William Wordsworth**

*The sky is overcast
With a continuous cloud of texture close,
Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
A dull, contracted circle, yielding light
So feebly spread, that not a shadow falls.*

In this introspective poem, Wordsworth observes the night sky while walking beneath a clouded sky, finding solace in the heavenly spectacle.

5. **God and the Universe**

– **Lord Tennyson**

*Will my tiny spark of being wholly vanish in your deeps and heights?
Must my day be dark by reason, O ye Heavens, of your boundless nights,
Rush of Suns, and roll of systems, and your fiery clash of meteorites?
II.*

*'Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human state,
Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power which alone is great,
Nor the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent Opener of the Gate.'*

6. Auguries of Innocence

– William Blake

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

These poems capture the enduring fascination of poets with the universe and its mysteries. Today, we continue to explore the cosmos through the lenses of advanced instruments such as the James Webb Telescope, which reveal distant galaxies, black holes, and stars.

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These are websites that we found useful while compiling this. Please also search the web to know of what has come later.

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