CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

Religion and poetry have been companions from times immemorial. The aim of both is lofty for they deal with eternal truths. Both are capable of the dual action of either rising to elevated realms or delving deep down to find hidden truths. While both religion and poetry attempt at unravelling mysteries that have baffled human minds, it is ironical that the relationship between the two is always slightly mysterious and not apparently obvious.

Critics have dealt with the religious nature of all poetry and the formal nature of religious poetry. In the realm of poetry about religion terms like "religious", "devotional" and "sacred" are often used to denote subtle categories. It is difficult to categorically differentiate them as these terms overlap.

For the religious poet God is generally an all potent power or cosmic force, a Transcendental Being behind the entire creation. Man's personal concerns like sin, fall and salvation will normally remain outside the purview of the religious poet. But adoration of God, his awe felt at God's majesty, his responsibility in God's Universe, these will however form part of the religious poet's canon.
From the other angle the devotional poet may be a religious poet at heart, the predominant difference being in the personal aspects. God is viewed in a human relation by the devotional poet who tends to concretize the abstract power using conventional symbols. But again the "I" of these poems does not merely represent the poet alone. It is a way of dramatizing a universal truth.

The term "sacred" simply is that which is not "profane". But paradoxically the sacred can manifest itself only through the things of the world.

To the question as to what category George Herbert and Nammazhvar belong, it should be said at the outset that they are two poets noted for their God-love. They have been classified as religious and devotional, but such classifications are purely subjective and derivational. For in the sublime realms of poetry and religion, nothing can be compartmentalized. What strikes one is the similarity between these two poets. Love of God has inspired both of them and they both show life on earth as a preparatory period for the life hereafter. They appear to become, in their poetry, the battle grounds rounds of salvation, themselves. Their poetry lead us on to get a glimpse into their very soul wherein we witness similar spiritual struggles. It is this aspect
of conflict and struggle in these two pilgrim poets that lends interest to their poetry. Their original handling of poetic techniques is able to bring the conflicts right in front of our eyes.

When one reads deeply Herbert's and Nammazhvar's god-intoxicated poems, there is a clearly-defined feeling, a cognizance, about the conflict between the believer and the connoisseur. There is abundant evidence in the poetry of both Nammazhvar and Herbert about the triumph of the imaginative self over the rational self. The reader, to whatever sect of whatever religion he may belong, gets thoroughly immersed in Herbert's emotional outbursts about God's immense love for the undeserving man. The technical innovations the quaintly clever comparisons, the cunningly-wrought paradoxes, the surprising endings and many more abound in Herbert's poetry, making the reader of any religion simply ignore the Christian context which gives rise to his poetry. Christ's complaint on the cross, ("Sacrifice") so elaborately worked out and so brilliantly presented through a mingling of the form and the content, is a connoisseur's delight, overcoming all the religious and theological convictions one may hold.
No less is the joyful rapture of the reader while dipping deep into Nammazhvar’s poems. The effortless word-formations, the plethora of images and symbols suggestive of a variety of meanings, the endless tales of Krishna’s leelas - all couched in the most musical of verses - make Nammazhvar’s poetry a case study for the triumph of art over rational thinking. There are many instances of non-Hindu critics/readers of Tamil poetry raving about Nammazhvar’s poetic effulgence. Thus in the poetic works of Herbert and Nammazhvar, the conflict between poetry and belief seems to be resolved in favour of poetry irrespective of any type of belief.

Herbert and Nammazhvar provide, through their poetry, the kind of pleasure that sublime art alone can give to the discerning reader. Of course, in doing it these poets have derived a lot from their traditions - both literary and religious. The respective traditions to which Herbert and Nammazhvar belonged are not only complex but also varied. Even as these poets conform to tradition generally, they retain their individuality. In the case of Herbert the Anglican Church to which he belonged, coloured his religious beliefs, and his allegiance to the Anglican church was unshakable though he had been influenced by Catholicism and Puritanism also.
The seventeenth century was a great age of religious poetry in England and poets handled various poetic forms quite successfully. The rich and diverse tradition of poetry which inspired these poets enabled them to adapt it to their subject matter and though they were brought up in a common religious tradition these poets were original. Their poetry reflects their personal reactions to common experience. The religious poetry of the age expressed the individual soul's attempt to apprehend the mystery or subtleties of the doctrine.

The medieval religious poetry, whose influence on the seventeenth century poetry was substantial, laid greater emphasis on God coming down to save man than on man's attempt to reach Him. It is remarkable that Nammazhvar's poetry too emphasises this aspect. Both Herbert and Nammazhvar firmly believe that neither man's wisdom, nor his efforts can save Him. If at all man is lifted above the morass of his sins, it is only due to God's initiative and infinite love and grace. This is the quintessence of the poetry of both Herbert and Nammazhvar.

The poets of the seventeenth century depicted Christ as king or warrior, using the old heroic tradition. They used the conventions of love poetry, also popular in the age and adapted it to suit their religious verses. Hence God was
also portrayed as a Lover in love with the soul of man. This is another noteworthy similarity discerned between Herbert and Nammazhvar. Both of them lived in ages dominated by love poetry and religious poetry. And both poets used and adapted the conventions of love poetry for their religious poems.

The religious poets thus tried to rival the love poets of their age. Herbert who wrote only religious verse was greatly influenced by John Donne in whom there is a fusion of both love poetry and religious poetry.

Herbert's contribution to English poetry is that he wrote original religious poetry instead of merely paraphrasing biblical passages. He showed how Church symbols, theological doctrines, and paradoxes in the Christian religion can become subject matter for poetry.

The simplicity of language that the metaphysical school attempted found favour with Herbert who achieves a greater degree of simplicity than others of that school. His preference is for the natural prose order and his characters speak in a casual tone.

There is something akin to this in Nammazhvar as well. He belonged to the great bhakti movement in South India, which ushered in a great religious and social renaissance.
during the period from the sixth to the ninth century AD. The Azhvars who spoke to and about God in the vernacular Tamil were thus able to reach the lowest strata of society, who were not familiar with Sanskrit, the language at court. Moreover, some of the Azhvars themselves belonged to the low castes and they illustrated through their devotional hymns that God is available to all, irrespective of their caste, colour or literary or linguistic attainments. This may have been one of the reasons for Herbert's homely imagery as well.

The devotional movement spread in South India thanks to the Azhvars who brought in the idea that the divine being is someone near to the human being. The movement which was gaining strength in South India due to the decline of Buddhism and Jainism was further strengthened by this acceptable concept of a personal God.

The existence of the Supreme Being as a loving person, filled with love and pity for both sinners and others alike, granting salvation, was an exciting idea to the people.

We see Herbert also portraying such a personal, loving God who has come for the redemption of sinners and others alike.
What the seventeenth century literary influence was to Herbert, the Cankam poetry was to Nammazhvar. Following the Cankam tradition, Nammazhvar considers himself as the bride of God. His originality lies in expressing the devotee's mental attitude as seen by the mother and companion of the girl in love. This element is not found in Herbert's poetry. Again we do not see in Herbert's poetry Nature as almost a character in the love drama, helping and reflecting the mood of the people involved in the drama as is the case in Nammazhvar's poetry. The girl in love in Nammazhvar's poetry not only follows the conventional methods of sending messages to the Lord through birds, bees, clouds and wind but the poet oversteps convention by making her proclaim her love for Him publicly. Songs of praise and valour seen in conventional literatures have also been refashioned by the Azhvars and to some extent by Herbert so as to reach the Supreme King.

The element of love poetry is found more in Nammazhvar than in Herbert. Although Nammazhvar's poetry cannot be strictly called erotic, the sensuousness of love poetry is seen to be more dominant in him than in Herbert's poetry.

In his handling of the myths, Herbert is mostly traditional and draws upon the biblical conventions and
Christian myths. But he shows great ingenuity in adopting the older myths and transforming them so quaintly that his personal experiences intermingle with the archetypal elements.

Like Herbert, Nammazhvar too draws heavily from the fund of puranic myths. But in his case the use of myths is more obvious than in Herbert. Thus both poets use myths sometimes obviously and at other times they inextricably weave myths into the texture of their poetry. But in both cases, their poetry is enriched by the skilful embroidery of traditional myths.

Like the seventeenth century English poets, the Azhvars too draw from traditional love poetry and merely substitute the lover by God. Through the language of human love, these poets express their love for God and their yearning to unite with Him. Various relationships between God and the human soul were conceived by the Azhvars.

Several common features could be detected in the themes handled by Herbert and Nammazhvar, while certain differences are also inevitably found. In the works of both poets a few themes like love, grace, sin, surrender and salvation are predominant. Both poets talk of God in human terms, although both are also conscious of His
omnipotence and omniscience. They address God directly and are not overawed by Him, for love dominates over all other feelings. While both poets have a craving for God, Nammazhvar's craving seems more intense, a devouring kind. Nammazhvar's love assumes supra-cosmic dimensions. The poet sees everything in creation as reflecting and being a part of God. Herbert like Nammazhvar firmly believes in the greater intensity and immensity of God's love for man than his for the Lord.

God's grace is again viewed by both poets as being in abundance and very easily available. This loving God is very easily accessible according to both poets. The very concept of God descending to the earth to redeem man is a proof of His boundless love for man. While Herbert goes to the extent of thinking that Adam's fall is not fully unfortunate as it is man's downfall and sin that has made the Son of God come down to earth, Nammazhvar also talks about the concept of Avatar or incarnation. It is believed generally by the Hindu theist that whenever sin abounds on earth the Lord will appear or descend or incarnate. God condescending for worthless man is thus a common link in the themes of the poets.

Man need not play an active role to win God's grace. All that is required of him is pure love. It is enough if
man is but a passive medium for God's love to flow through. But even this man is not prepared to do. Both poets emphasise this folly of man. Man is so ungrateful and thankless to God who showers favours on him always.

Man in his ignorance goes away from this loving God and throws himself headlong into worldly love. This aspect pains both poets. Both Herbert and Nammazhvar portray God as the Archetypal Hound of Heaven. Their poetry presents several situations where He pursues the devotee relentlessly and finally occupies his soul, thereby giving it permanent bliss. Man's redemption is made possible by God's grace alone. Like a mother cat which lifts her kitten to a safer place without any effort on the part of the kitten, God's love and mercy will uplift us.

Both poets are as aware of man's sinful nature as they are conscious of God's love and mercy. In fact Herbert and Nammazhvar are obsessed with the idea of sin. Alike they lament on man's susceptibility to sin, although God, religion, and society have provided several fences to keep him away from sins. The poets enumerate several sins prevalent in the world ensnaring man and becoming impediments in the path of his Godward journey. Both Herbert and Nammazhvar list out sins from
hypocrisy to disobedience to the divine creator. But while Nammazhvar talks of **Karma** based on the Hindu **Karma** theory - of actions of past having an impact on the present, of the cycle of births and deaths, this idea is absent in Herbert, naturally due to the difference in philosophical origins between the poets. Again while Nammazhvar refers to man's good and bad deeds, only his sinful side is projected by Herbert.

The methods of purification are also similar in the poetry of Herbert and Nammazhvar like tears of repentance, confession, prayer, sighing and yearning for the Lord and ritualistic worship. Although both poets are obsessed with man's sinful nature, a remarkable similarity is that in both cases there is a total absence of cynicism or pessimism. This point leads to another similarity - the poets' firm conviction in the merciful nature of God who is the medicine for all sins. It is a striking resemblance in their poetry when both Herbert and Nammazhvar view God as the only medicine to remove all types of sin. It is this faith that God's love and grace flows down to man irrespective of his worth that makes their poetry positive.

We also notice a swing in the moods of the two poets. The swing, of course, is more characteristic of Herbert.
and also more predictable. Both poets pass through a gamut of emotions ranging from ecstasy and joy to extreme dejection and despondency. While the rise and fall pattern is clearly seen in Herbert's poetry as a graph in the poem, in Nammazhvar's verses this pattern is seen not in individual poems but in decades.

Both poets suddenly feel that God is indifferent to their prayers. But both realize that God only appears to be so. It is their own ignorance which makes them think of God as uncaring.

Herbert and Nammazhvar are again similar in their awareness of the transience of worldly life, which is filled with short-lived pleasures addressed to the senses. If man falls a prey to these gaily guised sorrows he can never gain bliss. Both poets are conscious of their own inadequacies and this makes both of them humble although it is to be noted the humility is more obvious in Nammazhvar.

To both poets self-surrender is an end in itself not just a means to attain His grace. It is more a frame of mind, caused by an intense love for God and not a deliberate and conscious action. Once again we find their surrender and God's grace occurring simultaneously in both cases.
Death is viewed without fear by both poets. This is because of their love for God which has vanquished all fears in them. But while Herbert views death as a release after man's foul journey on earth, Nammazhvar goes a step further and wishes to be set free from the cycles of births and deaths. Herbert refers to bodily ailments and is preoccupied with death. Hence in his poetry we see him talk more of Christ's death than His birth. Nammazhvar talks only of God's descent, never of His death. This again is a difference, inevitable due to the difference in religious backgrounds. Herbert, in this light, views man as an eternal debtor who can never hope to repay Christ's supreme sacrifice. According to Herbert, man alone is endowed with the powers of reasoning and the ability to speak and write God's praise. He alone can enter into a relationship with God. When man fails to do this it pains Herbert. The poet feels that not only is man a sinner, not praising God, but as he is denying the opportunity of praise to all the other creatures who can praise God only through man, he is a double sinner.

Coming to the goal of the poets, Herbert wants to reach Heaven and much more - God. Nammazhvar has voyaged beyond wants. He does not even want Vaikunta. To such an extent has his ego been obliterated that he no longer wants anything. It is enough for the humble poet if he can
serve Him and His devotees. Herbert wishes to serve His master but there is no reference to serving devotees. One gets the feeling that Herbert is seen reaching his goal. He seems to have reached it. In Nammazhvar's case he himself declares his having reached his goal. Communion with the Lord gives rise to joy in Herbert. But it is ecstasy that springs in Nammazhvar when he gains communion with Him.

After a deep and careful study of their poems and the way in which the themes are handled, two observations must be made. While it has been said that it is the spiritual struggle and conflict that brings alive the poetry of both Herbert and Nammazhvar, Herbert's conflicts seem definitely more intense than that of Nammazhvar. This is because Herbert has been a man of the world in the full sense, with worldly ambitions. From his biography we learn that he wavered considerably before entering priesthood. He is conscious of his inadequacies as he has lived through it all. While he is conscious of the infinite love of God and its redeeming nature he is very often fearful or doubtful lest sin enter his heart once again. He wonders if his nature, susceptible to sin can withstand the trial. There had been a stage when he had wondered if he could continue with the same master. That was when the seemingly paradoxical ways of God, the apparent task-master had put
him in a quandary. It is this awareness, gained first-hand of his susceptibility to sin that gives a sense of greater immediacy and intensity to the spiritual conflicts in his soul than in Nammazhvar, who has only intuitively felt worldly sins. Nammazhvar is never the rebel that Herbert is at times.

The pulls of the world do not seem to have been so strong in Nammazhvar. The conflicts of a tortured soul are brought to us straight from a man who has gone through it – in Herbert's poetry. Therefore though the personal pronoun "I" is used by both poets, in Herbert, it represents him to a greater extent than when Nammazhvar uses it, for in him the "I" is of more universal representation. In Herbert it is more a sinner crying out to his God, but Nammazhvar is crying out on behalf of sinners.

Another notable distinguishing aspect between the two poets is the degree of their craving for God. Not only is Nammazhvar drowned in this God-love, but such is the immensity of his love for the Lord, that it engulfs the Lord Himself and He seems to drown in the Azhvar's love, which is deeper than the oceans and wider than the infinite sky. Nammazhvar's love for God and God's craving for him borders almost on cannibalism. Herbert's craving does not reach this dimension. Also Nammazhvar's love for Narayana is such
that he is partial to Him and considers Him superior to the other two of the Trinity in the Hindu religion, namely Siva and Brahma. Herbert does not appear to be so blinded by God's love. He has love and reverence for God and Christ alike and does not distinguish much between them.

Regarding the mystic nature of their poetry, the five stages in the mystical progression identified by mystics forms the basis for our assessment of the two poets as mystic poets. Although it is generally believed that Herbert is not a mystic poet, yet it is remarkable that he does seem to have passed through the various stages of the mystical journey.

In both Herbert and Nammazhvar the five stages of the mystical journey can be traced. While Herbert undergoes the pre-awakening stage, Nammazhvar does not. In Herbert the Awakening and Purification stage is of a longer duration before the Illuminative stage is reached. In Nammazhvar the Illuminative level is reached much quicker. In both poets the Awakening and Purification occur almost simultaneously. In fact awakening is itself a purification leading to illumination. The poets awake to a realization of God's love and their own sinful nature and this in turn makes them seek purification. The Purgatory or Purification process is almost similar in both poets - as they both resort to prayer, worship, tears of remorse and so on.
The Illuminative stage is both cases in short and the poets get their taste of divine joy. The contact with the Lord has been established but all that is afforded is a glimpse and the fleeting nature of this experience makes their soul yearn for continuous communion and total union with God. This is the culminating point of the first mystic life.

The second mystic life commences with the torment of separation racking the soul, which is the hallmark of this stage, known as the Dark Night of the Soul. It is seen that this stage in particular is a highly fertile ground for poetry. Both Herbert and Nammazhvar pine for their God and long for union with Him. The short-lived happiness of the Illuminative stages makes them hunger for absolute fulfilment. Their poetry depicting this stage is highly charged with emotions. The soul of the poets is seen tossed to the peak of agony and the nadir of desolation during the period of separation from the Lord. Paradoxically, the poets experience the joy of the pain of separation. The joy springs from contemplation of the Lord and union with Him and the pain is caused when the soul is reminded of the separation between them.

Having crossed the four stages the poets reach the final lap of the journey, the Unitive way. The Dark
Night has given way and the glorious dawn has been ushered in. Darkness, deprivation, dejection and negation leave without a trace as they have been conquered by light, fulfilment, joy and a positive conviction in God's love. The joy of union is heightened by the torment that preceded it. The storm is over and a radiant, peaceful day has dawned.

Though the path trudged by them is similar, we do find certain differences. While Herbert undergoes a pre-awakening conflict and has a specific incident in his life that spurs off the Awakening stage, Nammazhvar neither has the pre-awakening conflict nor a specific incident in his life that leads to the Awakening stage.

Again, though nature mysticism is found in both, in Nammazhvar's poetry, nature has a more specific role to play. Nature forms the background, reflecting his moods and is thus an integral part of the drama of love as it also becomes the poet's messenger often, carrying his messages of love to the Lord. Nature does not play such a part in Herbert's poetry. We find a level of difference in the Univitlve stage in that while Nammazhvar declares that God has embraced him, in Herbert's case God has smiled at him, welcomed him, held him by the hand, led him inside and spoken to him. Again, Herbert seems to have entered
into a spiritual marriage, whereas Nammazhvar has explicitly affirmed his union with the Lord and the ecstasy experienced thereof. Nammazhvar's love has been consummated. Thus although both poets have reached the Unitive stage, the level of intimacy of the shared love and the union appears to be deeper and more explicit in Nammazhvar than in Herbert. Herbert's joy is paralleled by Nammazhvar's ecstasy.

While assessing the mystical attainments of the two poets should be accepted that Nammazhvar is undoubtedly the greater mystic of the two. This is made clear by his own declaration in the last decad of Tiruvaymozhi. Herbert has not been considered a mystic by many critics. Yet the attempt has been made to place him alongside Nammazhvar, as Herbert's poems can be interpreted in the light of the various mystical stages enunciated by the mystics all over the world. The final unitive stage of Herbert is suggested and the conclusion reached is derivational.

The worldview of the two poets includes their philosophy, beliefs and ideas on the pattern of the universe, the origin, role and goal of man, God's love and power, man's sin, the transience of worldly life and the means to achieve the final goal of human life. Absolute faith in the redeeming quality of God's grace is the core of their
philosophy. There is no pessimism in them. They share a positive philosophy, filled with optimism and hope.

Both Herbert and Nammazhvar believe in God as being a personal and transcendental power. The entire universe is His manifestation for the Creator has marvellous powers. He is all pervasive and the variety of His creation is stupendously boundless. The poets dwell on the transience of worldly life and this leads them on to the concept of sin. While in Herbert's view man's ingratitude towards God has no parallel, Nammazhvar focusses on man's utter indifference. The poets agree on the view that man's sin is the main impediment standing in the way of his achieving life's goal. Yet they are positive in their approach to life and worldly life is viewed as a prelude to a more complete life. Both poets have compassion for humanity, which is evident from their works and from biographical accounts. Man's sin can be conquered by prayer and repentance but what ultimately redeems him is God's love and grace, which makes it possible for him to reach the goal, which according to both poets, is submission to the will of God and communion with Him.

While it was generally feared in Herbert's age that man's sin could result in cosmic anarchy, Herbert did not subscribe to this idea. He believed in God sustaining a
coherent pattern of the universe. He had a belief in the theory of the Great Chain linking God and all of creation, with a role in it for every creature. Everything in the universe has harmony and order and follows a pattern, but, in Herbert's view, man alone upsets the pattern by being disorderly himself.

In Nammazhvar's view the universe was created by God who, during the deluge, mercifully swallowed all the worlds and contained them safely in His stomach, and brought them forth again. Herbert believes that man is a microcosm and the focus of God's love for he alone is endowed with the capacity to praise God. But Nammazhvar feels that everything in creation including the ant is equally the focus of God's love. Herbert projects his idea of a model man and provides the guidelines for an ideal life. His attitude to death is one of fearlessness and he views it as a release, while Nammazhvar, equally undaunted by death, goes on to talk of after-death.

Herbert is of the view that the present is to be lived in a complete sense instead of anticipating and fearing griefs that are to come. He is positive that either grief will not come and if it does, it is soon overcome. Herbert is a happy man and priest and his general outlook is more
sanguine in his prose work than in his poetry. The *Country Parson* proves that he preached what he practised and that he was contented in doing God's work.

Nammazhvar views the world and speaks of everything in it in terms of God. His God-love colours his entire vision. He tries till the very end of his work to unravel the mystery of the universe. He is baffled by God first going away from him and later, coming back to embrace him. Man can never hope to find out the why of everything in creation. The Master's mystery will continue to puzzle him forever.

A close study of the formalistic aspects of their poetry brings out certain similarities and differences. Herbert and Nammazhvar use religious symbols drawing heavily from the Bible and the *Puranas* respectively. Although they are influenced greatly by the literary traditions of the age, they have skilfully adapted them to suit their purpose. A remarkable similarity is the musical quality of their verses, for most of their verses are meant to be sung. Another noteworthy point of resemblance is that both poets bring home their message in verses marked by laudable economy of expression. As a result their verses are short. Their poems often are mini-dramas. In Herbert's case, the dramatic situation is brought alive in the poem by
colloquies and arguments and we hear more than one voice. Similarly Nammazhvar's Tiruviruttam and a number of verses in Tiruvaymozhi also present dramatic situations with several voices being heard.

Herbert's poetry is filled with homely imagery from daily life. This is not always the case with Nammazhvar. The latter's poetry is more descriptive and hence filled more with metaphors and similies than Herbert's poetry. Herbert believes in writing a simple style though it has been pointed out by critics that the simplicity is often contrived. Herbert often experiments with the various forms of poetry resulting in the pattern poems, the pruning poems, poems with hidden messages and so on. The structure of the pyramid is seen in his poetry. In most poems the low key of the beginning and the calm ending form the bases for the climatic peak, which occurs somewhere in the middle, to rest on. At the end of the poem, the conflict is in the past and the poet has solved it.

There is a sudden swing or rather, an abrupt transition at some point in the poem. Herbert seems to have played with the rhyme scheme and uses it to portray his mood. While in one poem it is broken as is his heart by God's denial, it seems to join him in praying to the Lord to come in another. We often notice poetic devices joining hands with the poet's feelings.
Unlike Herbert, Nammazhvar has written all his verses in the antati form. Herbert has also used this form in two of his poems which provides for the circularity of thought. In Nammazhvar's works we see a steady progression from the first work to the last. Such a steady progression is not obvious in Herbert.

In Herbert's poetry the drama of spiritual conflict is re-enacted with the help of artistic devices. It is almost like an action-replay. For the conflicts seem to be in the past. Such a re-enactment of a drama is not so obvious in Nammazhvar, the poetry of the present seems to show Herbert having come to terms with himself. We do not jump into the conflict in Herbert's poetry, rather see it in retrospect. Another resemblance between Herbert and Nammazhvar is the fact that their poems are not open-ended. We are not required to offer solutions or reach conclusions. The conflicts are solved by the poets themselves. There is no room for reader contribution to the solution of the conflict portrayed. But it must be agreed that even being mere witnesses to their spiritual struggles is a highly rewarding experience.

Herbert's poetry is more dramatic in its appeal while Nammazhvar's beauty is more in its poetic value. The seventeenth century had still the impact of the previous
century, when drama had dominated the literary scene. The attraction of drama was still quite strong. Herbert's poetry has all the qualities of drama innovatively woven into its texture. Each poem is a drama and every poetic device used has a role to play in it. Structure, form, rhyme and tone join hands with the themes and the curtain is raised for a mini drama. Herbert is a great manipulator. His command of tone and the presence of more than one voice adds to the dramatic effect. The arguments and colloquies, the abrupt transitions from one mood to another, the rhyme dancing attendance to Herbert the director of the drama these are Herbert's special hall marks. Such drama is absent in Nammazhvar, though he too uses several characters and tones, and dialogue. Such is Herbert's skill in manipulation, that at times even God is made to play a role and He enters the drama on cue. This only goes to show Herbert's sincere fervour and ardent wish to make his poems the dramatic messengers of his heart's dearest theme - God love. It could even be said that had not Herbert had his calling to devotional poetry he would even have made a popular dramatist. This cannot be said of Nammazhvar. Even Herbert's pattern poems and word games etc must have risen out of his weakness for the dramatic. In this context it must be pointed out that while God talks in Herbert's poetry - either as in the "dramatic" monologue sacrifice or utters
a word or a sentence or regular in dialogue as in some poems, God is silent in Nammazhvar's poetry.

Again while both poets have spiritual strength, in Herbert's case he is endowed with "Spiritual resilience". He is like a rubber ball that bounces back always. The harder it is hit the higher it rises. Similar is Herbert's mental attitude. He is never dejected for long. With joyous buoyancy springing from his faith in God's love he rises above despair and despondency. This is the moral which is derived from his poetry.

It must be mentioned here however that the true beauty of Nammazhvar's verses can never be fully extracted from the translations. However well done, a translation is but an attempt to catch a dew drop to appreciate it at close quarters. Yet if Nammazhvar's poetry has been so beautiful even in translations, one can only imagine the sheer gossamer fine artistry in the original.

Nammazhvar's poetry is replete with syntactical variations. It is quite descriptive with an abundance of metaphors, similes and paradoxes. Symbols from nature which are traditionally associated with religion are also used generously by him. In the matter of rhyme, Nammazhvar chooses to use it throughout. It is noteworthy that in his
case, the rhyme occurs at the beginning of the line, while in Herbert's case it occurs at the end of the line. Nammazhvar uses short metre when he advises and instructs his fellow-men but he does not whimsically play with metre or rhyme-scheme as Herbert does. In the innovative handling of form, structure, language and other poetic devices Herbert seems to emerge as a more skilled artist.

Both poets wrote songs in praise of God and it is a rare resemblance that their verses are sung in Churches and Vaishnava temples respectively.

Both poets praise and sing God's glory. While Herbert's relationship is paradoxically both constant and fluctuating, Nammazhvar, whose mood too dips and soars is clearer and more resonant in praising the glories and feats of Lord Narayana, and His boundless grace for an insignificant being like him.

Reviewing and analysing the concurring and differing aspects of Herbert's and Nammazhvar's poetry, one finds remarkable similarities in thematic concerns, as discussed above among other aspects. Both poets view God in different roles. But their perceptions slightly differ, for while Herbert whimsically sees God in varied, unusual roles Nammazhvar does not have this whimsicality. Yet, the relationship, whatever it is, in both poets allows a high
degree of intimacy between the devotee and His God. It is
this aspect that both poets represent in a moving manner.
It is this God-love that leads both poets to the last step
of surrender, total and comprehensive.

Herbert and Nammazhvar are both pilgrims travelling
onward in search of their Lord. They trudge along a similar
path, pass through familiar landscapes and are tossed about
by storms now and then. While Herbert strives for "perfect
freedom" by absolute submission to the will of God,
Nammazhvar desires the annihilation of the self and absolute
identification with the Lord. Whatever may be these minor
points of difference, it is proved very clearly that Herbert
and Nammazhvar share several common traits and the heady
fragrance of their poetry is very much alike.

The purpose of this comparative study will have its
objective fulfilled when the western literary world takes
congnisance of the great achievement of Nammazhvar, the
Tamil poet, as comparable to that of the metaphysical poet
Herbert.

In conclusion it can be said that it matters not
whether we subscribe to the religious beliefs of the poets,
though familiarity with their traditions will enrich our
reading. So unique is their poetry that it can be
interpreted and the experience therein relived by anyone who has loved, longed and felt emotional turmoil in any sphere of human activity. The poets take us on a tour across the landscapes of their mind and the caverns of their heart. Critics have offered several angles to view them from but what matters ultimately is our individual reading and enjoyment of their poetry. It would be profitable at this juncture to keep in mind what Vendler and Bennet have to say about religious poetry being enjoyed by a reader not sharing the beliefs of the poet. In fact if he does not share the beliefs he will be more flexible and open-minded and lesser will be the chances for him to see the poem coloured with his own subjective experiences. Good religious poetry can be discriminately appreciated by the non-believer as well. All that is needed is susceptibility to the poet's recreating powers. Undoubtedly Herbert and Nammmazhvar are wizards who recreate the cosmos in their soul, for us, with the magic wand of poetry. They set our mind voyaging through oceans of thoughts, now turbulent now tranquil... these thoughts convey us at some point to the very brinks of eternity and we are nearly sure that somewhere - we did catch a glimpse of that Loving God.