CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Poetry, like God, is omnipresent. It is not reserved to live in books of literature alone. The world in which we live is filled with poetry at every turn. The air we breathe has poetry in its tingling breath. There is poetry in the dancing waves, in the singing birds, in the nodding flowers. Every bit of sparkle, every damp or dark patch is poetry in its various shades. Poetry, in short, is a beautiful and delightful art that gives shape to shadows and breathes life into airy nothing. The truths of the world are new born in poetry and they become radiant when the fluorescent fingers of the poet pass over them.

Several particles of truth and emotions, some tender, some awe-inspiring, some holy and others thought-provoking, fly like little angels in the inner universe of the human mind, flapping about their wings. Caged in the mind, unable to manifest themselves bodily, they secretly enter the limbus of poetry and appear in the world. The variety of poetic manifestation can be limitless and there are some fields of poetry that are able to touch the heartstrings of men, making them feel deeply. All poetry demands of the reader a little bit of effervescence in his heart and sympathy and appreciation. Only then can it be rewarding to
him. While some feel that poetry itself is a divine art, springing from God's words as music, others feel that poets are prophets.

Poetry dwells high, ever poised for the diurnal actions of either soaring up into flights of fancy, to seek and try to catch the sunbeam amongst the clouds or dive deep down into the axis of the earth and unearth the treasures of hidden truth. It is natural that at some point of its flight or delving it finds a companion engaged in similar action and, thrilled, joins hands with the sweet companion, namely, religion. It is delightful to watch the pair clasping each other by the hand and flying together in their common search for truth.

But the mysterious relationship between this wandering pair cannot easily be assessed. Both seem to have a divine origin but they, who try to substantiate shadows, wish to keep their secret liaison vague and shadowy. For Santayana, "religion and poetry are identical in essence, and differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry" (qtd. in Buckley 6). When the two are so inextricably woven together, it would be difficult to define the exact periphery of "religious
poetry". According to Buckley, since the nineteenth century, "there has been a good deal of discussion about the religious nature of poetry; not about the nature of 'religious poetry'" which has had little effective issue since the seventeenth century (8).

Thus for A.D. Hope, poetry is "a way in which man carries out his side of the continual responsibility for maintaining the frame and order of the world, from the rising and setting of the stars, the procession of the seasons, the nature of beasts and plants and rivers and seas, the order of society and the behaviour of supernatural beings" (qtd. in Buckley 9). Seen in this light, it is an "act of celebration" involving "a sense of communion with those natures and participation in their processes. It is for the poet to feel himself to be not merely the mirror of nature or its commentator, but the voice of creation speaking for it and as part of it" (qtd. in Buckley 9). These hint at the notion of poetry as a religious act and the poet plays an active as well as a passive role. Not only is he a created being functioning at the heart of creation as an actor in a drama but at some point he is also the director, a demigod who creates anew.

Terms such as "religious", "devotional" and "sacred" have been used to refer to the type of poetry we are to deal
with in the present study and it is necessary to dwell on these at length.

While speaking of religious poetry, Buckley remarks that poetic "oeuvres" may exhibit a religious interest or impulse. It is the impulse to establish the sense of man's life and his human relationships as being connected with, or better, bonded with forces in the universe, which have their correlations in his own psychic life and so in at least some of his chief relationships, but which cannot be accounted for in terms of his psychic life, are in some sense superior to him, in some sense govern him, are manifest to him in terms of power and presence, and in some sense require of him adoration, worship and celebration. They may or may not involve the further concepts of a communal fall, personal sin, personal or communal salvation, and an eternal life lived either in personal or communal terms. (11).

The impulse will involve a sense of submission and responsibility and will have a relevance to one's identity and inner feelings.
In religious poetry, God is seen as a Power permeating everything, at the head of the entire cosmos. A devotional poet is one who seems to be "enclosing his experience in institutional terms and conventional symbols" (Buckley 12). As for the term "sacred" it is something opposed to "profane". Mircea Eliade comments that "the sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from 'natural' realities" (qtd. in Buckley 12). The manifestation of the sacred has been termed "hierophany". But paradoxically, though the sacred is opposed to the profane, it always needs objects which are part of our natural profane world through which to manifest itself. So, at this stage of manifestation, it is difficult to differentiate one from the other, for, out-of-the-world purity does need the help of the worldly to manifest itself. It is thus partly within this world and in part transcends it. It is into such a paradoxical situation that poets rush in for they are suspended between the terra firma and the cloudy world of make-believe and a similar limbo found in religious poetry challenges and inspires some breathtaking poetry.

Viewed in such contextual parameters, the immense God-love of George Herbert, the seventeenth century English metaphysical poet and Nammazhvar the ninth century Tamil Vaishnavite mystic, makes it difficult to bracket them
within specific categories as "religious", "devotional", "sacred" etc. They have however been classified as religious and devotional poets, a classification purely for literary convenience springing mainly in a subjective manner from the classifier. They could be called religious and devotional, for although for the most part they are devotional — deeply loving God and seeing Him in human relations, directly addressing Him and giving vent to their personal feelings — in places, they do see Him as a Power ruling the world and as the Force behind creation. Again, the definitions are purely derivational. Generally devotional poetry is personal in tone and establishes a specific relationship between the devotee and God. Therefore, while devotional poetry is religious in nature, all religious poetry need not suggest an intensely personal and devotional mode. In religious poetry God is viewed more as an abstract power, while in devotional poetry the Formless or nameless Being or divinity is concretized and is conceived of as playing an intensely human role. The human relationship is extended to the unknown so that what would otherwise have been an otherworldly experience could be better perceived.

In both Herbert and Nammazhvar we find love of God and the belief that He can prepare man's soul for the life
hereafter. They show the world as the preparatory ground for the salvation that is to come. Both poets are themselves the battleground for salvation. The term "battleground" leads us on to the drama of struggle raging in their soul. While on the one hand the goal seems to be personal salvation, on the other the "I" assumes a universal significance in a dramatic form. In short, the struggle adds profuse colour and interest to their poetry. The conflict seems to inject life-giving blood into the mere words of the poem and the drama of a spiritual seeker is brought alive before our eyes.

A look at the spiritual conflicts in these two God-centred poets makes one delve deeper and see how religion has been the stimulus for provoking varied emotions in the two poets divided by centuries, continents, cultures and languages. Their minds seem to have been inspired by similar sparks but the fireworks emitting from them have been multicoloured and multidimensional. One marvels at the artistry of Herbert and Nammazhvar, the almost similar responses evoked in them and their masterly handling of the subtle theme of God. An attempt is made at the outset not only to trace in their works the two different personalities, their varied backgrounds, influences and techniques but also to probe further and show how the two poets share the same mould of soul, and their hearts appear
to throb in unison. The attempt would succeed if it could convince one of the unity amidst the diversity.

The present thesis is an analogical study of George Herbert and Nammazhvar. In comparing these two poets, H.H. Remak's definition of comparative Literature as "the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country" has been taken as the parameter (qtd. in Weisstein 23).

In coming to the conclusions about their artistry and their personalities, in knowing about the man and the work, a detailed look at their individual lives, their physical backgrounds and the social and cultural milieu would be a good starting point.

George Herbert was born in 1593 in an ancient and aristocratic family in Montgomery. His father died before the boy was four and therefore Herbert grew under the care of his illustrious mother, Magdalen. He had his early education at home and went to Westminster School in his twelfth year. A brilliant student as he was, he obtained a King's Scholarship, which bears testimony to his general proficiency. Herbert matriculated from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1609. He graduated in 1612, became a Fellow of Trinity College in 1614, took his master's degree in 1616 and in 1618 he was appointed Reader in Rhetoric (White 149).
With his accomplishments Herbert had won a respectable position in academic circles and was naturally bent upon acquiring public distinction and power. But Herbert's mother, "a woman of quick intelligence, unusual courage, firmness of will and strong religious zeal", who had exercised a very great influence on Herbert from his early years, "coveted her son's devotion, not for herself, but for the Church. She had always intended George for the Church; soldiering was the family profession, but for this he had not the physique and he resigned himself, at first reluctantly, to an academic career which was to end in a country parsonage" (Bennett 50-51).

In his two sonnets sent to his mother while he was at Cambridge, he had assured her that he would dedicate his skill in language to the pursuit of sacred poetry and he never drew back. He composed many of his poems while at Cambridge. They circulated in manuscript and Herbert's reputation as a poet grew. He was already well-known as an intellectual and a wit. His high birth and brilliance of mind made it easy for him to achieve position and power at court. He became Public Orator and later, a Member of Parliament. It is not known for sure what vacillations, tensions and conflicts this ambitious man experienced, which prevented him from pursuing his courtly life vigorously. He was torn between worldly hopes and the call of holy orders,
making him realize that these cannot go together. When King James died in 1625, Herbert's hopes of public distinction also got diminished. He became disillusioned with the political world. The terrible plague of London must also have had some deep effect on him. For, as a result of all these, he resolved to take holy orders and in 1626, he was ordained deacon at Leighton Bromswold, Huntingdonshire.

For a person of his high birth, who had risen to such eminence, this was certainly a very decisive step. This also rendered any further civil advancement impossible for him. Herbert had been greatly influenced by Donne in taking this decision. He was suffering from ill-health at this time and he lived in retirement to regain his health and "to dispose his heart finally towards the obscure and modest life of a parish priest" (Brown 14). Even when he was at the university, he is said to have been wracked by despondency, passion and choler. Many poems in The Temple reflecting an inner conflict were written during these years.

To decide on accepting a parish was not easy for Herbert as he was oppressed by a sense of unworthiness. Always given to self-searching, he asked himself whether he was accepting priesthood out of a desire to serve the Lord or only as a means of escaping from the various problems
confronting him. So, finally when he decided to take holy orders, it was not a sudden conversion like that of Donne, since Herbert had been inclined towards a religious life from his early years. And it was a total submission to the will of God and his dedication to his calling was almost legendary. He moved over to Bemerton near Salisbury, where he lived for three years till he died in 1633 of consumption (Brown 15).

More than half the poems in The Temple were composed during this period. He used poetry not only to express his devotion but also to clarify and resolve the conflicts raging within his complex personality. Writing poetry was a solace and a joy to him. His vividly personal poems resulted from the tensions he suffered and resolved. Herbert's inward conflict which had lent such poignancy to the poems written in the period of indecision and inaction was quieted when Herbert went to Bemerton, and there are only occasional echoes of it" (Hutchinson xxxvii). Later poems like "The Flower", though they reveal the intensity of the struggle he has endured, show us that he has recovered from depression. We still come across conflicts in the poems he wrote at Bemerton but they are of a different nature. While his earlier conflicts resulted from his struggle with ambition, the later ones were due to his
rapidly failing health. He started doubting the usefulness of his vocation as a priest and gives expression to such feelings in poems like "The Crosse".

Herbert's devotion to his calling was so complete, once he accepted it, that he was referred to as "Holy Mr. Herbert" by his contemporaries. In his autobiography, Lord Herbert of Cherbury writes about his brother: "His life was most holy and exemplary; insomuch, that about Salisbury, where he lived, beneficed for many years, he was little less than sainted" (qtd. in Hutchinson xxxvi). Herbert was the model for the English parish priest. The pulpit was his joy and his throne. This once proud man, who was curt with his social inferiors, became accessible to the humblest, made up all differences with his parishioners, encouraged them in the habit of reading and befriended the poor easily. In short, Herbert represented his own ideal of the country parson: "Now love is his business and aime" (Works 284).

According to Bottrall, the best testimony to Herbert's holiness of life as a parish priest is his own book, A Priest to the Temple, which he wrote at Bemerton. In it, he resolved to set down the form and character of a true pastor so that he might have a mark to aim at. A true priest need not be a scholarly contemplative but a man who goes about doing good, like his Master. In church the priest's care is
to glorify God by a form of worship that is perfectly intelligible to all those taking part in it. His sermons therefore are simply-worded explanations, his catechizing constant and searching (Bottrall 37).

Herbert married Jane Danvers, a cousin of his step-father in 1628/9 and there was perfect affection between the two. Herbert himself does not mention the subject of his marriage in his writings. He mentions her in his will as "my deare Wife," but otherwise he does not refer to her directly, except to add her greetings in his letters to his friends. And he did not address love-poems to anyone other than his God.

Herbert's works include a few Latin and Greek poems. He wrote verses in Greek and Latin in memory of his mother and they were published during his life time. Just before his death, Herbert sent the manuscript of his English poems to his dear friend Nicholas Ferrar telling him that he would find in them a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that had passed between God and his soul before he learnt to subject his will to the will of the Lord. He wanted Ferrar to read the poems and publish them only if it would benefit some poor soul journeying along the spiritual path. Ferrar arranged for the publication of the volume, which was entitled The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations.
The first public edition was issued in 1633. The book was well received and in the next three hundred years several editions appeared. The most complete collection of Herbert's English and Latin works is *The Works of George Herbert* by Rev. F.E. Hutchinson, published in 1941.

Herbert's other important work *A Priest to the Temple* or *The Country Parson* was published only in 1652. It is a practical prose treatise in which Herbert explores the methods by which a parson could strengthen the hold of the established Church upon the hearts and minds of the people of rural England (Bottrall 68). Hutchinson's edition of Herbert's works includes *The Temple* and *A Priest to the Temple*.

While Herbert is only "Little less than sainted", Nammazhvar has been given a unique place among the twelve Azhvar saint-poets of Tamil Nadu. The Vaishnava tradition hails him as the foremost among the Azhvars. (The term azhvar literally means drowned in or maddened with God-love). The Vaishnavas believe that Vishvak-sena, the Archangel-chief, incarnated as Nammazhvar as desired by the Lord, in order to revive and emphasize the way of love to Vishnu. He is believed to intercede with God for saving the souls of men.
Historical, linguistic and literary research assigns to the Azhvars a period from the sixth to the ninth century AD. Nammazhvar was born in Tirukkurukur now called "Azhvar Tirunakari", in Tamil Nadu, in a peasant caste. While some claim that he lived from approximately AD 880 to 930, others assign to him the seventh or early eighth century (Ramanujan xi).

However, Sri Bhagavata prophesies the birth of saints in South India along the holy rivers such as the Kaveri, Vaigai and Tamaraparani. Men born in the Krita, Treta and Dwapara yugas wished to take birth in the Kali yuga* as they knew that in this age would be born great souls devoted to Vishnu. Accordingly Nammazhvar was born in the Kali age in 3102 BC or just 43 days after Lord Krishna left His mortal coil. Tradition has it that the twelve Azhvars lived roughly between 4200 and 2700 BC (Raghavan 1-2).

According to legends, Nammazhvar was born in answer to the penance and prayers of his parents and was named Maran. He had other names like Satakopan and Vakulabharanan but he was best known as Nammazhvar, meaning "our own

---

* A yuga is a cycle or world period running to thousands of years. According to Hindu mythology, the duration of the world is divided into four yugas namely Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. The world is now said to be passing through the Kali yuga.
It is said that as soon as the child was born, he was so absorbed in the contemplation of God that he would not eat or drink, the child never cried but smiled a heavenly smile. It was an extraordinary child maintaining wonderful silence and serenity. The distressed parents resigned themselves to the will of God and left the child in the temple of Lord Adinatha. The child took up residence under a tamarind tree in the temple, which stands even today, and sat there in a meditative posture for sixteen years.

Meanwhile, Madhurakavi, who later became a disciple of Nammazhvar, was on a tour of North India. One night he saw in the southern sky a supernaturally strange light and wanting to find out the mystery of this marvellous phenomenon, he followed the light for years till it led him to Kurukur, where at last it disappeared. This incident reminds one of the three wise men from the East who came to Jerusalem to see the Child Jesus.

Madhurakavi tried in vain to wake the wonder-child by making sounds. In order to test whether the figure was deaf and dumb, he put a question: "If in the womb of what is dead, a subtle thing be born, what doth it eat and where doth it rest?" Pat came the reply from Nammazhvar: "That it will eat and there it will rest" (Govindacharya 202).
Madhurakavi understood from the answer that the saint who grew without any material nourishment, had God Himself as his food; and it was God he lived in. Madhurakavi was transported into rapturous devotion for the saint, who broke his life-long silence thus; Madhurakavi adopted him as his master, then and there, thus becoming one of the twelve Azhvars himself, though with a difference. While all the Azhvars sang about God, Madhurakavi sang about the glory of his master, Nammazhvar alone. To him, Nammazhvar was a spiritual guide, capable of giving salvation.

Nammazhvar's works are the Tiruviruttam, containing 100 stanzas; the Tiruvasiriyam, 7 stanzas; the Peria Tiruvantati, 87 stanzas; and the Tiruvaymozhi, 1102 stanzas, all the four works being preserved in the Nalayira Divya Prabandham. Of these, Tiruvaymozhi is the best known work. These four works of Nammazhvar are said to contain the essence of the Rig, Yajur, Atharva and Sama vedas respectively.

The Tamil hymns of all the twelve Azhvars were gathered and arranged by Nathamuni (d. AD 920) for their recitation. According to tradition, he recited 12000 times the ten stanzas which Madhurakavi had composed in praise of Nammazhvar and both saints appeared to Nathamuni in a vision and gave him knowledge of all the four works of Nammazhvar.
According to certain accounts, all the works of all the Azhvars were received by him in this way. Nathamuni's compilation was called Nalayira Divya Prabandham ("The Four Thousand divine Compositions") shortened to Nalayiram ("Four Thousand") or Divya Prabandham ("Divine composition"). He, his grandson Yamuna (10th - 11th Century) and later, Ramanuja (11th - 12th century) were responsible for arranging for the recitation of these hymns in the Vishnu temples. Ramanuja made the chanting of the hymns from the Divya Prabandham an integral part of the daily temple ritual. The hymns of the Azhvars are sung in marriage ceremonies and in obsequies also. Such was the reverence that people accorded to Nammazhvar that, soon after his death, his images were installed in South Indian Vishnu temples and revered as the very feet of God. In these temples every devotee's head receives the touch of a special crown that represents Lord Vishnu's feet or Nammazhvar. It is named "Satakopan" after Nammazhvar.

Tiruviruttam is a poem of one hundred four-line stanzas, in which the Azhvar expresses the longing of his soul for union with God, under the figure of the love of a maid for her man. Tiruvasiriyam, the smallest among Nammazhvar's works, consists of seven verses. The poem talks about the nature of Reality, the means, the goal of human endeavour as well as the obstacles to the attainment
of that goal. Peria Tiruvantati, consisting of 87 verses, instructs the mind about the greatness of God and the need to worship Him. Tiruvaymozhi, the longest and most important work of Nammazhvar, consists of 1102 stanzas. It talks about the nature of God, the nature of the human soul, ways by which the human soul can reach God, the obstacles on the way and finally how the soul can overcome them and ascend to Vaikunta or Heaven.

Innumerable editions of the Azhvars' works have appeared and they have attracted many brilliant commentators. The Divya Prabandham, particularly the Tiruvaymozhi and the commentaries stand at the head of a philosophic genealogy of all Vaishnava ideas, culminating in Ramanuja's Visishtadvaita philosophy (Ramanujan xiv). Upto the time of Ramanuja, devotees learned the subtlety of meanings of Tiruvaymozhi only by word of mouth in the Guru-Sishya (master-disciple) tradition. The first recorded commentary on this work was by Tirukkurukai Piran Pillan, a disciple of Ramanuja and it was called Arayirappati (Six Thousand Patis, a "pati" consisting of 32 letters). More elaborate than this is Onpatinayirappati (Nine Thousand Patis) by Nanciyar. The third one by Azhakiya Manavala Desika is called Pannirayirappati (Twelve thousand patis). Irupattinalayirappati (Twenty Four Thousand Patis) is the
commentary by Periya Vacan Pillai. The most exhaustive commentary on Tiruvaymozhi is Muppattiarayirappati (Thirty-six thousand patis) by Vatakku Tiruviti Pillai. This is also known as Itu and is held in high esteem by the Vaishnavas.

The chief sources for the lives of Nammazhvar and the other Azhvars are Divyasuri Caritam in Sanskrit by Garudavahana (12th - 13th century) and Guruparampara Prabhavam, a prose work in Sanskritised Tamil by Pinpalakiya Perumal Jeeyar (13th century). A few other works such as Upadesa Ratna Malai by Manavala Mamuni and Desika Prabandham by Vedanta Desika give us an account of Nammazhvar's life.

It is quite interesting to note that both Buddha and Nammazhvar were born under the same constellation, Vaikasa Poornima. Both of them were actuated by infinite compassion towards suffering humanity. With Nammazhvar the ruling feeling was one of compassion, pity and sympathy towards all men wallowing in sin and suffering. While the Buddha was driven away from the worldly life by his sorrow, Nammazhvar's sorrow drove him to God and he cries out in agony to the Lord and prays to Him to release all men from false knowledge, impure conduct and filthy body (Ayyangar, D.R.5). Nammazhvar's ambition was not his own individual salvation but redemption and salvation of every soul, past and future. That was his ideal.
Both Herbert and Nammazhvar have chosen the medium of poetry to express their spiritual yearnings. The relationship between religious conviction and poetical expression of such conviction poses a few questions on the response of readers to religious poetry.

Religious poetry has generated consequentially an endless debate on whether it can be appreciated by the non-believer as well as the believer. Over the centuries, two entirely different positions have been taken by critics on the issue. While some hold the view that it is necessary for one to believe in those things in which the poet believed for a full appreciation of his work, others maintain that the poem is a separate entity once it is brought out by the poet and its navel strings must be severed and delinked from the poet for a free and unbiased reading. Before attempting to analyse this issue, it is necessary at this point to establish what good poetry is.

What is of importance in poetry is more the manner in which things are expressed rather than the matter, for a poem "expresses not the thing itself but the poet's feeling of it. One poet is moved by religious experience, another by human love, another by the song of a bird or the sight of a flower, yet another by a political idea. It does not matter to the reader whether he himself could have been
affected by that thing but only whether the poem affects him" (Bennett 137).

Helen Gardner expresses the view that very often in religious poetry one commits the blunder of considering a poem good for the experience encouched in it rather than for the way in which it is expressed. If the poem holds a mirror to our own religious experiences and convictions, we are tempted to label it good. In this case, it is the compatibility of thoughts, not the poem itself, that gains appreciation. On the other hand, one tends to condemn the poem if one does not share the poet's beliefs (131).

It is often argued that there is nothing in common between the religious poet and the reader who does not share the poet's beliefs. But such men forget the fact that poetry itself is composed of human needs and impulses, which are recurrent and therefore familiar to the reader. Joan Bennett illustrates how in Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" the imagery and rhythm are able to convey even to an unbeliever the impulse to flee in fear, the feeling of longing, the fear to think, the haste, hurry and so on. The unbeliever may not find in the poem a parallel to his own experience but the impulses impregnated in the poem are common enough to be intelligible though disguised in the garb of the poet's faith and belief (140). A religious
poem, according to this critic, does not convert the reader to the doctrine implied in it but in some sense it transfers its thought and feeling to the reader. All that is needed is "a background of common experience" and the poem "does the rest" (Bennett 141).

Conforming to the same view, Aurobindo writes: "A poem is a poem, not a doctrine. It expresses something in the poet's mind or his feeling". He adds that his appreciation of a poem is based on its "aesthetic standpoint". He declares that even "if a poet were to extol a false doctrine such as a malevolent God, creating a painful universe, still if it were a fine poem, I would enjoy and praise it...." (321).

It would be profitable here to take note of Vendler's opinion in this regard. About Herbert's poetry she remarks that it is "as valuable to those who share none of his religious beliefs as to those who share them all" (4). She takes a different stand from that of Coleridge and Eliot "both of whom believed that Christians made the best readers of Herbert" (4). Her argument is based on her concern which sees the workings of Herbert's mind and heart as the main subject of the poem rather than the religious beliefs expressed through them. Though she agrees that Herbert does use typical Christian ideas and symbols, she maintains that
his poetry "is not thereby limited in meaning to any dogmatic content, nor dependent for its aesthetic success on a reader's assent to any of the religious premises it embodies" (Vendler 4). She goes to the extent of declaring that Herbert may be better read by one not sharing his beliefs as only then an unbiased and discriminate assessment is possible (5).

Elizabeth Drew remarks that to enjoy poetry, "the only necessity is emotional sympathy and not intellectual assent" (240). It may be added that although one need not subscribe to the beliefs of the poet, a purely objective knowledge of the traditions and symbols used in a religious poem will equip the reader better for a richer reading of the poem.

Religion after all does not exist in a vacuum, divorced from life. Religious poets only try to lead us from the known to the unknown. Even if the destination proposed is strange, the path trudged along seems familiar. Thus religious poetry, like all poetry, does use the metaphors and similes from life. Therefore, there is no reason why the religious poet cannot communicate with the reader, believer or otherwise.

Both Herbert and Nammazhvar are gifted with such a felicity of expression that they are able to draw us into the circle of their religious experience where God and
religious truths shine with simple beauty. Their religious experiences, strange though they may be to many, can be appreciated when they are so aesthetically embedded in a poem. The analogy of how we enjoy a crime thriller may be a supporting point here. It does not mean that we either agree with the intentions of the murderer or have experienced such a situation personally. Similarly, our appreciation does not depend upon our belief in the poet's ideas. After all, religious poems do not try to "persuade us to believe anything". They embody in language "what it feels like" to believe in a religion (Drew 252).

Joan Bennett's views would be a fitting conclusion to this brief discussion on poetry and belief:

For a reader of devotional poetry as of any other kind, the most important qualification is responsiveness to the language and rhythms of poetry. He need not share the poet's beliefs, he may even be more responsive, because more flexible and unreserved, less tempted to foist his own experience on to the poem, if he does not: but he must be susceptible to the poet's power to recreate experience. (141).
Whatever mode is adopted in assessing poets like George Herbert and Nammazhvar, the final factor that emerges as the most distinguished one is the richness of the poetical as well as the religious experience that every discriminating reader derives from a study of these two poets, separated, however, by various physicalities such as region, language and social climate. The scholar who happens to stumble on the surprising similarities in thought and emotion in these two poets really enters a poetic gold mine despite those separating physicalities. The present study is intended to be an exploration of this gold mine in its various chambers. The chapters that follow take a close and loving look at the different aspects of the poetry of Herbert and Nammazhvar.

Chapter II traces the religious and literary traditions to which Herbert and Nammazhvar belonged. Religion was the chief concern during the seventeenth century and the poets were greatly influenced by the religious revolution and the bitter religious feuds of the sixteenth century. A brief discussion of this background and the influence of the medieval love poetry on the religious poetry of the seventeenth century is attempted next. An assessment of the effective handling of the myths and archetypes by these poets forms a part of this chapter.
The landscape of the bhakti movement is provided as the background against which Nammazhvar is viewed. The influence of the Cankam movement on Nammazhvar's poetry and his individual way of handling the conventions are then brought into focus. Thus, while placing the two poets in their respective ages, the chapter traces the impact of the religious movements and the literary traditions on them and their innovative use of these traditions in emerging as poets to be reckoned with.

A thematic study of the two poets is undertaken in Chapter III. Themes common to both poets such as Love, Grace, Sin, Surrender and Death have been analysed with illustrations. The several images of God as visualized by them have also been brought out. The chapter also deals with the two types of freedom envisaged by the two poets as their desired goal.

Chapter IV analyses to what extent Herbert and Nammazhvar can be called mystical poets and the various stages they pass through in their mystical journey. The various kinds of mysticism according to the Christian and the Hindu systems, and the various marks of identification are enumerated. The five stages of one's mystical journey according to Christian mystics namely the Awakening of the Self, Purgation, Illumination, Dark Night of the Soul and
the Unitive Way and the corresponding five stages in the Hindu Bhakti Mysticism namely Parabhakti, Parajnana, Paramabhakti, Viraha Bhakti and Prema Bhakti have been analysed. An attempt is made to fit the different stages of the poets' spiritual progression into these mystic states with the help of their poems.

In Chapter V, the general philosophy of life held by the poets, their attitudes, the values dear to them, their idea of man's role and his purpose of life have been dealt with. Their concept of the origins and goals of man, their ideas about the cosmic principle and their attitude to the important aspects of life - these are among the other issues this chapter deals with. In short, it is a chapter on the Weltanschauung of Herbert and Nammazhvar.

The formalistic aspects of the poetry of Herbert and Nammazhvar and their innovative handling of the techniques are the chief concern of Chapter VI. Various aspects of their poetry like the structure, style, form, rhyme, imagery, symbols, metaphors, paradoxes etc. have been analysed with examples from their poetry in an attempt to reveal their skilled craftsmanship in handling language as a tool.

Chapter VII serves as the conclusion, wherein an assessment of the two God-intoxicated poets will be made.