D. B. College Jaynagar Madhubani
L. N. Mithila University Darbhanga
Dept. of English
Dr Anandkunwar
Mob. No - 9199895259
Class - B.A. I
Paper - I
Topic - 'Metaphysical Poetry or Poets'
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The term "metaphysical poets" in its widest sense means poetry which is inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and of the role assigned to the human spirit in the general drama of existence. In other words, metaphysical poetry in its original sense is concerned with the nature of the ultimate Reality. In its widest sense, such poetry deals with metaphysics, that which is beyond physics or the material world. Lucretius Dante and Goethe are metaphysical poets in this sense.

The term 'metaphysical poets' is currently to John Donne and the school of Donne such as George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, henry vaughan, Richard crashaw and Traherne. This term was coined by Dr. Samuel Johnson in his Life of cowley, Long after the poets to whom we apply it were dead. Dr. Johnson used this term as a term of censure as a piece of literary slang. In his essay on The Metaphysical poets (1921) T. S. Eliot points out that this phrase has long done duty as a term of abuse, or as the label of a quaint and pleasant taste. Dr. Johnson, too borrowed this phrase from a witty sally from Dryden, who said of Donne that "He affects the metaphysics not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses".

John Donne (1573-1631) was the most original poet of the early seventeenth century. He broke away from the traditional pattern of Elizabethan love-Poetry based on Petrarch and Ronsard. we find something modern about Donne as a love-poet as and as a religious poet. His life was adventurous. He was a gallant and a courtier who eloped with his master's niece. After a Bohemian youth, he became at length the Dean of St. Paul's. His mind was restless and adventurous.

He was a learned poet, using learned scientific images for poetic purposes. He introduced a new critical temper in the love-lyric. He celebrates the various moods of a lover. Some of his love-poems begin in an abrupt, dramatic manner:-

(i) For God's sake, hold your tongue and let me love.

(ii) I wonder by my troth, what thou and I did, till we lov'd?

His love poetry is contained in his "Songs and Sonnets". One aspect of Donne's originality is that he gave to the short lyric something of the flexibility, the urgent and profound expressiveness that came to be developed in dramatic blank verse.

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It has been said that the Metaphysical poets were capable of the sensuous apprehension of thought. Donne's poetry is remarkable for its fusion of passionate feeling and logical argument. In such a song as "Sweetest love, I do not go....." the poet tries to console his mistress not to take their separation seriously. Donne has been described as the 'monarch of wit' in an elegy on his death by Carew. Indeed, for Donne the play of intellect tended to become an emotional experience. He is well-known for his use of the metaphysical conceit. Thus he compares a pair of lovers to the legs of a compass. His employment of intellectual concepts from scholastic philosophy led to the use of the term 'Metaphysical' to define his wit and his particular type of conceit. The term 'Metaphysical' was extended by Dr. Johnson to describe his followers and imitators. Donne certainly created a 'school' of poets. His most interesting followers were religious poets, who were influenced by his religious poetry. Written after the death of his wife, Donne's Holy Sonnets record his sense of guilt and also his earnest desire to surrender to God's grace.

George Herbert (1593-1633) compared has a simple and unimpeded [illegible] the central theme of Herbert's poetry

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