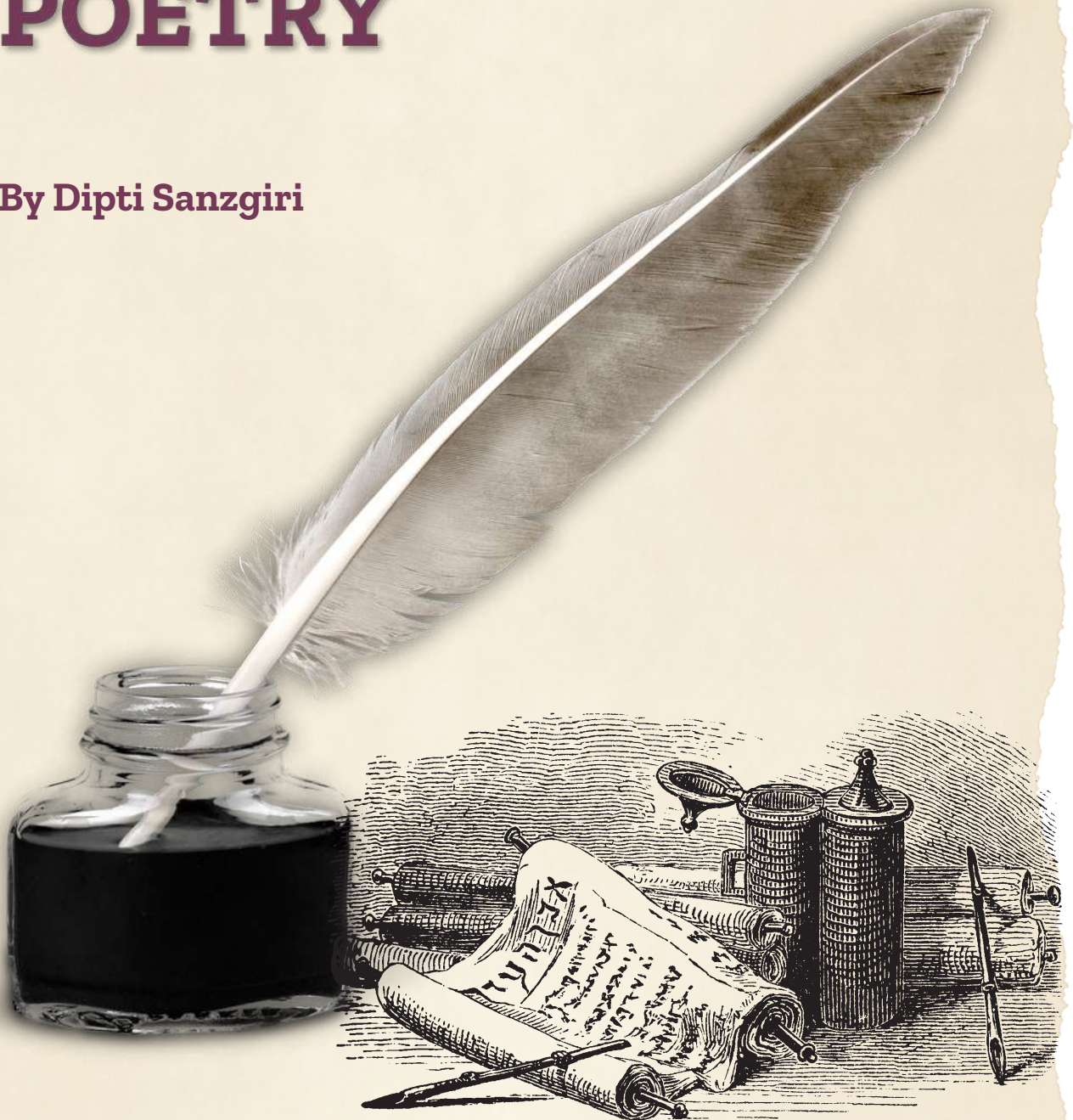


DISCOVERING LIFE'S BEAUTY THROUGH POETRY

By Dipti Sanzgiri



What is beauty? How do we define it? What happens to us when we encounter beauty?

It is an experience that is so profound that many poets have expressed in many beautiful ways.

My Heart Leaps Up

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die!

The Child is father of the Man;

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.



- William Wordsworth

Throughout the ages, the nature of Beauty has been very difficult to characterize. The dictionary defines beauty as that which *brings pleasure to the senses*. But that can be a highly subjective gauge: What one finds beautiful, another may perceive as ugly, thus affirming the proverb, "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder".

There are, however, some things that everyone who encounters them, experiences beauty in. Like the rainbow! Our hearts leap up at its sight!

According to ancient Greek philosophers, beauty is difficult to define because it is an expression of the divine in life. And something like rainbow elevates us towards divinity! Almost as if it is a bridge for us to cross over!

Plotinus, the Greek philosopher, said that the divine emanates; and in emanation, its expression is Beauty. Plato spoke of Goodness, Truth, Justice and Beauty as the 4 divine archetypes or the four sides of a pyramid, meeting at the peak which is the One, Unity. Beauty then seems to be one of the facets through which we get a glimpse of the divine.

And perhaps, the reason why we resonate with the beauty that resides in a rainbow is because it reminds us of beauty that resides within us. Plato's idea of Reminiscence supports this thesis by pointing to an eternal, unchangeable essence of who we truly are, encapsulated in a quote generally attributed to him, "Man you are God, but you forgot". When we encounter beauty, the experience touches a chord, awakening something hitherto hidden from us, that now slowly rises towards the surface of our consciousness, remaining there.

In his poem Daffodils, Wordsworth relives the uplifting memory of seeing a field of dancing daffodils:

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

*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.*

*Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

*The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:*

*A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:*

*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.*



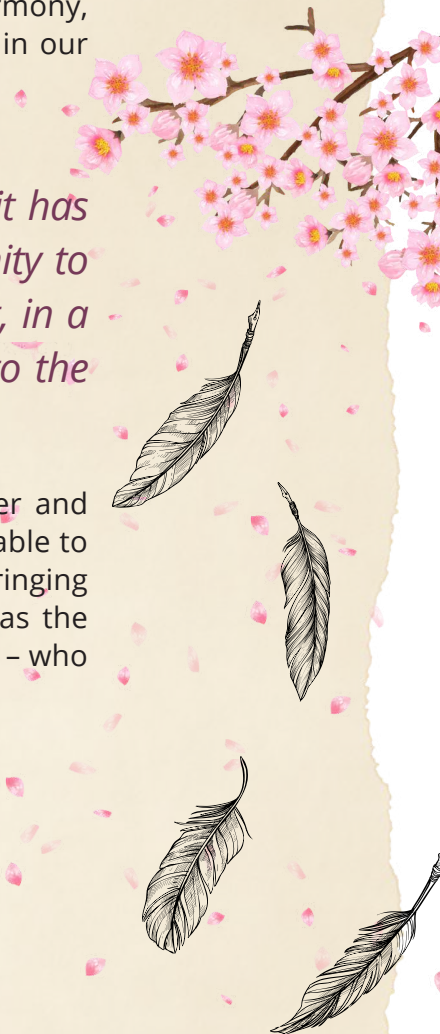
What makes this poetry so popular and why do so many admire its beauty? Perhaps because the poet describes beauty in words which create such powerful imagery that you feel as if you are in a field of daffodils. It captures a range of emotions, contemplation and connection with nature as one might experience. And there is rhythm in the meter of this poetry which gives a sense of harmony, constancy, and serenity. Such poetry remains in our heart as a memory, in our treasure chest that we can keep going back to.

What is it in the blooming of a flower that makes it universally beautiful? Maybe we perceive the blossoms' transition to their full potential thereby fulfilling their purpose, just by being who they are. They are not 'doing' anything, they just are, in full bloom. And in their being, we recognize the fundamental principles such as Harmony, Proportion, Order, Unity, and realise the need to bring them in our own lives.

As Tagore observes,

"..... a work of beauty has no question to answer; it has nothing to do, but to be. It reveals in its form a unity to which all that seems various in it is so related that, in a mysterious manner, it strikes sympathetic chords to the music of unity in our own being"

When we encounter something truly beautiful, all other inner and external distractions seem to cease bothering us, and we are able to just focus and concentrate on the beautiful object, bringing calmness and serenity within us. Often these moments, act as the conduit to bring forth the questions that reside deep within us – who am I? what is the purpose of my life?



Rumi offers us an answer:

There is a fountain inside you. Don't walk around with an empty bucket.

You have a channel into the ocean, yet you ask for water from a little pool.

Beg for the love expansion. Meditate only on THAT.

There is a basket of fresh bread on your head, yet you go door to door asking for crusts.

Knock on the inner door, no other.

Sloshing knee-deep in fresh river water, yet you keep asking for other people's water bags.

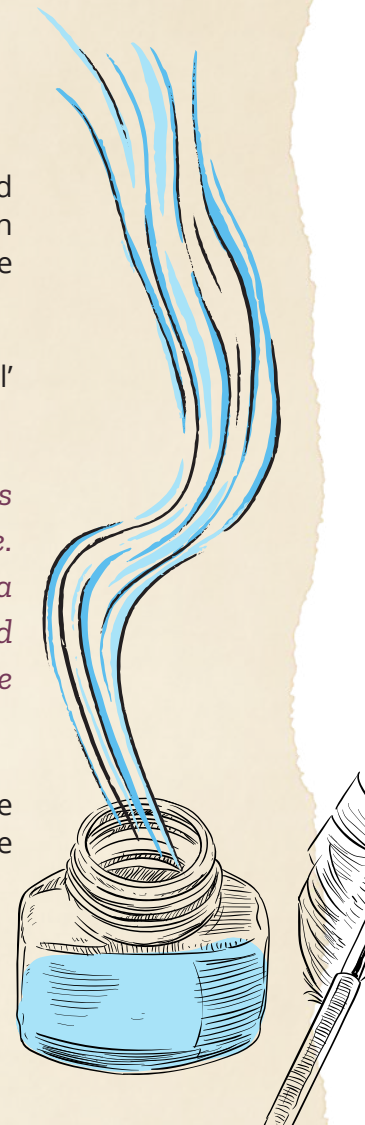
Water is everywhere around you, but you see only barriers that keep you from water.

Quite like the flower, to be able to bring beauty in our lives, we need to blossom and expand - elevate ourselves by removing from within us, barriers such as fears, jealousy, envy, anxiety. We will then be able to see clearly the beauty both inside and outside of us.

And in today's world, we can begin by cultivating basic 'civil' behaviour.

Tagore says, *"Civility is beauty of behaviour. It requires for its perfection patience, self- control, and an environment of leisure. For genuine courtesy is a creation, like pictures, like music. It is a harmonious blending of voice, gesture and movement, words and action, in which generosity of conduct is expressed. It reveals the man himself and has no ulterior purpose."*

In this, is a unification between our idea of civility, our choice to be civil, and our expression of civility; and beauty is in this unity. Can we create such a unity within us?





Maybe our purpose in life is to constantly make ourselves better – more generous, more loving, more accepting, less fearful and thereby bringing more beauty in our lives. Can we make our lives a poetry that keeps unfolding its beauty by our honing the art of living?

"Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine."

- Plotinus

