INTRODUCTION

John Donne, the leader of the metaphysical school of poetry, was, along with Ben Jonson, the main influence on the poetry of the first half of the seventeenth century. Carew's praise of Donne as the monarch of wit rightly points to his influence on contemporaries and the next generation. As a love and religious poet he stands among the few top ranking poets of English literature.

The present study deals with the imagery of Donne encompassing his entire poetic corpus. The dissertation does not aim at mere collection and tabulation of Donne's imagery in the traditional and formal manner. Nor does it follow the line given by Wells. Thus no attempt has been made to classify images as: the Decorative, the Sunken, the Violent, the Radical, the Intensive, the Expansive and the Exuberant. Similarly, no classification of images in categories like the Dynamic, the Static, the Free and Bound imagery is given. Images have been classified also as they reproduce a perception in whole or in part (viz. Living or Broken, Simple or Complex, Scientific copy images or Aesthetic); according to their dependence or inter-dependence (viz. Symbolic,
Emblematic or Allegorical); and also according to their communion with this or that sense (viz. Visual, Auditory, Olfactory, Gustatory, Tactile, Kinetic, Kinesthetic or Synaesthetic).¹ No such classification has been adopted here.

The method will be what Wellek has called the "Specifically literary" method which refers "a work of art to the values of its own time and of all the periods subsequent to its own" for "A work of art is both 'eternal' i.e. preserves a certain identity and 'historical' i.e., passes through a process of traceable development".²

Thus, the content rather than form shall be studied and analysed. The images have been grouped according to the fields from which they have been derived. No distinction has been drawn between the image and the conceit, for a conceit is, after all, an image. The images, then are interpreted with a view to showing what they reveal about the poet's mind and his ideas. Attempts have been made to relate the choice of imagery with the events of his life. However, the main


purpose of the study is to find out the sources and functions of Donne's imagery. No chronological order has been followed in the division of chapters or discussion of images as, barring a few exceptions, the actual dates of his poems are a matter of conjecture.

The work has been divided into five chapters. Chapter one defines imagery, tells its different sources and functions. It gives us a general idea about imagery which is essential to our purpose. Chapter two deals with the Erudite and Secular imagery of Donne. He was not only interested in the ancient and medieval learning and philosophy but was equally conversant with the advancements that were in the air at his time. He was both a medieval and modern. His interests in the social and domestic life show his firm realism. The third chapter discusses Love, Death and Disease imagery in Donne's poetry. His approach towards love was realistic. He found this physical world and human body full of corruption and decay. The next chapter deals with his Religious imagery. The problem of death and decay at the level of body and physical world can be solved through religion. The final chapter sums up what has been discussed in the previous chapters. It has been found that the images play a vital role
in the development of the theme of the poem and are most often its integral part. Being highly functional, they are employed to substantiate the argument. Donne explores the reality at the level of intellect, emotions, physical world and soul through his imagery.

The work aims at finding as to what extent are the images efficacious and apt, and to what extent do they exhibit, illustrate and enforce the total meaning as intended by the poet. Main points of the study are: what are the major sources of Donne's imagery? How and why are the images being used? And, what functions do they perform in the poems.