CHAPTER SIX

Imagery and Art

Imagery:

Poetic imagery is the artistic and effective use of language to help the reader get something of the feel and vision of the poet-artist at work. It helps to recreate the experience of the poet in the reader for a better appreciation of the poet's way of looking at a thing and presenting it. It may be defined as the attempt of the poet to compress into words - dynamic, vivid and suggestive - the emotional state through which he passes while viewing an object, contemplating a scene or presenting and analysing a situation. It is the use of appropriate words or figures of speech that would express effectively just what the poet sees and feels at a particular moment of inspiration.

Most of the critics have defined imagery as the representation, through language of sense experience. Fred B. Millet remarks: "Students of literature are indebted to modern psychology for its investigation of imagery, the element that produces the effect of vividness. Imagery is the result of the evocation, with varying degrees of
clarity, of mental reproductions, representations, or imitations of sense perceptions." According to R.H. Fogle:

To the psychologists and many critics imagery in poetry is the expression of sense experience, channelled through sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, though these channels are impressed upon the mind and set forth in verse in such a fashion as to recall as vividly and faithfully as possible the original sensation. In these terms a poetic image is the record of a single sensation. 

Imagery is present when two things are put together in order that their relationships may be seen, provided that in these relationships the element of similarity is present. "A simple image, then, is a verbal comparison, a figure of speech. A complex image may be a fusion of simple images, a poem, a scene from a play or even the play itself." Summing up the essence of imagery, Fogle further states:

3. Fogle, p. 22.
Imagery is the living principle of language, ... our speech advances and is constantly revivified by the discovery and expression of fresh analogies which increase our knowledge of ourselves and of the world ... Good imagery is richly evocative, various in the implication of its meaning.¹

The word 'image' most often suggests a mental picture, something seen in the mind's eye. It is a word picture that portrays a scene, describes a feeling, expresses a thought or rather a picture. According to C.Day Leavis: "In its simplest terms it is a picture made out of words",² "a word picture charged with emotion or passion",³ and "more or less sensuous picture in words, to same degree metaphorical, with an undertone of some human emotion in its context, but also charged with and releasing into the reader a special poetic emotion or passion."⁴ Caroline Spurgeon views the poetic image as the "description of an idea, which by comparison or analogy, stated or understood with something else, transmits to us through the emotions and associations it arouses, something of the wholeness, the depth and richness of the

³ Ibid., p. 20.
⁴ Ibid., p. 22.
way the writer views, conceives or has felt what he is telling us."

A poetic image, while aiming at a reflection of reality, does not merely reproduce or capture reality, it presents things from a certain perspective, a certain angle of vision and experience. It does not give us the mere fact of the thing, but an aspect of the fact, not so much the fact as the sense of fact, not so much a picture as a feeling about the picture. It need not present the full picture, but only the parts that catch the eye and the imagination of the poet. The poet may exaggerate a certain aspect for effect or may prune it for the same purpose. The poet being a man of heightened sensibility and feeling, can make much of a scene or a situation, can give it a colouring and a meaning, an atmosphere and a purpose that is beyond the capability of his more prosaic viewers.

Much of the aesthetic pleasure a poem provides is because of its imagery. The importance of imagery, however, consists not only in investing words with symbolic meanings and ideas, but through them evoking the

atmosphere and the background against which an idea is to be viewed and understood. Emphasizing the importance of imagery, W.E. Williams remarks:

Poetry, whose concern is to make pictures no less than to embody thought, needs imagery as fundamentally as it needs sound and rhythm. And its need for imagery is a more urgent one than that of prose, in the exact proportion by which poetry is a more compact and economical and transcendent form of expression than prose. Poetry must use pictures to save words.¹

As an important ingredient of poetry, imagery helps in the representation of feelings and the working of the mind through pictures that possess the power of evoking sensations and acting immediately upon the emotions. Elizabeth Drew is right when she remarks: "Indeed poetry without images would be an inert mass, for figurative language is an essential part of its imagery".² Robert Frost considers imagery and metaphor as the most important constituents of poetry: "There are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry, but the chiefest of these is that it is metaphor, saying one thing in terms of another."³

3. Ibid., p. 51.
Imagery is important in that it reveals the mind and heart of the poet, the place where images are conceived. Through imagery the whole personality of the poet is laid bare before us. Through it we know the way he looks at things, the way his mind functions as it grasps objects and ideas. Imagery is, thus, a valuable aid to the understanding of the poet. Caroline Spurgeon refers to this view when she remarks:

Like the man who under stress of emotions will show no sign of it in eye or face, but reveal it in same muscular tension, the poet unwillingly lays bare his own innermost likes and dislikes, observations and interests, associations of thought, attitudes of mind and beliefs, in and through images, the verbal pictures to illuminate something quite different in the speech and thought of his characters.¹

The importance of imagery lies in perceptive experience or even imaginative experience. Dark areas in our minds are suddenly illumined as by a flash of lightning when the significance of a comparison dawns on us, specially when the comparison is uncommon and yet startlingly appropriate. A poet conceives his images from different aspects of life and experiences. According to

¹ Spurgeon, p. 4.
P. Guerry: "So imagery is all important, and the true poet has at his disposal imagery belonging to many diverse fields of experience, and the greater the poet is, possibly the more fields in the affairs of life will be at his immediate disposal from which to draw his imagery."

Since imagery is the result of the evocations of mental, reproductions, representations, or imitations of sense perceptions, there are as many kinds of images as there are senses. In fact, there are more kinds than the ordinarily considered senses of sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound. For psychologists have demonstrated a sixth sense which they have named kinesthetic, a term which they apply to the sensations of tension or relaxation. Such images are evoked by words as "dive", "scrunch", "rest", or "dally". More broadly, a kinesthetic image may be that of any sensation arising from the tensed or relaxed muscles, joints, and tendons of the body. Thus sensuous imagery includes visual (sight), auditory (sound), tactile (touch), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), and kinesthetic (sensations of movement) qualities.

Visual images are more common than images pertaining to other senses. This is why earlier imagery was considered to be visual only. Though most images have faint visual associations adhering to them, there are images that are connected with other sense organs as well. If we analyse sight-images closely we can distinguish a number of sight-images, namely, colour, size, shape, position and movement, illustrated by such words as 'blue', 'mountain', 'cat', 'near' and 'dive'. The word 'dive' makes it clear that certain words may evoke not merely sight images but also distinct kinds of other images. From the word 'dive', for example, certain readers will get a visual image, while others a kinesthetic image. Sometimes an image is not confined to a single sense. It may be a mixture of several kinds of sensations. When Edith sitwell wrote: "The light is braying like an ass", or Swinburne said: "The voice is an odour that fades in a flame", they were bringing in one kind of sense perception to express one of another kind. This mixing up of different sensations for better expression of thought and feeling is called "synaesthesiæ".
Although every image partakes of a sensuous characteristic, it does not mean that any sensuous statement would automatically become an image. It must also have the qualities of emotion and passion. C.Day Leavis remarks: "Every image recreates not merely an object but an object in the context of that experience and thus an object is a part of relationship."¹

There is a difference in the images evoked by a word and the images involved in the associations aroused by that word. According to psychologists 'association' is the ability to bring up from experience and memory circumstances that are relevant to some word that refers to a person, place, object of experience. "Free association" suggests the unrestrained evocation of relevant or irrelevant remembered circumstances. In the analysis of imagery one has to distinguish between the images immediately evoked by the words and the images involved in the personal associations those words have for the reader. To allow excessive weight to one's 'private' associations with the poet's words is to run the risk of creating a poem quite distinct from the one the poet intends us to experience.

¹ C.D. Leavis, p. 17.
One has also to distinguish between the image suggested by a word when it stands alone and the image suggested by the word in a particular context. For instance, the image aroused by the word "red", when it is alone, will not be the same image as that which is aroused by the word when it is associated with the word "sunset". We are concerned primarily with the images that arise from a word in a particular context.

There is a definite pattern in the selection and use of images by a great poet. At any one moment of time many impressions and connections clog the mind of a poet. He, however, screens the mass of images that accumulate in his mind and chooses one that conveys most his shade of meaning, the one most appropriate for the task in hand. He sees that it works into the texture of the poem, so that there is a concord between image and theme, the image lighting the way for the theme and helping to reveal it to the writer and more to the reader.

It is essential that an image is not allowed to become too independent of the poem. Since an image is only a means to an end, it should not be allowed to take on more significance than can be given it in the context in which it is placed. It must not be permitted to pull away
the mind of the reader from the main theme or argument. It is to be seen that a definite pattern of the images is evolved and that the various images do not clash with one another. There should be maintained congruity and consistency of impression in them not only for the benefit of the reader but also for the purpose of the poet. A surfeit of imagery is as harmful as the lack of it makes a poem or even a prose composition dull and insipid reading.

An important point to bear in mind in regard to the creation of an image is that while a poet can create an image from any given object provided his imaginative response to it is strong enough, the image so created must be intelligible to the large body of readers. It should not be too exclusive, too esoteric for its meaning and relevance to be totally hid from the reader otherwise instead of illuminating, the image would do the work of making the meaning obscure, as is so often the case with the metaphysical poets.

The primary function of the image is to establish a kind of emotional bond between the poet and his reader. The image creates a kind of order out of emotional and intellectual confusion, since the world around us is a riot of objects and the world of thought not a little less
so. Some sort of selection and arrangement of parts, of
drawing connections and parallels, if even for purposes of
illustration, is necessary. The image, in a way, does the
work of the esemplastic imagination of Coleridge,
accepting, rejecting, moulding thoughts and feelings into
keeping with each other in a lucidly conceived design. It
establishes an emotional link between the poet and the
external world, the varied world of nature and the world
of sensation, letting the poet give play to fancy, letting
him draw infinite comparisons and equations.

Imagery in Sarojini's Poetry:

Sarojini Naidu is the most enchanting of Indian
English poets. She was not only endowed with a lively
imagination but also nourished on the romantic and
aesthetic traditions in English poetry. She therefore
delighted in sensuous and aesthetic perceptions rather
than thought and developed into one of the greatest of
lyricists and image-makers in the Indian English poetry.
Her Poetry reveals the mature note of conscious artistry
and a close parallel between modes of poetry, music and
painting. It unrolls before our eyes innumerable dazzling
visions and a rich tapestry and gorgeous and ornate
images. Not only her sense perceptions are quick and
alert, she has also a rare gift of communicating these
perceptions by vivid, picturesque, impressionistic and sensuous imagery. Her imagery is derived from the rich, colourful and varied scenes of nature around her as well as Indian myths, folklore and luxuriant images, Oriental sources. Commenting on the Indian Character of her V.S. Narvane remarks:

However, the strongest feature of Sarojini's poetry is her vivid imagery. Her most memorable lines are those in which she has presented beautiful and graphic pictures by fusing together several visual impressions. It should be stressed, once again, that these images can be appreciated only by those, who have retained their sensitivity to the subtle stimuli which come from the Indian environment, and who still have a feeling for aspects of Indian life now rarely experienced in our modern cities.¹

Sarojini's poetry presents a delightful feast of metaphors and similes. Metaphor most commonly plays a pivotal role in the creation of an image. It is the medium through which the poetic world is related to the real world. Through metaphor, the specialized view of things is revealed by the poet and relationships established, relationships that might never have been noticed by others since they are peculiarly a particular poet's. It is a particular experience. Since it is the business of the

¹ Naravane, p. 139.
poet to perceive such relationships, to show that there is a unity underlying and relating all phenomena, the image comes in handy for the purpose. The image faculty of a poet makes him discover or rediscover or even renovate old connections between objects and feelings. This seeing of relationships and similarities in things at first sight dissimilar is the essence of the poetic image, its basic nature so to say. The image is built up as a result of all past and present experience of the possessor of the image. According to T.S. Eliot "Only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood."¹

A distinctive feature of the poem "A Rajput Love Song" is a string of varied metaphors used in it. The beloved Parvati images her lover to be "a basil wreath", "a jewelled clasp of shining gold", "keora's soul", "a bright, vermilion tassel", "the scented fan", "a sandal lute", and "a silver lamp":

O love! were you a basil-wreath to twine among my tresses,
A jewelled clasp of shining gold to bind around my sleeve,

O Love! were you the "keora's soul that haunts my silken raiment,
A bright, vermillion tassel in the girdles that I weave;

(p. 80)

Amar Singh wishes, his beloved Parvati to be "the hooded hawk", "turban spray" or "floating heron-feather", and "an amulet of jade".

O Love! were you the hooded hawk upon my hand that flutters,
Its collar-band of gleaming bells atinkle as I ride
O Love! were you a turban-spray of floating heron-feather,
The radiant, swift, unconquered sword that swingeth at my side,
O Love! were you a shield against the arrows of my foemen,
An amulet of jade against the perils of the way.

(p. 81)

The "day" in this poem is described as a "wild stallion", "subtle bride of my mellifluous wooing", and "The silver-breasted moonbeam of desire".

Come, thou subtle bride of my mellifluous wooing,
Come, thou silver-breasted moonbeam of desire.

(p. 8)
In "Bangle Sellers", bangles are imagined to be "shining loads", "rainbow-tinted circles of light", and "lustrous tokens of radiant lives":

Bangle-sellers are we who bear
Our shining loads to the temple fair....
Who will buy these delicate, bright
Rainbow-tinted circles of light?
Lustrous token of radiant lives,
For happy daughters and happy wives.

(p. 108)

The poems "In Praise of Gulmohar Blossoms" and "Golden Cassia" contains a series of metaphors. "In Praise of Gulmohar Blossoms", the lovely hue of gulmohur blossoms is linked to "the glimmering red of a bridal role" or "rich red of a wild bird's wing"; and gulmohur blossoms are called "gorgeous boon of the spring":

What can rival your lovely hue
O Gorgeous boon of the spring?
The glimmering red of a bridal robe,
Rich red of a wild bird's wing?
Or the mystic blaze of the gem that burns
On the brow of a serpent king?

(p. 94)

In the second stanza, "The valiant joy" of the gulmohur blossoms' "dazzling, fugitive sheen" is similar to:
The limpid clouds of the lustrous dawn
That colour the ocean's mien?
Or the blood that poured from a thousand breasts
To succour a Rajput queen?

(p. 94)

"The radiant pride" of gulmohur blossoms" "victorious fire" is:

The flame of hope or the flame of hate,
Quick flame of my heart's desire?
Or the rapturous light leaps to heaven
From a true wife's funeral pyre?

(p. 94)

In "Golden Cassia", the golden cassias are
"fragments of some fallen stars", or "golden pitchers of fairy wine", or "glimmering tears that some fair bride shed remembering her lost maidenhood", or "glimmering ghosts of a bygone dream":

But I sometimes think that perchance you are
Fragments of some new-fallen star;
Or golden lamps for a fairy shrine,
Or golden pitchers for fairy wine.

Perchance you are, O frail and sweet!
Bright anklet-bells from the wild spring's feet,

Or the gleaming tears that some fair bride shed
Remembering her lost maidenhood.
But now, in the memoried dusk you seem
The glimmering ghosts of a bygone dream.

The poem "Farewell" is a string of metaphors for the poet's songs:

Bright shower of lambent butterflies,
Soft cloud of murmuring bees,
O fragile storm of sighing leaves
A drift upon the breeze!

Wild birds with eager wings outspread
To seek an alien sky,
Sweet comrades of a lyric spring
My little songs, good-bye!

In the poet "Past and Future", the past is a "mountain cell":

Where love, apart, old hermit-memories dwell
In consecrated calm, forgotten yet
Of the keen heart that hastens to forget
Old longings in fulfilling new desires.

Most of Sarojini Naidu's verses are embellished with varied types of beautiful similes which present scintillating images and make her poetry revealing. A simile is an expanded metaphor. It makes comparison between two dissimilar objects more explicit by the use of
such words as "as", "like", to show that comparison is being made. Like a metaphor simile is also used to focus on unfamiliar qualities or to give familiar qualities unusual vividness and stress. The important point is not that the two things being compared resemble each other closely in certain qualities for which they are compared, but that the feeling that is normally associated with one can be transferred to the other.

In the poem "Past and Future", The Soul is likened to a bridegroom and his future like a "fated bride", hidden behind the veil:

And now the Soul stands in a vague, intense Expectancy and anguish of suspense, On the dim chamber-threshold... lo! he sees Like a strange, fated bride as yet unknown, His future shrinking there alone, Beneath her marriage-veil of mysteries.

The poem "Alabastor" is an extended simile comparing the poet's heart with "alabastor box":

Like this alabastor box whose art Is frail as a cassia-flower, is my heart, Carven with delicate dreams and wrought with many a subtle and exquisite thought.

Therein I treasure the spice and scent Of rich and passionate memories blent
Like odours of cinnamon, sandal and clove,
Of song and sorrow and life and love.
(p. 24)

In "The Palanquin-Bearers", the maiden in the palanquin "sways like a flower"; "skins like a bird"; "floats like a laugh"; "hangs like a star"; "springs like a beam on the brow of the tide"; "falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride". The Palanquin-bearers bear her along in their palanquin "like a pearl on a string" (p. 3). In the poem "Indian Weavers", the robes of a new-born child are "blue as the wing of a halcyon bird", the marriage-veils of a queen" like the plumes of a peacock" and a dead man's funeral shroud "white as a feather and white as a cloud" (p. 5). In "Coromandel Fishers", there is an apt and beautiful simile describing the wind lying asleep in the arms of the dawn "like a child that has cried all night":

Rise brothers, rise, the wakening shies pray to the morning light,
The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a child that has cried all night.
(p. 6)

"Indian Love-song" contains a string of similes. In the first stanza, the lady-love describes her deep feelings of love for her lover:
Like a serpent to the calling voice of flutes,
Glides my heart into thy fingers, O my love!
Where the might-wind, like a lover, leans above
His jasmine-gardens and sirisha-bowers;
And on ripe boughs of many-coloured fruits
Bright parrots cluster like vermilion flowers.

The second stanza deals with the feelings of the lover for
his beloved:

Like the perfume in the petals of a rose,
Hides thy heart within my bosom, O my Love!
Like a garland, like a jewel, like a dove
That hangs its nest in the Ashoka-tree.
Lie still, O love, until the morning sows
Her tents of gold on fields of ivory.

In "Humayun to Zubeida", the beloved haunts the
lover's waking "like a dream", his slumber "like a moon,
pervades him" like a musky scent and possesses him "like a
tune" (p. 22). The poem "Autumn Song" has a beautiful
simile describing the sunset:

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow,
The sunset hangs on a cloud:

and another describing the dreams of the poet's weary
heart:

My heart is weary and sad and alone,
For its dreams like the fluttering leaves have gone.
In "The Song of Princess Zub-un-Nisan. In praise of Her Own Beauty"#, the roses turn pale with envy on seeing the beauty of the princess's face,

And from their pierced hearts rich with pain
Send forth their fragrance like a wail.
(p. 38)

In "Indian Dancers", the wild and entrancing strain of keen music cleave the stars "like a wail of desire", and the glittering garments of purple of Indian dancers burn "like tremulous dawn in the quivering air" (p. 39). In "The Dance of Love the strains of music are described with the help of a series of appropriate similes:

The music sighs and slumbers,
   It stirs and sleeps again...
Hush, it wakes and weeps and murmurs.
   Like a woman's heart in pain;
Now it laughs and calls and coaxes,
   Like a lover in the might.
(p. 73)

The dancers sway and shine "Like bright and windbloom lilies" (p. 73).

In "The Queen's Rival" the seven new queens shine round Queen Gulnar:

Like seven soft gems on a silken thread,
   Like seven fair lamps in a royal tower,
Like seven bright petals of Beauty's flower.
(pp. 46-47)
The poem "The Pardah Nashin" describes the life of a pardah nashin through following appropriate similes:

Her life is a revolving dream
Of languid and sequestered ease;
Her girdles and her fillets gleam
Like changing fires an sunset seas;
Her raiment is like morning mist,
Shot opal, gold and amethyst.

From thieving light of eyes impure,
From coveting sun or wind's caress,
Her days are guarded and secure
Behind her carven lattices,
Like jewels in a turbaned crest,
Like secrets in a lover's breast.

(p. 53)

There is such a surfeit of similes and metaphors in Sarojini's poetry as annoys some of the critics. Lotika Basu comments severely on the excessive use of similes and metaphors in her verses:

One gets rather tired of the brilliant metaphors and similes. They introduce an element of artificiality in her poems. It makes them as exotics that wither and die when compared to the natural simplicity and bare beauty of the work of the greatest artists. A few of her poems seem to be written only for the sake of her metaphors and similes.¹

¹ Quoted by D. Prashad, p. 166.
The rich use of similes and metaphors, however, reveals the great potentiality of Sarojini's handling them as pictorical blocks of imagistic perception and using them for organizing her poetic emotions.

Sarojini Naidu has also made a very impressive use of imagery pertaining to different sense perceptions. There is a rich tapestry of visual and kinetic images combined together. In the poem "Nightfall in the city of Hyderabad", we get the visual images of bright colours:

See how the speckled sky burns like a pigeon's throat,
Jewelled with embers of opal and peridote.

See the white river that flashes and scintillates,
Curved like a tusk from the mouth of the city-gates.

(p. 55)

Equally impressive is the image of night descending over the city bridge:

Over the city bridge Night comes majestical
Borne like a queen to a sumptuous festival.

(p. 56)

In "Curved" and "borne", we have kinetic images.

In "The Indian Gipsy" Sarojini conveys the fall of night through animal imagery:
Ere the quick night upon her flock descends
Like a black panther from the caves of sleep.

"On Juhu Sands" presents an image of moon shining
on the waters of sea:

On the sea's breast the young moonrise
Falls like a golden rose.

In "Palanquin-Bearers", Sarojini makes use of visual and
kinetic images to describe the scene of a maiden being
borne in a Palanquin:

Softly, O softly we bear her along,
She hangs like a star in the dww of our song;
She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide,
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.

The words "hangs", "springs", and "falls" have the
association of kinetic images.

"Coromandel Fishers" describes the scene of the
fishers rowing their boats on the blue waters of the sea:

But sweeter, O brothers, the kiss of the spray and
the dance of the wild foam's glee:
Row, brothers, row to the blue of the verge, where
the low sky mates with the sea.
There are beautiful visual images derived from the "bridal robe", "wild bird's wing", "ocean's mien" and "funeral pyre" of a true wife in the poem "In Praise of Gulmohur Blossoms":

The glimmering red of a bridal robe,
Rich red of a wild bird's wing?

Or,

The limpid clouds of the lustrous dawn
That colour the ocean's mien?

Or,

Or the rapturous light leaps to heaven
From a true wife's funeral pyre?

"Indian Love Song" has a vivid colour imagery in the description of the scene of morning:

Lie still, O love, until the morning sows
Her tents of gold on fields of ivory.

There is a kinetic image in "sows". "Cradle-Song" describes how

The wild fire-flies
Dance through the fairy neem;

In "A Song in Spring" fireflies are shown weaving aerial dances:
Fireflies weaving aerial dances
In fragile rhythms of flickering gold.

(p. 88)

These lines have both visual and kinetic images.
In "The Joy of the Springtime" we see "The dance of the dew on the wings of a moonbeam". (p. 89)

In "Leili" (a Persian word for the night), Sarojini presents an impressive visual imagery drawn from the religious source. Night is personified and enshrined in the forest temple. The entire forest makes a temple where winds are seen dancing and swooning at the holy feet of night. The atmosphere created lends a sublime holiness to the night. The highly praised image of the moon shining as "a caste-mark" on the brow of heaven is a rare achievement in itself:

A caste-mark on the azure brows of Heaven,
The golden moon burns a sacred, solemn, bright, The winds are dancing in the forest-temple, And swooning at the holy feet of Night, Hush! in the silence mystic voices sing And make the gods their license-offering.

(p. 31)

There is an auditory image in the line "Hush in the silence mystic voices sing".

Equally impressive is the image of India as "a bride high-mated with the spheres":

And, like a bride high-mated with the spheres,
Beget, new glories from thine ageless womb.

(p. 58)

Besides these visual images we get a rich feast of auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile images in Sarojini's verses. There are auditory images in the lines of "Coromandel Fishers":

Rise, brothers, rise, the wakening skies pray to the morning light.

(p. 6)

Or, of "The Snake-Charmer":

Whither dost thou hide from the magic of my flute-call?

Or,

Whither dost thou loiter, by what murmuring hollows.

(p. 8)

Or or "Village Song":

Far sweeter sound the forest-notes where forest-streams are falling.

(p. 12)

Or or "Indian Love Song":

Like a serpent to the calling voices of flutes", Glides my heart into thy fingers, O my love!

(p. 16)
Or "Indian Dancers":

0 wild and entrancing the strain of keen music that cleaveth the stars like a wail of desire.

Or

And exquisite, subtle and slow are the tinkle and tread of their rhythmical, slumber-soft feet.

(p. 39)

Or of "The Dance of Love":

The music sighs and slumbers,
It stirs and sleeps again ... Hush, it wakes and weeps and murmurs Like a woman's heart in pain; Now it laughs and calls and coaxes, Like a lover in the night, Now it pants with sudden longing, Now it sobs with spent delight.

(p. 73)

Or of "June Sunset":

An Ox-cart stumbles upon the rocks, And a wistful music pursues the breeze From a shepherd's pipe as he gathers his flocks Under the pipal-trees. And a young Banjara driving her cattle Lifts up her voice as she glitters by In an ancient ballad of love and battle Set to the beat of a mystic tune, And the faint stars gleam in the eastern sky To herald a rising moon.

(pp. 192-193)
Or of "A Persian Lute Song":

I pray you singing girls refrain
From music and be mute,
O laughing flute-player restrain
The rapture of your flute,
And watch with me, not yet hath rung
The golden hour, not yet
Comes he for whom the lutes are strung
For whom the feast is set.

(The Feather of the Dawn, p. 11)

The poem "Street Cries" has impressive auditory images in "when dawn's first cymbals beat upon the sky", or "And in dim shelters koels hush their notes", and "When lutes are strung and fragrant torches lit" (p. 57).

The olfactory images are found in "the scent of mango grove" ("Coromandel Fishers", p. 6); "Like the perfume in the petals of a rose" ("Indian Love-Song", p. 16); "In what moonlight-tangled meshes of perfume" ("The Snake-Charmer", p. 8); "Pervade me like a musky scent" ("Humayun to Zubeida", p. 22); "Like odours of cinnamon, sandal and clove" ("Alabaster", p. 24); "The Winds are drunk with the odorous breath/Of henna, sarisha, and neem" ("In a Time of Flowers", p. 92); and:

O radiant blossoms that fling
Your rich, voluptuous, magical perfume
To ravish the winds of spring.

("Champak Blossoms", p. 98)
There are tactile images of the sense of touch in "a basil-wreath to twine among my tresses", or "a jewelled clasp of shining gold to bind around my sleeve", or "the hooded hawk upon my hand that flutters" ("A Rajput Love Song", p. 7); "That hath foregone the kisses of the spring" ("Vasant Panchami", p. 91); "You have crushed my life like broken grain", or "trod into dust" my flowering soul ("Invincible", p. 174); "crushed between my lips the burning petals of rose" ("Ecstasy", p. 212); "Kiss the shadow of love's passing feet" ("The Offering", p. 211); "With your foot-prints, on my breast" ("The Feast", p. 212); "My heart be your tent and your pillow of rest/And a place of repose for your feet" ("The Lute-Song", p. 214); and

Forgive me the sin of my hands...
Perchance they were bold over much
In their tremulous longing to touch
Your beautiful flesh, to caress,
To Clasp you, O Love, and to bless
With gifts as uncounted as sands —
O pardon the sin of my hand!

("The Sins of Love", p. 215)

There are sensuous qustatory images in "Drink deep of the hush of the hyacinth heavens that glimm around them in fountains of light", or "The poppies of lips that are opiate-sweet" ("Indian Dancers", p. 39); "the faint,
thirsting blood in languid throats craves liquid succour from the cruel heat", or "lovers sit drinking together of life's poignant sweet ("Street Cries", p. 57); "golden pitchers for fairywine" ("Golden Cassia", p. 96); "rich fruit of all Time's harvesting2 ("The Vision of Love", p. 217); and

But sweeter madness drives my soul to swift and sweeter doom.

For I have drunk the deep, delivious nectar of Your breath!

("Ecstasy", p. 213)

All these images reveal Sarojini's high poetic sensibility and imagination and her delight in the objects of beauty.

**Symbolism in Sarojini:**

Symbolism in Sarojini's poetry is not only the product of her rare creative imagination but also the result of the influence of her great admirer Arthur Symons who was associated with the Symbolist Movement in the English poetry of the eighteen ninetees and also wrote his epoch-making critical book.

**The Symbolist Movement in Literature:** The symbols employed by her are both traditional and personal. Though most of her symbols are conventional or stock symbols, she, at
times, uses a set of private symbols to express her personal vision. Her personal symbols are, however, not obscure like those of Blake and Yeats.

Some of Sarojini's poems—"The Lotus", "Pearl", "Indian Weavers", and "The Flute Player of Brindaban"—are completely symbolic. The whole series of poems, entitled "The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love", is symbolical. Temple stands for a symbol of both human and spiritual love. Its three parts, "The Gate of Delight", "The Path of Tears", and "The Sanctuary", Hindu structure. The Torana (entrance way), prodakshina-patha (Circumambulatory passage way) and the garbha-griha (inner sanctuary). The twenty four poems, eight in each part, symbolize twenty four pillars or arches of a temple. The pilgrim lover reaches the sanctuary or attains the Cosmic Centre by trials and suffering.

In the poem "The Lotus", the lotus stands for a mystic lotus symbolizing Mahatma Gandhi whose name nowhere appears in the body of the poem. The words "To M.K. Gandhi" are there only in a parenthesis added to the title. The symbol runs through the poem and helps the poet to elevate the Mahatma's character to a supreme height. The octave of the sonnet is an objective description of the lotus, but with such symbolic over-tones as we could
find in it a description of Mahatma Gandhi as well. Every epithet helps us to understand the subject - both the lotus and Gandhi -, and appropriately suggests the implied mythology and history: "sacred and sublime" (we know how lotus is associated with the sacred gods, Lord Vishnu, Lakshmi and Brahma); "grace inviolate" (unaffected by worldly temptations and fears); "transient storms" (great difficulties and obstacles faced by Gandhi); "Deep-rooted in the waters of the time" (The mythological implication is the first waters out of which creation sprang up; the historical implication is that Gandhi is deep-rooted in the cultural wisdom and heritage of the country); "a far-off clime" (a foreign country, Britain, which would loose its hordes on the Mahatma). While "The ageless beauty born of Brahma's breath" suggests that the lotus is Brahma's flower, "Coeval with the Lords of Life and Death" conveys the idea of the lotus being born and coexistent with Brahma and Vishnu and Gandhi with the divine wisdom. Thus the ancient symbol of myriad petalled lotus associated with Brahma, Vishnu, Lakshmi and Buddha, has been very imaginatively employed for highlighting Mahatma Gandhi's purity and spiritual powers.

In "The Pearl", the pearl symbolizes a human being whose real talents shine and scatter their brilliance only
when they were exposed to the wide world. Like a pearl which holds the bright colours of the sun, shines in its full glory only when it comes out of its shell, similarly an individual acquires reputation and recognition only when he rises above his narrow, private, particular self and identifies himself with the wider and richer life of the family, the community, the State and the common brotherhood of humanity. Therefore it is nothing but the barren pride.

Of cold, unfruitful freedom that belies
The inmost secret of fine liberty.
That makes the pearl
Return unblest into the primal sea.

(p. 175)

In "Indian Weavers", its three stanzas describing the three hours of a day in the life of the Indian weaver suggest symbolically the journey of life from birth to death. The gay and colourful robes which the weavers weave at break of day for a new born child symbolise the first stage of man's life which is full of hopes and promises. The weavers here stand for Brahma, the god of birth or creation, weaving the yarn of life: "Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild/We weave the robes of a new born child" (p. 4). "Blue stands for innocence and "halcyon", a bird which breeds on the flowing water, stands as the symbol
of creation. The second stanza suggests symbolically the gaiety and adventure associated with youth. The weavers weaving "marriage veils" at fall of night, stand for Vishnu, the god of magnificence of life. The colourful peacock plumes suggest the colour and joy one experiences in youth. The third stanza represents symbolically the end of life's journey. The weavers who weave in "The moonlight chill" a "dead man's funeral shroud", stand for Shiva, the god of destruction. The "moonlight chill" and "white" colour suggest appropriately death.

"The Flute Player of Brindaban" symbolizes the Infinite that calls every human soul and "turns every human heart away from the mortal cares and attachments" (p. 161). The soul craves for the complete absorption in the Infinite. Radha symbolizing human soul is restless to follow the "magical call" of Lord Krishna's flute:

Foresaking all;
The earthly loves and worldly lures
That held my life in thrall,
And follow, follow, answering
The magic flute-call.

(p. 161)

Several of Sarojini's other poems are replete with symbolic images. In "The Gipsy Girl", the gipsy acquires
a symbolic significance towards the close of the poem, because of her hidden links with times immemorial:

Time's river winds foaming centuries
In changing, swift, irrevocable course
To far off and incalculable seas;
She is twin-born with primal mysteries,
And drinks of life at Time's forgotten source.

(p. 50)

The serpents in "The Festival of Serpents", being "the seers and symbols of the ancient silence", fill our hearts with a sense of mystery. They acquire symbolic significance which lends the poem a strange weird beauty:

Swift are ye as streams and soundless as the dewfall,
Subtle as the lightning and splendid as the sun;
Seers are ye and symbols of the ancient silence,
Where life and death and sorrow and ecstasy are one,

(p. 111)

The broken wing in the poem "The Broken Wing", symbolizes, the failing poetic fervour of the poet. The poem, however, reveals her unfaltering courage and determination in the face of great sufferings. She may lose bodily strength but her spirit is undaunted:

Behold! I rise to meet the destined spring
And scale the stars upon my broken wing!

(p. 145)
The winds in Sarojini's nature poems often acquire symbolic significance. In "A Song in Spring", she visualizes the winds as types of the wise, experienced travellers who have accumulated a lot of worldly wisdom. Since they wander everywhere, they know the mystery of love, life and death. The west winds have:

Spied on Love's old and changeless secret,
And the changing sorrow of human souls.
They have tarried with Death in her parleying placces,
And issued the word of her high decree,
Their wings have winnowed the garnered sunlight,
Their lips have tasted the purple sea.

(p. 88)

In "Leili", the "mystic voices" signing and "the winds dancing and swooning at the holy feet of Night" have symbolic overtones:

The winds are dancing in the forest-temple,
And swooning at the holy feet of Night,
Hush! in the silence mystic voices sing
And make the gods their incense-offering.

(p. 31)

Cousins who is highly impressed by the symbolism of winds as devotees, remarks: "The symbolism in Mrs. Naidu's poem of the dancing winds as devotees in the temple of nature must surely stand among the fine things of literature". ¹

¹ Cousins, p. 265.
Sarojini's images - sensuous and symbolic - reveal that she like a great poet is to a very great extent an explorer in realms of thought and feeling hitherto untrodden. By some sublime power within herself she sees through flashes of imaginative insight "into the life of things", and is able to show their relation to the grand principles which control all thought and being. She extends the bounds of her own experience and then ours through the fusing alembic of our common emotional nature, until we also see into the life of things.

**Sarojini's Art, Diction and Versification:**

Sarojini is a keenly sensitive poet in the Romantic tradition. For her poetry is purely a "musical thought", the concrete and artistic expression of the human mind in emotional and rhythmic language. She is a lyric poet *par excellence* among the Indian English poets. All of her verses have rare emotional intensity being "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" - of joy, sorrow, despair, fervour and exultation. Like a true lyricist she uses a diction which has a magical and haunting cadence and loveliness. Some of her verses are in the form of songs with rich verbal melody and can easily be set to music. She attains a lyrical perfection
because in giving expression to her deepest feelings, she strikes a chord which sets all our hearts vibrating.

Sarojini has made use of almost all lyric form—sonnet, ode, elegy and folk poems. Her sonnets like, "Love and Death" (p. 72), "Death and Life" (p. 119), "Imperial Delhi" (p. 156), "In Salutation To My Father's Spirit" (p. 160) and "The Lotus" (p. 167), though expression of deep emotions, have a classical control, a sense of balance and some kind of high seriousness that make them worthy sonnets. They are all in Italian form with an octave and sestet; while the rhyme scheme of the octave is invariably: a b b, a a b b a, of the sestet varies and takes different forms as c c d, e e d; c d c, d f f; c c d, e e d; and c d c, e d e. Among her odes we have "Ode to H.H. The Nizam of Hyderabad", To the God of Pain" and "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus". They are exalted in subject matter, and elevated in tone and style. They are full of deep and sincere emotion but their expression is consciously elaborate, impressive, and diffuse. Sarojini has written moving elegies on the death of the Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, her political mentor Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Umar Sobhani, a rich philanthropist of Bombay. These are entitled respectively "Ya Mahbub!", "Gokhale" and "Umar"(The
(Feather of the Dawn). These are touching poems of personal loss and are written in simple language. They are confined to their objects of mourning, their death being the inspiration and sole theme. The poet here gives an expression only to his deep and sincere feelings of lamentation without indulging in discursive reflections.

Sarojini has written folk poems without taking recourse to the objective narration or using the ballad measure. Most of these folk songs - "Palanquin - Bearers" "Wandering Singers", "Indian Weavers", "Coromandel Fishers", "The Snake-Charmer", "Corn-Grinders", "Harvest Hymn", "Cradle-Song", "Village Song", "Bangle Sellers", "Spinning Song", etc. - are written to suit the Indian tunes. The rhythms, metres, and stanza forms vary according to the moods of the singers. The metrical inventiveness of Sarojini is best seen in these poems because she uses in them impressive refrains and weaves native words and phrases to convey Indian colour and atmosphere.

One cannot miss in Sarojini's poetry her ease in the English language, her sense of the sounds of English words and her mastery over the metrical system of English poetry. Although her life spans across the late Victorian, Decadent, Edwardian and Georgian and the
emerging Hulme-Eliot- Pound periods of English poetry, she being brought up in romantic tradition and fed solely on the ornate poetry of the East and the West, remains typically romantic in her taste and temperament, sensibility and art. Sarojini does not try poetry after the modern fashion nor does she approve of its lack of passion. Its use of free verse, its terse, dry and lean diction and its emphasis on harsh truth and intellectual content do not suit her imaginative and romantic temperament. Sensuous and aesthetic perceptions are the raw material on which she builds the edifice of her poetry of beauty and romance. She found the echoes of the romantic tradition in the Rhymer club coterie with whom she had close contacts and like them stuck in her poetry to verbal felicity, metrical discipline and musical texture.

Sarojini is a great artist in the use of words. She believes with Mallarme that poetry is written with words and not ideas. She has a miraculous power of communicating her responses to any kind of sense impression in words which are surcharged with feelings. Armando Menezes emphasizes the rich use of evocative and suggestive words in Sarojini’s poetry:
She had a woman's love for words. They were not, to her, just convenient instruments of expression, they were things: precious, lovely things, like jewels. She rejoices in polysyllables that roll and rumble, or rattle like long burnished swords: the phrases like 'lovely stalactile of dream'; or 'in the long dread, incalculable hour'.

Sarojini's diction is greatly influenced by the romantic vocabulary of the early nineteenth century and is highly strung and sophisticated. It is, however, wrong to criticize it as artificial for it is very communicative and has the compelling utterance of emotion.

Sarojini has tremendous power of phrase-making. She is artist in the use of words and phrases aglow with fire and meaning. She coins new words with the help of epithet and verb or epithet and noun combinations. We have thus highly evocative words like "laughter-bound", "sorrow-free", "laughter-lighted", "jewel-girl", "sandal-scented", "moonlight-tangled", "rose-scented", "dawn-uncoloured", "thought-worn", "wind-blown", "wind-inwoven", "love-garnered", "flame-carven", "hermit memories", "lotus-throne", and "parrot-plume". Equally suggestive and pictorial are phrases like "the wakening skies", "The leaping wealth of the tide", "The kiss of the spray", "The dance of the wild foam's glee" (p. 7),
"The moonlight tangled meshes of perfume", "Golden-vested maidens", "The petals of delight", "the silver-breasted moonbeam of desire" (p. 8), "koel-haunted river isles", "sandal-scented leisure" (p. 11), "ecstasy of starry silence" (p. 36), "hopes up-leaping like the light of dawn" (p. 37), "a wail of desire", "gem-tangled hair" (p. 39), "silver tears of sorrow2 (p. 199), "lyric bloom", "melodious leaves" (p. 203), "echoing boughs", and "blossoming hopes unharvested" (p. 49). There are many such pictorial phrases scattered all over Sarojini's poems. Some of these phrases are rich in alliterations: "Fair and frail and fluttering leaves", "fairy fancies", "laughted", "tangles of my tresses", "the dear dreams that are dead", "fashion a funeral pyre", "the heavenward hunger", and "glimmering ghosts".

Sarojini often uses vernacular words which though uncommon in poetry, lend native flavour to her verses and add to their rhythmic melody. It is surprising that Lotika Basu is critical of the use of these native words: "The artificiality of Mrs. Naidu's poems is increased by the repetition of vernacular words which have no meaning and association for the English reader and seem only something fantastic - words in fact, which even in their native language have no poetic value, such as 'Ya' Allah!"
'Ya Allah! or 'Ram re Ram'!" These vernacular words are, however, so much compressed with meaning and fit so well in the context of the poem that they never look superfluous or meaningless. They have religious associations to the Indian mind and they capture beautifully the subtle native passion.

Sarojini has composed in various stanza forms and there is hardly any metrical measure accepted in English poetry which she has not successfully practised - iambic, trochaic, anapaestic, dactyle, or their permissible combinations. In "Cradle Song", Sarojini uses iambic measure for melodious effect:

From graves of spice,
O'er fields of rice,
Athwart the lotus stream
I bring for you
Aglint with dew
A little lovely dream.

(p. 17)

In "Song of Radha, the Milkmaid", she combines iambic with anapaestic measure:

I carried my gifts to the Mathura shrine...
How brightly the torches were glowing!...
I folded my hands at the altars to pray
"O shining ones guard us by night and by day".
And loudly the conch shells were blowing,
But my heart was so lost in your worship Beloved
They were wroth when I cried without knowing
Govinda! Govinda!
Govinda! Govinda!

(p. 113)

In the poem "To My Children", we get a pure
trochaic measure, a rhyming eight-line stanza in
trimetre:

Golden sun of victory, born
In my life's unclouded morn,
In my lambent sky of love,
May your growing glory prove
Sacred to your consecration,
To my art and to my nation.
Sun of Victory, may you be
Sun of song and liberty.

(p. 51)

In "Wandering Singers", Sarojini uses anapaestic
measure, lines beginning with an iamb, followed by three
anapaests:

Our lays are of cities whose lustre is shed,
The laughter and beauty of women long dead;
The sword of old battles, the crown of old kings,
And happy and simple and sorrowful things,
(p. 4)

Sarojini uses even dactyle measure successfully, though it is rarely used in English poetry:

Full are my pitchers and far to carry,
Lone is the way and long,
Why, 0 why was tempted to tarry
Lured by the boatmen's song?

("Village Song", p. 103)

In addition to the successful use of these English metrical measure, Sarojini has also experimented skilfully with native folk-tunes, village tunes and bazar tunes in her poems. In "Palanquin Bearers" she reproduces in words the swingy movement and the accompanying music of the palanquin bearers:

Lightly, 0 lightly, we bear her along,
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream,
Gaily, 0 gaily we glide and we sing,
We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

(p.3)

In "Village Songs" she captures magic of rural atmosphere by dramatic monologue of a village maiden who is delayed in returning to her house. The rhythmic movement of the refrain "Ram re Ram! I shall die" adds to the musical charm of the song:
My brother will murmur, "Why doth she linger"
My mother will wait and weep,
Saying, "O safe may the great gods bring her,
The Jamuna's waters are deep"...
The Jamuna's waters rush by so quickly,
The shadows of evening gather so thickly,
Like black birds in the sky....
O! if the storm breaks, what will betide me?
Safe from the lightning where shall I hide me?
Unless Thou succour my footsteps and guide me,
Ram re Ram! I shall die.

(p. 103)

In the poem, "In The Bazar of Hyderabad", Sarojini
recreates the scene of an Indian bazar by reproducing its
tunes in a dramatic manner:

What do you weigh, 0 ye vendors?
Saffron and lentil and rice.

What do you grind, 0 ye maidens?
Sandalwood, henna and spice?

What do you call, 0 ye pedlars?
Chessmen and ivory dice.

(p. 106)

Equally impressive is Sarojini's use of the Bengali
metre in "Slumber Song for Sunalini":

Sweet, the saints shall bless thee...
Hush, mine arms caress thee,
Hush, my heart doth press thee, sleep,
Till the red dawn dances
Breaking thy soft trances,
Sleep, my Sunalini sleep!

Commenting on the use of metrical rhythms in Sarojini's verses for musical effects, Prof. Rameshwar Gupta aptly remarks: "It is enough to show that if Sarojini had genius, it was a genius for verbal rhythm. The very tissues, nerves and muscles of her body would sometimes go into motion to get the rhythm that rested in her being, and then it would manifest itself in some melodious articulation. English poets who show such variety of rhythmic patterns and tunes are not many. That is Sarojini's contribution to English poetry."

Her Achievement:

Whatever our estimate of Sarojini's contribution to Indian English poetry, it will generally be agreed that she was a born poet, one eminently endowed with the temperament and nature of true artist. Except for Keats there are very few poets who had such an overpowering passion for poetry as she. To her it was poetry that charged her every moment, and to which she directed her best early efforts. This keen poetic sensibility and her

early brilliant promise could not find their mature fulfillment because she had to give up composing verses after four volumes of poems owing to her deep involvement in the national struggle for independence. She could not, therefore, realize her ambition to be a great poet. The rapture of song, however, always remained with her.

Sarojini was conscious of her limitations and was perhaps a better critic of her own poetry than anyone else. She remarked very frankly "My poor casual little poems seem to be less than beautiful - I mean - that final enduring beauty that I desire."¹

She also confessed with disarming humility:

I am not a poet really. I have the vision and desire but not the voice. If I could write just one poem full of beauty and spirit of greatness, I should be exultantly silent for ever; but I sing just as the birds do, and my songs are as ephemeral.²

In a letter to Romesh Chandra Dutt in March, 1906, which she wrote on receiving a copy of his Ramayana and Mahabharata in English verse, she again expressed her own sense of inadequacy:


2. Ibid.
I realise what much finer, more lasting, more fruitful achievement it is to have made accessible to the world, in this splendid and noble version, the proudest epics of the centuries, than the tinkling little verses such as I had the audacity it seems to me so now - to send you.¹

Though Sarojini could not scale great heights and touch the summit in her poetry, yet one would not miss in whatever she wrote her inner consistency of vision as well as an extraordinary grasp of the reality of human emotion and aspiration. Having been brought up in romantic tradition of poetry she remained through and through a lyricist who gave vent to her intense and authentic emotional experiences in melodious verses. The spontaneous outpouring of feeling rather than an intellectual exercise continued to be her mode, and sensuous and aesthetic perceptions rather than thought, the contents of her poetry. Nissim Ezekiel notes with great dissatisfaction: "It was Sarojini's ill-luck that she wrote at a time when English poetry had touched the rock bottom of sentimentality and technical poverty. By the time it recovered its health, she had entered politics, abandoning the possibility of poetic

development and maturity. It is, however, doubtful that even if she had continued to write without taking to politics, she would have ever developed into the Hulme-Pound-Eliot tradition of poetry. Her love for beauty and romance would have never led her to write in new poetic idiom with its emphasis on intellectual content and irony.

In its final assessment Sarojini's poetry with its transparent sincerity of love for the people and landscape of India, its lyrical spontaneity and melody, its beautiful images and metaphors embodying the rich cadence and rhythm of Indian life, still remains unrivalled in the Indian English poetry in its own mode. Sri Aurobindo, the profound judge of life and literature, has correctly remarked that Sarojini had, "qualities which make her best work exquisite, unique and unchallenged in its own kind."

2. Ibid.