CHAPTER II

SOURCES OF IMAGERY

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As 'the artistic image' is the central concept of aesthetic theory and the creative process in art involves thinking in terms of image, the question arises - thinking about what? Mikhail Ovsyannikov replies that art is a specific form of the reflection of reality. But the transformation in this reflection of reality differs from one artist to the other. Realistic, romantic and naturalistic art presents different aspect of this reflection of reality. But all the same, it remains a reflection. Again, this reflection finds a different reflection in poetry, sculpture, architecture, painting etc. Romantic poets, failing to face the harsh, hard, and harrasing realities of life, tries to go away from the reality into the airy flights - above and beneath - in the past and future into mythology and fanciful fantastic thoughts which are expressed through images in poetry. And thus they present the distorted image of reality. Leo Tolstoy has rightly said that romanticism is an escape from reality. "So long as

1. Suchkov, A History of Realism, p.5.
3. Leo Tolstoy, What is Art?.

man is man, where will he go leaving this earth?"

Rene Welleck and Austin Warren quote Freud as saying, "The artist is originally a man who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demands for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first made, and who, then in phantasy-life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way of return from the world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts, he moulds his phantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life." This phantasy-play which the artist creates by flying on the winged imagination is, on critical analysis, a simply transformed form of the natural proportions of the real objects, events, persons etc. Mikhail Khrapchenko has very beautifully said in this context: "Human thought is barren without imagination, just as imagination is barren without reality." Imagination always remains linked with realities of the world like a kite that is flying high up in the sky but its string binds it to the earth failing that it would never come back to the earth. Similarly the airy imaginative flights of the poets always remain in living touch with the reality. Even when we find a poet freeing himself consciously and deliberately, from the resemblance to reality, his fantastic


5. Freud, quoted by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, p.82.
images are always linked to the intellectual, emotional and sensuous impressions formed in the mind of the poet. The poet, a conscious, conscientious and responsible intellectual worker, always tries to fit his images perfectly and naturally into the system of the aesthetic needs and concepts of his age.

As reality is, ultimately the basis of all images, the poet expresses his aesthetic experience, which is a series of images standing out against a background that is formed by the accumulated body of experience. There is no doubt that in order to transmute life's impressions and experiences into poetic images, we cannot ignore the role played by imagination. B. Ifor Evans defines imagery as a form of mysticism which has its roots in the objective world around the poet because he receives his immediate experiences in his struggle that he does in order to exist and make this world better for others to live in. In the words of B. Ifor Evans: "Imagery, in its purest form, is mysticism made manifest from sources that depend on ordinary experience." 7

Nature, human society, history and mythology are not the repositories of ready-made poetic images and the poet is not a peasant who takes out the bundles of grain from this granary. But he is a conscious artist who collects everything that he experiences intellectually, emotionally,

7. B. Ifor Evans, English Literature - quoted in the World of Poetry, p. 103.
sensuously and spiritually, and transforms his experiences, keeping in view the aesthetic needs of his people and under the spell of inspiration composes a poem which is in itself an Image.

The saint poets of the Adi Granth try to make the masses understand their higher spiritual experiences and in doing so they find a successful source in the image. Image is a successful device of making tangible the otherwise obscure affairs of the spirit as Schelling says that image is the finite expression of the infinite.

About Nanak's imagery, I. Serebryakov writes, "Nanak's imagery derives from daily life and from the scenery of his nature land. His poetry abounds in pictures linked with the occupations of the peasants, the artisan, the merchant, and images suggested by the luxuriant vegetable and animal world of the Panjab. Yet imagery with Hinduism also occurs."9

The sources of the imagery in the Adi Granth can be divided into five parts:

2. Human Society.
3. Animal World.
4. Mythology and History.
5. Miscellaneous.

Nature:

The saint poets were not the court poets of any king. They were born in poor families of barbers, weavers, cobblers, peasants etc. They did not even live in glass-houses. They were brought up in the lap of nature by poor parents. With the result that they had very rich experience of nature. There is no doubt that we cannot compete with nature, but the poetry selects images from nature showing that there is symmetry, unity, pattern and beauty in Nature. Goethe says, "Art does not try to compete with nature in all its breadth and depth, but keeps on the surface of natural phenomena. Nevertheless, art has its own depth, its own strength. It captures the supreme aspects of these superficial phenomena, disclosing what is regular in them - the rational perfection of proportions, the acme of beauty, the virtue of meaning and noble passions."

Nature is the inexhaustible and never-failing source of imagery. Almost every saint-poet finds images from nature. So the images taken from Nature serve the purpose of the poet which is to make the spiritual experience of the Infinite understandable for the people. For example, we find images of ocean, rain, rivers (especially Ganga, Yamuna, Gauhati, Godavari), ponds, tanks, waves, whirlpools, mud, persian-sheels etc. From the world of vegetation, they selected images from

flowers - especially lotus, pabban (chupati), mushrooms, swallow worts, bamboos, neems, mangoes, lemons, chandan tree, simbal, sesame-stalks and aquatic plants and weeds. We also find general images of woods, various seasons, weathers and the atmosphere in all their varying moods. Bara Maha Tukhari of Guru Nanak is a classic in this field as a perfect piece of poetry. It is full of successful images which have the qualities of evocativeness, novelty, fertilities and intensity in them.

From it all, we do not say that while selecting images, the saint poets did not imitate nature. In the words of Boris Suchkov: "We see nature as acting on its own account; the artist (the poet) acts as a man - on man's account. From what nature offers us, we take into our lives only a small amount, that which is worth desiring, and gives pleasure; what the artist offers man should be entirely accessible and pleasing to the senses, should all give pleasure and have an appeasing effect, should all give food for the spirits, should all educate and ennoble; and the artist is grateful to nature that produced him, and in this way brings back to her a kind of second nature, nature born of the feelings and thoughts, nature perfected by man."11

Human Society:

Imagery in a poem, in order to put light on the main theme, creates images of different objects, experiences with the purpose of communicating the ideas properly and wisely.

"At its highest, imagery, by drawing together widely separated objects and experiences into a brief and unlaboured expression, asserts the unity of human life," says B. Ifor Evans. The saint poets of the Adi Granth take images from various sources - human relations, occupations, embellishment, townships, forts, games, diseases and various parts of the human body, houses, kitchen etc. The human relations that are given much importance in using them as images are: husband-wife, father-son, owner-slave, Guru-follower, saints - worshippers of Maya, gurmukha-manmukha. The occupations of kings, courtiers, ministers, magistrates, policemen, soldiers, tax-collectors, clerks, farmers, gold-smiths, blacksmiths, carpenters, shopkeepers, brokers, traders, pedlars, qazis and pandits are very beautifully exploited in the imagery. We find images from chess, pasa, chaupar, gambling, medicine, jugglery, stage-craft, athletics, wrestling, etc. The images of beauty-aids i.e. ornaments of gold and silver, bracelets, ankle bells, ornaments studded with jewels and rubies, chandan scents, saffron, collyrium etc. are also found in the Adi Granth. The images of battle field and the use of swords and other armaments are also used by the saint poets. The wearing of shackles as punishment, nose rings, handcuffs, etc. are also used to bring the divine philosophy to the intellectual level of the ordinary masses. Images from the processes of human birth, death and the cremation or burial of the dead body are also found in this sacred text.

12. B. Ifor Evans, English Literature, p. 103.
Various parts of the human body such as head, forehead, eyes, hands, ears, neck, nose, tongue, legs, feet, etc. are used as images. No doubt, many of these images did not flower into poetic images, but as similes and metaphors they served the purpose for which they were created. These great poets of the past did not only use the parts of the human body in their images but also made images from caves, forts, houses, homes, doors, threshold, walls etc.

In the house-hold affairs, we find images from kitchen, utensils used in it and its various preparations of food articles. Taverns and the whole process of the preparation of wine is exploited in the images. Silken and rough clothes, blankets and the process of washing, sewing, mending etc. did not escape from the range of vision of these saint poets.

Maya appears as an enemy of God and human beings. It is the beloved of the egocentrics and of all the selfish slaves of the great five demons - wrath, greed, anger, lust and false attachment. In that age of religious consciousness, the people were very much inclined towards religion - the spiritual affairs of the individual. And at the same time, they lived through the transitional stage of our society in which the worn-out rituals, rites, religious practices and ceremonies were to give place to the emerging new religious ideologies and cults. So, images of yogis and siddhas and of Hinduism, Mohammedanism, their sacred places and their forms of worship were given a serious consideration in the selection of images.
Animal World:

The lives of animals and birds and the aquatic animals are also exploited in order to form images. For example, the birds, such as swan, heron, chatrik, crow, garura, peacock, swallow, parrot, pigeon, sparrow and koel; the animals such as lion, elephant, deer, dog, cow, bull, horse, buffaloe, jackal, mouse, cat, monkey, etc.; equatic animals, such as fish, frog, tortoise, snake, crocodile etc. are used in imagery. Even the small insects are not ignored. They also become images in the hands of these master-poets. The worms, louse, black bee, moth, fly, butterfly, bee and ant are used in images. In disease images, the various diseases such as pains, agonies, fever, small pox, carbuncle, abdominal pain and the physicians, feeling the pulse, etc. are included.

The reason of taking images from the world of animals, birds and insects and the common diseases, is that we are all familiar with them in our day-to-day life. Some of these animals and birds are appreciated for their good quality and others are condemned for their viciousness, i.e. the cleverness of the crow, cat and fox, the innocent and harmlessly passionate love of the moth, chatrik, peacock and deer. As the images from our immediate and living contacts have the quality of familiarity in them, they are very useful in making us understand quite easily the most complicated and confusing spiritual experiences of the saints.
Mythology and History:

"The supernatural mystery, the affairs of the divine, the evolution of grace, the appropriation of divine life in contemplation, all these are brought together in a profound and coherent synthesis, and in this the image - as God's chosen means of speaking to the man - occupies the central place," says E. L. Mascall.\(^{13}\)

Every mythological figure remains alive because of the quality which is given to it. The qualities which were once ideals, are found preached symbolically through the myths. Man, through ages, wanted to solve the mysteries of God, the universe and of his own life. These poets of the Adi Granth dive deep into the meaning of life and show that there is a purpose of the mysterious Almighty behind this whole play of the universe. And every new saint poet used his predecessors and the predecessors of the predecessors as examples/ references which become a great source of religious imagery. The story of Rama, like the story of Krishna is quite popular among all these poets for the purpose of using it or some of its portions, in images. The mythological churning of the ocean by gods and demons and getting of the fourteen jewels out of it, is also used in imagery by the saint poets. Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra and the saints of the past like Vidura, Ajamal, Dhruba, Prehlada, Sukhdev, Balmika, Ambrika, Jarmejaya, Gajraja, Ganika, Ahalya, etc. are used in images. Even the saint poets

\(^{14}\) E. L. Mascall, Words and Images, p. 120.
like Namdev, Kabir, Trilochan, Jaidev, Sadna, Ravidas and the Sikh gurus and their followers and foes, are not excluded.

The reason is that even mere references to the mythological characters and events create images in our minds. Even the historical figures creates some sparkling images as they themselves, had to struggle against some cruel kings, some out-dated ideology, system or religious creed and from such a struggle they emerged as heroes of the people having some special super-human qualities. For example, we can take the cases of Kabir and Namdev. So mythology and history also proved a great source of the imagery in the Adi Granth.

Miscellaneous:

Images are taken from many other sources also. Images from law courts, education, machines, various metals, colours and festivals are also available. Many beautiful images concern the universal bodies, the world of music - vocal and instrumental and dances also embellish their poetry. We find images of dirt and dust also.

The selection of images from two opposite and contrasting objects, persons or realities become a very beautiful and inexhaustible source of imagery. For example, Day and night, nectar and poison, birth and death, gurmukh and manmukh, heaven and hell are used as very successful images, because the contrasts intensify and magnetise the contents of the image.
We should not consider that these sources were exploited in their exact, correct and real form by the saint poets. They were selected and transformed in order to give us a better understanding of the reality of things. As "Art is not concerned purely with representing apparent reality. A work of art is not intended to be taken as a likeness of reality," observes Suchkov.  

The poet being socially, intellectually and spiritually conscious, sensitive and alert, experiences the external reality more deeply. His senses are more penetrating and active. But it does not mean that he is an automaton or a very sensitive camera. He is influenced by some persons, events, historical and mythological figures and mythical stories. He transforms the objects of his experiences which he gets from his immediate contacts and from the reading of books, into meaningful images. Mikhail Khrapchenko observes: "As experience is a continuous process, it seems clear that a writer's work is not just to be influenced by events he happened to witness, but by the things that stirred his soul and become part of his spiritual ego."  

In creating poetic images, we cannot ignore the role of imagination. Without it, it is quite impossible to transmute the life's impressions and experiences into poetic

15. Suchkov, History of Realism, p.7.
images. It is imagery that makes the confused and unshapely experiences quite lively, meaningful and colourful. P. Gurry observes: "It is imagery which vitalizes such expressions infusing it with copious suggestions of weights, buoyances, textures, sounds, movements, shapes and colours. But there is, too, an awakening of emotion, without which an experience would be dead, and also a directing of emotion, without which the experience would be warped, confused and unshapely." 17

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