CHAPTER I

IMAGERY: ITS MEANING AND FUNCTIONS

Imagery is considered as the very height and life of poetry. Without imagery a poem looks like "a day without sun or a woodland without birds." An image is capable of making the experience live in the mind of the reader. Imagery bridges the gap between the creative writer and the receptive reader and makes them one and remains the "life principle of poetry":

The very word image has taken on, during the last fifty years or so, a mystical potency: think what Yeats made of it. Yet the image is the constant in all poetry, and every poem it itself an image. Trends come and go, diction alters, metrical fashions change, even the elemental subject matter may change almost out of recognition: but metaphor remains, the life principle of poetry, the poet's chief test and glory.

Poetry is made up of comparisons, simple or complex, open or concealed, and is enriched by mixing up or juxtaposing these comparisons. An image may be a single word and called a metaphor, synecdoche etc; an explicit comparison, i.e. simile, personification, paradox, antithesis, hyperbole etc. J. Middleton Murry rightly observes:

All metaphor and simile can be described as the analogy by which the human mind explores the universe of quality and charts the non-measurable world.³

But every poetic image is to some degree metaphorical. In the modern sense, metaphor implies analogy, "unification of disparate ideas" and stands for "something invisible, something inner".⁴ It transfers a particular quality of one object to the other and in doing so it "provides the means by which words are elevated into living things", to borrow an expression of Terence Hawkes.

Aristotle wrote long ago, "But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor ... it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphor implies an eye for resemblances".⁵ Truly so, the great poets have the rare quality of looking into things and finding out resemblances between them. But mere analogy does not constitute a poetic image. Apart from "saying several things at once",⁶ it must have the element of

wonder and excitement because a poetic image "looks out from a mirror in which life perceives not so much its face as some truth about its face". Imagery unfolds the secret truths behind things as it aims at peeping into the hidden realities behind the apparent meaning. Thus, a poetic image is not just bringing together of two items, it must make the readers "experience greater intellectual pleasure" by expressing some truth. Briefly, poetry aided by metaphor is sensuous, clear and vivid and brings us back to reality and truth.

Since a poet is highly perceptive and sensitive by nature, the tissues of his brain are easily vibrated by the smallest and humblest object, scene, sound or idea. These impressions are perceptible throughout his poetry in form of images. Poetry is a product of experience and imagination. Imagination plays a vital role in forming images in the poet's mind. In a metaphor, two or more things, not normally thought of as being connected with each other, are brought together and fused into one in the imagination of the literary artist. Contact with the working of a great poet's imagination gives us a completely new and refreshing meaning of a thing as it is "a writer's

imagination which catches at hitherto unperceived relations between things."  The imagination of the poet works out a series of images in such a way that the reader becomes oblivious of words, yet he can peep into the meaning worked out by the poet.

Imagination, on the whole, is the power that transforms and sublimes the crude substance of the poet's sense perception and of the experience received from others, and transmutes it into elements of beauty. It is the imagination of the poet that pictures lifeless things as alive by grasping a piece of external reality, colouring it with effective tone and making it distil a new emotional attitude. Thus, poetry arises from a distilled and heightened sense of external reality. Imagination contains a shaping force that creates a poetic image. This process of recreation includes both the object and the sensation connecting the poet with the object. It is only after the sensation and the object are happily married that


The image is "one of the most common and at the same time, most troublesome terms in literary criticism", hence it is not easy to arrive at a complete definition of the term "image". Spurgeon rightly points out, "One could easily devote a volume to arriving at a definition of an image, safeguarding and illustrating it, and to discussing what metaphor is and the philosophy which lies behind it". Though various efforts have been made to define the term, yet it is a difficult task to say what an image means exactly.

The term "image" has been derived from the Latin word "imago" which means to "imitare", i.e. to imitate. It is used in several different ways. A layman uses it in one sense, a psychologist in another and a poet in yet another sense. In common parlance, "image" denotes "a close copy", a representation, a picture, or an exact counterpart of something. It is in this sense that the reflection of a person is, sometimes, described as the very image of

another person".15

In terms of psychology an "image" refers to the revival of a perceptual experience. Hence, the "strictly psychological use of the term 'image' is ... for a purely mental idea which is taken as being observed by the eye of the mind".16 In other words, an image is a revival or mental reproduction of some sensuous experience undergone in the past. Though "In psychology, the word 'image' means a mental reproduction, a memory, of a past sensational or perceptual experience, not necessarily visual",17 in poetry, it is used in a still wider sense. No doubt, poetry being the creative activity of the mind, takes cognizance of the psychological image also, but it does not depend solely on psychology. Poetry presents objects in emotional contexts. It "is in its essence emotional and logical.... Poetry is an expression through words ... words without emotion, whatever else they are, are not poetry".18 Since poetry contains words charged with emotion, a poetic image can not be a cold, dull and lifeless copy but a life like copy of an object or percept.

Precisely, they are not mere reproduction of a perceptual experience but seek to recreate an emotional experience.

Poetry is the art of "making equations to emotions". Charged with feelings, emotions and passion, images acquire a potentiality of revealing the secret depths of poet's experience, "for they came to represent the depths of feeling into which we can not peer". So, emotional vigour finds an outlet in images. Emphasizing the significance of feeling and emotion in images, writes George Whalley, "feeling is not something added on to sensory images, but that feeling is the image..." C. B. Cox and A.E. Dyson's definition seems up to the characteristics of a poetic image as "Basically, any thing descriptive or evocative in poetry; any thing which helps to visualise or realise a scene or situation." 

Coleridge considers passion in the image as a proof of the original genius. He observes:

It has been before observed that images, however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterise the poet. They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion or by associated thought or

images awakened by that passion.

But it has to be conceded that some images may lack the emotional element in that high degree which Coleridge emphasises, especially, those which display witticism. Each image has more or less intellectual element, for it discovers relationship between two dissimilar objects. C.D. Lewis observes:

"Relationship being in the very nature of metaphor, if we believe that the universe is a body wherein all men and all things are 'members one of another', we must allow metaphor to give a 'partial intuition to the whole world'. Every poetic image, I would affirm, by clearly revealing a tiny portion of this body, suggests its infinite extension."²³

The image which is based on purely sensuous relationship is faintly intellectual, whereas the image which discovers some novel or original relationship is deeply so. Ezra Pound defines image as one that "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time".²⁴ But he goes too far in his emphasis on intellection and exactness in image which becomes specific to the Imagist movement.

What C.D. Lewis says about the poetic image seems to be the most convincing definition as it epitomizes the most

of the characteristics of a poetic image. The poetic image is:

...a more or less sensuous picture in words, to some degree metaphorical, with an undertone of some human emotion in its context, but also charged with and realizing into the reader a special poetic emotion or passion.  

Poetic images, in this way, are word pictures awakened by, and charged with, the emotion and thought of the poet in varying degrees, and they convey to the imaginative reader something more than the accurate reflection of an external reality. "Although it is true that any concrete noun is an image, poetic images are more often phrases or even whole sentences than single words". Sometimes even a whole poem is an image. It encompasses all type of tropes e.g. similies, metaphors, synedoches, personification etc., and indeed conceits too.

Though, the present study does not differentiaete a conceit from an image, it discusses them both simultaneously. As the poetry of Donne abounds in conceits, it would be proper to discuss the term "conceit" at some length. It originally meant "an idea" but in terms of poetry, "it came to mean the development of a figure of

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speech which presents an unusual parallel between two apparently unrelated things". 27 Defining a conceit T.S. Eliot remarks that a conceit is the elaboration of a figure of speech to "the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it". 28 Thus "ingenuity" is the intellectual instrument of "elaboration" which means building up from "simple ingredients", as Webster defines it in his Dictionary. Being intellectual in nature, a conceit demands the reader to think out distant relationships. Conceits have varying degrees of ingenuity in them. Accordingly they produce varying degrees of "imaginative surprise". 29 Therefore, at first sight a conceit may appear far-fetched.

A conceit normally originates in a metaphor. Most often it is an idea though not inherent in the subject yet parallel to it. The metaphor is stretched to a considerable extent or, at times, even throughout the entire poem. Moses treats those conceits to be the best which are characterised both "by greatly removed terms and by

considerable development".  In a successful, expanded conceit the idea and the figure become almost one through the stress on the points of similarity. It requires a highly imaginative and intellectual power on the part of the poet to find out such parallels and to present them in such a way that the distance is overpowered by the similarity. The ingenious development of the comparison, which is a characteristic of a conceit, may seem to go a bit too far to modern taste.

A conceit, when it is an elaborated idea, is termed as an expanded conceit, though it may not be necessarily so. If the idea is not developed at any length, the conceit may be called a condensed conceit. In such a case the image tends to become the very body of the thought. Donne employs both the types of conceits in his poetry.

Though it is very difficult to draw strict lines "separating all conceits from all other figures, for they are entirely similar in manner of formation and find their origin in a similar psychological process", yet, it will be worthwhile, for a proper understanding of the term, to differentiate between a poetic metaphor and a conceit. In a metaphor an object is temporarily referred to in terms of

another object because they have one or more points of similarity. The poet's aim is to describe the first object but he brings in the other object just to illustrate the first one. The work of the image here is to transfer, unconsciously, the attribute of the second object to the first. A conceit, an "overelaboration of one metaphor or simile", on the other hand, is interrelated not only in the first object but in the relationship between the two objects and often demonstrates how they may be seen resembling each other. The element of imaginative surprise, resulting from the unification of disparate ideas, distinguishes a conceit from other tropes.

Despite these apparent differences between a conceit and an image, the fact remains that a conceit is but a type of image like simile, metaphor, etc. The term "image" has been treated in its broader perspective as defined by Lewis. Tuve also makes the similar remarks about the process of the origin of all such figures.

Attempts have been made to sum up the main characteristics of a poetic image. It has been found that the outstanding feature of a poetic image is its quality to indicate the poet's attitude towards his subject with

precision. Middleton Murry has observed, "Try to be precise and you are bound to be metaphorical". However, precision is not the final word, even extended and elaborated image may add to the beauty, theme and meaning of the poem depending on the requirement of theme and art of the poet. A poetic image should have the qualities of freshness and vividness. Poetry chooses fresh epithets and metaphors not for their newness, but because, "the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters". A great poet may present even the old and commonplace with entirely new and fresh meaning unperceived so far. Even out of the most familiar material, "good writers often create surprising images". Suggestiveness is a very important aspect of an image. At times great artists convey even those meanings which they themselves are not aware of.

An image should evoke the desired response in the readers. It should have efficaciousness i.e. ability to move the readers towards the desired effect. "Propriety and decorum", i.e. suitability of images to the cause and

34. Ibid., p. 24.
purpose the poet has in his hand, is one of the most important touchstones of a good image. Apart from its congruity, the harmonizing power of an image adds to its aptness. Imagery, viewed in relation to these characteristics, is a touchstone of the poetic power. It "requires a sustained pressure of imaginative truth and of intellectual control if the image is to animate, and light up and enrich the theme". 37 Images and theme should interpret, force and reinforce each other. The validity of an image is judged in relation to the purpose its serves in the poem. Imagery is at the root of the process of thinking and remembering. Our thinking is but the recalling and re-arranging of the images of the sense impressions in a certain order. As the pictures speak to the intellect through the eye, so imagery "brings ideas home to the mind through imagination". 38 With its colour and brilliancy, it enables language to express abstract ideas.

Imagery is the sharpest instrument of a poet to convey himself. It imparts novelty, freshness and beauty to the thought: colour, effectiveness and life to the style. The general assumption about imagery is that it

should be decorative, but decorativeness is not enough, an image inevitably adds to the effect of the poem in some other way at the same time. Imagery presents truth more clearly, forcefully and movingly than a plain literal statement. The scattered sense impressions in the poet's mind get arranged and formed into a coherent order through imagery. A poetic image seeks to establish "an emotional order out of mental and intellectual confusion."  

Regarding function of an image Clemen states:

"Images simultaneously heighten the atmosphere, characterise the dramatic personae and provide an adequate expression of the mood for the speaker just at the right moment."

Clemen's observation is about the functions of imagery in drama where images "foreshadow the coming events". But the case with poetry is somewhat different.

The most common function of a poetic image is to illustrate a meaning and make it vivid "through making some portion of it palpable to senses". This results in "the accurate conveying of the sensuous qualities of experience". But imagery does not confine itself to truthful report of sense impression or expression. It has the power of transmuting an idea into a sensation and of

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41. Ibid., p. 81.
transforming an observation into a state of mind. It creates or contributes to creating "a mood or an emotional experience". Expressed through a successful image, factual truth ceases to be merely such and exhibits a further truth i.e. the connection it has with the world of emotion, and its power to produce imaginative pleasure and ultimately create an aesthetic pleasure. Imagery, thus, results in an aesthetic pleasure with the creation of a new world out of the diverse objects, states of mind and concepts. Imagery provides the reader with a stimulus, not only for a sensory but also for an emotional response. Imagery, not only serves to establish an idea, but also explores the depths of human experience. It brings out hitherto unperceived and unexplored realities. By means of imagery the poet blends with the expression of his thought something of the significance, beauty, majesty and mystery of the universe.

Imagery enforces the total meaning as intended by the poet. When words fail to communicate the meaning, imagery completes the task as it has the rare capacity to "define" otherwise "indefinable spiritual qualities". Imagery reveals the inner spirit of the poet. Images may

be regarded as mirrors reflecting the different aspects of the poet's personality. Through imagery, a poet "lays bare his own innermost likes and dislikes, observations and interests, associations of thought, attitudes of mind and beliefs...". Thus, through imagery, we can peep into the personality of the poet. The present study attempts to have such hints about the secret depths of Donne's personality but its main purpose is to study Donne's poetry in order to find out the sources and the functions of his imagery and simultaneously trace out his search for reality.

Since the very inception of literature, in oral as well as written form, imagery has been treated as the superb human creativity. It has been recognised as the touchstone of poetic talent. As literary trends change from time to time, varying attitudes have been adopted towards the application of a poetic image too. For instance, in the Elizabethan age poetic images were employed mainly for ornamentation; the metaphysical treated functionality to be the basic purpose of an image, though it simultaneously worked as an ornament as well; whereas in the second decade of the twentieth century imagery became a movement in itself, the tool became the purpose. The movement, known as the Imagist movement, was recorded first by Ezra Pound in 1912 by his reference to it in appendix to Ripostes, but

the movement gradually disappeared by the end of the decade. Led by T.S. Eliot and in later years by Amy Lowell, the movement had its influence mainly on F.S. Flint, J.G. Fletcher, Richard Aldington, T.E. Eliot, Conrad Aiken, Marianna Moore, D.H. Lawrence etc. The movement has been defined in Princeton Encyclopaedia as under:

... a belief in the short poem, structured by the single image or metaphor and a rhythm of cadences, presenting the direct apprehension by the reader an object or scene from the external world, and referring to implicate the poem's effect in extended abstract meaning. 47

Thus, the movement laid emphasis on clarity and exactness of visual image in short poems. Successor to the French Symbolism, Imagism sought analogy with sculpture whereas Symbolism had affinity with music. Except for this emphasis on imagery, that too only visual, the movement has not much in common with Donne's imagery or even with other poets of the Elizabethan or Metaphysical age. For the poets associated with the Imagist movement, the movement mattered more than individual use. A poet of the Elizabethan or Metaphysical age does not limit himself to "those instrumentalities for conveying of meaning to which the Impressionist painter or the Imagist confines himself: selectivity and accuracy". 48 It case of a Metaphysical poet

like Donne, therefore, a poetic image has to be studied keeping in mind the transfiguring process - i.e. the natural development of image to create intense emotional and intellectual experience in a given moment of time.

There has been a tendency to relate the Metaphysical imagery with that of the Symbolist movement. Allen Tate, for example, has dwelt upon the similarities between Metaphysical and Symbolist poetry in relation to their imagery.\footnote{See discussion on Allen Tate as given by Leonard Unger, \textit{Op.Cit.}, pp. 14 ff.} Donne has used a few symbols but they have simplicity and clarity of meaning shared with readers through long and traditional usage whereas the Symbolist poets share meanings upon subconscious or physiologically primitive likenesses between persons. Therefore, no attempt has been made to study Donne's imagery in relation to the Symbolist poetry.

To enumerate all the sources of imagery, that a poet might resort to, is as difficult and impossible as it means to enumerate all the objects, conditions and ideas related to the universe, heaven and hell, that have been known and imagined and which are yet to be known or imagined. Imagery takes cognizance of every object which has a two fold significance - as a fragment of reality and a representation of something other than itself. Carlyle
rightly observed, "All visible things are emblems. What thou seest is not there on its own account. Matter only exists to represent some idea and body it forth". Poets have surveyed every nook and corner of this universe, heaven and hell for images. Imagery is a sort of intermediate region wherein the world of visible things seems to blend with the world of thought. As a matter of fact, poetry has to assimilate and unify the diversity of material which the streamy nature of association sweeps into the poet's conscious mind. Thus, passing through the rich garden of blooming images, the poet culls whichever of them strike his fancy and vision. The choice of imagery may differ from poet to poet, and even one poet may choose different images from time to time. However, efforts have been made to study the major sources of imagery that attract the imagination of poetic minds in general.

One of the greatest storehouses of imagery is external nature. A poet culls images that fascinate him from hills and rills; plants, shrubs and flowers; floating clouds and growing fields; dancing rivers and blowing winds; lonely lakes and sturdy mountains; shadowy boughs and dense forests; dewy greenery and dry sands; reclining violet and starry primrose; healing breeze and stormy gales

as all these have been perennial sources of inspiration to him. The ethereal birds with their heavenly music, bewitching flowers with their purfumes and colours, lovely dark and deep woods, threatening night winds, the change of weathers and day and night, sunset and dawn, all the forms of landscape, different climatic zones serve the poet in expression of his innermost feelings which can not be seen with physical eyes. 51 Not a sight, not a sound, not a movement in the world of nature escapes the poet's attention.

The renaissance poets exploited nature imagery to highlight human tendencies, behaviour and qualities. The poets have translated into images their nature as well as human experiences. For instance, we find Donne defining an inconstant and flirting beloved through the conceit of a stream that feels proud on being kissed by many boughs standing by its shore. Poets find books in brooks, changing moods in sea and sky, knowledge and ignorance in light and darkness. They find even animals and beasts corresponding to something in human nature or even human attributes have been transferred to animals and insects as in "lecherous goats" or "envious serpents". Even inanimate nature is full of images, for instance, take images from

51. Cf. "...every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance of nature corresponds to some state of the mind and that state of mind can best be described by presenting the natural appearance as its picture". S.J. Brown, Op.Cit., p. 103.
the vast mineral world such as "iron will", "golden ease", "true as steel", "leaden hours" and so on.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century all progress, trade, business, adventures, and discoveries were associated with voyages. Naturally, they attracted the imagination of the poets and images of sea and sea animals find frequent occurrence. Tempests, tides, harbours, ships and anchors all have been employed as images. If the vastness and depth of sea provides images for positive aspects of human life; the risks, fears and diseases associated with sea and voyages define negative aspects of life in form of images. Sky has also captured the imagination of poets and they conjure images of the sun, the moon, stars and other heavenly bodies, meteors, eclipses, galaxy, sun spots and so on.

The seventeenth century witnessed a deep love for learning and erudition as new discoveries and inventions were being made and the old system of belief was being questioned by the new philosophy. It generated an interest in the old as well as new learning even among the masses. Consequently, scholarship became an essential qualification of even poets. This particular aspect of the age can be traced in the choice of images. The poets employed an immense variety of images from ancient scholastic metaphysics; Greek and Roman learning, literature and
mythology; medieval practices; astronomy; astrology; science; new learning; modern discoveries and inventions etc. Medical science and physiology - human body and its anatomy, functioning, beauty and ugliness - have always served as fertile sources of imagery. Despite all progress and advancement, there have always been people who resort to the occult, superstitions, witchcraft and magic. Such practices also provide images to poets. For example, alchemy provides images of alembic, tincture, concoction, elixir, dross, alloy etc.

The world of secular activities has always remained one of the greatest treasures of imagery. Activities related to commercial and financial life - trade, business, coins, mintage, money, property, earning, spending etc.; domestic life - family matters, social issues, cooking, banquets, playing, working, rising, sleeping etc.; agricultural life - ploughing, tillage, growing, reaping, harvesting, transplantation etc.; occupations - printing, engraving, weaving, smithery etc.; household - domestic furniture, equipments, utensils etc.; architecture - buildings and palaces, foundations and roofs, walls and windows, floors and ceilings etc.; all are enclosed within the circle of imagery. The loftiest thoughts may be brought home to the mind and heart by the humblest of these objects used as images. Sublime activities, for instance, poetry, theatre, stage, music, dance etc. also have
remained fertile sources of imagery.

Socio-political conditions have influenced man from times immemorial. The ambitions and aspirations for social, economic or political advancement have always brought high esteem for kings and courts. So, kings with their power, authority and supremacy; courtiers with their corruption; law officers and judges with their malpractices and delays; and litigious men with their quarrels, attracted poets and served as rich sources of imagery. Similarly, human tendency to dominate others by coercion and violence is a universal phenomenon which, to a poetic mind, provides images of armies, battles, swords, cannons, spears, shields, pistols, pikes, legions, troops, captivity, seizure, attack, retreat, generals and soldiers etc. Even prisons with their hellish atmosphere, prisoners with their miseries, spies with their searching senses, criminals, plunders, pirates, murderers and thieves all provide effective images to a poet.

Even the negative aspects of life serve as a perennial source of imagery as they have always influenced man. Diseases such as fever, plagues, dropsy, palsy, gout, mental illness and pestilences may define many psychological, emotional and intellectual states of a man. Death, the ultimate reality which no one can escape, provides images of dead bodies, graves, coffins, tombs,
ashes, putrification, worms, churchyards, bones, skeleton, ghosts, spirits and so on. The contemplation on the ultimate reality of human body and the physical world brings images of negative philosophy and the other-worldliness.

The tension between faith and doubt brings about effective images which serve the poetic purposes. Theological matters, then, are no less important sources of imagery, for example, religious beliefs and practices, churches and temples, scriptures and mythologies, ceremonies and sacrifices, priests and congregations, monastries and monks, hermits and saints, angels and apostles etc. The fear of damnation brings about images of sin, evil, Satan and hell; whereas religious faith brings the images of confession, redemption, resurrection, salvation, Christ, crucifixion, God and heaven. Such images often define the metaphysical issues of divinity and life after death.

Out of the innumerable sources of imagery, a poet chooses those objects to serve as images that inspire his imagination for one or the other reason. Since the choice of imagery depends on various personal aspects of a poet’s life as well as the socio-political and economic milieu of the age, a study of imagery reveals many untold stories about them. The present study aims at having such
insight into the personality of Donne but it mainly concentrates on the study of the functions and sources of imagery in his poetry.

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