CHAPTER II

POETIC IMAGINATION

SECTION I

WESTERN THEORIES OF THE IMAGINATION:

The ultimate source of poetry, both according to ancient and modern theories of Western poetics, is a specialised faculty of the poet's mind, variously referred to as "poetic genius", "poetic instinct", "inspiration", "wit", "poetic imagination", "the Muse" etc. Though each of these terms carries a distinctive shade of meaning appropriate in the context of use, they all refer to a vague and mysterious power which is believed to be the cause of poetry. It is "the urge that sets a poet to work and the devotion that keeps him at it". But there is a basic difference between the ancient theories and the modern thinking on this subject. The ancient theories (of the 'poetic muse' etc.) in keeping with the primitive practice of myth-making, were attempts to explain the mystery of poetic creation. Modern theories of the poetic

1. Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Preminger et al., p. 396
imagination, on the other hand, endeavor to explain rationally, on the basis of argument and psychology, the powers of poetic creation. In this study, however, the terms mentioned above and similar others with all their nuances are taken approximately to refer to the poetic imagination or the faculty which is supposed to be responsible for aesthetic creation.

The question which naturally crops up is whether the imagination is inborn or acquired. The oldest view on this subject is that it is an inborn gift bestowed as a divine favour on a chosen few. Homer, and other poets, therefore, invoked the Muse in the beginning of their works for the successful completion of their undertaking. The earliest theoretical investigation, however, in the European tradition, of poetic inspiration is found in Plato's Dialogues. In the Ion Plato denies that the poet or rhapsode's gift is an art which can be studied and asserts that it is a divine gift which inspires the singer.

The gift which you possess of speaking excellently about Homer is not an art, but as I was just saying, an inspiration, there is a divinity moving you
The Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from those inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration. For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed.  

The poet who is thus possessed by the Muse is only a passive vehicle of the gods. "Through all these the God sways the souls of men in any direction which he pleases ..."

Poetic inspiration is a kind of noble madness.

And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains.  

It is clear from these passages that Plato does not endeavour to unravel the mystery of poetic inspiration.


3. ibid. 536, p.291

4. ibid. 534, p.289; also the Phaedrus, 245.
However this is not Plato's final view since in the Republic the cause of poetry, according to Plato, is imitation, or the poet's skill in make-believe, and not divine inspiration.

Though Aristotle recognizes the imagination, nowhere in his Poetics does he discuss its importance in poetic creation. Indeed, he seems to have rejected the old Platonic theory of inspiration. His classification of the imitative arts on the basis of the means of imitation, the manner of imitation and the object of imitation, and his careful analysis of the structure of tragedy apparently leaves no room for the poetic imagination. His theory of imitation seeks to

5. In the Poetics he mentions genius only in connection with the creation of metaphors. (The Art of Poetry, Ch.22, p.62)

6. Vide Gilbert's tr. of Ch.XVII of the Poetics—"therefore poetic art is the affair of the gifted man rather than of the madman, for men of the first kind can adapt themselves well but those of the second are beside themselves". (Literary Criticism—Plato to Dryden, p.94) and his discussion thereon (p.117). vide also Hathaway's discussion of the medieval controversy on Platonism versus Aristotelianism on inspiration (Age of Criticism, p.401)
explain the nature of poetic creation rather than the
nature of the poet's faculty which is responsible for
that creation. Horace and Longinus speak of genius as
the cause of poetry, but Horace parries the question
whether poetry is a product of genius or of art:

Often it is asked whether a praiseworthy
poem be due to Nature or to art. For my
part, I do not see of what avail is either
study, when not enriched by Nature's vein,
or native wit, if untrained; so truly does
each claim the other's aid, and make with
it a friendly league. 7

Horace ridiculed eccentricity of outward demeanour as a
sign of genius, and contended that instruction and
exercise improved natural genius. Genius, nevertheless,
remained a great mystery. "Mediocrity in poets has never
been tolerated by gods, men or publishers", but no amount
of instruction can engender greatness. Poetic decorum is
no doubt important and is seen at its best only in the
works of a genius, but it cannot be said that genius is
the outcome of decorum. For Longinus also, the most
important source of the Sublime is genius. Genius is born

7. Ars Poetica, l. 408-411, tr. R. Fairclough,
Horace, Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica, p. 495

8. ibid. l. 371-372, p. 481.

9. Longinus, On Literary Excellence, Ch. IX, tr. by A. H. Gilbert
in Literary Criticism - Plato to Dryden, A. H. Gilbert, 1962, p. 154
but it can derive some tangible advantages from training:

The great man, they hold, is born and taught, and the genius is what he is only by the gift of nature. The productions of native ability are thought to be ruined when subjected to the dry-as-dust technologist. But I believe this popular notion can be proved false, if only we consider that while in the strongest emotions Nature is a law unto herself, yet even she does not like to work rashly and entirely without method. Though she supplies the germ and primary element of everything, yet method must determine how much and when each one is to be employed and must assist in training the natural powers. 10

With Longinus, as with Horace, genius remains an imponderable about poetry, but still it cannot be altogether divorced from the method and training.

These critics do not probe into the nature of genius because the aim of their works is to give practical instruction to budding poets, and too much insistence on genius can be somewhat discouraging to them.

10. ibid. Ch.II, p.148
It is with the Renaissance that the theoretical investigation of the imagination may be said to begin. The Renaissance subjected to critical scrutiny concepts such as "inspiration" and "genius" which previous generations had taken left unexplained. The central issue in the long controversy between the so-called Platonists and the Aristotelians in the late Renaissance in Italy was whether poetic creation was explicable in terms of reason. The Platonists upheld the ancient belief in a mysterious furor poeticus, and the Aristotelians dismissed the idea as vanity or nonsense. For instance, Castelvetro cited Aristotle to reject the belief in divine inspiration:

Aristotle was not of the opinion that poetry was a special gift of God bestowed on one man rather than on another, as is the gift of prophecy and other similar privileges that are not natural and common to all ... This opinion had its origin and source in the ignorance of the common people and has been increased and favoured by the vainglory of the poets ... 12


12. Castelvetro - The Poetics of Aristotle Translated and Annotated, in Literary Criticism - Plato to Dryden, ed. A.H.Gilbert, p.310
But the old belief persisted, though in a changed form. It was an achievement of the Renaissance spirit of synthetis that it could reconcile this belief with its scientific rationalism. We see this in the first great English critic, Sir Philip Sidney, who accepted "the muse" or "genius" as a causal factor especially in the writing of sacred poetry.

Milton also ascribed his poetic power to the Muse.

13. "The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms, Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes and Proverbs ... Against those none will speak that hath the Holy Ghost in due reverence. In this kind though in full wrong divinity, were Orpheus, Amphion, Homer in his Hymns and many other both Greeks and Romans." Thd Defence of Poesy, p.100-101.

14. Of my Celestial Patroness, who designs
Her nightly visitation unimplord
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires.
Easy my unpremeditated Verse. (Paradise Lost IX 1.21-24)

In praising the muse, Milton was not merely following an old custom. He expressed his conviction about divine inspiration very clearly in The Reason of Church Government:
"But when God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say and what he shall conceal" (John Milton : Complete Poems and Major Prose, p.666)

His own poetic mission was a command of God and not a temporary whim; it was called for
"by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases". (ibid, p.671)
But the Renaissance thinkers went further, and tried to determine the function of the imagination. Sidney for instance, observed:

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature ... Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diverse poets have done ... Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.  

Bacon explained the function of the imagination in slightly different words. Poetry, he remarked,

was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind.  

The imagination, thus, was the faculty which rearranged and reorganised the stuff of our daily experience and re-created a better ordered or at least a pleasantly different world. It was distinguished from the reason and was considered autonomous. There was more

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15. Defence of Poesy, p.100


17. "... not being tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and severe that which nature hath joined" ibid. pp.24-25
than a suggestion that therefore it needed to be controlled by judgment.

That suggestion was elaborated when the imagination came to be investigated more systematically and as a specific psychological faculty in the philosophical works of Hobbes and Locke. Till then, it had been regarded as a divine gift, which could not be considered in rational terms. The Seventeenth Century British philosophers were interested in the problem of human behaviour and understanding, and it was in connection with this problem that they turned their attention to the imagination. They used the words "fancy" and "imagination" interchangeably, and contrasted the imagination with judgement which alone was rational. Hobbes equated the imagination with memory and maintained that it was rooted in sense perception. The word was derived from the word "image" and the sense which was responsible for giving images was the sense of sight. The eyes received impressions of objects, and those impressions persisted even after the objects were removed or the eyes were closed. This gave rise to the experience of the mental images of those objects. The imagination was made up of these images in memory. Hobbes explained this phenomenon in the following words:-
"... after the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. And this is it that the Latins call Imagination, from the image made in seeing and apply the same, though improperly, to all other senses. But the Greeks call it Fancy which signifies appearance and is as proper to one sense as to another". 18

But the imagination was something much less than normal sense-perception, because the "images" were not the real objects and because they were more obscure. Hence the imagination was a "decayed sense." The imagination and memory were practically identical, though they had different names. Hobbes said

When we would express the decay, and signify that the sense is fading, old and past, it is called memory. So that Imagination and Memory are but one thing, which for diverse considerations hath diverse names ... 20

But this is "simple" imagination; Hobbes spoke also of "compound" imagination which was the subject of fiction.


19. ibid. p.9

20. ibid. p.10
Compound imagination consisted of the combination of different images and gave rise to strange and wonderful things which were never seen in the real world:

From the sight of a man at one time, and of a horse at another, we conceive in our mind a Centaur. So when a man compoundeth the image of his own person with the image of the action of another man as when a man imagines himself a Hercules or an Alexander, which happeneth often to them that are much taken with reading of romances, is a compound imagination, and properly but a fiction of the mind.21

The Hobbes's theory of imagination, it is clear, did not go beyond the figures and situations in fairy tales and romances, and the sensuous images which are at the root of such figures of speech as simile and metaphor. The imagination was not a creative faculty at all and the causes of the pleasures of the imagination remained uninvestigated.

In Locke's theory, imagination becomes outcome of the wrong association of ideas. Locke was interested in the serious and important operations of human understanding which led to knowledge. Knowledge itself consisted in the comparison of ideas and in finding out their genuine connections. It was the outcome of the discovery of the

quoted from Beardsley's 'Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present Day' p.171
natural correspondence and connection that ideas sometimes had with each other. "It is the office and excellency of our reason to trace" these natural correspondences and connections. But in addition to these, there is also a kind of connection of ideas, not based on nature, but on chance and custom. This latter connection led Locke to investigate the problem of the imagination. While discussing memory he mentioned the mind's ability to call forth "dormant ideas" stored up in memory "which we call invention, fancy and quickness of parts". The connections or associations of ideas based merely on chance or custom have nothing to do with reality as the "ideas of goblins and sprites which have really nothing to do with darkness than light", become associated in the mind of a child by the tales of a foolish maid. This kind of association of ideas is at the root of fancy and figures of speech. Locke admitted fancy for the pleasure it gave but figures of speech he condemned as "perfect cheats".


23. ibid. I.199

24. ibid. I.531

25. Locke - 'Conduct of the Understanding' reproduced from Beardsley's 'Aesthetics -From Classical Greece to the Present Day', p.175
In Locke's view any association of ideas based on chance or custom was the source of error, superstition and prejudice, and it was totally opposed to logical thinking which might lead to truth.

The influence of these philosophers on the intellectual world of the 18th Century was immense. "To go against Mr. Hobbes ... was to defend the irrational and to perpetuate the old poetic paraphernalia; you stamped yourself as superstitions and old fashioned". The reason was ascendant everywhere and inspiration and enthusiasm became associated with religious fanaticism and imposture. (Thus Dr. Johnson defined enthusiasm as "vain confidence of divine favour or communication.")

The prestige of science was on the increase, and its stress was on universal and verifiable objective truth. This kind of intellectual atmosphere made a deep impact also on poetry. The emphasis came to be on the expression of what was general and universal in man's experience of life and the poet was advised to avoid everything that was private and individual or not in keeping with the general

experience of mankind. The fancy often led the poet astray, and the critic Thomas Rymer warned the poet against its snares:

... a poet is not to leave his reason, and blindly abandon himself to follow fancy, for then his fancy might be monstrous, might be singular, and please no body's maggot but his own; but reason is to be his guide, reason is common to all people, and can never carry him from what is natural. 27

The opposition between wit and judgement and the desirability of putting wit under the control of judgement were stressed also by Pope:

Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuse,
Want as much more, to turn it to its use;
For wit and judgement often are at strife,
Th' meant each other's aid, like man and wife. 28

The function of the imagination was to help the poet in perfecting expression with apt similes and

27. Critical Essays of the XXVIIth Century ed. J.E. Spingarn, II. 192

metaphors, making his thought delightful. The imagination "beats over and ranges through the field of memory, till it springs the quarry it hunted after."

Another important result of the influence of Hobbes and Locke was that the early 18th Century restricted the scope of the imagination only to image-making. This is clearly seen in the theories of

29. E.N. Hooker, however, gives a different interpretation of Pope's definition of wit as "What oft was thought but never so well expressed". It does not mean or imply, according to him, that wit is a stale or commonplace thought neatly triked out. "The definition rather supposes that the writer, starting with a common and universal experience, sees it in a new light; and his sensitive spirit, endowing it with life and fresh meaning, provides it with form, image, language and harmony ... It presupposes the liveliness and insight of the creative mind ..." ('Pope on Wit' in Eighteenth Century English Literature - Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. J.L. Clifford, (N.Y., O.U.P. 1959) p. 58.


31. Kenneth MacLean, John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century, pp. 55-56
Addison, Watts, Akenside. Addison for instance held that the imagination predominantly depended on the sense of sight:

It is this sense which furnished the imagination with its ideas, so that by the pleasures of the imagination or fancy ... I here mean such as arise from visible objects, either when we have them actually in our view, or when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions or any (of? the like occasion. We cannot indeed have a single image in the fancy that did not make its first entrance through the sight. 32

Addison's theory is based on Hobbes's conception of the imagination as a "decaying sense". Nevertheless, his essays on the pleasures of the imagination worked as a liberalising influence. His approach was literary and not purely epistemological. He recognised the utility of the imagination in contributing to the pleasure of poetry and came near to recognising it as a creative faculty:

... We have the power of retaining, altering and compounding these images, which we have once received, into all the varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the imagination, for by this faculty a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landskips more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature.33

32. The Spectator (No.411) ed.D.F.Bond, III 536-37
33. ibid.IIIp.537
The same ambivalent attitude is seen also in Johnson. "Imagination", "fancy", "wit" and "invention" are interrelated terms in Johnson's criticism. But while he praised wit and invention, he disfavoured the imagination and the fancy. In keeping with the 18th Century practice he used these terms synonymously, and made them the power of forming "ideal pictures" or "images" or "representations", their most important characteristic being unreality or illusoriness. Johnson expressed his distrust of this faculty in a number of places. In The Rambler (No. 89) he condemned the "luxury of fancy" with its "airy gratifications" as "fatal to a man whose business is to think".

The dreamer retires to his apartments, shuts out the cares and interruptions of mankind, and abandons himself to his own fancy; new worlds rise up before him, one image is followed by another, and a long succession of delights dances around him. He is at last called back to life by nature, or by custom, and enters peevish into society, because he cannot model it to his own will ... The infatuation strengthens by degrees, and like the poison of opiates, weakness weakens his powers, without any external symptom of malignity. 36

34, 35, 36. The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, IV. 105-106
Like Hobbes, Johnson considered the fancy an inferior faculty to be controlled by the reason "All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity". In the Life of Butler, he described the imagination as a power that combined the materials that study and observation supplied. It was therefore a power that was useless without knowledge. The influence of Locke on Johnson is clear here.

A perceptible change in the 18th Century point of view is encountered in Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses on Art*. Reynolds' observations on the imagination are incidental and brief, and he does not attempt to define it. But he stated that the appeal of art was to the imagination and the feelings:

I observe, as a fundamental ground, common to all the Arts with which we have any concern in this discourse that they address themselves only to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility. 39


Johnson spoke also of the use of the imagination in poetry in making images, metaphors etc. This will be considered in the Ch. IV below.

Reynolds looked upon the imagination as the faculty associated with truth. He contrasted the imaginative truth of art with the argumentative truth of science. Art was not contrary to reason; rather it was governed by a faculty superior to the reason.

There is in the commerce of life, as in Art, a sagacity which is far from being contrary to right reason, and is superior to any occasional exercise of that faculty, which supersedes it; and does not wait for the slow progress of deduction, but goes at once, by what appears (to be) a kind of intuition, to the conclusion. For though it may appear bold to say it, the imagination is here the residence of truth. 40

The products of the imagination cannot be explained in terms of reason. Their significance is grasped intuitively:

A man endowed with this faculty, feels and acknowledges the truth, though it is not always in his power, perhaps, to give reason for it ... 41

Reynolds' views on the imagination are the sign of the changing attitudes of the times. The imagination is

40. ibid. p.230
41. ibid.
no longer for him a merely associative faculty busy in building images. It is a creative faculty of the artist's mind, and it is responsible also for the spectator's capacity for aesthetic appreciation. It absorbs, assimilates and orders intricate human experiences of life and produces a sovereign impression in the form of art. From Reynolds to the great Romantics is not a far distance. In the brief observations of Reynolds almost all the ideas of the Romantics on the imagination are implicit.

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42. "This impression is the result of the accumulated experience of our whole life, and has been collected, we do not know how or when". ibid. p.230

43. Blake criticised Reynolds because his views on this subject were radically different. He sincerely believed in the old inspiration theory and discounted Reynolds' contention that genius could be taught, and argued that if "Pretence to Inspiration is a Lie and a Deceit, the whole Bible is Madness". (The Complete Writings of William Blake, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, p.452). He deeply suspected that Reynolds' theory of art, with its tenets of the imitation of nature, ideal beauty and a rational ordering of materials, was a counterpart of the Lockean epistemology which he violently opposed. In it, knowledge was the outcome of reflection on sense-data. Blake subscribed to the old theory of innate ideas and immediate vision of things. "Knowledge of Ideal Beauty is Not to be Acquired. It is born with us. Innate Ideas in Every Man are born with him." (ibid. p.459) Among post-Renaissance critics, Blake alone perhaps upholds the old inspiration theory with such vehemence.
The Romantics discarded the empiricist doctrine that knowledge consisted only in finding out objective natural correspondences and connections between things and that the mind was only a passive recipient of sense impressions. They asserted the vital role of the mind in arranging, ordering and interpreting the stuff of man's experience. It was because of the imagination that the mind could transform sensations into knowledge. The imagination, accordingly, was not the source of error and superstitions as the empiricists believed, but was the source of knowledge. In addition, it afforded a glimpse into the subjective, inward kind of truth for which the empiricists had no explanation. Consider "the truth" of the following poem:

**The Garden of Love**

I went to the Garden of Love
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green

And the Gates of this Chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore;

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44. The epistemological position of the English Romantics and German idealists dealt is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter III, Sec. I below.
And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires 45

It is inane to try to limit the references for
"The Garden of Love", "Chapel", "the board" etc. to their
natural correspondences. They extend to the creations
of the poet's imagination. It is through these very images
that the poet seeks to convey the truth of his conviction,
namely, that organised religion has killed the very spirit
of true religion. True religion is the "Garden of Love";
organised religion has filled it with "graves and tombstones",
and has built a "chapel" with a "Thou Shalt Not" board.
All these imaginative expressions convey a truth of inner
experience. Empiricism did not take into account this kind
of truth because it discounted the role of the mind in
dealing with the facts of experience.

Such notions of the nature and function of the
imagination were proclaimed by Wordsworth early in his
career. The imagination, according to him, was the power
that helped a man to see truths that the senses could
not reveal.

45. The Poems of William Blake, ed.W.H.Stevenson,
(Longmans, 1971) p.146.
Imagination here - the Power so called
Through the sad incompetence of human speech,
That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once some lonely traveller, I was lost;
Halted without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now can say -
'I recognise thy glory' : in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world ... 46

The imagination was superior to ordinary reason;
it showed what was permanent in the ever changing show
of things and made man aware of the ideas that permanently
abode.

I had been taught to reverence a Power
That is the visible quality and shape
And image of right reason; that matures
Her processes by steadfast laws; gives birth
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
No vain conceits; provokes to no quick turns
Of self-applauding intellect; but trains
To meekness and exalts by humble faith;
Holds up to the mind intoxicate
With present objects, and the busy dance
Of things that pass away, a temperate show
Of objects that endure; and by this course
Disposes her, when over fondly set
On throwing off incumbrances, to seek
In man, and in the frame of social life
Whate'er there is desirable and good
Of kindred permanence, unchanged in form,
And function, or, through strict vicissitude
Of life and death, revolving ... 47

46. The Prelude vi, 592-602.
47. ibid. XIII, 1. 20-39
The imagination is the gift of Nature to great minds:

... The Power, which all
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
To bodily sense exhibits, is the express
Resemblance of that glorious faculty
That higher minds bear with them as their own.48

It was this mental power, shared by all, small and great alike, that helped man organise and interpret the manifold and ever changing flux of experience.

The mind of man is framed even like the breath
And harmony of music There is a dark
Invisible workmanship that reconciles
Discordent elements, and makes them move
In one society.49

Wordsworth's conception of the imagination as seen in The Prelude was an expression of what he instinctively felt to be the nature and work of that faculty.

But Wordsworth did not set forth an argument or a theory of the imagination. That work was attempted by his philosopher-friend, S.T.Coleridge. Coleridge's is perhaps the most widely accepted theory of the imagination.

48. ibid. XIV.86-90.
49. ibid. I.351-355.
in Western poetics. "The nature and genesis of the imagination" is one of the important problems which Coleridge deals with in his *Biographia Literaria*. In Chapter XIII of the *Biographia* he gives, in response to a complaint from a "friend", an exposition of his concept of the imagination. Prior to that in Chapters V to IX he traces the growth of his mind from Hartley's associationism to German transcendental idealism. This is done in preparation to the expounding of the "nature and genesis of the imagination". It is based on his conception of the mind.

Coleridge postulated "understanding" and "reason" as the two cognitive functions of the mind. The understanding discursively dealt with the phenomenal world apprehended through sense impressions; the reason comprehended through direct insight the transcendental universal forms of things in nature. The understanding dealt with the world of nature; the reason, with the world of thought.

50. The influence of Kant and Schelling on Coleridge's thought has been noticed in greater detail in Ch. III Sec. I below.
By understanding, I mean the faculty of thinking and forming judgements on the notices furnished by the sense, according to certain rules existing in itself, which rules constitute its distinct nature. By pure reason, I mean the power by which we become possessed of principles - eternal varities of Plato and Descartes, and of ideas, not images.51

But neither reason nor understanding is complete in itself; each stands for an aspect of the reality. The universal or the particular per se is not the reality. It is not a fixity but a process in which the concrete and the ideal interact and complete and fulfil each other. But they cannot exist in worlds apart. It is necessary to bring them together in coalescence, and the mind does that with the help of the imagination. God created the mind in His own image, and therefore, like the creator who created the world out of chaos, the mind creates thought out of chaotic sense impressions. The essence of God's creation is natura naturans and not dead matter, working according to the laws of physics. God's creation was not one determinate act but is a continuous process realizing natura naturans. Man's imagination, bringing

together the ideal and the concrete is a repetition on a small scale of the same process. It fuses "the insights of reason with the impressions and conceptions drawn from the concrete".  

The imagination being the prime condition of cognition is common to all. This is the primary imagination which organises experience and puts order and form upon sense impressions. It is an intermediary which makes the interaction between the subject and the object possible and thus causes cognition.

There are clearly two powers (i.e., the subject and the object) at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION. 53

The imagination can give direct intuitive cognition of Ideas and Essences in the Platonic sense. It is "as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM". But Coleridge's

52. W.J.Bate Coleridge (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1969)p.155
53. Biographia Literaria, I.86
54. ibid. I.202
concern was not with the primary imagination; it was with the process of creation in art. He postulated, therefore, a heightened form of this faculty which he called "the secondary imagination". Coleridge explained its nature and function as follows:

The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is made impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unite. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. 55

The important point is that the secondary imagination co-exists with "the conscious will". Shawcross, Coleridge's editor, quotes Schelling's words to bring out the significance of this remark.

Intelligence is productive in two-fold wise, either blindly or unconsciously or with freedom and consciousness; unconsciously productive in the perception of the universe, consciously in the creation of an ideal world.

The primary imagination is the organ of common perception, the faculty by which we have an experience of an actual world of phenomena. The secondary imagination is the same power in a heightened degree, which enables its possessor to see the world of our common experience in its real significance. And the creations of art are the embodiments of this vision. 56

55. ibid. I.202

56. J. Shawcross on Biographia Literaria I.
The secondary imagination is a higher creative or plastic power. What it gives is not philosophical abstractions. It reworks the perpetual data of primary imagination into concrete expressions. These expressions are perhaps symbols of the "ideas" - the self, the world and God - which are otherwise given as concepts by the reason. Thus, the imagination and its product (i.e., art or poetry) are midway between the particular objects and abstract concepts.

Art itself might be defined as of a middle quality between a thought and a thing; or as I have said before, the union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human. It is the figured language of thought and is distinguished from nature by the unity of all parts in one thought or idea. 57

The mention of "union and reconciliation" and unity of all parts is reminiscent of the adjective "esemplastic" which Coleridge used to describe the secondary imagination. In a celebrated passage Coleridge explains this unifying function of the imagination:

57. Biographia Literaria, I.249
Imagination ... reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities of sameness with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and of freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. 58

The emphasis Coleridge places on the intuitive knowledge of Ideas and Essences, finding expression in the works of the imagination links his theory with the poetry of the great Romantics like Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. This poetry invests man and objects of nature with the reflections and feelings of the poet's mind, and sees in them the divine presence or a fundamental truth about human life. Thus Blake finds in his Divine Image the presence of God in the human virtues of mercy, pity, peace and love, and Wordsworth hears in the notes of the cuckoo the intimations of a previous hour of bliss (indicative of immortality):

58. ibid. II.12
Though babbling only to the vale
Of sunshine and of flowers,
Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours 56

And also,

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream
It is not now as it hath been of yore;
Turn wheresover I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen now, can see no more. 60

In Coleridge's theory, the imagination is clearly distinguished from the image-making faculty of fancy.
The fancy is the common source of imagery. Its nature and mode of operation are altogether different. It does not deal with Ideas and Essences, but plays with "fixities and definites". It is,

indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory, the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association 61


60. Ode-Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Childhood, Ibid. p.460

61. Biographia Literaria, I.202
From the mention of the law of association it becomes clear that the fancy in Coleridge's theory is the same as the imagination in the theories of Hobbes, Locke and Addison. It is only an ancillary faculty in poetic creation.

Coleridge's theory of the imagination as the creative faculty of the poet's mind, as his vision of what is significant and universal in human experience, has found wide acceptance among poets and critics alike. The later theories of the imagination are clearly indebted to his thought. The modern approach to the nature of the imagination is different. The imagination provides the poet with images, but the image is not a stylistic embellishment or an illustrative device. Rather, it is through the image that the artist interprets the world. Hence the image has become so important in modern literature and criticism. The image is prized because of its symbolic value and because it stands for the autonomy of art. The view of the work of art as itself an image was already appreciated by Coleridge when he characterised art as mediating between the world of thought and the world of nature. The image is neither an abstract concept, nor a physical fact. The artistic
image is a symbol. It is at once individual and universal, and has a distinct existence of its own marked by organicity and completeness. Coleridge distinguished the symbolic from the allegorical.

An Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial and the former shapeless to boot 62

The symbol, on the contrary, is

caracterised by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Special or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. 63

Symbols are "at once portraits and ideals". The figures in the Old Testament and the characters of Shakespeare, Coleridge maintains, are symbols in this sense:


63. ibid. p.30

64. ibid. p.30
In the Bible every agent appears and acts as a self-subsisting individual; each has a life of its own, and yet all are one life. 65

Shakespeare's characters, from Othello and Macbeth down to Dogberry and the Grave-digger, may be termed ideal realities. They are not the things themselves so much as the abstracts of things, which a great mind takes into itself, and there naturalizes them into its own conception. 66

Modern views of a work of art as an image are only variations of Coleridge's theory of the esemplastic imagination and of his conception of the artistic symbol. His views on this subject have deeply influenced even self-proclaimed anti-romantic critics of our Century like T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot. What distinguishes poetry from prose according to Hulme, is imagery. The language of prose is opaque and mechanical; that of poetry is transparent and hands over sensations vividly.

The element in it which will be found in the rest of art is not the accidental fact that imagery conveys over an actually felt visual sensation, but the actual character of that communication, the fact that it hands you over the sensation as directly as possible, attempts to get it over bodily with all the qualities it possessed for (sic) when you experienced it. 67

65. ibid. p. 31


Imagery, accordingly, is not mere decoration; it is "the very essence of an intuitive language". Art presents the exact curve of the thing, but it is not interested in the individual. Its interest is in "discovery and disentanglement", i.e., discovery of the essence and distanglement from action. "Art is the pure contemplation of the Idea in a moment of emancipation from the Will".

Another important modern critic who stresses the imagination and the image (without using the terms prominently) is T.S. Eliot. According to Eliot, a work of art is a product of the artist's unifying sensibility. It is this sensibility which distinguishes the artist from the ordinary man. The ordinary man's sensibility is merely receptive; it cannot unify disparate experiences into meaningful wholes. Whereas,

68. ibid. p. 135

69, 70. ibid. p. 149
when a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The later falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. 71

Poets have "a mechanism of sensibility" which can assimilate any kind of experience. Eliot observes that the metaphysical poets possessed this capacity to an extraordinary degree. The poet's mind is like a crucible which transmutes all experiences it receives. It is the sign of its maturity and makes it the perfect medium of art.

And I hinted, by an analogy, that the mind of the mature poet differs from that of an immature one by being a more finely perfected medium in which special or very varied feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations. 73

But the rule is that the end-product of such combinations should be self-consistent and self-intelligible. 74

71. *Selected Essays*, p.287
72. ibid. p.287
73. ibid. p.18
74. ibid, p.111
Such a product is an altogether new thing, and concentration is its essential attribute. In it the dichotomy of thought and feeling is dissolved and the result is a unified experience. This, again, is seen to a remarkable extent in the poetry of the late Elizabethans and early Jacobeans:

In Chapman especially there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling, which we exactly find in Donne.

The poet's artefact is autonomous. It exists somewhere between the writer and the reader, and arrests the timeless in the temporal by virtue of its historical sense or tradition. Eliot does not use the terms 'image' and 'symbol', but his views have a kinship with Coleridge's conception of aesthetic symbol.

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75. ibid. p.21
77. The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p.30
78. Discussed in greater detail in Ch.I pp.114-117
Another important critic of our Century, I.A. Richards also holds a similar view of the work of art, very frequently though he, too, does not use the terms "image" and "symbol" in his aesthetic investigations. He also stresses that a work of art is an autonomous whole complete in itself, that the poet's sensibility plays a vital role in its creation, and that its significance is of an altogether different order from the statements in ordinary language. Accordingly, the role played by language in poetic creation is Richards' chief concern. In this, he is deeply influenced by Coleridge's theory of language and its correlation to his theory of the imagination. Coleridge held that language played a vital role in giving expression to the operations of the imagination, and that it was a living and growing system. Richards acknowledges his indebtedness to this view of Coleridge very clearly:

He was a semasiologist - aware, as few have been, that to ask about the meanings of words is to ask about everything. And I am assuming that his contributions towards this obscure, neglected, yet most central incipient science of the future are as important as he took them to be ... and that to attempt to take his work another step onward is the best way of paying back a debt.  

79. Coleridge's theory of language and its correlation to the imagination are discussed in some detail in Ch.IV below. (pp.

80. Coleridge on Imagination. pp.XI-XIII.
Richards uses Coleridge's metaphysical machinery and concept also but only as "instruments with which to explore the nature of poetry"; the main thrust of his argument however, is linguistic or "semasiological".

The use of language in poetry is different from that in other discourses (i.e. ordinary and scientific discourses) by the fact that it uses language imaginatively, and not as a code of signs. Words in a language are not mere signs and their meanings are not exhausted by dictionary entries of usage. "A word becomes something that a million people use on the same day, and that successive generations go on using through hundreds of years." A word thus becomes a repository of experiences, and that is its meaning. In everyday speech only a few facts of a word's meaning are utilized and not in full meaning. In imaginative speech it is different. "The projection of its meaning into a word is an instance of Imagination." And meanings thus projected interact and interanimate, and lead to one total effect. In the poet's usage,

81. ibid. p.21
82. Coleridge on Imagination, p.104
83. ibid. p.110
Words are the meeting points at which regions of experience which can never combine in sensation or intuition come together. 84

This theory of language gives a clue to Richards' theory of the imagination. "In Imagination the parts of the meaning -both as regards the ways in which they are apprehended and the modes of combination of their effects in the mind - mutually modify one another." Accordingly "any presentation of an integral view of life" is a work of the imagination. In this, the poet's sensibility plays an important role because the poet has a perfect control over his experience and he undergoes it with "with more than usual vigilance." 87 His responses are highly discriminating and ordered, and therefore he can visualize varying possibilities of existence more clearly, i.e., without habitual narrow interests and confusion. 88

84. Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.131.
85. Coleridge on Imagination, p.86
86. ibid. p.96
87. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.184
88. ibid. p.32
The poet's creations, since they do not have any correspondences in the world of actuality, are only myths. But they are highly significant myths because they re-order and re-organise the world of actuality and present what is not available in ordinary experience. "The saner and greater mythologies are not fancies: they are the utterances of the whole soul of man and as such, inexhaustible to mediation."

I.A. Richards in a very significant way completed the theory of aesthetic symbol or image first enunciated by Coleridge. He provided that theory with the much needed theory of language. His theory of art explains very satisfactorily the nature of the products of the imagination.

In this Section we traced in brief the history of the imagination in Western poetics in its vicissitudes. No other concept in the history of thought has perhaps gone through such extreme changes in fortune. At one time it was esteemed as a divine gift, at another, a claim to it was regarded as an imposture; it was valued at one time, as the source of divine wisdom; it was condemned, at another, as sheer madness. After Kant and Coleridge

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however, the imagination and its products, and their autonomy and significance came to be widely accepted. With this we may conclude our brief consideration of the Western theories of the imagination and turn to the Indian theories.

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SECTION II

THE INDIAN THEORIES OF THE POETIC IMAGINATION.

'Sakti', 'pratibhā', or pratibhāna are the Sanskrit words for poetic imagination. The consideration of the poetic imagination constitutes a very important part of Sanskrit poetics. It is considered the most important of the factors that collectively give rise to poetry. Indeed, it is the essential condition of poetry. As in Western poetics, the imagination or 'pratibhā' in Sanskrit poetics, in the sense of "genius" or "inspiration", is an imponderable of literature, but at the same time, as a specialised faculty of the poet's mind, it is regarded as a psychological phenomenon which may be speculatively investigated.

The oldest view about the imagination is that it is a divine gift which comes in the form of inspiration. The earliest Indian poetry is represented in the Vedas, and the belief is that the hymns in the Vedas were not composed by the sages, but were 'seen' by them.

90. These factors are mentioned below.
The Sanskrit word for "sage" is "ṛṣi" which literally means "seer". It is not infrequent for the Vedic poets to pray to the gods to "send" hymns to them. The story of the composition of the Ramayana also gives expression to the belief that poetic genius is a divine gift. The sage Valmiki saw a Niśāda kill an innocent bird Kraunca playing with its mate. When he saw the poor bird in the agony of death, words of indignation spontaneously came to him.

ma niśāda pratisthām tvam agarah śāśvatīh samāh
yat kraunca mithunādekan nyavadhiḥ kāmamohitam

(tr. May you O Niśāda, fail to get name and fame through eternity, killed as you have, one out of the loving pair of Kraunca birds.)

Valmiki was greatly astonished at the style of this unexpected expression and began to think over it. He noticed that the expression was neatly divided into feet of a measured length and that it had a musical

91. ṛṣīrdarśanāt.

quality like the rhythm of a harp. The sage could not
guess how the expression came to him. But he was not
kept in suspense for long. The great God Brahma soon
paid him a visit and told that he had himself caused the
wonderful expression to be uttered by the sage. He then
enjoined upon the sage to treat of the entire life of
Rama in the style of that expression.

It will be incorrect to conclude from the story of
the genesis of the Rāmāyanā that pratībhā is in every
case the gift of a god. No Sanskrit poetician, except
Hemacandra
perhaps Hemacandra, mentions pratībhā as a divine gift.
Hemacandra also gives this kind of genius a secondary
place and calls it borrowed.

All Sanskrit poeticians agree that pratībhā or the
imagination is the most important causal factor in poetry.
The other factors are the observation of the transactions
in the world (lokāveksana), the study of the śāstras
and the lore, and the sympathetic criticism of elders.
But the other factors are shared even by non-poets. Only genius is rare and inborn. It cannot be acquired through labour as scholarship may be acquired by a dull pupil through the instruction of a teacher. Vaman calls genius the seed of poetry. A poem produced without it only evokes ridicule.

The importance accorded to pratibha leads to two further questions: (1) To what extent is it within the poet's control? (2) What is its nature?

If pratibha is completely beyond the poet's control, the normative science of poetics has no relevance. But it is not so. Practice, perseverance and expert advice have their importance. In this respect Sanskrit poeticians hold a view easily comparable to that of Horace:

95. gurūpaḍeśād adhyetum śastraṁ jāḍadhivyopyalam, kāvyam tu jāyate jātu kasyacit pratibhāvatah, (Bhāmaha, I.5)

96. Kavītvabījam pratibhānam; yasmādvanā kāvyam na nispadyate. nispannam vā hāsyāyatanam syād (Vāmana, Kāvyālamkārasutra, I.3.16)
Whether a good poem be the work of nature or of art is a moot point. For my part I fail to see the use of study without wit or of wit without training ...

All Sanskrit poeticians recognise that though genius is supreme, the skill born of practice and perseverance is also necessary. It has its fruit as Dandin says; it helps a man born without genius to achieve poetic excellence. But this kind of skill marks the second-rate genius. Sanskrit poeticians describe it in rather pejorative terms as "acquired" (upādya), "superadded" (uapādhikī), "borrowed" (ahāryā), or "tutored" (apeadesikī).


98. amandascabhiyogosya kāraṇam kāvyasampadah, (The Kāvyādārśa, I.103)

99. Rudrata's Kavyaleśkāra, I.17

100. Hemacandra's Kāvyānuśāsana, I.6

101. Rajaśekhara's Kāvyamīmāṁsā, Ch.IV.
Whether genius or the imagination is inborn or acquired or got as a gift from a deity, it must have some defining characteristics. This leads to the more difficult question: 'What is the nature of pratibbā?'.

The Sanskrit poeticians hold that pratibbā is a kind of samskāra which comes to an individual through previous births. The notion of pratibbā as a samskāra has a reference to the Hindu doctrine of kārma and rebirth. The rationale or mystique or whatever we call it, of the doctrine of kārma does not, however, help us much in understanding the nature of the samskāra which is said to be the seed of poetic genius. Not much direct help is available even from the critics who use the terms vāsanā and samskāra to characterise the poetic imagination, because they took it for granted that their readers understood these terms. Fortunately, there is some indirect evidence which throws much valuable light on the Indian concept of pratibbā as a samskāra.

Samskāra means, among many other things, a latent and subtle impression left on the mind of a man by an 

102. janmāntarāgata - samskāravīśesah kaścit
(Vāmana’s kāvyaśāsanastra 1.3.16)
experience. Thus, when we see a rose at a distance, we see not only its colour and shape, but become aware also of its fragrance. Our awareness of the fragrance of the rose in this instance is not a matter of perception, since the flower by supposition is at a distance. It is the product of our past experience of that quality in the rose. Whatever that experience left on our mind about the rose is its Samskāra. Samskāra is not memory, since memory is associated with particular objects and occasions in the past. In the example given above, we do not remember the fragrance of the rose smelt in the past but simply become aware of that quality in the rose - any rose. In the epistemology of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school this kind of experience is called alaukika pratyākṣa (transcendental perception). The psychological truth involved here is the familiar one that all percepts are partly presentative and partly representative. (We shall return to the problem of the poetic imagination as a kind of transcendental perception later.) Our experience of life leaves on our mind innumerable subtle and latent impressions. This process

103. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 249
goes beyond our present life since, according to the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, we bring with us at the time of our birth all the *sāṃskāras* of all our immemorial past births. The secret of the poetic imagination, according to the Indian poeticians, lies in these *sāṃskāras*. But here a question naturally arises. Nobody is free from these *sāṃskāras* since life makes subtle and latent impressions indiscriminately on all. Wherein, then does the distinctness of the poet lie? Let us, for the moment concentrate on the qualities of the ideal reader. According to the Indian poeticians, an ideal reader of poetry also must have the faculty of the imagination. Rajaśekhara calls the reader's imagination *bhāvayitrī pratibhā* and defines it as follows:

\[
śā hi kaveh śramam abhiśrayam ca bhāvayati
tayā khalu phalitah kaver vyāpāratarurānyathā
so avakesi syat. 105
\]

(tr. That indeed, makes the poet's effort fruitful and reveals his meaning. With that really does the tree of the poet's endeavour come to fruition; otherwise, it will remain barren.)

104. *adhikārī cātra vimalaprabhānasālī̄hrdayayah, AB I.279

105. *KM.* Ch.IV
This, in fact, is the bridge between the poet and the reader. The hrdaya-sāṃvāda or communion of hearts between the two of which the Indian poeticians speak so often becomes possible because the reader has a sympathetic imaginative understanding of what the poet says. The reader's imaginative faculty (his aesthetic instinct) is also a kind of sāṃskāra, but while speaking of it, the poeticians fortunately do not touch the esoteric doctrine of karma. Their discussion of it is more down to earth. A keen observation of and a lively interest in the transactions of the world are said to be necessary for an understanding of literature, but these are not enough. The impressions left by the experience of life on a person must work in such a way as to attune his heart to art-experience. But unfortunately life impressions do not always work in this way in all cases, and therefore, there are plenty of people who have no aesthetic sensitivity. Only a person whose heart is attuned to art-experience can understand the poet's meaning. But what, then, is the poet's meaning?

The poet's meaning, as it finds expressions in his work, is also ultimately derived from his experience of life. Like an ideal reader, the poet is also a man of keen
observation and has a lively interest in the activities in the world. There is, however, a basic difference between a mere man of the world with his insatiable and often idle and vulgar curiosity about all and sundry particulars, and the poet, whose observation is conditioned by his pratibha. The poet, when he sees the objects in the world, is interested not in them, but in the essences behind them. To impart a concrete form to these essences in a work of art is the function of the imagination. Bhatta Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta have indirectly stressed this in their respective concepts of bhāvakatva and sādhāranikarana (universalization).

But the poet's work does not end with universalization; it rather begins with it. Universality is there even in the abstractions of science and philosophy but that is not art. The universality of man's experience of life is given in art a delightful form capable of affording rasa. As Sri Aurobindo says, the function of poetry is not to teach truth of any particular kind, nor indeed to teach at all, nor to pursue knowledge, nor to serve any religious or ethical aim, but to embody beauty in the word and give delight. 106

The word is naturally central to the function of the imagination. Its power is seen in the poet's use of words. They are his tools.

Pratibhā gives the poet, in the first place, mastery over his tools. It provides him with the various means of expression, such as vocabulary, figures of speech, style and ingenious meanings etc. and makes him intuitively aware of their proper use. It enables him to present things in an altogether new light, in such a way that in his words they appear for ever new and fresh. Pratibhā is a kind of intellect (prajñā), but it is not the analytical and discursive intellect. It will be more correct to characterise it as a kind of vision or intuition into the significance of things. It shines only when the poet sheds his limited ego and becomes one with his subject. This condition is analogous to the yogi's realization of the Supreme Reality in samādhi (transcendental meditation). In that condition the yogi is free from the

107. va śabdagrāmam arthasartham alamkāratantram uktimārgam anyadapi tathāvidham adhihrdayam pratibhāsayati (KM, Ch. IV)

108. pratibhānam varpanīyaviṣayanūtanollekhā śalītvam.
(Abhinavagupta on the Dh.A., p. 137)
ignorance (avidyā) which obstructs that realisation.
The common man always suffers from avidyā and therefore cannot have the vision of the Highest; his vision is distorted because

avidyā is the fall from intuition, the mental deformity of the finite self that disintegrates the divine into a thousand different fragments ... (it is) the twist of the mind which makes it impossible for it to see things except through the texture of space-time cause. 109

When avidyā is removed, the obstruction covering the vision is lifted. This happens also on a different plane. The inability to see the deeper significance of things, so common among people, is like avidyā. When the inability is done away with, everything appears in its true light. 110
The man in whom this happens is a born genius.

109. S.Radakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, II.575

110. tatra sahājāmāh sā āvaranakṣayopaśamānātrat sahajā. savituriva prakāśasvabhāvasya atmanoabhrapatalamiva ānāvaranīyādyāvaranam. tasya uditasya kṣaye anuditasya upaśame ca yah prakāśāvirbhavah sā sahajā pratibhā (Hemacandra I.5, p.6)
But this does not end only with awareness. It must necessarily lead to creation. As Abhinavagupta defines, the imagination is the intellect’s power to create a novel thing. In the process of creation the poet’s mind is fully concentrated on the work, and various possibilities present themselves to him. The poet comes to visualise very vividly even the things which are not actually before him. But it is not building up mere mental images. It is conveying a sense which people without the poetic imagination can never have on their own. It is seen in grand and striking poetic conceptions.

The creations of the imagination are not mere copies or shadows of the objects in the world. They have an independent existence of their own. Art-objects are autonomous (ananyaparatantra) and complete in themselves.

111. *apūrvavastunirmānaksamā prajñā* (Abhinava on Dh.A. p.29)

112. *manasi sādā susamādhini visphuṇanamanekadhārthasya* (Rudrata I.15)

113. *apratibhavasya padārthasārthah parokṣa iva*,

*pratibhāvatah punarapāyatopi pratyakṣa iva* (KM Ch.IV)

114. *KP* Ch.I.1
Poetic creation is a world apart and the poet is the creator of this world. It excels even God's creation because it is full of *rasa*. It is the seer's vision of the world in a concrete form. The poet is a seer because his imagination is the perception of the principles behind various states and natures.

115. **नायर्षिह कवित्युक्तम रशि च रिला दर्शनात**
**विचित्रभावधर्ममा तत्तवप्रक्ष्या च दर्शनम**

(*Kāvyānusāsana* Ch.I, p.6)
SECTION III

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE WESTERN AND THE INDIAN
THEORIES OF THE IMAGINATION.

In both Western and Indian poetic traditions the oldest view about poetic genius is that it is a kind of divine gift. In the Indian tradition this view is represented by the belief that the Vedic hymns are inspired by the gods. The same belief is seen in the story of the genesis of the Rāmāyāna. In the Western tradition this view is powerfully presented in Plato's Ion and Phaedrus. The most important aspect of this view is that the poet has no control over his inspiration. Plato, for instance, looked upon poetic inspiration as a kind of divine madness, and compared poets with Corybantean revellers who were not in their right mind when they sang. He even used the word "orgy" to describe poetic inspiration. The poet, according to him was only a passive vehicle through which God spoke. The oracular function of the poet and the orgiastic nature of poetic inspiration and poetic rapture are nowhere to be seen in Indian poetics.
A corollary of the inspiration theory is that poetic genius can be obtained through prayer. This belief was widely shared both in India and the West, as can be seen from the practice of invocation in the beginning of a poem, especially an epic poem. We may only mention here the Indian poet's "maṅgaḷacaraṇa" and Milton's invocation in the beginning of Paradise Lost as examples in point.

Indian poeticians, however, did not attach much value to this theory. Their concepts of "borrowed" (āhāryā) and "tutored" (aupadeśikī) pratibhā were no more than a reluctant concession to an old and widespread belief.

This does not mean that Indian poeticians did not accept inspiration as the cause of poetry. The source of inspiration, in their thinking, was not divine favour, but saṃskāra. Because of the concept of saṃskāra (subtle latent impressions made by life experiences), the Indian theory of poetic imagination has become very complex.
The सांस्कृत part of this theory derives from the Hindu doctrines of कर्म and rebirth, and there is no analogous theory in Western poetics. But apart from this, there are other elements in it, such as the imagination as the perception of essences and as the creative faculty, which are useful for comparison.

All Sanskrit poeticians maintain that the imagination is the only source of poetry. Without it there can be no poetic creation. This means that the secret of poetic creation lies hidden in the poet's personality, since the poet's प्रतिभā is part of his being. The difference in the aesthetic quality of different poets is due to the differences in their geniuses. Rājaśekhara clearly says so - प्रतिभातारतांयेन प्रतिष्ठाम bhuvi bhūridhā.

In Western poetics, on the other hand, there are some critics who entirely reject the view that the imagination is the cause of poetry. Aristotle, for example, nowhere mentions in his Poetics the poet's imagination as a causal factor in poetry. Castelvetro, a well known Italian critic in the Renaissance and commentator on
Aristotle, openly refuted Plato's theory of divine inspiration. He believed, (even as Aristotle believed) that a careful study of the structure would enable any person to write tragedy.

Horace raises the question whether genius or art is responsible for poetic creation but hesitates to answer it explicitly. Longinus speaks only of the sublime and holds that only genius can produce it. Both Horace and Longinus agree that genius can profit from training. This is also the view of Indian poeticians.

It is doubtful whether Sanskrit poeticians would agree with Aristotle's view implicit in his method of structural analysis. They would gladly study his method from the critic's point of view and appreciate its utility in understanding a work of art. But they would never subscribe to the view that structural analysis enables one to write tragedies. Bhamaha's view in this regard is representative; he says that no amount of learning can create a poet if natural genius is lacking.
Of course the Indian theory of the imagination as a product of *sāṃskāras* is not without difficulties. The subtle and latent *sāṃskāras* are very elusive because they lie hidden in the mind of the individual. In the case of the poet, the *sāṃskāra* which constitutes his *pratibhā* is experienced only in the form of his work, for apart from it, there is nothing to manifest the *sāṃskāra*. This only means that the process of poetic creation must remain, to a very large extent, a mystery.

The systematic theoretical investigation of the nature of the imagination is of comparatively recent origin in the West. It began with the philosophical works of Hobbes and Locke. In India, on the other hand, the investigation began with the work of so ancient an author as Rudrāṭa (9th Cent.). This was continued by Bhaṭṭa Tauta and Abhinavagupta (10th Cent.) and Rajaśekhara (11th Cent.) and others. Literature was the direct concern of all these writers. The direct concern of Hobbes and Locke, on the other hand, was with human understanding and behaviour in general. Their interest in the imagination was purely incidental. Their concepts of it were, on the whole, uncomplimentary to it. Hobbes made imagination a decayed sense stored
with faded memory; Locke looked upon it as an arbitrary association of ideas based on change and custom, which had no verifiable correspondence in the world of reality. The "compound imagination" in the theories of these philosophers could not go beyond explaining certain elements in fairy tales. They did not consider the imagination as a great creative faculty. Addison's essays mark an advance over Hobbes and Locke. His theory of the imagination is clearly based on that of Hobbes. Both associate the imagination with mental images, but the sense which provides the mind with images is the sense of sight. All these images are stored up in the memory and therefore the imagination is basically a variety of memory. It has the power to retain, combine or alter mental image. But Addison did not regard the imagination as a decayed sense, and its images as fictions of the mind. He maintained it was a high creative faculty and was the chief source of aesthetic pleasure; it could transform reality and make it more beautiful.

The concept of the imagination as the image-making faculty is nowhere encountered in Indian poetics. Of course, mental images are at the root of the figures of speech like
simile and metaphor and all the imagery which enriches poetry is derived from mental images and associations. But according to Indian poeticians imagery is only part of the larger activity of the faculty which they call pratibha. The scope of pratibha extends over all aspects of literature. It is perhaps for this reason that the distinction between fancy and imagination, which is carefully maintained in Romantic poetics, finds no parallel in Indian poetics.

The views of Bhaṭṭa Tauta, Rudraṭa, Abhinavagupta, Rajaśekhara, Kṣemendra and Hemccandra may be taken as forming a single comprehensive theory of the imagination. The source of all these views is Bhaṭṭa Tauta’s highly original definition of imagination - prajñā navanavollekhaśālinī pratibha - that it is that intellectual power which shines with ever new scintillations. In sharp contrast to the views of Hobbes and Locke all Sanskrit poeticians emphasise that pratibha is prajñā, i.e., the imagination is a power of the intellect. According to Abhinavagupta the imagination is the intellectual power which enables the poet to present familiar things in a striking and novel way. Rajaśekhara looks upon the imagination as the source of
and grand conceptions of beautiful styles of expression. Hemchandra describes it as the poet's power of vision and declares that none can be a poet without being a seer.

This Indian theory of imagination has two points in common with Coleridge's concept of the imagination. The imagination has a cognitive status. Without the primary imagination no knowledge is possible. Another point of similarity is that imagination is not a mere associative and aggregative principle. It is an intellectual power capable of creating novel objects (apūrvavastunirmānaksma).

Nevertheless it must be conceded that the view of the various Indian poeticians discussed here are not full-fledged theories of the imagination. They are insights into its nature and function. For a relatively complete theory of the imagination, we have to turn to Coleridge and other great Romantic thinkers of the West. Wordsworth, for instance, considered that it was the power to organise and interpret the manifold and ever changing flux of experience. Coleridge relegated the image making
faculty of fancy to the background, and made the imagination in its two varieties, the prime condition of knowledge and of creation. The imagination combines the two functions of the mind, namely the understanding and the reason. The understanding deals with the concrete, the reason, with the ideal. But neither the universal nor the particular per se, is complete in itself or is the reality. The imagination brings them together in art. The work of art is of middle quality between the ideal and the actual. It is symbol or a pervading image. Modern theories of poetry lay great emphasis on this fact. As an image or a symbol, a work of art has unity, integrity, autonomy and universality and it gives vividness of sensation. There have been attempts, as in Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* to interpret whole poems or the poetry of a poet on the basis of central images or symbols employed in them. Indian poetics also emphasizes the autonomy, integrity, shapeliness and universality of the products of art, but there was no attempt to interpret whole works of art on the basis of central images or symbols. The concept of the work of art as a symbol is not encountered in Indian poetics, in the form of a theory, but its elements are present in the theory of *rasa*. The objective correlatives (*vibhayas*) are at once particular and universal. One
aspect of Coleridge's theory is the autonomy of art. This aspect had always been recognised even before Coleridge, but for a well argued theory of art in the autonomy, we have to go to Kant and Coleridge. In Indian poetics, we have to fall back upon the comprehensive theory of rasa to uphold the autonomy of art.