



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### "A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO POETIC IMAGINATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECT POETRY OF POPE, SOUTHEY AND CHRISTINA ROSSETTI"

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#### ABSTRACT

The present article takes a fresh look into the study of poetry that has rich subjectivity and imagination from Psychological and Neurological point of view with the help of the established theories of Cognitive Psychology and Cognitive linguistics and explores the feasibilities of propounding a theory of imagination without deconstructing or damaging aesthetic functions of poetry. The study of poetic imagination from Cognitive point of view can possibly be part of new approaches to Humanities and literary studies in the twenty first century.

Poetry has been appreciated, analyzed and criticized only within the frame work made and principles laid by the so called theories of Poetics in the East and the west. But it is the high time to study poetry from linguistic and Psychological point of view. This article shapes a new approach by studying Poetry through Cognitive science. Cognitive science can help the critics of poetry in order to analyze the elements of imagination that postulate both the composing of poetic expression and poet's sensibility. This article takes a fresh insight into the unknown realms of Poetics. This new approach analyzes the process of creative fabrication of poetic imagination and poetic expression. Poets have their imagination work on reflections of life and these reflections have a source that is invisible in the world of creative expressions. Linguistic structures play a negligible role in the construction of poetic expressions. These poetic expressions mostly fail to get their meanings constructed due to lack of creative elements in that poetic language and due to loss of experience in expression.

#### INTRODUCTION

The classical theories of poetry starting from Aristotle to T.S. Eliot, there have been many methods of analysis and appreciation of poetry. In the recent times Cognitive Science has reached a significant position in every field of research particularly among Arts and Humanities. Modern technological advancements have had their roots in the renaissance period if we study new explorations and distance between Religion and Science. Human imagination crossed the borders of knowledge and now in the Twenty first century it set to cross the limits of perception through studies like Cognitive Science, Knowledge Technologies, Creativity studies, Alien Technologies, Spiritual Sciences, Vision Science and Neuro-linguistics. These new subjects are interdisciplinary studies that help the modern man to explore the possibilities of the so called impossibilities in Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts.

Though there are many theories of study of poetic imagination in literature and Poetics in particular the present article doesn't take them into consideration while explaining the process and metaphorical qualities of the select pieces of poetry from different poets of different ages, movements, cultural backgrounds and languages. The recent theories of Cognitive Psychology and Cognitive linguistics will be taken into the main analysis of poetic imagination. This paper explores the extremes of emotional bonding in the whole process of image construction in culturally and symbolically rich poetry of Alexander Pope, Christina Rossetti and Robert Southey for a comparative analysis. There are many theorists from the Oriental to the Occidental, stressing the need for a systematic approach to explore the creative faculties underneath the bond between words and symbols and Metaphors and images.

**Poetic Imagination:** The studies that had been carried out during the 19<sup>th</sup> century revealed that most of the British poetry produced with prolificacy has great relevance and importance even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to its forecast of the consequences of war, poverty, drought, scientific advancements and crush of religious sentiments in the wake of technological revolutions that helped the European societies to develop at fast pace. Most of the poetry written in any century in any language in any country must have imagination and prophetic character. This imagination is what Coleridge distinguished from fancy. The sensibility and sensitive response to invisible things of beauty, love, valor, etc, in imagination helps the poet to overcome his transfer from reality to dream, take a long time to travel between the worlds: virtual and real, distinction made in the mind. This distinction includes a list of things that work on poet's mind.

Every language might have some creative elements that enrich and qualify the cultural designs of the meanings that they correspond, for example: "Brahmaram" is a word drawn from Sanskrit that means "a fly" if this word is a part of a piece of poetry as "Brahmara Geetam" the meaning of "Brahmaram" attained a cultural and symbolic meaning within the creative field of the poet's piece of poetry. But when the same expression is read out of its context its meaning will have an affinity towards general meaning of that particular socio-cultural fabric because words do not have rigid meanings but only arbitrary meanings.

Ezra Pound's definition of "image" could help us to understand how poetic mind perceive things out of reality. He defines image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". Direct treatment of subjective or objective "things"; avoiding unnecessary words that fail to present poet's imagination and compose in sequence of the musical phrase instead of metronome are what Pound proposed regarding imagist poetry. All that great poetry produced in Britain, America and India is not imagist poetry. Through ages, poetry as a genre never existed to record its new expressions and experiments but to evolve as a visible imagination that makes the poets and poetry readers to live in a world created through poetic sensibility and invisible existence.

Metaphorically Poet's perceiving of things varies as he or she doesn't perceive things always in the same meaningful context. As their imagination is very strong, their attitude to the things that they see varies in course of creation of meaning to the invisible symbols of imagination. These invisible symbols have their occurrence in each stanza. If we read the Telugu Poet, Gunturu Seshendra Sarma's poetry, "*Janavamsam*" in particular, there are number of symbols and images that speak the lines beyond their literary and literal meanings. It is a kind of state where the readers of poetry do have an illusionary concentration beyond their general construction of meaning.

Poetic imagination is unexpected and unintentional because "Poetry is a feeling" (Seshendra). "Poetry is not a language" (T.S.Eliot). A poet cannot write a poem without inspiration. The ancient Greeks considered poetry as a perfection and used it in art, music and education.

Imagination in poetry has some peculiar characteristics such as colour, shape, odour, symbol, image, movement, time, place, taste, etc. Aesthetic and sensual functions are the fundamental characteristics of poetry. Poet's sensibility can be observed as a subjective sensual function in any poetry. This sensibility is susceptibility to tender feelings. It is the capacity to respond to what is beautiful. Aesthetic sensibility is sensibility to what is elegant graceful, sonorous and beautiful. Sensibility is a wakeful attention. T.S. Eliot regarded sensibility as the creative faculty and quality of temperament in a poet.

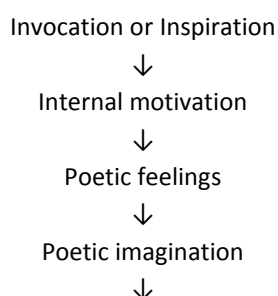
**Stages of imagination in Poetry:** There are many stages of imagination in poetry whether it has subjectivity or objectivity. Poetry has been studied and appreciated only from the literary point of view and has been analyzed on grounds of its aesthetic and linguistic functions. The early poetry in English and Telugu were dominated and bound by the principles of metrical composition, lyricism, prosody, metaphors and imagination where as the English poetry and Telugu poetry since the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been written without giving any importance to any Classicism and conservatism. In fact all the rules laid so far in Classical "Poetics" were broken as a mark of tribute to Modernity and Progressivism. Poetic justice has got many meanings in this period where poets have decided what subjects can be taken to write poetry. Though a negligible section of poets showed their experiments with new poetry by writing Graphic poetry, Techno-poetry, etc, only a few numbers of poets could produce master pieces that paved way to writing poetry with more imagination rather than melody and lyricism.

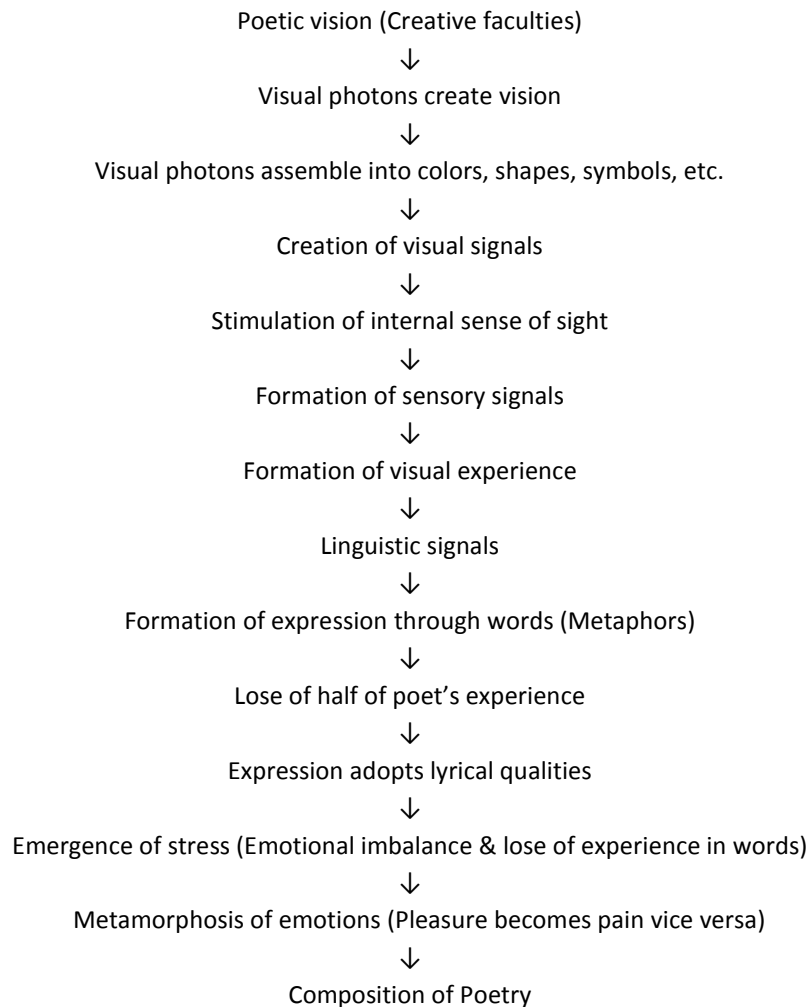
When a poem is read the reader will be transported into a world of imagination which had been imagined by the poet before he expressed it in writing. Now, the question is how does a reader get transported into the poet's world? Before we know it we must know a fact that every poem is a world created by the poet. The poet creates both text and propensity or spirit in his poem correspondingly. This creativity comes from his high end imagination that shapes his tendency. This tendency is a thought process that makes the poetry reader to experience poet's imagination to some extent.

When a reader reads a text he tries to understand poet's imagination only by depending upon the text which has externally structured linguistic qualities. Text is a form of expression that supports vividly, symbolically, metrically, phonemically epigrammatic rendering of ideas into sentences. Here neither the text nor the objective absolutely expose or visualize poet's imagination because poetic imagination is completely different from general imagination. To explain it, let us take an example. When someone is asked to imagine a trapezium his past knowledge or memory can help him to visualize the shape of a trapezium but a poet never begin his imagination whenever he wants, his imagination begins unexpectedly and unintentionally.

In any kind of poetry poet experiences objects beyond his experience and foresees impossibilities as possibilities. He fails to explain what he has experienced because it is beyond his language abilities. Complexity of overlapping of sensations and emotions take place in poet's imagination. Sometimes they do not come into the trap of the linguistic abilities of the poet. Hence he fails to express them in his writing and suffers a mild traumatic condition. His creative faculties might become out of his control and fail to help him come out of his ambiguity.

The following stages of poetic imagination can be useful for us to understand the stages of poetic imagination:





Poet can see things beyond his capabilities of perception. Hence capability to perceive things beyond their actual existence can make a poet imagine a visual object before it takes its substitutes or factors such as colors, shapes, symbols, images, tastes, emotions, combinations, etc, unless and until the poet's vision completely forms its beauty cannot be enjoyed by the poet.

This ecstasy due to visual happiness drawn out of constituted beauty gives poet an ability to express through sounds or words in a strange sequence. This sequencing of sounds qualifies and enriches the meaning. This meaning amplifies the visual imagery and takes the readers to a window and shows the beauty of the poet's visual and its beauty so that the reader becomes happy.

Poet sees a light beyond the light, listens sounds beyond the sounds, sees colors beyond the colors and perceives things existing beyond their existence. Now the question is what factors give such a visual capability to poets? There are three fundamental factors: Memory (Smriti), Experience (Mati) and Foresight (Pragna). When memory (past), experience (present) and foresight (Future) join with conscious of the poet, emotions get stimulated.

**Classical and Modern Poets and Imagination:** The classical poets never wrote poetry following any particular theory or movement. They were very subjective in their writing unlike modernists who proposed and followed number of theories such as symbolism, Dadaism, Imagism, Nihilism, Futurism, Realism, Surrealism, etc. Modern poets did many experiments unlike the Classical poets. "Vaagvydagdhy pradhanepi rasa yevyaathra

jeevitham” means “Though sound and meaning are important in a poem Rasa is the life of the poem”. The ancient poetry is purely psychological and the poets used metaphors extensively.

“A group of sounds that express beautiful meaning is called poetry” is what the central view of Dandi’s poetic vision. The modernists and modern critics of poetry accepted and almost follow the principles established by the Sanskrit scholar Dandi. If a poem is read irrespective of its poet’s ideology or principles or influences, etc, its imagination can be analyzed without attributing theories or movements in poetry because imagination is the central nerve of any poem. No poem exists or can be called a poem without a bit of imagination in it. When a poem is studied under the light of interdisciplinary studies like Cognitive Science which involves multiples angles of analysis: Linguistic, Neurological, philosophical, Psychological and Computational studies. This confluence can help us to analyze poetic imagination.

**Poetic Intuitions:** “Poets are judged by the frames of mind they induce in us” says Emerson. Poet’s imagination will have visual characteristics. It is expressed with pictorial expression. Poet’s imagination gives him delight. This delight is basically caused by the beauty. “Beauty is the inner most essence of the thing”. So whatever is seen in his imagination might definitely have beauty which turns from its graveness to gayness and leads to ecstasy. When the poet perceives or looks at an object his inner feelings will be generated. This is what critics say, Art is the subjective reaction to objective reality. What a poet perceives is an objective reality and his reaction to that object will be more intuitive in nature. “The poet’s main glory is the power of pictorial expression”. The poet’s impression on an object gives him delight. This delight is mainly due to intuitions in poet’s mind. The whole imagination which gives delight due to intuitive, i.e. subjectivity becomes an experience.

Poet’s intuitive experience doesn’t exist like a memory in his mind but it tries to come out of his mind as an expression. “Art’s purpose is the communication of such delight to others”. Hence the poet intentionally wants to express his delight very sensitively through a medium, here we should remember that “medium of poetry is the most spiritual and powerful of the all media of art” hence among all arts poetry alone has an exclusive position and significance to become a suitable medium to express any powerful or spiritual feelings that are intuitive in character and sensitive in texture.

**Cognitive functions of poet’s imagination:** In his book *The Blank Slate* (2002), Psychologist Steven Pinker says “The mind cannot be a blank slate because blank slates don’t do anything. The mind is a complex system composed of many interacting parts. Our perceptual experiences depend on stimuli which arrive at our various sensory organs from the external world and these stimuli cause changes in our mental states, ultimately causing us to feel a sensation, which may be pleasant or unpleasant”.

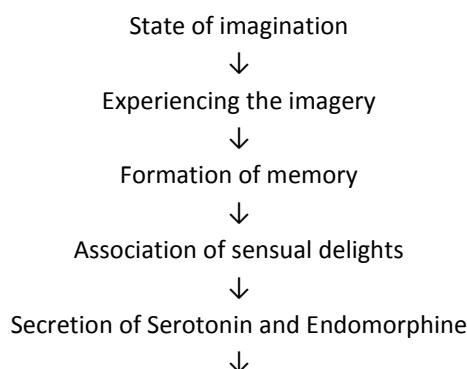
It is the mental imagery of things that are not currently seen or sensed by the sense organs. In our minds we often have images of objects, events and settings which we cannot actually see those things and experience but you can imagine them. According to Metaphysics poet’s mental representations enable representing things that have never been experienced as well as things that do not exist. Although visual imagery is more likely to be recalled and mental imagery may involve representations in any of the sensory modalities, such as, hearing, smell, or taste. A poet can experience what he has seen and experienced in his imagination.

**Visual representation:** A visual representation in poetry is another important aspect to notice when mental representations are understood distinctly. Roland Barthes (1957) brought the semiotic structures of imagery to widespread public attention, and anthropologists became sensitive to spatial and nonverbal cues (Hall 1959). Historian Daniel Borstin’s *The Image* (1962), identified important trends in language and thought.

In contemporary cognitive linguistics, an image schema is considered an embodied pre-linguistic structure of experience that motivates conceptual metaphor mappings. Evidence for image schemata is drawn from a number of related disciplines like Cross-modal cognition in psychology.

A visual metaphor provides a frame or window on experience. This experience is drawn from poet's memory that can be framed as embedded experience model. This model can help us to know the parts of a poetic experience and analyze their distinctive features which fail to break through the poet's expression. We can see the following proposed model of embedded experience to know the mechanics the course of poetic imagination.

#### The Embedded Experience Model:



Meditation of emotional sensibility → Emotional tranquility → Loss of expression → Dissociation of sensibility due to stress → Stress caused by linguistic inability → Linguistic inability causes sub-conscious psychic stress → Loss of experience in expression → Emotional overlapping → Domination of mono-emotion → Metamorphosis of emotion → Stabilization of current emotional feelings → Composition of patterns of words into lines.

It can be reasonably postulated that sound, vision, smell etc, each involve different neurons and that these perceptual systems can be active without involvement of any psychological factors. Away from the general theory of perception poetry is a special case to study in order to understand poet's perceptive capabilities from multiple angles. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf say that language influences people's perception of the world. It is one of the prophetic characteristics of poetry. "It is very difficult for people to engage in 'un-interpreted perception'" says Graham R. Little. Poet's sensibilities lie in the poet's meditation of the imagery and his perception of objects through transitive cognition.

Young love lies sleeping  
 In **may time** of the year,  
 Among the **lilies**,  
 Lapped in the **tender light**;  
**White lambs** come grazing,  
**White doves** come building there;  
 And round about him  
 The **may** – bushes are **white**.                      – Christina Rossetti, "Dream love"

It was a **summer** evening  
 Old Kaspar's work was done,  
 And he before his cottage door  
 Was sitting in the **Sun**;  
 And by him sported on the **green**  
 His little grandchild Wilhelmine.                      – Robert Southey, "After Blenheim"

Whose herds with **milk**, whose fields with **bread** (5)  
 Whose flocks supply him with attire;  
 Whose trees in **summer** yield him shade in **white fire**.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;  
 Thus unlamented let me die;  
 Stead from the world, and not a stone tell where I lie. – Alexander Pope, "Solitude"

In the above poems Christina Rossetti, Southey and Alexander Pope have imagined a time in summer with different descriptions of imagery. Their experiences helped them to get their sensual delights associated. This delight has been expressed in colors: 'white' and 'green'. Color is another factor of sensual delight where poet tries to paint his emotional state with a color. This color reference is what they see in their pure imagination. When Southey and Rossetti meditated on their emotional sensibility a state of emotional tranquility made them lose their expression. Hence they chose simpler words to express their emotional condition.

The emotional tranquility at its peak stage causes the poet to lose his expression and he cannot find apt words to express his feelings as he already incurred stress due to dissociation of his sensibility. Stress is caused due to two factors and in two times: The stress caused due to loss of expression caused by the result emotional tranquility. Hence the poet fails to associate some of his feelings with an apt word and suffers stress. Secondly the stress caused due to the poet's sub-conscious thought of loss of experience in expression. This is again a linguistic inability caused by emotional overlapping. The sub-conscious psychic stress due to linguistic inability is not a direct result of a preceding factor or external factor but a dissociation of sensibility. This is mainly observed in Metaphysical and war poets. The Romantic poets have overcome to some extent this problem of stress by imbibing pantheism and animism. When a belief strongly persists about a thing in imagination its influence on poet's cognition makes him forget the stress caused by sub-conscious linguistic inability. His experiencing of the things or association of sensual delights is more important than expressing what he has seen or experienced. It can be seen in P.B. Shelly's poems and also among Metaphysical poets like John Donne and Andrew Marvel.

When poet fails to express his experience or fails to garner apt words to form rhyme and rhythm aided lines, he suffers from stress which could lead to distraction sometimes from the main vision or imagination. Then the poet delimits his experience to a normal anecdote due to lack of appropriate words to construct his experience. "As for free verse which was born partly, it would seem, of a desire to express one's thought" without deforming it" (Leforgue) and partly from musical per-occupations ( Gustav Khan)." This kind of stress has never been studied closely from the Cognitive science point of view. Unlike scientific study of Art Poetry can be studied with the help of Cognitive Philosophy and Vision Science. This study could help the researchers to formulate links between reality studies and virtual reality. But the elements of mysticism and mythology which have had their long and deep roots into human conscious long ago before the Anthropological studies revealed the impact of ancient beliefs about gods, demigods and heroes from heaven and forests.

Poetry is a vision science that helps to see invisible things in visible things. In writing poetry, the essential subjects like metaphors, symbols, images, sounds and colors are nothing but the invisible things of poetry. The poetry written on a place, person, object, loss, incident, revolution or on a war does not have similar elements of imagination as that are seen in love poetry. Poet creates an ideal world where his understanding of the things have their own meanings which may not easily be understood by a common reader because the poet's perceptive fields are different from the perceptive field of a common poetry reader. For example sight perception is not possible without photons, and second, that photons influence the neurons involved in sight and third that this can occur without there being any interpretation and without involving attention. The fourth and final point might be that this analysis of sight applies to all senses.

When we read the aforementioned poems, Alexander Pope, Christina Rossetti and Robert Southey have portrayed their emotional tranquility and though these three poems have different emotional backgrounds, i.e. Love, happiness and sorrow respectively, the elements of imagination are similar in terms of time, color and objects. The lilies, white lambs, doves, bushes and the metaphor 'tender light' in "Dream Love"; summer, Sun and color green in "After Blenheim" and the words like milk, bread, summer, and white fire in "Solitude", have specific cognitive functions not only in terms of colors but also the time and its relation with the color.

When the time and color are inter linked the poets have built their own meanings to their sensual delights in a particular perceptive field. This perceptive field can be analyzed by adopting methods of Cognitive science. Each poem given in here must be treated as a world or a system of signs that can be signified only when the poet's emotional patterns takeover his memory and create an experience in order to stabilize his course of emotional overlapping without affecting the movement of imagination. This condition, i.e. metamorphosis of emotions during prolongation of imagination, gradually leads to a state of tranquility where the poet's conscious loses its ability to work on expression. This will cause linguistic inability due to dissociation of sensibility. When sensibility is in active mode of dissociation the Cognitive activity of mind does not accept the aptness of the words to the elements of experience due to high arbitrariness. High arbitrariness of words that try for suitability do not match the original experience or satiate poet's creativity. Hence the poetic stress will arise before the poet's imagination ends. Though there are many other factors that influence immediately after writing a few lines and post experience factors, they do not play dominating roles as long as imagination is in course.

Pragmatics allows us to investigate how this "meaning beyond the words" can be understood without ambiguity. The extra meaning is there, not because of the semantic aspects of the words themselves, but because we share certain contextual knowledge with the writer or speaker of the text. The neural networks have very complex relations and connections. Still the Neuroscientists have to explore their complexity for making computational models of human thought- action patterns. It has been scientifically and philosophically emphasized that cognitive functions of mind have a close relation with the perception and imagination of the poet. Immediate perception that says that we immediately perceive Reality via a perceptual field, and even more specifically, we immediately perceive reality via the effect a perceptual field has on sensory apparatus of our physiology.

Poet's belief in some mythical elements and mysticism can be observed in his poetry. W.B. Yeats, for instance, has used his beliefs about the Irish mythology in his poetry. It comes directly from his sub-conscious creations. If we consider what a poet imagines as a creation, it must be out of his conscious cognition.

"A poem is not born on the paper or born in the raw mind of an individual but it is born in the medium of consciousness" says G. Seshendra Sharma in his "letters – In defence of people and poetry". Every poet has a purpose before writing poetry. This purpose cannot be called intention, but an imagination that draws its material from the embedded memory as mentioned above.

## CONCLUSION

Cognitive linguists deny that the mind has any module for language-acquisition that is unique and autonomous. Although cognitive linguists do not necessarily deny that part of the human linguistic ability is innate, they deny that it is separate from the rest of cognition. Cognitive linguistics argues that language is both embodied and situated in a specific environment. This can be considered a moderate offshoot of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in that language and cognition mutually influence one another, and are both embedded in the experiences and environments of its users. The proposed embedded memory model might help the researchers of Cognitive Science to study Poetry from Neuropsychological point of view and reveal the actual cognitive functions of mind while writing poetry and during imagination. This could help the future Poetry readers to know where exactly the association and dissociation of poetic sensibility takes place and



how the loss of expression in experience can be analyzed through Computational models of Cognitive Psychology by studying ancient, medieval, modern and post-modern poetry in any language.

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