

Imagery in Tagore's *Breezy April* and *Heaven of Freedom*

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Tagore is pre-eminently a Bengali writer and is not generally described as an Indian writer in English. However, his own English writings and their influence on the regional literatures in India take him out of Bengal and bring him recognition as an all – India writer. One of the main themes of his poetry is Nature. He is aware of the need for harmony between man and Nature. He is also aware of the infinite beauty of Nature. To him 'Nature is not only a store – house of beauty – of colour, form, smell and rhythm but also the veritable symbol of the emotional and conceptual truth. Tagore sees a life giving, protective, yet inconstant element in nature and the imagery he uses conveys the meaning he finds in nature.

In *Breezy April* Tagore evokes a series of word pictures in which the April breeze is given life and vivacity and seen as mother, fairy, spirit of spring and lover. The nature of the April breeze, its swift changing moods creativity, tenderness and movement are thus beautifully conveyed in apt language. Thus, the idea of life in nature is clearly illuminated.

Tagore assumes the persona of a tree which delights in the touch of the April breeze. As the tree speaks to the breeze, a series of images arise. The tree sees the breeze in various forms and moods. Though it addresses the breeze as 'Vagrant April' it gets solace from its gentle rhythmic movement.

'Rock me in your swing of music'

This line evokes the image of a mother rocking her baby to sleep with a gentle lullaby.

The tree, alive to every changing mood of the breeze next sees it as a fairy-like charmer, who thrills its branches, 'with enchantment' and touches it with 'sweet surprises'. The tree longs for the breeze. In the second stanza the tree is seen as living, its unchanging existence by the wayside. The word 'life-dream' conveys the idea that the tree has lived a long time. The past years are like a dream. It also conveys that life in the tree has been dormant in winter. The April breeze or Zephyr is the harbinger of spring. It activates all life forces within the tree, for the tree says,

‘You come startling me from slumber’ It is awakened from cold winter. Thus, the breeze is seen as the spirit of spring ushering in a season of growth and new life.

“willful in your mood fantastic

Courting, teasing and inconsistent”

the April Breeze is visualized by the tree as a whimsical lover gently courting and teasing the beloved.

The image of the lover is further developed till the end of the poem. The tree lives a lonely life, its only companions being its shadows. It is very familiar with the breeze and its changing moods; its fitful fancies. The breeze blowing through the leaves of the tree rustles them and creates a gentle sound which is ‘leafy language’. The breeze is personified once again as a nimble-footed spirit at whose touch the tree breaks forth into blossom. This evokes the image of the beloved blushing at a murmured endearment of the lover. The quick movement of the leaves in the gust of breeze is seen as a tumult and surrender to the gentle loving touch of the breeze.

According to Tagore ‘The play of spring in nature is the counterpart of the play of youth in our lives’.

Thus the April breeze is personified as a mother, fairy spirit of spring and lover. Tagore reveals his capacity for oneness with nature. He identifies himself with the tree and becomes aware of the beauty, and loving creative touch of the spring breeze.

Tagore’s love for and awareness of the beauty of nature and the elements can be likened to Keats’ love for beauty. There is a note of similarity in the way in which images are evoked in Keats’ *Ode to Autumn* and Tagore’s *Breezy April*. Keats’ *Ode to Autumn* is a glorification of beauty and nature.

It was the realization of the close bond of relationship between nature and men, which enabled him to endow the figures of the thresher, the reaper the gleaner and the maiden at the cider press with the whole spirit of Autumn. In his Ode Keats’ personifies the season itself. Autumn can

be seen wandering amidst her store. Sometimes she may be found sitting on a granary floor, allowing the wind to play with her hair. The season is personified in Keats' poetry,

'Three sitting careless on a granary floor
Thy hair-soft lifted by the winnowing wind
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies,
While thy hook
Spares the next swathe and all its twined flowers;
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cider press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the lost oozing hours
By hours'

The researchers feel that at a deeper level, the poem holds in it Tagore's idea of the creative and vibrant Spirit of God the creator and Architect with his myriad movements.

The poem *Heaven of freedom* is taken from the Gitanjali and is one of Tagore's patriotic lyrics in which patriotism finds its truest and noblest expression. Patriotism in Tagore also, implies self-dedication and a response to the inner urge for self-sacrifice and purification. The value Tagore had for freedom is clearly seen.

A deep reading of the poem shows that Tagore's ideas, take the shaProf. Humayun Kabir opines "Sincerity of feeling and vividness of imagery combine with music of his (Tagore's) verse to give us the poems that haunt the reader long after the actual words are forgotten."²

Images are said to be part of poetry and constitute 'the life principle of poetry'.

Caroline Spurgeon defines an image as

the little word-picture used by a poet
or prose writer to illustrate, illuminate
and embellish his thought. It is a
description or an idea, which by comparison
or analogy, stated or
understood, with something else,
transits to us through the
emotions it arouses, something

of the 'wholeness'. the depth and richness of the way the writer views, conceives or has felt what he is telling us.³

Heaven of Freedom is one of the most often quoted of the songs in *Gitanjali*. Tagore articulates a prayer for his country's redemption. The poet prays for fearlessness, truth and unity among the people. Unity is strength. The mind should be free and without any fear. Only then can one be proud and confident. This freedom will provide free knowledge. Then this knowledge can make people understand each other and remain united. The lines

'Where the world has not been broken up
Into fragments by narrow domestic walls'

convey the idea that there must not be communal clashes among the people due to difference in caste and religion.

Tagore sees an India, "Where timeless striving stretches its arms towards perfection". Tagore also visualizes a time when clear reason will triumph over falsity. Reason is the foundation of certainty in knowledge, in the midst of an imperfect world. The poet wants the minds of men to be led by good thoughts to good action. In the concluding lines, the poet prays to the Almighty to make his countrymen awake and choose the perfect path of life to attain peace and perfection. Tagore calls such a state a 'Heaven of freedom'. The depth and richness of Tagore's conception is conveyed through a series of images. These images are not always related to one another but collectively convey what the poet means by freedom for India.

The Title of the poem *Heaven of freedom* conveys the image of perfection. In the first two lines Tagore says that only a fearless mind will bring self-confidence and will make an individual whole. In the third line the poet uses the words 'broken up' which is usually used to denote easily breakable articles like glass. Here it depicts the disunity that can result if social clashes occur in the country. He uses the words 'Narrow-domestic walls' – denote the dividing force of narrow-mindedness which can block understanding and co-operation. The image evoked here is that of something whole which has been shattered. Tagore prays that unity and brotherhood

should not be destroyed by petty difference of opinion. What he asks for is a world vision not a narrow outlook.

The word 'depth of truth' suggest an image of a well. Truth dwells deep within each individual in the inmost being of person. In the lines 'tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection', 'striving is personified a man's perseverance and hard work.

The words 'clear stream of reason' are juxtaposed to 'dreary desert'. Tagore uses 'clear stream' for reason to depict a clear stream where the water is pristine, not muddy. This shows that reason should not be sullied by emotionalism superstition or fanaticism. Tagore calls for brotherhood and understanding in religion. The poet uses the words 'dreary desert sand of dead habit' to bring out the sterility of habits cultivated unconsciously. Tagore conveys through this image that rationalism should not be lost in stagnation. It is interesting to note that the use of the images of the 'well' and 'spring' and thus water, is associated with essential principles such as truth and reason. Thus the life giving quality of water is closely connected with truth and reason, for a noble life.

In the concluding two lines Tagore prays to God to lead his people along the true path and attain self-realization to create a 'heaven' on earth. Tagore visualizes thus a 'Heaven' in this world where there is complete understanding, freedom, peace and love. What he hopes for is a world of wisdom and progress.

Tagore says, "The country is the creation of the people. The country is not the soil, it is people's sould. When the spirit of the people shines, the country becomes manifest... The country is not made of soil, the country is made of man."¹

In the poem the emphasis is on the spiritual reality of life. Tagore prays not for the 'heaven' of material personality in India, but for spiritual growth. He prays for fearlessness, truth, unity and the dominance of reason over superstitions.

In conveying his view that the attainment of real freedom involves ties of relationship, obligation and self-realization. Tagore uses apt imagery and shows his vibrant creative imagination. His imagery is not provincial nor particular, but universal and he is a poet who belongs to India as well as the whole world.

His attitude towards nature is not confined to romantic fancy. He sees in *Breezy April* the multifold power of Nature and through it the power of the Divine. He also accepts nature's influence upon the growth of human mind.

In *Heaven of Freedom* Tagore wants to discard all kinds of weakness and condemns meek submission to injustice. He shows the need for inner growth of the nation. This is relevant in an age of war, only peace within can and will bring peace in the world.

Imagery is effectively used by Tagore to express themes of each of the poem. The recurrent images used by Tagore externalize his thoughts and emotions. The images form a basic ingredient of his works. There is extraordinary ease with which noble thoughts, lofty sentiments and apt and natural images have been combined by Tagore to form unforgettable poems.

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² & ³ Singh, Ajay. Rabindranath Tagore: His Imagery and Ideas.Vimal Prakashan :Ghaziabad,1984.