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SYMBOLS IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS - A STUDY



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ABSTRACT

A symbol is a figure of speech. It has the literal and suggested meanings which are joined together. Retaining its identity it may bring other images also, the same way as a cross or a trishul, besides being metallic objects, stand respectively for Christianity and Hinduism as well. Symbol has concrete referents in this objective world. The function of symbol is to suggest various implications beyond it. A symbol can also be defined as the fusion of physical reality with the inner world. The use of symbols not only enriches a work of art and the depiction of a character but provides the very lifeblood, the soul to it, and compensates for its other

deficiencies (Srivastava, 1917 : 137)

KEYWORDS : *Anita Desai's Novels , literal , Christianity and Hinduism .*

INTRODUCTION :

Anita Desai has picturesquely presented the symbolic world of her fiction, the themes of despair, death desolation and socio-psychic fragmentation. What is important for her "is the movement of the wing one tries to capture, not the bird (Srivastava, 1917: 137). Symbols help Desai reveal her protagonists' psyche. As Wimsatt and Brooks (Pathak, 1990: 101) suggest, "every colour, sound, odour, emotion and every visual image has its correspondence" in traits of human self The 'cry of peacock', or 'the city of death' Calcutta, or 'the locale of Manari island' or 'sleepy Mirpur' Desai has used them symbolically What is still more interesting is her use of colour symbols, which convey "the awareness of a confusing duality of existence."

The two dominant colors in *Cry, The Peacock* are black and white. Red is symbolic of Maya's craving for a colorful life. It also suggests the underlying streak of violence. As Maya herself admits, "a thousand drops of blood, a thousand ruby red hammer-heads showered across" (Quoted in Pathak, 1990: 101) her vision.

The white colour is indicative of drabness and indifference on one hand and weirdness and fragility on the other. In *Voices in the City*, however, scenes and characters have been presented in terms of black or dark. We have in it "dark wintry evening", "black browed" Monisha, dark

complexioned Jit, wearing dark glasses, "night turning blood black", and so on. The dark colour signifies the stifling atmosphere of the household and also a purposeless journey in life culminating in death. Black has been accentuated occasionally with streaks of white." (Pathak, 1990: 101) "Everything is dark", shouted Sita loudly, in *'Where Shall We Go This Summer?'*. She finds her Manari house "pitch dark" with its "crowded darkness inside"; (P. 27) and "Below them was the shifting, sighing darkness of the palm leave leading down to the sand dunes and the sea." (P. 27). Thus the use of symbols is an important aspect of Desai's fictional art.

Anita Desai's novels abound in symbols through which she tries to capture and concretize a wide range of experience. She has large variety of these symbols which she uses with consummate skill. They lend vividness to the situations she tries to describe, the characters she delineates and the events she narrates. Because of her use of condensed symbol, her art comes close to a painter's. This mode of perception and expression proves useful to her. (Amin, 1989: 226) Her symbols evoke a sense of harshness of sound that grates on one's ears, of colours that are loud gaudy. Through such symbols, she tries to express the harshness and violence and hostility that her characters experience in their daily lives.

Thus her symbols convey the reality. She also projects very skillfully the adverse effect of noise on her character's mental makeup. (Amin, 1989: 229) "Most of Anita Desai's characters experience the terror of the mysterious, the fear of an evil force lurking around them, the dread of living in a hostile world. This consciousness is expressed through symbols of birds, insects, vipers, cobras, bats, owls, jackals, nightjars, lizards, tguanas, apes, langurs and gibbons which are mentioned frequently in her novels.

Even birds like eagles, hawks and kites are used to express the ferocity and rapacity that are a part of both human and natural worlds." (Amin, 1989: 230) Her skill in handling the symbols is originated from her experience in life, as she says, "Long ago I knew of snakes that coil themselves around the sweet - smelling sandalwood trees of the forest. Queen of the Night attracts snakes too, and tuberoses. All white flowers, chaste sweet white flowers, luring the snakes to their hearts of scent. And they come, the snakes, they come slithering towards these virgins of the night, with only their small cold eyes glinting in the dark, and they cling to the bending stalk, and with forked tongues lash and lash again at the heart of innocence." (Quoted in Amin, 1989 : 231).

Anita Desai evokes a sense of eerie also through the use of symbols. Her symbols reveal the character's inmost thoughts and speak a lot about her own character. "Most of the characters also exhibit a sense of being trapped irretrievably in various circumstances" (Amin, 1989: 235). Words like "tunnel", "net", "cobweb", "snare", "hedge", "cage", "tomb" are abundant in all the novels They evoke a sense of captivity which the characters experience."

Desai, while writing her novels, uses certain images again and again and that, although real, they acquire the significance of symbols. The use of iterative images and symbols, however, lends density to her fictional world and compensates for the absence of action or variety of characters. Her symbols and private mythology bring her close to the existential philosophy. Her craft consists in creation and manipulation of scenes. While characterizing protagonists and elucidating their various psychic states, obsessions and predicaments. Symbolic implications are developed by her.

Desai has generously employed symbol on a criterion of aesthetic rather than casual relevance. This added remarkably to the textural density that is not noticeable in the works of other Indian-English novelists. Desai has a high imaginative power and artistic capacity for control and selection. Anita Desai's use of animal images shows her mastery of narration. Very powerful and perturbing animal images have undeniable influences on the main motif of the novel.

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