

Chapter 5

Symbolism in the Novels of Mamoni

Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai

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RAISOM GOSWAMI AND ANITA DESAI

5.0: Introduction:

Symbolism is a technique adopted to convey something meaningful indirectly through symbol. The symbol may be an object, a word, a situation, a place, a person or an action. There are various definitions of symbol. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 'a symbol is a person, an object, an event, etc. that represents a more general quality or situation.'¹ Again 'A Glossary of Literary Terms' defines symbol as follows:

In the broadest sense a symbol is anything which signifies something in this sense all words are symbols. In discussing literature, however, the term symbol is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object, or event which in its turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself.'²

1. Sally, Wehmeier, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, page 1318.

2. M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, page – 206.

The term ‘symbolism’ has come from the word ‘symbol’. The word symbol has been derived from the Latin word ‘symbolum’ meaning ‘a symbol of faith; from Greek ‘symbolon’ meaning ‘something that is thrown or cast together.’

‘Symbolism’ as a movement started in France, Russia and Belgium in the late 19th century. Symbolism stands against the stereotyped conventions of naturalism and realism. The prominent leaders of this movement were Mallarme, Maeterlinck, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Redon etc.

In literature symbolism arrived with the publication of Charles Baudelaire’s “*Less Fleurs du mal*” (*The Flowers of Evil*) in 1857. The term ‘symbolist’ was first coined by the critic Jean Moreas. He used the term to distinguish the symbolists from the other groups of writers. The symbolists use symbols to represent some ideas. Some writers, such as William Blake, Casper David Friedrich, Edgar Allan Poe, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, William Butler Yeats, Thomas Stern Eliot, etc. were influenced by symbolism and used symbols in their writings.

The writers under study, namely, Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai have used symbols very brilliantly in their novels. Both Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai are masters of symbolism; they had felt that without symbolism writings are uninteresting to the readers. Their novels are characterized by strong symbolism. The most important thing of their novels is that they have christened their novels with symbolic titles, as for example Mamoni Raisom Goswami’s “*Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah*” and Anita Desai’s “*Cry, the Peacock*”.

5.1: Symbolism in the novels of Mamoni Raisom Goswami:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is a master of symbolism. Her novels are characterized by strong symbolism. The most important aspect of her novels is that she has christened her novels with symbolic titles. For example: *Nilakanthi Braja*, *Mamore Dhara Tarowal*, *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah* etc.

5.1.1: Symbolism in Chenabar Shrot:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's "*Chenabar Shrot*" is her maiden novel. The novelist has used symbols drawn from nature and the world around her in this novel. The title of the novel is very symbolic. The word 'shrot' is an Assamese synonym for the English word current meaning the speed of the water flow. The 'Chenab' is one of the fastest rivers of India. The current has already swept away many a lives. The author has used the symbol of the swifted arrow to symbolize the swift current of the river. She has also used the 'sharp sword of steel' to refer to the strong current of the river. The author, in another context considers the river current as a restless beautiful white flower garland in.

The novel is about the exploitation of the laborers working under Hindustan Construction Company. The Construction Company is constructing a bridge over the river Chenab in Kashmir. The Company has Waz Sahib and his wife along with other Sahibs and their wives. The beauty of Waz Sahib's wife is symbolized as the river Chenab.

Sibanna compares the wife of Waz Sahib with a pair of worn out shoes. The worn out shoes symbolize her state of being neglected by her husband. Though she is considered as a goddess by the workers, sorrowfully her husband Waz Sahib flirts with

another woman leaving her alone at home. The company is considered as blood thirsty tyranny. Again the novelist has used the worn out shoe symbol to mean the treatment of the company to the labourers. They have long used the laborers but once they have lost their working capacity, the company throws them out. They have never reused them.

The famine in Kalahandi is symbolized in the form of Nir Amma. The famine in Kalahandi comes as a curse to disturb the life stream of the poor people. Nir Amma's ghostly physique symbolizes the horror of famine.

Soni's bulging abdomen is symbolized first, as a sack of salt and then as a sack of cement. For Soni, her pregnancy is not a blessing but a burden. She, being a company labourer can not stay at home for enjoying her pregnancy period as she has nobody to support her.

The novelist uses the full bloomed moon as a symbol. In the last part of the novel Sony looks at the full moon at the sky. The moon looks very bright even though there is cloud. The moon symbolizes freedom that Soni wants.

5.1.2: Symbolism in Nilakanthi Braja:

Nilakanthi Braja is rich in symbol. Mamoni Raisom Goswami has adorned her second novel with the appropriate title *Nilakanthi Braja*. Here Braja refers to the Brajadham where Lord Krishna, the God of Hindu mythology, is believed to be played with his companions. In this context Braja is a very holy place. But this holy Braja has become nilkanthi or blue-naked. The Assamese word nilkanthi means blue necked in English. The word 'blue necked' refers to Hindu God 'Lord Shiva' whose neck became blue after he had drunk the poison that came out of the sea in the course of the churning of the sea. In the same way Braja is no more the holy Brajadham of Lord Krishna. It is

now filled with sin and evil powers. Braja has become corrupted and hence become nilakanthi.

The novelist has used the symbols of the peacock, the snake, the snake catcher and the Gandhian cap in the novel. The peacock is a symbol of beauty. Sometimes this attractive bird becomes ugly in adverse situation. In the same way beautiful girls like Saudamini, Mrinalini and Sashiprava loss their beauty as time lashes them badly.

The snake inside her room symbolizes Saudamini's passionate love for her Christian lover. The snake goes out without caring the people outside and comes back. It is symbolic of Saudamini's attitude of ignoring the society.

The peeling of a dead snake by a snake catcher symbolizes Saudamini's position in the society. She feels as if she was the snake. The society has killed her identity and now trying to remove her skin. She is the victim of the society and its cruelty.

The novelist has used the red scarf as a symbol of marriage as the colour of the vermilion used by a married Hindu woman is red. Saudamini, while running towards the bank of the river gets her feet caught in the red scarf of a married woman who was blessed to die before her husband. Saudamini dies mysteriously as a married woman but not an unfortunate widow. Saudamini's father's wish to see her as a married woman is symbolically fulfilled.

The gandhian cap is used as a symbol of nonviolence, honesty and truthfulness. The artist Rakesh decides to wear a gandhian cap. M. K. Gandhi was a devotee of truth. When asked how he would be recognized after going away from Brajadham, artist

Chandrabhanu Rakesh replies that he would wear a gandhian cap. Rakesh says:

“I may or may not wear a pair of shoes but a clean gandhian cap.”³

Rakesh considered the ideals of Gandhiji as the best principles of life.

5.1.3: Symbolism in Ahiron:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami has gone for symbolism right in the title of the novel *Ahiron*. Ahiron is a river centric novel. The novel revolves round the happenings in the day-to-day life of the employers and workers engaged in a construction work on the river Ahiron, Madhya Pradesh, India.

The novelist has used symbols as her literary tool to explain her theme. She has used the eagle bird symbol repeatedly in different situations. The eagle birds quarrelled on the roof of the labour camp symbolizes danger. The same birds are seen at the moment when the news of a deadbody of a khalasi has come.

The dry coconut shell symbolizes emptiness in relationship. Ajij Miyan opines that he has met so many people in his life time who do not have selfless love and respect for others.

The leafless tree symbolizes both hope and hopelessness. Kadam is seen standing by the tree when Harshul has been humiliated by the rebels. Kadam is

3. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, Nilakanthi Braja, page – 128

waiting for her baby's father Gauri Sankar for months, but he has not come. Thus the tree symbolizes hopelessness

The same tree symbolizes hope or a new beginning for Kadam as her baby has got a safe heaven. Childless Harshul adopts Kadam's baby and Kadam sees a bright future awaiting for her unfortunate baby.

5.1.4: Symbolism in Mamore Dhara Tarowal:

Mamore Dhara Tarowal is Goswami's another novel rich in symbolism. The novel revolves round the strike of the company workers employed in Duncan Construction Company. The rusted sword symbolizes the weak leadership. The union leader Yasuwant's inability to lead the strike is symbolized by the rusted sword. He is unable to lead the strike in a successful direction due to inexperience.

Like in *Chenabar Shrot* and *Ahiron*, the novelist has used the river as symbol again in this novel. The Sai River symbolizes the continuous life struggle of the labourers.

The flower of the fig tree symbolizes scarcity. Sambhu Pasowan compares educated Yasuwant with a fig tree flower as educated youths are rare within the Harijan labourers.

The thorny Babul tree is repeatedly used as symbol. It symbolizes the problems associated with strike. Again the Babul tree symbolizes self-deception. Narayani, a labour woman loves a young engineer. They make love under the babul tree discarding

the piercing of the thorns. Narayani dreams to be the princess of this princely engineer. Later on, this engineer leaves the branch without giving her a glance.

The rust free sword symbolizes Yasuwant's determination to act. The local leader Shastri is very much responsible for the failure of the strike. The strike has brought unbearable miseries to the life of the workers. On the otherhand greedy local leader Shastri becomes rich as a result of the strike. Two years later Shastri is seen living happily in a very cosy house in the town. Yasuwant has understood everything. He has so many questions to be answered by Shastri. He remembers how children died of hunger and hunger turned women into prostitutes. Yasuwant comes to Shastri one night with a sharp sword in his hand. The glittering sword symbolizes Yasuwant's transformation from a weak to a strong leader.

5.1.5: Symbolism in Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's outstanding novel *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah* is extraordinarily rich in the use of symbolism. The title of the novel plays a vital role on the level of symbolism. An elephant with tusks symbolizes strength and power.

The howdah is also a symbol of aristocracy and pride. The howdah is a decorated piece of work positioned on the back of an elephant while travelling on it. Here the howdah is moth-eaten. The moth eaten howdah symbolizes the loss of former glory.

The novel is based on a Vaishnavite Sattrā of a Gohain family. The family owns a private elephant named Jagannath as a symbol of family pride. The howdah used on

the back of Jagannath is a special one. The novelist describes:

“The howdah was eye catching. It was made of mahogany wood. The images of lion, horse and kite bird were curved on the howdah. Here lion stands for emperor; horse for speed and kite bird for endeavor.”⁴

Jagannath and the howdah are inseparable from each other. This Jagannath, one day ferociously throws the howdah away with his tusk and damages it with his legs. The cruelty with which Jagannath breaks the howdah symbolizes his revolt against the feudal system of the society.

Giribala, already a widow suffers immensely at her in-laws' house. She comes back to her parents with a heavy heart anticipating some peace of mind. But in her father's house all the rules made for a Brahmin widow have been awaiting for her. She realizes that her father's house is a box made of urium wood. The novelist writes:

“For Giribala her father Sattradhikar's house is a box made of urium wood.”⁵

The urium box symbolizes a cage in which Giribala has to live like a bird. This means she has no freedom to live her life according to her wish even in her father's house. There is restriction in every step of her life as she is a widow.

The three women characters- Giribala, Durga and Saru Gohani are widows with flesh and blood. The novelist has used symbols to draw a pen picture of their insatiable biological needs. For instance, in case of Giribala a special silk umbrella has

4. Mamoni Raisom Goswami: Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah, page – 126.

5. Ibid, page -122

been used as a symbol. The patriarchal society forgets that widows are also human beings. Giribala does not care that society which does not consider a widow as a part of it. She falls in love with a foreigner Mark Sahib and wants to surrender herself to him wholeheartedly. One day, Giribala feels passionate at the sight of the umbrella that was used to welcome her husband as a groom. Now Giribala's feelings are not for her late husband but for her lover Mark. She feels a strong urge to touch the umbrella. Touching the soft silk cloth of the umbrella she feels as if it were the soft skin of Mark Sahib. Suddenly she starts rubbing her cheek against the umbrella. She has also rubbed it against her shoulder, neck and breasts. The novelist describes her abnormal behavior in the following lines:

“Giribala has touched the umbrella. It feels soft. It is the soft skin of Mark Sahib. What does she do? She has started rubbing her cheek against the umbrella. Then she rubs against her shoulder and neck. Even she has tried to pull the soft silk cloth of the umbrella to the soft part of her chest. The umbrella used to welcome her husband seems to be her Christian lover Mark's skin. Does anybody have this type of situation?”⁶

The domestic elephant Jagannath goes 'must'. Jagannath's 'must' condition symbolizes Giribala's suppressed sexual desire. Goswami has used symbols to express the mental condition of her women characters. She has used the shedding of skin as symbol for exposing the secrets lying deep in Soru Gohani's heart. Widow Saru Gohani has passionate feelings for Mahidhar Bapu. When the theft of Durga's gold

6. Ibid., page - 122

ornaments is discovered suspect goes to Mahidhar as he frequents Saru Gohani's house. People understand that there is a secret relationship between Soru Gohani and Mahidhar Bapu. Soru Gohani senses a forthcoming danger. The novelist has explained her intense fear in the following manner:

“Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! Someone has started shedding Soru Gohani's skin.”⁷

Again in another instance when Soru Gohani has heard that police would come to investigate the theft she trembles in fear. The novelist has used the skin shedding symbol once again for describing Soru Gohani's helplessness and fear of losing Mahidhar.

The novelist has used symbols of fruits, flowers etc. to present ideas of physical beauty of her characters.

5.1.6: Symbolism in *Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusarita Pristha*:

Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusarita Pristha speaks about the theme of the novel by its very title. The title is exclusively symbolic. The title symbolizes violence and death. The pages of the novel are fully spattered with blood and dust. The novel speaks of blood shed and mass killing in Delhi. The blood is the blood of innocent people. The pages of this novel are full with bloody descriptions of brutal killings of thousands of people. The novelist has touched the fresh blood of people murdered savagely in the

7. Ibid., page – 138.

anti Sikh riot in Delhi. The novel is based on reality.

Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusarita Pristha is set in Delhi of 1984. Here, the city Delhi symbolizes terror and regression. Delhi represents the new and old history of India. The historical past of Delhi runs parallally with the present Delhi in the novel. Delhi is a city with different layers. Delhi conceals many truths in the core of its heart. Delhi witnesses so much. Delhi is both cruel and kind. Delhi brings hope and hopelessness in this novel. Delhi baths in blood.

The author skillfully uses the well digging symbol. The digging symbolizes the process of discovery of the secrets lying deep in human heart. She tries to explore the mystery of human heart. One can not guess the quality of water that lies deep in the chest of the earth. In the same way it is impossible guess the secrets of human heart.

The novel is all about anti Sikh riot of 1984. The novelist portrays characters insulted, injured and tortured immensely in the course of the riot. These characters symbolize the sad plight of the Sikh community in the then Delhi.

The novelist stands as a symbol of love amongst hatred. She loves human beings. As a devotee of love she likes to read Mirza Galib, Rahim Khan and Tulsidas. She searches for love among the ruins. But now the deadly cries of the terror stricken people have pierced her tender heart. She becomes dumb at the sight of dead bodies in the streets and everywhere. Goswami's heart bleeds for the victims of the riot.

5.1.7: Symbolism in Chinnamastar Manuhto:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami uses technique of symbolism in the novel *Chinnamastar Manuhto*. Here the mighty Brahmaputra stands as a symbol of age old

tradition of Assam. The Brahmaputra is the pride of Assam. The Brahmaputra witnesses the rise and fall, virtue and vice, love and hatred of Assam. The mighty Brahmaputra seems to change its mood according to the situation. It sometimes roars and sometimes remains silent.

The deformed skull symbolizes the violence of man against man. The deformed skull is supposed to be the skull of someone sacrificed in the name of Goddess Kamakhya.

The buffalo, brought for sacrifice is symbolic of young girl victims of forced marriages. In the novel two men are trying to lead the buffalo to the sacrificial altar but the buffalo is trying to resist in vain just like Bidhibala. Bidhibala is dead against her proposed marriage with the elderly man whom her father has selected for her groom. She, only to get rid of her misfortune, joins the prostitutes and goes away from Kamakhya. Finally she meets a tragic death as an innocent animal.

5.2: Symbolism in the novels of Anita Desai:

Anita Desai is an expert in using symbolic technique. She uses rich symbols in her novels. The titles of her novels are always symbolic. For example, *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Fire on the Mountain* etc.

5.2.1: Symbolism in *Cry, the Peacock*:

Cry, the Peacock is ever the first novel written by Anita Desai. The title of the novel *Cry, the Peacock* is highly symbolic. The 'cry' of the peacock is symbolic of

Maya's cry for love. The peacock's cry "Pia Pia Mio Mio I die", ⁸ resembles Maya's cry in the sense that dying they are aware of life. Maya is also preoccupied with death. She believes that as the Albino astrologer has prophecised, either she or Gautama would die in the fourth year of their marriage. Maya is under this trauma and anticipates her husband to sympathise and console her. But being a very practical and matured man Gautama discards all her complains. Gautam finds no meaning in the cries of the Peacocks as Maya does.

The Albino astrologer is a symbol of death. Maya recalls every moment of the Albino astrologer in her life in association with death.

The colour symbols the novelist has used in this novel are interesting. The colours red, white and grey are the dominant colours in this novel. Maya's dream for a colourful conjugal life is symbolized by the colour red. Red also symbolizes both danger and violence. The colour white refers to Gautam's indifference to Maya. Grey colour symbolizes lifelessness in Gautam whereas red symbolizes life in Maya.

The hill orchids symbolize Maya's sterility. The hill orchids never bloom. Like that Maya is also childless. Maya is disappointed because of her childlessness. Maya's intense desire to be a mother is symbolized by her deep concern for the pigeons nests filled with babies. The tender suckling by the mother rat also symbolizes Maya's craze for motherhood.

8. Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, page - 82

The image of dancing Shiva symbolizes freedom; freedom of soul. Maya is a caged bird. She is trapped in the web of her illusion. She wants to be free from all her miseries.

Finally, the female protagonist Maya's name itself is also a symbol. The word 'Maya' stands for illusion. Maya herself terms it "Only a dream. An illusion. Maya my very name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion." ⁹

5.2.2: Symbolism in Voices in the City:

Desai uses symbolism in her second novel *Voices in the City*. The city refers to here is Calcutta. Desai presents Calcutta symbolically for both hope and hopelessness, light and darkness. Calcutta is symbolized as a beastly and blood-thirsty Calcutta. It is termed as monster city, devil city, the harsh city etc. Calcutta is symbolized as a city of death and also city of kali, the goddess of death. The novel is set in this multifaceted city. The characters mainly Nirode, Monisha and Amla grow to both life and death in this city.

Monisha's sterility or childlessness is symbolized by the empty pouch of the kangaroo she has seen at the zoo. Monisha desires for motherhood but remains barren. Her husband Jiban's lovelessness makes her life more barren.

Monisha is suffering both physically and emotionally. She feels like a caged bird in the house of her in-laws. Monisha's situation is symbolized by the caged-tiger mentioned in the novel.

9. Ibid., page - 144

Desai has used the colour symbolism in this novel as she has already used in *Cry, the Peacock*. She has used the white colour as a symbol of creative Calcutta and black for a destructive one. Calcutta is full of hope for some people and hopeless for some others.

Nirode compares his mother with the goddess Kali. Hindu mythology believes the mother Kali as a goddess of life and death. Nirode believes that life can not be separated from death. The mother symbol is used as a reference to the creative and destructive force of life. It is death that gives meaning to life.

5.2.3: Symbolism in Bye-Bye Blackbird:

Desai's third novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is highly symbolic in nature. The very title of the novel is extremely symbolic. The novel deals with the dilemma of Indian immigrants in England. Here black bird symbolizes the Indians as the complexion of the Indians is dark in comparison to the white English people.

The theme of the novel is that London has bade good-bye to one black Indian namely Adit. Adit Sen feels satisfied with his English wife Sarah. But as time changes Adit feels nostalgic. Adit's nostalgia becomes an incurable disease. Adit's wife also feels alienated from the society as a result of her inter-racial marriage with Adit. She is humiliated by her people for marrying a black immigrant from India. Sarah has double identity first as an English then as a wife of an immigrant India. Sarah's state of mind is symbolized through the water-mammoth symbol. The water-mammoth stands as a symbol for her sense of guilt of marrying an immigrant. Sarah always tries to hide herself from her local people in fear of being insulted for her decision of marrying an immigrant from India.

Desai uses the colour symbol again in the novel, as she has already used in her two former novels *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voice in the City*. Dev feels uneasy when he first goes to live with Adit in his Clapham house in England. He feels disgusted at the cold, unwelcomed treatment of the English people in London. Dev's state of mind is symbolized by the black tunnels and black air. The colour black symbolizes his fear of a dark future waiting for him in London.

5.2.4: Symbolism in Fire on the Mountain:

Symbolism plays a pivotal role in Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*. There are several symbols used by the novelist to bring out her project successfully. The protagonist Nanda Kaul is tired of her busy life. She comes to live all alone in the isolated house 'Carignano' at Kasauli far away from her children. Carignano symbolizes the lonely and barren life of Nanda Kaul. She wants not to be disturbed any more in life. She chooses Carignano because:

“What pleased and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness.

This was the chief virtue of kasauli- its starkness.”¹⁰

Nanda's isolated house Carignano stands in direct contrast to her old busy house where she has lived as a Vice Chancellor's wife.

The mountain symbolizes Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul stands alone as the mountain with strong determination.

The 'fire' is symbolic of the smouldering fire in the heart of Nanda Kaul. The

10. Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, page - 4

fire is also the fire burning in Ila Das' heart. Even Raka, Nanda Kaul's great grand daughter can not escape from the fire. Raka as a child experiences the heat of the fire burning inside her. The novel ends with Raka's putting the mountain in to fire. This fire is symbolic of the wild nature of Raka.

The withered garden of Nanda Kaul is symbolic of her withered life. The garden once fully bloomed is now in the process of withering. Nanda is also tired of a long tiring workload as a wife and a mother. She is so fade up with maintaining relationship that now she feels her own children as like 'too much furniture' ¹¹

Desai uses birds as symbols in her novels. She uses the parrot as a symbol in this novel. One day Nanda Kaul has been lying on her bed pondering over her past and present. She has been waiting for the cool evening breeze. She expects no one to break her silence. Suddenly some parrots have disturbed her with a quarrel. The parrots are symbolic of Raka, who is coming to disturb her peace of mind.

Desai has used the eagle as a symbol repeatedly in this novel. The eagle soars high in the blue sky and is out of sight. Accordingly Nanda Kaul wants to fly away from her worldly problems in quest of a new peaceful life. She wishes to be invincible and invisible.

The eagle also symbolizes Raka's restlessness. Raka has no surrendering attitude. She is a victim of her parent's unhappy married life. She has no childlike nature. She is as free as a bird. She invades the mountain with her little untiring feet.

11. Ibid., page -33

She runs on the mountain from morning to the dusk. The novelist compares her pace with that of the eagle. She can surpass an eagle with her speed:

“She was higher than the eagles, higher than Kasauli and Sanawar and all other hills”.¹²

5.2.5: Symbolism in Where Shall We Go This Summer?:

Anita Desai's shortest novel, *Where Shall we go this Summer?* is rich with symbols. The peaceful stream of the protagonist Sita's life is suddenly disturbed when she feels the presence of her fifth child inside her. She feels completely lonely. She feels alienated from her family. She, being desperate wants to go away from her people to the Manori island for some peace.

The novelist has used two prominent symbols in the novel- the city of Bombay and the Manori island. Here Bombay city symbolizes reality while Manori island symbolizes illusion. For Sita the island is a symbol of spiritual happiness. Sita is bored with her life in Bombay and decides to go and live happily in the island. She decides to stay in her father's long deserted house standing all alone in the island. The house symbolizes Sita's alienated self. The house is completely disconnected from the main city Bombay. Here the house symbolizes Sita's loneliness. The house is fully covered with dust, and spider webs. The condition of the house is same as the condition of Sita's mind.

As in *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai has used the bird symbol in this novel too. Sita

12. Ibid., page - 67

compares herself to a wounded eagle. In the novel the crows are seen screeching and pecking at the wounded eagle. It is symbolic of Sita being beaten up by her situation.

5.2.6: Symbolism in Clear Light of Day:

Clear Light of Day is another novel rich in symbolism. There are some shrinking symbols fit to convey the theme of the novel by virtue of their suggestive power. The novel is about the relationship among the four brothers and sisters of das family-Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba. All the four siblings are searching for their lost affinity that they seem to have lost somewhere. The strong childhood bond amongst them is lost as they have grown older.

The old shabby house of the Das family in old Delhi symbolizes decay and desolation. Tara visits her old paternal house along with her husband Bakul. She has experienced a mixed feeling of both pleasure and pain at the sight of her old shabby house. The whole environment of the house including the worn out garden and the old scummy well are symbolic of the decay that the very house symbolizes.

Like in *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* the writer has used colour symbols in this novel. The arrival of Mira Masi is compared to the arrival of a new season of green mangoes. Here green symbolizes hope and liveliness. The drawing room of the Das' house is equipped with red curtains, red carpets and red rexine sofas. Here the colour red symbolizes anger, fury and danger. Again the grey colour symbolizes the decaying time. It also symbolizes dullness, as in the life of Bim (Bimla). Bim after the death of her parents takes the responsibilities of her house on her shoulder. Her life

becomes prematurely grey under her responsibilities. Again the grey sand accumulated on her desks and books symbolizes the growing greyness in her body and soul.

The dust storm is symbolic of the continuous storm blowing inside Bim's heart. The dust storm has turned the garden into grey with dust just as time has turned Bim's hair grey before time.

The tearing of Raja's letter by Bim symbolizes a new beginning in the life of the four siblings. Bim decides to forgive her brother and sister who have left her alone in hard times. Bim recalls T.S.Eliot's line from the poem *Four Quarters* about time's dual function as a preserver and destroyer. A clear vision of life comes to her as the title of the novel symbolizes.

5.2.7: Symbolism in *In Custody*:

Desai's seventh novel *In Custody* describes the protagonist Deven Sharma's journey for success in life. Here in the novel, the novelist uses symbols perfectly for her purpose.

The protagonist Deven Sharma is a temporary lecturer in a college struggling for a better living standard. The story revolves round his unsuccessful attempts to upgrade himself. Deven is dying to escape from his prison like existence but fails. Deven lives in a small town Mirpore and later gets the opportunity to go to Delhi to interview Nur, a famous Urdu poet. But finally, the interview becomes his illusion.

Deven considers Mirpore to be a hell. For him Mirpore is a cruel trap, as indestructible prison from which there was no escape. The novelist uses the dust

symbol to convey the unproductivity and sterility of Mirpore. She uses words and phrases such as dust, dusty, dust heaps, dustbin to symbolize the futile life of Deven.

Like in *Where Shall we go this Summer?* and *Clear Light of Day*, Desai has used the house symbol in this novel too. The house is dusty and dark. The house symbolizes Deven's painful existence. The house where Deven lives is like a dark cell of a prison.

On the otherhand Nur's house is an attractive one. But Deven finds no glory of poetry inside his house. For Deven Nur's house symbolizes darkness and despair. Deven's dreams have been shattered after his meeting with Nur. He realizes that Nur's is also trapped in the same web of fate.

Desai uses the summer season as a symbol in the novel. Summer symbolizes Deven's devastated spirit in the course of his journey to attain ultimate success.

Deven feels his existence as partly living. Towards the end of the novel he walks on the canal. He wishes to be stabbed to death by his own students. He feels that the futility of his existence is reflected in the water. Hence the water symbolizes Dev's life as a caged bird.

The Sun is used as a symbol in this novel. The Sun symbolizes reality for Deven. Finally Deven decides to give up all his fascination for Nur. He decides to go back to Mirpore as his long waiting to record something special has turned to be a failure. That particular morning the sun has shone in a very clear sky. The sun shine has cleared the darkness from the mind of Deven. He wants to run to the sun. This symbolizes his growth from diffidence to self confidence.

The calligraphic pattern made of the black and white marble is also used as a symbol. The pattern helps Deven to understand the nature of art. Art has the power to make his creative impersonal. Finally Deven accepts the responsibility of Nur's poetry.

Thus Anita Desai has used symbols fit for expressing her themes in this novel.

5.3: Conclusion:

The novelists under discussion are experts in the handling of symbols in their novels. Without the symbols their novels would lose their charm and value. Here chief concern is given to the key clusters of symbols to show how these are significant to the conveyance of the beautiful and different themes in different novels of both the writers concerned. The symbols used by them have added flavor to their novels.