CHAPTER IV
SOUND SYMBOLISM

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4.0 Sounds as Symbols

Language is a system which mediates in a highly complex way, between the universe of meaning and the universe of sound. On the one hand we have "things to say", on the other hand we make noises which, under ordinary circumstances, convey these things to a listener. Thus language is "sound with meaning" or "sound with a soul". (Chafe, 1970: 15)

Language enables a speaker to transform the shape of ideas into configurations of sounds and it enables a listener within his own mind to transform these sounds back into a reasonable facsimile of the ideas with which the speaker began and this is the basic view of language. Ferdinand de Saussure, for example, asserted that "the linguistic sign unites ---- a concept and a sound image." Edward Sapir wrote that "the essence of language consists in the assigning of conventional voluntarily articulated sounds." Leonard Bloomfield, too, noted that "in human speech, different sounds have different meanings. To study this co-ordination of certain sounds with certain meanings is to study language." (Chafe, 1970: 15)

Combining sounds with meaning is by way of mak-
ing words. That is, words stand for something other than themselves, and their relationship to the thing that they stand for is arbitrary. For example, when a man nods his head to indicate assent, the gesture is arbitrary and therefore symbolic. In another example, when a man raises a flattened hand in a communist salute, he has moved into the realm of symbolism.

The best known form of human communication is speech, which involves the sounds. These sounds, carry the information that people convey among one another in everyday interaction. Thus the sound is the signal of speech. The segmental sounds of everyday speech like the consonants and vowels that make up words. "Words are made up of sequences of sounds, each sound being represented, by a system of alphabetic writing; and that, whereas the words of a language have a meaning, the sounds do not. Thus the sole function of sound is to form words." (Lyons, 1968 : 53) Thus, sound is the origin of language. It shows friendliness between speakers. "Children make sounds as the language for expressing simple sociability. The sounds may be classified as 'smooth', 'harsh', 'liquid', 'masculine', etc. For instance, one might maintain, in the spirit of the 'naturalists', that 'I' is a liquid sound, and that therefore the words 'liquid', 'flow' etc., contain a sound
which is 'naturally' appropriate to their meaning. The modern term for this kind of relationship between the constituent sounds of words and their meaning, in so far as it is asserted to be a feature of language, is sound-symbolism. (Lyons, 1968 : 5)

Exclamations like Aha !, Alas ! or Hurrah ! are the emotive sounds expressing subjective feelings of surprise, triumph, mockery, irony; of grief, pity, disillusionment; and of approbation, exhilaration, exultation, respectively. (Potter, 1957 : 143)

It may be that man may first have discovered the pleasure of rhythmical sound for its own sake - long strings of sounds, like the child's babble. "Next, the pleasure of making such sounds in company with others could have been discovered; and the knowledge that, to make such sounds, is to provoke that pleasure. At this point speech becomes something that can have a purpose. Various accidental things might now come together - in the same way that, for a child, the response of his mother to his mamama-ma sound could have been an accident; and the sound which was being made when the accidental event occurred could gain an association with that sort of event in the speaker's mind. The sounds are more likely, it seems, to have become associated with the events themselves. (Anderson, 1975 : 8-9)
Imitative intense forms, which denote a sound: the imitative speech-form resembles this sound: cock-a-doodle-doo, meeow, moo, baa. Many bird names are of this sort: cuckoo, bobwhite, whip-poor-will. Doubled forms are common: bow-wow, ding-dong, pee-wee, choo-choo, chug-chug. (Bloomfield, 1950: 156)

All the sounds that form part of message are vocal symbols. They are conventional signs uttered with a purpose of conveying a meaning. For example, Seagull's cry is uttered with a purpose, and it certainly has some meaning, since it evokes mental images that are definable and significant. It reminds that a storm is raging over the Irish Sea and that thousands of gulls at this moment are seeking shelter on the adjacent foreshores. But this cry is a sign strictly limited to immediate experience. It might be represented diagrammatically as a series of vibrations and can be shown by a way line. This would present a reliable and scientific record of one aspect at least of the gull's cry. Phonetic \[g^\text{^l}\] and orthographic 'gull' are both symbols of this sequence of sounds consisting of voiced speech sounds (plosive + low - mid - back short vowel + dark velarised 'l' with movement to the side. Each is, in fact, a symbol of a symbol, or a symbol
twice removed. Between this pearl grey bird and the three sound symbols have no permanent connections whatsoever. The connections are conventional and arbitrary. (Potter, 1957: 36-37)

If 'gull' is a series of symbols twice removed from the referent, its representation in the Morse Code as a sequence of dots and dashes (---- . ... ---- . . . ---- . - . . . - ..) is a set of symbols three times removed. First comes the bird; then the noises; then the letters; and then the signal code dots and dashes. It might be argued that the three sounds of gull [g Â¹] have some historical connection, with that near human wail it emits. Gull obviously is an echoic, imitative word and such words abound in many languages. An Englishman tells his small son not to be afraid of the big bow-wow, because that is the customary representation of the dog's bark in English. But in German it becomes wau-wau, in French tou-tou, and in Japanese wan-wan. In Jacobean England the cock crew cock-a-diddle-dow. (Shakespeare, The Tempest, I, ii, 386) Today in England he crows cock-a-doodle-doo, in France cocorico, but in Germany kikeriki! All these approximations are conventional and they may be said to be on the margin of language. Over the border lie such auditory symbols as the ringing of bells and the blowing of whistles and sirens. Traffic lights at
crossroads are visual symbols, but they too stand beyond the confines of language. (Ibid., 37)

A symbol is a sign that is always a substitute for some other sign with which it is made synonymous. All signs not symbols are signals: all signs not signals are symbols. The essential act of thought is symbolization. Our minds transform experiences into symbols. There is nothing in experience that cannot be transformed into a symbol by the mind: nothing that cannot be made to signify something else. (Ibid., 45)

Human language uses sound as its medium of transmission. Its use by human beings is so all-pervasive and the role that it plays in human society is so essential that it justifies us in distinguishing man from all other living beings describing him as the "talking animal". (Devito, 1973 : 9)

A small proportion of utterances in everyday life can be described as purely informative. Long before we developed language as we now know it, we probably made, like the lower animals, all sorts of cries, expressive of such internal conditions as hunger, fear, loneliness, sexual desire, and triumph. We can recognize a variety of such sounds and the
conditions of which they are symptoms in our domestic animals. Gradually such noises seem to have become more and more differentiated; consciousness expanded. Therefore, although we have developed language in which accurate reports may be given, we almost universally tend to express our internal conditions first, then to follow up with a report if necessary: "Ow! My tooth hurts (report)." Many utterances are as we have seen with regard to 'snarl-words' and 'purs-words', vocal equivalents of expressive gestures, such as crying in pain, baring the teeth in anger, nuzzling to express friendliness, dancing with delight, and so on. When words are used as vocal equivalents of expressive gestures, we shall say that language is being used in presymbolic ways. These presymbolic systems, and the talking we do in everyday life is a thorough blending of symbolic and presymbolic. (Hayakawa, 1974 : 76-77)

Indeed, the presymbolic factors in everyday language are always most apparent in expressions of strong feeling of any kind. If we carelessly step off a curb when a car is coming, it doesn't much matter whether someone yells, "Look out!" or "kiwotsuke!" or "Hey!" or "Prends garde!" or simply utters a scream, so long as whatever noise is made is
uttered loudly enough to alarm us. It is the fear expressed in
the loudness and tone of the cry that conveys the necessary
sensations, and not the words. The quality of the voice itself,
that is to say, has a power of expressing feelings that is
almost independent of the symbols used. We can say, "I hope
you'll come to see us again", in a way that clearly indicates
that we hope the visitor never comes back. (Ibid., 76)

Very small infants understand the love, the warmth,
or the irritation in a mother's voice long before they are able
to understand her words. Most children retain this sensitivity
of presymbolic elements in language. The activity gives us a
pleasant sense of being alive. Children prattling, adults singing
in the bathtub are alike enjoying the sound of their voices.
Sometimes large groups make noises together, as in group
singing, group recitation, or group chanting for similar
presymbolic reasons. In all these the significance of the words
used is almost completely irrelevant. (Ibid., 77-78)

Humboldt (Versch 79) says that "language chooses to
designate objects by sounds which partly in themselves, partly
in comparison with others, produce on the ear an impression
resembling the effect of the object on the mind; thus stehen,
statig, starr, the impression of firmness, Sanskrit Jr. 'to melt,
diverge', that of liquidity ........... In this way objects that produce similar impressions are denoted by words with essentially the same sounds, thus wehen, wind, wolke, wirren, wunsch, in all of which the vacillating, wavering motion with its confused impression on the senses is expressed through -- --- w." Humboldt himself assumes that much of primitive sound symbolism may have disappeared in course of time. Nyrop repeats, that the significations of words are constantly changing, further that the group of sounds comes to mean different things according to the language in which it occurs. (Jespersen, 1964 : 396-397)

Sounds may in some cases be symbolic of their sense, even if they are not so in all words. There are some sounds which symbolize the objects, thus clink, clank, ting, tinkle of various metallic sounds splash, bubble, sizz, sizzle of sounds produced by water, bow-wow, bleat, roar of sounds produced by animals, and snort, sneeze, snig, smack, whisper, grunt, grumble of sounds produced by human beings. The echoic word designates the being that produces the sound, thus the birds cuckoo and peewee. (Ibid., 398-399)

Sound is always produced by some movement and is nothing but the impression which that movement makes on the
ear. It is quite natural that the movement itself may be expressed by the word for its sound. There are words expressive of such movements as are not to the same extent characterized by loud sounds. Word may come to be felt as symbolic of the movement. There is also a natural connection between action and sound in the word. (Ibid., 400)

The connection between the sound of the word and its sense is even more direct. The sound of the word symbolises the state of mind. The sound expresses dislike, disgust, scorn, dirtiness etc. hoarse voice. Through changes in meaning, too, some words have become symbolically more expressive than they were formerly; thus the agreement between sound and sense is of late growth in miniature, which now, on account of the 'i', has come to mean 'a small picture', while at first it meant 'image painted with minium' and in pittance, now 'a scanty allowance', 'formerly any pious donation', whether great or small. (Ibid., 408)

The sound of a word, in some way suggestive of its singification - if a word containing the vowel (i) in a prominent place meant 'small' than the sound exerted a strong influence in gaining popular favour to the word; it was an inducement to people to choose and to prefer that particular (104)
word and to cease to use words for the same notion that were not thus favoured. Sound symbolism makes some words more fit to survive and gives them considerable help in their struggle for existence. If we want to denote a little child by a word for some small animal, we take some words like kid, chick, kitten, rather than bat or pug or slug, though these may in themselves be smaller than the animal chosen. (Ibid., 408)

De Saussure gives as one of the main principles of science that the tie between sound and sense is arbitrary, and to those who would object that onomatopoetic words are not arbitrary. He says that "they are never organic elements of a linguistic system. Besides they are much less numerous than is generally supposed." (Ibid., 410)

In all languages the creation and use of echoic and symbolic words seems to have been on the increase in historical times. If to this we add the selective process through which words which have only secondarily acquired symbolical value survive at the cost of less adequate expressions, and subsequently give rise to a host of derivatives, then we may say that languages in course of time grow richer and richer in symbolic words. So far from believing in a golden primitive age, in which everything in language was expressive and
immediately intelligible on account of the significative value of each group of sounds, we arrive rather, here as in other domains, at the conception of a slow progressive development towards a greater number of easy and adequate expressions-expressions in which sound and sense are united. (Ibid., 411)

Sound symbolism has been used by Anita Desai in all of her novels. In her novels sound symbolism may be classified as, 'Politeness', 'Terseness', 'Generosity', 'Aggressive', 'Courtesy', 'Rusticness', 'Elegance', 'Sophistication' and 'Sarcasm'. Now we see how she has used all these in her novels.

4.1 Politeness

'Polite' means to show good manners and respect for the feelings of others. One who treats anybody with politeness is a polite person.

For example in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', Raman treats Sita with politeness:

(a) "Why ? Why ? he spoke gently. Everything will go well. I thought it grows easier and easier". (P. 32)

(b) If you want a lift to Ajanta, you had better cross the road and stand on that side", he advised him gently. (P. 51)
4.2 **Terseness**

To use few words is terse. There is a terse voice and style of the characters in Desai's novels.

For example in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?', the terse replies of the characters are as follows:

(a) "Not us, not us," neighed the goats wagging about the table. (P. 11)

(b) I remember. Oh yes, yes, remember", they all murmured, hummed, sang and sank into shadows lumped on a wooden bench. (P. 12)

(c) "Fortunate, fortunate" they hummed and swayed and rocked. (Ibid.)

4.3 **Generosity**

A person who understands and respects other people's opinions and behaviour especially when they are different from their own is a generous person.

For example in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?', the certain expressions show generosity of the speaker:

(a) "The toy gun. Go, Karan, the toy gun will do". The
smallest child, awed at being chosen as the instrument of deliverance, ran for it so fast that he fell. He cut his chin and bawled but was ignored. She fetched it herself, out of his toy box. Shot it (P. 39)

(b) "Yeah, I'd better," he agreed, and shifted the pack on his shoulders as though it bruised him. (P. 51)

In 'Cry', The Peacock', Gautam maintains a life of non-involvement and expects the same of his wife: "You must not allow yourself to grow so painfully involved." Maya's ironical rejoinder to this is: "He was so perfectly right. Here lay the catalysis of my unrest. I had grown too involved." (P. 58)

4.4 *Aggressiveness*

'Aggressive' means to behave in a threatening way or ready in a threatening way or ready to attack. In 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?', the aggressive behaviour of the characters is as follows:

(a) So she spoke angrily. "Why haven't you cleaned it?." (P. 29)

(b) There was a clamour of shouts and accusations, screams and shrill, tooting sounds as the argument gave way to action. She thought she saw the madly flapping edge of
the battle-scene-arms flailing, sari ripping. (P. 42)

4.5 ** Courtesy **

'Courteous' means being kind and polite to others. A kind, courteous person is likely to make friends more easily than a rude person. He can easily charm people with his easy manners, gentleness and kindness.

In 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', Raman and the other character's manners and gentleness have been depicted in this way:

(a) The woman half-smiled when she entered a room, and bent over their trays on which they were chopping vegetables - chopping, slicing, chopping, slicing the incredible quantities of vegetables they daily devoured. (P. 48)

(b) Raman started the car waved shouted "Good-bye, good luck," and drove on. (P. 52)

(c) He looked quite piqued, Sita noticed, from the effort of running away from the bulbous Miriam who had once, when he had slithered down the knoll to gaze at her goats in the drizzle caught him in her arms, more fit to grapple with a python than caress a child and, smacking her lips over him as over a tasty snack, raucously bawled-

(109)
Don't cry, baby, don't cry,
Mama making chilli fry,
Papa catching butterfly,
Don't cry, baby, don't cry.

(P. 118)

4.6 Rusticness

'Rustic' means rough and unrefined, sometimes uncultured as compared to manners of a civilized society.

For example in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', the character's rough behaviour and uncultured society have been shown in this way:

(a) The owner of the diesel-oil pump that catered to the few motor boats, came out of his shack under the coconut palms and stood picking his teeth with a match-stick, watching. Some of the Manori fishermen who had just brought in their craft with small hauls of fish for the market stook up in their battered boats and stared. (P.15)

(b) Moses curled his lip at that: What would become of a child given so much and such varying attention? "Hroo", he yelped at the bullock, "hroo, hroo!" (P. 21)

(110)
4.7 **Elegance**

'Elegant' means tasteful and stylish in appearance or manner.

For example in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', the character's appearance and manners are as follows:

(a) "He treated me for my fits and boils with powdered pearls and rubies and charged nothing," praised a third in a voice of awe, as if laying offerings at an altar. (PP. 11-12)

(b) Moses gave the lungi a careless flick. Its checks of rose and maroon had about them the glow of squarecut gems - therefore it was not only a careless but also a proud flick. (P. 8)

(c) Miriam, sitting on her haunches and smoking a cigar, saying with more insolence than despair, "But there is nothing to cook !" made her remember those two vivid creatures the "original inhabitants" of Jeevan Ashram, dressed in throbbing shades of pink and orange. (P. 103)

4.8 **Sophistication**

Refined, Having or showing much worldly
experience and knowledge of fashionable life is called 'sophisticated.'

For example in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?':

(a) "She has heard that Moses has let the whole house fall down."

"Who says the house has fallen down?" Moses bellowed, half-rising from the wooden bench on which they all sat. His bosom wore pendants of perspiration and their glitter seemed menacing in the ill-lit cavern of the illicit liquor shop. "Show me one brick that has fallen", he challenged. (P. 9)

(b) "What do you know about my condition?" she flared. "I've told you - "I've tried to tell you but you haven't understood a thing", and hurled slippers, papers, nightgowns.

"I don't understand much, but I understand you are having a baby and must not be allowed to behave like this. You must stay where there is a doctor, a hospital, and a telephone. You can't go to the island in the middle of the monsoon. (P. 33)
4.9 Sarcasm

'Sarcastic' means ironic which is often bitter and would hurt somebody's feelings. For example in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?':

(a) The crows hop clownishly about the rock, on which the sea breaks "scrambling to catch a rotten fish or scraps of edible flotsam left by the waves to stink in the sun." They also sit outside on the ledges and balcony rails of the flats, waiting for the lazy cooks to throw out the kitchen garbage into the alley. They catch them in the mid-air. These "tatterdemalions" are experts in all evil practices that go on in the civilized society like murder, infanticide, incest, theft and robbery, everything is "much practised by these rough, raucous, rasping tatterdemalions". (P. 38)

(b) They whistle in ecstasy and wave their wings as they find a wounded or a baby eagle. They laugh and rasp as they whip it with their "bluebottle wings" and tear into it with their "scimitar beaks". The eagle tries to crawl into the shelter of the wall's shadow and its "leaf red" wings scrape the concrete and then its "Goldbeaked" head falls to one
side. Sita shouts for a stick and stones. But the crows are indifferent. They are used to a certain amount of opposition and aggression from the human population of the city; they could tackle it, ignore it, choking with laughter". (P. 39)

(c) In 'Cry, The Peacock', through the cry of the peacock, Maya hears the call of the albino astrologer. She identifies herself with the peacocks: "Now that I understood their call, I wept for them, and wept for myself, knowing their words to be mine." (P. 97)

References


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid. P. 97

8. Ibid. P. 51.


10. Ibid. P. 12.

11. Ibid.


13. Ibid. P. 51.


15. Ibid. P. 42.


17. Ibid. P. 52.

18. Ibid. P. 118.


21. Ibid. PP. 11-12.

22. Ibid. P. 8.

23. Ibid. P. 103.


25. Ibid. P. 33.

26. Ibid. P. 38.

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29. Ibid
31. Ibid. P. 76.
32. Ibid. PP. 77-78.
34. Ibid. P. 400.
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36. Ibid. P. 408.
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