CHAPTER V
WORD SYMBOLISM

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5.0 **Word Symbolism: Meaning and Nature**

A group of sounds arranged in a fixed order is called a word. A word denotes every part and every sort of human experience in the world. It symbolises the particular community also. Sometimes words denote some-what ambiguous situations. They provide means for communicating our thoughts to one another.

We understand the world in terms of words. According to Bhartrhari, "The nature of objects and existence in the world is determined by how we cognise it. It follows that objects, their cognition and linguistic expressions about the affairs of the world all of them, are dependent on the words." (Patnaik, 1994 : 13)

Each word in a sentence has a different place and it has its own function. There is a principal word in every sentence and other words are only to qualify it. "The essential nature of a word lies in its meaning. A word is that which has a fixed relation to some object, so as to recall it whenever it is heard or read; i.e. it means an object." (Bist, 1990 : 49) So the words are significant symbols. "The Mimamsakas however argued that a word has a natural capacity to express the
meaning it does; but to Naiyayikas, a word comes to have a meaning which has been assigned to it by convention." (Ibid.)

Thus, in general, a word is the symbol of thoughts. But when the author symbolises his experience, feeling, thought in terms of languages, then the literal meaning gives rise to a different meaning, known as symbolic meaning or latter sense, symbolism. In this it negates its private existence and content for the meaning it symbolises. The meaning is neither a particular physical state nor the imaginary, called forth by the word, but it is universal. "A word means a particular not primarily but by secondarily. In addition to its primary meaning, a word can have a secondary meaning also. The so-called suggested meaning is too fleeting and subjective to be regarded as a logical meaning. The primary meaning of a word is at first known either directly from authority or by induction from its particular uses by authoritative persons in different contexts. But subsequently the meaning is remembered when the word is heard. The secondary meaning is resorted to only when the primary meaning is found to be incompatible in a particular context, but it is somehow connected with the primary meaning. The secondary meaning, therefore must be known through 'arthapatti' based on the primary meaning and
the context. But if the secondary is not occasional, but perma-
nently fixed by usage to the complete loss of the primary
meaning, as in "spinster", "beef", etc., it is known also like
primary meaning through memory in all subsequent uses." (Ibid.,
51-52)

'Sab'da means "uttered or written strings of words
having a syntax and meaning". (Patnaik, 1994 : 22) In short,
it means 'language'. It is the name of a complex phenomenon
implying an activity as well as a principle. It is something in
which all human beings, in fact, all sentient beings are en-
gaged. It is the linguistic potency, the very power of
conceptualisation, which is the basis of our consciousness as
well as the awareness of the external world. (Ibid.)

The language (word) in the manifested form is our
only way of expressing awareness about the objects as well as
the activities of the world. Bhartrhari offers in support of his
statement that 'the word appears as objects'. (Patnaik, 1994 : 24)

The existence of words is considered real. Words
have got potentiality of expressing definite meanings. 'Word
has also been defined as a Sentence. In order to convey the
combined sentence meaning the words require the add of some
necessary properties, which are Expectancy, Compatibility and Juxtaposition. (Bist, 1990: 30)

Each word has a meaning. A case marker is added to it in order to show the relation of the word to other words in a sentence. The relation is meant by these Vibhakties or suffixes appended to names. "Words according to the Mimamsa, are independent of any relation to other words. When they are used in a sentence, suffixes are added to them. These suffixes mean the particular relation in which a word stands to the other words of a sentence." (Ibid.)

The different elements of a word give rise to distinct sensations of sound. They do not fuse together but come one after another in the exact order in which the different syllables are uttered. The unity of the word is based on the unity of its meaning, that the different syllables come to be treated as one word just because they convey one meaning when combined together. (Ibid., 31)

We now come to the 'Word Symbolism'. Every word is a symbol. A word is a symbol of some idea. It has some meaning. The constitution of a word lies in its meaning. "The meaning of a word consists in its relation to the object which
it signifies. A word may have different meanings according to the different ways in which it may be related to an object. According to the Naiyayikas, there are three kinds of a meaning of a word, namely, abhidha, paribhasa and laksana."
(Ibid., 33)

Abhidha is the primary meaning of a word. The relation between a word and its meaning may be either sanketa or laksana. "Sanketa is the direct relation between a word and its meaning, such that the knowledge of the word leads immediately to the knowledge of its relation to that meaning. Sanketa or the direct relation between a word and its meaning may be either eternal or non-eternal." The relation between the word 'book' and the object called book is a direct and eternal relation and it is called 'Sakti'. This 'Sakti' of a word is due to the will of God which ordains that such and such a word should mean such and such an object. It has been rightly said that the Sakti of a word is its natural relation to the object which it signifies. For example, 'fire' possesses the power of burning, so the word possesses a natural potency to mean certain things independently of the will of any person. (Ibid.)

"When Sanketa or the direct relation between a word and its meaning is non-eternal, it is called 'paribhasa'. This is
due to the will of authorities which prescribes that such and such a word should mean such and such an object. The meaning established by the authorities is the technical meaning of a word. Words which bear the meanings are called 'paribhasika', e.g. the word 'article' in grammar, 'premise' in logic, 'court' in law, 'category' in philosophy." (Ibid.)

By laksana we mean the secondary meaning of a word. It is the indirect meaning in which we understand a word when its primary meaning does not consist with other words. "A word indirectly means an object when it is related to it because of its direct relation with something else with which the object is somehow associated. For example, when we are told 'the house is on the Ganges', we take 'the Ganges' not in its primary meaning of 'the current of water', but in the secondary meaning of 'the bank of Ganges'. Here the secondary meaning is suggested through its association with the primary meaning." (Ibid.)

Thus we see that our experience cognitions as well as the awareness of objects are interwined with words We can say that phenomenal world is analysed in terms of word. "Bhartrhari remarks, "Hearer's knowledge of a sentence arises
from the words of the speaker and it reaches him through the
words, and these words having been understood ends in the
shape of knowledge, which is again in the form of words." (Patnaik, 1994 : 93)

5.1 Word Symbols in Anita Desai

Symbols are the most prominent device of Anita Desai. She has used different types of symbols in her novels. One such is word symbolism. One of the most outstanding things in her novels is that she is fond of using words for their own sake. She describes the animal world just for the sake of displaying her skill in using words for their music and magic.

Desai has a love for the sound of words. She uses native words for items of food, dress, rituals, festivals, trees, etc. and she has attempted to evoke the typically Indian atmosphere by using these native words. Her characters use words, words, words and through them reveal their mind. She also uses Hindi words without translating them into English, e.g. "The soft blue twilight in the garden vibrated with rich words like Zulph and Mehtab". (Bhatnagar, 2000 : 266) She uses Indian words such as, burka, sari, raga, tanpura,
dervishes, bhajan, chelas, swaraj, lota, manta. The word 'chela' is used so often in the novel 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?' that it gets on our nerves. It appears that Desai's interest in this area is on the wane. (Ibid., 271)

According to Darshan Singh Maini: "Words appear to have sensuous appeal for her, and she exults in the reach and power of her rhetoric." (Cf. Bhatnagar, 2000 : 264) Symbol is the sole ingredient of her art. Different words have been used as symbol in her novels.

5.2 One Word - Different Symbols

In 'Voices In The City', the house is the symbol of prison, safety and shelter. (Swain, 2000 : 143) In 'Village By The Sea', 'house' is the symbol of neglect, abandonment and forlorn self of Hari as well as the rural folk of the village Thul. In 'In Custody', 'house' symbolises Deven's failure to form harmonious conjugal ties and the couple's marital isolation and conjugal chaos leading to insanity. In 'Village By The Sea', 'house' serves as a symbol of neglect and abandonment. It also brings out the loneliness of Hari as well as the rural folk of the village. (Ibid., 147) In 'Cry The Peacock', 'peacock' is a symbol of "brain fever bird", "a reminder of
death" and "ill-fated lover". (Desai, 1980) In 'Bye-Bye. Blackbird', 'city' symbolises the voice of existence, which is mutely very unpleasant. It also symbolises emptiness and "a cold wasteland of brick and tile." (P. 70) In 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', 'house' symbolises the pale and melancholic psychic life of Sita. It also symbolises her desertion of normal routine life and objectifies the fear that is kept in her heart. The house, besides exposing the battered and fractured self of Sita, projects her wish to withdraw into an isolated illusory world of impregnable silence and muted movements. (Swain, 2000, 144-145) Jelly fish has also the symbolic meaning in this novel. It symbolises Sita's difficult relationship and her consequent alienation. It also suggests Sita's cast-away and ship-wrecked self. (Ibid., 140)

5.3 Different Words - One Symbol

In 'Cry, The Peacock', the image of "sapless and sere neem tree", "the silk-cotton tree" and lemon tree symbolise the inner voice and isolation of Maya. (P. 34) In 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', 'monsoon winds', 'sea' and 'water' symbolise Sita's lonely life amidst her own family and the society and chaos in her mind. (Swain, 2000 : 138, 201)
5.4 *One Word - One Symbol*

In 'Baumgartner's Bombay', Hugo's isolation is portrayed through the symbol of 'fir-tree'. (Swain, 2000 : 36) In 'Fire On The Mountain', Raka is "a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry" and "an uninvited mouse or cricket." (P. 40) In 'Clear Light of Day', the despair and isolation of Bim is symbolised through the mosquito. (Swain, 2000 : 141) In 'Voices In The City' darkness is the symbol of Monisha's broken heart. (Ibid., 151) In 'In Custody' 'landscape' symbolises Deven's dry and drab existence, his immured life. (Ibid., 152-253) In 'Cry, The Peacock' Mrs. Desai suggests the subconscious decision of Maya to murder Gautam through the dust symbol. (Ibid., 258) In 'Bye-Bye, Blackbird', 'Tea' is symbolic of relief. 'Tea', generally associated with normal practical day-to-day life and get-togetherness but in 'Bye-Bye, Blackbird' this symbol is judiciously related to Sarah. When Adit for the first time announces his decision to leave England and declares that his son will be born in India, Sarah finds herself in a psychic turmoil, but soon having overpowered the storm in heart she announces: "Let's have a cup of tea". (P. 204) In 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', Sita sees herself as a wounded eagle. Like a wounded eagle Sita is also unable to
face the reality of life with its violence sufferings and pains. The crows represent the callous society around her. The sight of the crows forming a "shadow civilization in that city of flats and alleys" (P. 25) and making a feast of a wounded eagle unnerves her to the point of tears. Crows represent the conflict in Sita's life. The island is also symbolic. It is the symbol of Sita's marooned life. She returns to the island but its inhabitants go on, completely oblivious of her presence. (Swain, 2000 : 154)

In another incident, Sita's personality is symbolized through foreigner. While returning from holiday at Ajanta and Ellora caves, Raman and Sita come across a tall, blonde, young foreigner who wants a lift to Ajanta. Raman thinks that the foreigner is a fool who didn't know which side of the road to wait on. But for Sita he seemed so brave. She says that it was not his foolishness but innocence "and it made him seem more brave not knowing anything but going on nevertheless". (P. 52) Here Sita identified herself with the foreigner because like her he is so vulnerable to violence and criticism in the society. Sita's habit of smoking is also symbolic of her desire not to give birth to the baby.
5.5 **Myth**

A myth is a generalised symbol. It is inevitable, it is natural, it is an inherent necessity of language. "It is the power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity." (Cassirer, 1946 : 5)

A myth, fascinating in itself, has a symbolic significance for the reader, depending on his experience, his observation, and his imagination. In the past even fairy tales and myths were symbolic. In Vishnu Sharma's 'Panchatantra', certain animals like fox and elephant could represent a wily and a respectable person. (Srivastava, 1997 : XIII)

Words are the source of all myths. Myths have been deployed by Mrs. Desai with all their religious and traditional associations. They serve as powerful instruments. "To take an example, the mythological Sita, though not presented directly in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?' yet owing to the identity of her name with that of the protagonist of this novel, reveals the ironical shades of the portrayal of the protagonist who suffers in her exile not from the memories of intense love for her husband, but from alienation." (Swain, 2000 : 259)

In Desai's novel 'Cry, The Peacock', the names of
Gautama and Maya are symbolic. Gautama's name is the symbol of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, who as Siddhartha had renounced his wife and child in his quest of solving larger issues of life. For Harish Raizada, Gautama's name "symbolises asceticism, detachment from life." (Srivastava, 1997 : 137) Another female character Maya's name is also symbolic. Maya becomes symbolic of 'Maya' (illusion) because she gives weightage to insubstantial and illusory things, and finds comfort in bogus ceremonies and frivolities. For Harish Raizada Maya's name symbolically "stands for the world of sensations. Maya herself calls it "Only a dream. An illusion Maya - my very name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion." (Ibid., 138)

References:
2. Ibid., PP. 51-52.
3. Ibid., P. 30.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., P. 31.
6. Ibid., P. 33.
7. Ibid., P. 34.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
14. Ibid., P. 204.
17. Ibid., P. 52.
19. Ibid., P. 22.
20. Ibid.
22. Ibid., P. 93.
24. Ibid., P. 137.
25. Ibid., P. 138.

27. Ibid., P. 271.

28. Ibid., P. 264.

29. Ibid., P. 143.

30. Ibid., P. 147.

31. Ibid., P. 259.

32. Ibid., PP. 144-145.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., P. 201.

35 Ibid., P. 36.

36. Ibid., P. 141.

37. Ibid., P. 151.

38. Ibid., PP. 152-153.

39. Ibid., P. 258.

40. Ibid., P. 154.

41. Ibid., P. 259.