

## Symbolism in Ahmed Ali's 'Twilight in Delhi'

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### Abstract

'Twilight in Delhi' by Ahmed Ali is his most famous and prominent work. Ahmed Ali is a Pakistani Scholar, poet, and teacher who grasps a privileged place as novelist and narrator of the shift of India from a British empire to a free state. The writers of modern age broke the traditional style of writing, by using different narrative styles or techniques like; symbolism, fragmentation and stream of consciousness in their writings. Symbols always fascinated readers, likely to unveil hidden meanings and have frequently been used to add a mystical touch to literary writings. In literature, one utmost appealing device which authors use in their works is Symbolism. In order to sidestep problems that may fall upon the writer, this literary device (symbolism) is being used by the writer that helps the writer to indirectly convey his/her message, for that, he uses objects, characters and animals as a symbol. The aim of this article is to analyse Ahmed Ali novel's diverse classifications of symbolism for example, characters used to scrutinize parts of society, references to nature and items that convey symbolic significance, and investigate the symbols utilized as a part of the novel, throwing light on the level of words, letters and characters, and furthermore to decipher these images and distinguish the different interpretations they stand for, by applying Saussure's Theory.

**Keywords:** Twilight in Delhi, Ahmed Ali, symbolism, symbols, categories, Saussure's Theory.

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## 1. Introduction:

In 20th century a poet, and author was born in Delhi named Ahmed Ali. He witnesses the freedom struggle that was taking shape in India. He wrote his first novel "Twilight in Delhi" published in Britain in 1940. Ahmed Ali's novel was the actual picture of the Muslims of subcontinent that how they were surviving during the years of 1857-1919 regarding their religious, cultural and social lives

Twilight in Delhi begins on a warm summer season night as Mir Nihal comes home to find his spouse awake. She desires to speak about the marriages of their youngsters. Mir insists their son, Asghar, should be married first, but they are interrupted by using a snake sneaking into Mir's pigeons' quarters. After Mir chases it off, Asghar arrives home and is chastised by way of his father for his English fashion. Asghar leaves instead of argue, his thoughts occupied by means of his would-be wife, Bilqeece, a lady from a lower elegance. Asghar is aware of his father will in no way approve of their marriage. He contacts his older sister, Begam Waheed, to assist him make the case to his mother and father. He tells his sister that he could rather die than stay without his cherished. Begam Waheed talks to their mom, Begam Nihal, to invite for her help. Although she is sceptical, Begam Nihal has the same opinion to help because she's involved about her son. When she talks to Mir, he will become irritated due to the fact he's involved that this can smash the circle of relatives' reputation. Their servant, Dilchain, overhears and tells Begam Jamal, Begam Nihal's sister-in-law. Even though she gloats to her sister-in-law over the family's misfortune, she additionally gives to help arrange the wedding without Mir's blessing.

Asghar is trying to go to his mistress, Mushtari Bai, in conjunction with a friend of his. The friend well-known shows Asghar's love for Bilqeece, which causes Mushtari to end up jealous as she's in love with Asghar herself. After they spend some time collectively, Asghar goes home and learns that his mom has agreed to assist him marry Bilqeece. Begam Waheed indicates that Asghar return together with her to her domestic in Bhopal to wait out the time earlier than he can marry Bilqeece. After some time, Mir returns home to locate his circle of relatives stricken by warmth illness. The warmth is so excessive that several of his loved pigeons have died. He buys new ones at the marketplace, and one among his servants arrived

in a hurry to show to him that his mistress, Babban Jan, is dead. He hurries to her domestic, forgetting to fasten the pigeon coop. He returns to find that Babban Jan has handed away simply mins prior. Grieving, he gives her mom some cash before leaving. At home, he finds that his pigeons were killed by way of a stray cat. Despondent, he makes a decision it is time to retire and permit Asghar make his very own selections about who he desires to marry. After retirement, he spends time specializing in his vintage interest of Alchemy. This is while King George is topped King of England and as such policies over India. Mir and his circle of relatives go to the parade, however Mir has a flashback to the violent takeover of India by using the British. Excusing himself, he walks home and is derived across a beggar who he realizes is one in all India's former rulers. He gives the person cash earlier than taking walks home, reflecting on the adjustments in his existence.

Asghar and Bilqeece get married in a complicated, days-lengthy rite, barely marred through a member of Asghar's circle of relatives insulting the bride's circle of relatives. On the quilt of the ceremony, Bilqeece's own family tearfully says good-bye to her as she leaves to be with Asghar. The wedding has some issues from the beginning, with the both finding themselves awkward round each other and Bilqeece no longer feeling at home around her husband's family. She tries to fit in, seeking to please his father, but there's little result. Asghar wonders if there's a true spark between them, but after they talk approximately getting their personal home and Asghar getting a task, matters improve. They flow out and get their own region, filling it with English items. This causes controversy with their households, but they don't care. Quickly they have a daughter named Jehan Ara.

Bilqeece's father passes away and she goes into a melancholy, and this causes greater war between them. Quickly, she comes down with tuberculosis and dies. Asghar is left to be a single father to their daughter. Bilqeece's younger sister Zohra helps him, and he soon becomes infatuated with her. At first it's not mutual, but she subsequently returns his feelings. They maintain their courting secret in the beginning, but quickly Asghar talks to her parents approximately marrying her. They agree, however Begam Jamal contacts them with info of how Asghar handled Bilqeece at some stage in their marriage. Zohra's mother refuses to accept the marriage. On the equal time, Asghar's older brother Habib Uddin comes home as he suffers from a contamination, and Mir is ate up with grief as he sees India descend into chaos at the equal time his eldest son dies. After the funeral, Asghar receives a letter from

Zohra, telling him she's being married off to someone else. He's left with a broken coronary heart. Mir returns to his room and reflects on all of the misfortune that has befallen his family, and dies in his sleep.

In literature, one utmost appealing device which authors use in their works is Symbolism. So as to sidestep difficulties that may come upon the writer, This literary device (symbolism) is being used by the writer that helps the writer to indirectly convey his/her message, for that, he uses objects, characters and animals as a symbol. There are different views for symbolism and its uses by the critics and each view is different from each others which led to seem diverse literary theories that opens the path for reader to identify symbols easily in any piece of literature.

Cuddon (1998) is of the view that: "The word symbol derives from the Greek verb 'symballein', 'to throw together', and its noun 'symbolon', 'mark' or 'sign'. It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else" (Cuddon, 1998: 884-885).

A symbol stands for, both literal meaning (what in reality it is) and symbolical significance (what it speaks to) (Sadowski, 1957). In different words, "a symbol must be something you can hold in your hand or draw a picture of, while the idea it symbolizes must be something you cannot hold in your hand or draw a picture of; it is a kind of figures of speech used for increasing the beauty of the text and has figurative meaning besides its literal meaning" (Sadowski, 1957). Because of the contribution in the evolution of symbolism in different domains by different theorists, symbolism possess number of meanings and has taken many forms and directions. In 19<sup>th</sup> century, "semiotics"-a study of signs, symbols and their meanings – was developed by the Swiss linguist "Ferdinand De Saussure".

Saussure (1990) termed "semiotics as a link between an object that is called (the signified) and its linguistic representation that can be a word called (the signifier) and the two are connected". To assign the language signs or more particularly what we called "the signifier", the term symbol has been used (ibid.).

"The signifier is interpreted as the material of (physical) form of the sign; it is something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelt or tasted. The field of semiotics is governed by its elements and key concepts which help in studying, constructing and understanding symbols, which are the signified, signifier and object. For Saussure (1990), the signified is the

intellectual concept represented by the signifier (verbal or non-verbal); the signifier is the visible form that represents the signified; the object is the observed form that is being represented by the signs (Saussure, 1990). He defined a sign as being composed of signifier (significant), the form which the sign takes, and the signified (signifié), the concept it represents; so, the sign is the result of the association of the signifier and the signified and the link between them is arbitrary (Saussure,1990)”.

The aim of this article is to analyse Ahmed Ali novel's diverse classifications of symbolism for example, characters used to scrutinize parts of society, references to nature and items that convey symbolic significance, and investigate the symbols utilized as a part of the novel, throwing light on the level of words, letters and characters, and furthermore to decipher these images and distinguish the different elucidations they remain for, by applying Saussure's Theory.

## **2. Literature Review:**

According to (Langer, 1954) Symbolization is the important act of ideas, it is a central process of human mind and it keep on going all the time. Symbolism or the use of symbols can change some ordinary thing in to something which is more than in its reality. The use of symbols usually involves using an object, an outlook, a faith or a standard in order to signify nonconcrete idea (Fadaee, 2011).particularly in literature, symbolism is the deep and veiled meaning in a text; which usually stands for representing things, a ethical or a religious trust or value via symbols for example: dove is the symbol of peace, lion is the symbol of courage, and cross is the symbol of Christianity (Cuddon, 1998). Even postures, movements and gestures can be symbolic, for instance: sorrow could be symbolized by beating the breast/chest, and the opened mouth and eyes usually symbolize wonder and surprise (ibid.). So, it can be said that a symbol connects an image/picture with its idea. In specific writings Literature would be a brunch of worthless words on a piece of paper if it is without symbolism

(Fadaee, 2011). Mental exercise is being provided by signs and symbols in order to understand and study the meaning and message that is hidden behind the symbols and its effects on the people as they communicate in the society.

Symbolism as an “aesthetic movement” initiated in France during the later part of 19<sup>th</sup>

century it is also known as “Decadent movement”, because of the depiction of imaginings as a truth. It took place in France, the fertile land considered for literature and spread to other nations. Symbolism was a reaction against realism and utilitarianism (Habib, 2005).

In the view point of Perrine (1974), the symbol’s meaning is better to be perceived in the context in which it is depicted, means that the symbols’ meanings should be recognized inside the content, not outside of the content. Over and above the symbol is a symbol when its demonstrative meaning is found different from the literary meaning (Fadaee, 2011)

“Symbolism is very fallible in the sense that it may induce actions, feelings, emotions and beliefs about things which are only notions without exemplification in the world which the symbolism leads us to presuppose.” (Whitehead, 1927:6).”

Whitehead (1927), argues that symbolism and direct knowledge are different; direct knowledge is reliable, correct and perfect. It is not prone to wrong ideas and errors, but symbolism is not reliable and it is bare to inaccuracies and errors; within symbolism the interpreter may wrongly interpret the symbol as he may not be sure about its correctness.

### 3. Data analysis:

In *Twilight in Delhi* (1850) there is an abundant deal of symbolism, it will be difficult to handle with all the symbols at once; for that reason, we emphasize on the foremost ones and attempt to represent the different meanings they stand for.

#### 3.1. Symbolism in characters:

“*Twilight in Delhi* attains prominence in its dramatic, objective demonstration of conflicting standards in action: each character looks at once symbolic, yet real”. In the novel of Ahmed

Ali, there are three prominent symbolic characters, which are Asghar, Mir Nihal, and Begum Mir Nihal.

### **3.1.1. Mir Nihal's Paralysis:**

The paralysis of the character of Mir Nihal carries strong symbolic meanings. . It depicts decline or end of old traditional beliefs. His desolation and state of desperation, when he knows about his sin, he will not be able to do anything, as in the last chapter Ahmed Ali narrates in last chapter, about his paralyzed condition. His days were counted and the beauty of the Earth faded. But life remained on which man had no control and must go on. He was disgusted and tired. His world turned into pieces, and fallen like pale leaves, stifled by loneliness, indifference and death. In spite of that he was alive on the mercy of fate and time. He remained in the state of coma, lying on the bed unable to even think and sit up. As the sun went down so the life of Nihal went deep down into utter darkness. The miserable depiction of Mir Nihal's paralyzed condition shows the end of his rule and authority. His internal structure and conditions are shattered. His dignity and dominancy is split and destroyed. He has no existence now.

### **3.1.2. Begum Nihal's Blindness:**

Lack of understanding in sustaining or in making right decisions has been symbolized by the blindness of begum Mir Nihal. The blindness of Begum Mir Nihal also depicts the blindness of the women of that age who has not been able to manage the things and not to make decisions

### **3.1.3. Asghar, a symbol of change**

Asghar's character, in the novel was disappointed and disillusioned. He was a typical Indian bachelor whose sexual desires are not met and he was living an aimless and purposeless life. As in part 2, chapter 1, when he thought about Bilqeece, he desired for her and was restless until he got her but that affection faded, looked for another for to satiate his sexual desires. The character of Asghar symbolically depicts that Indian-Merchant Muslims wanted everything near to them as they are follower of both British-Muslim culture. It also depicts

their inability to adopt completely because they were uncertain and had to enough courage to change.

At one point in the Novel Mir Nihal turn angry at Asghar “*You are again wearing those dirty English boots! I don’t like them. I will have no aping of the Farangis is my house. Throw them away! ...*” These words of Mir Nihal show that Asghar’s viewpoint is different than that of his family and Asghar is the only son of Mir Nihal, who choose his bride by himself against the traditions of family. It is not a big deal at surface level, but at symbolical level it is threat to dominance of Mir Nihal.

### 3.2. Symbolism in objects:

Ahmed Ali in *Twilight in Delhi* (1850) utilized a great deal of symbols ; he'd to make one stand for another,, and he grounded on depicting things and objects with two meanings, the unseen meaning and the veiled meaning which is the actual meaning that stands for the symbols. We as readers of this novel, we should understand these symbols and identify their actual meaning.

#### 3.2.1. English Boots:

*“You are again wearing those dirty English boots! I don’t like them. I will have no aping of the Farangis is my house. Throw them away! ...”*

The English boots that Asghar wears in the start of the novel are a material portrayal of the contention amongst Asghar and his dad. As a glad Indian who detests British administer, Mir Nihal is affronted that Asghar is wearing these boots. Asghar is disturbed that Mir Nihal is furious about these, yet he wouldn't like to begin a contention with his dad, so he leaves so nothing more can be said.

#### 3.2.2. Pigeons:

Pigeon symbolizes piety. Snakes eating pigeons, suggests that evil is vanishing piety. They also symbolize pleasure and fun seeking nature of residents of Delhi.

*“Pet pigeons devoid the love for freedom. They have got used to dependence.”  
They never fly away to live free independent life like others.”*



The chapter in the novel, in which the pigeons of Mir Nihal dies, is highly symbolic. It shook life of Mir Nihal. Healthy, tall and handsome Mir Nihal turned into the weakest person. The whole chapter symbolically depicts defeat of traditional life and culture of the Muslims. Keeping pigeons was old and tradition there in Delhi thus that ended shaking life of Mir Nihal.

### 3.2.3. Cat:

Cats and dogs are shown wandering throughout the novel. It depicts lust and hatred among people of that time. As narrator narrates: *“the Dogs were still going about and Cat, quarrelled on the roof”* The episode of cat is also symbolic in this novel. Cats kill many pigeons of Mir Nihal. It symbolizes the British whose entrance destroyed and altered way of living of the people of sub-continent by introducing their own ideologies, norms and mores.

## 4. Conclusion:

In conclusion, Ahmed Ali has used symbolism commendably. His use of symbolism makes him remain on the platform achieved by the English symbolists, the majority of the symbols are basic piece of the Delhivians culture. He uses symbol for symbols sake. He makes his symbols very persuading and pleasant by his aesthetic magnificence.

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