THINK INDIA JOURNAL

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

Celebrating Nature: Significance of Nature Symbols in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of the Yellow Sun*

A. Annie Divya Mahisha

Reg. No: 19223094012021
Research Scholar in English,
Centre for Post Graduate Studies and Research in English,
Muslim Arts College, Thiruvithancode.
(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli)

Dr. V. Asha Kumari

Research Supervisor,
Centre for Post Graduate Studies and Research in English,
Muslim Arts College, Thiruvithancode.
(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli)

Abstract:

Now-a-days the literary critics show much concern and interest in analysing and probing the inseparable relationship that exists between Nature and society. In this point of view, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie stands as a prominent writer in the art of utilizing nature symbols. This paper attempts to explore the nature symbols used in her novel *Half of the Yellow Sun*, which depicts the ability of the author in employing symbols to give literary value to her text. It also aims at exposing Adichie's intensive passion for nature symbols and her enthusiasm in representing her themes by the use of such appealing symbols. To sum up, the novel abounds with symbolic representations and Adichie has shown her mastery in exploiting these symbols to reveal her ideas to the readers.

Key words: Symbolism, Nature, Foreshadow, Igbo-Ukwu art, Biafra.

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist, essayist, poet, playwright, and short story writer. She also writes under the pseudonym Amanda N. Adichie. Her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is one of the latest contributions to Nigerian civil war literature. It is based on the Nigeria – Biafra War of 1967-70. Through the voices of her characters, Adichie expresses how the Nigerian civil wars have devastated human territories and settlement. Commenting on the novel, John C. Hawley notes that it sheds light on the effects of the war on the characters than on the politics of the war (20). The air raids destroy houses and forests, the atmosphere, and the waters are polluted or destroyed. The toxic materials used in the weapons, the destruction of trees and homes in Adichie's novel speak of the environmental degradation.

This paper gives focus to some recurrent nature symbols that appear all through the narrative and play a vital role in Adichie's novel. Nature symbols in her novel, foretells what is going to happen to her protagonists and they are closely connected to the main plot of her stories. In her novel, nature is seen as a living character that leads and controls the action. The novel takes place, move and end in a formidable situation of nature. The novel is abundantly rich with symbols drawn from nature. Abram states that "a symbol in the broadest sense, is equivalent to a sign, that is, anything which signifies something else in this sense, all words are symbols" (184). Throughout her novel Adichie uses symbols from nature to describe various emotional situations. Whenever nature symbols appear in her fiction, it suggests something deeper, more abstract, than the literal, sensual aspect of the image itself.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, natural elements foreshadow the brutal death of the Biafrans massacred in the North and in the civil war. For example, in his mother's hut Ugwu sees a "dead spider squashed on the wall; its body fluid had stained the mud a deeper red" (119). It

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

foreshadows the violent death of thousands of Igbo people during the massacres in the North and during the war. It is evident that the spider does not die a natural death, because its body fluids discoloured the mud, a deeper red. This violent death is seen later in Nnaemeka's slaughter at Kano airport, when the rifle goes off and his "chest blew open, a splattering red mass" (153).

The kite is traditionally known as a destroyer and a devourer. Adichie uses the kite, thus to suggest destruction and devouring. First she uses it to represent Amala, the village girl who goes in with Odenigbo when Olanna traveled to Lagos. The hen, which the kite took away its chick, is Olanna and the chick represents Odenigbo as the kite is Amala. Another suggestion here is the kite being the bomber plane which takes away the lives of the Biafrans who are the chicks. It also refers the sudden killing of the Igbo people in the North and the hen which is shouting and running after the kite represents Ojukwu, the Biafran Head of State who stands to defend them.

In the early sixties, Olanna watches as

> a hen near the lemon tree, guarding six chicks, nudging them towards crumbs on the ground … The hen began to squawk loudly and spread its wings to shield the chicks, but they did not run into the shelter quickly enough. A kite swooped down and carried one of them off, a brown-and-white chick. It was so fast, the descent of the kite and the gliding away with the chick grasped in hooked claws, that Olanna thought she might have imagined it. She couldn't have, though, because the hen was running around in circles, squawking, raising clouds of dust. The other chicks looked bewildered. Olanna watched them and wondered if they understood their mother's mourning dance. Then, finally, she started to cry. (224)

This sign foreshadows the violent death of Biafrans from air raids in the seceded territory. On day of Olanna and Odenigbo's wedding, the federal government declares a full-scale war on

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

Biafra. Just the same way the kite preys on the chick, the air raids will devastate the civilian population as a "fine haze of silver dust covered their entire bodies so that they looked like limbless ghosts with open eyes" (203) in the two collapsed houses. The same brutal and violent death is reflected in the description of a car which was on fire, "the body of a woman lay next to it, her clothes burnt off, flecks of pink all over her blackened skin" (203).

There is the similarity of helplessness in the hen and the emotions. Just as the "hen was running around in circles, squawking, raising clouds of dust. The other chicks looked bewildered" (224), the civilians cannot fire back at the war planes. They only "gathered to help and to stare, some dug through the rubble too, others stood and looked and still others shrieked and snapped their fingers" (203). The loss of loved ones in the massacre and the war leaves traumatic effects on the survivors.

The gift of a tortoise to Kainene by Madu is a symbolic object, which foreshadows the coming of Richard Churchill in her life. Kainene states:

> I remember once, years ago, when we went to Umunnachi to spend Christmas, he gave me a tortoise. The strangest and best present I ever got from anybody. Olanna thought it was wrong of Madu to take the poor thing out of its natural habitat and what not … I put it in a bowl, and of course, it died soon after. (81)

The tortoise represents Richard who is a British in Biafra and is taken out of his natural habitat. Like the tortoise which Kainene sees as the strangest and best gift to her, she also sees Richard as a rare lover who prefers her over and above her more beautiful sister and over Susan and other British women. Ironically, it is not Richard, who has been taken out of his natural habitat, dies but Kainene. The death of Kainene who represents hope, love and acceptance to Richard has some psychopathological consequence on him. After searching every hospital and every

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

mortuary in Biafra he concludes that "his life would always be like a candlelit room; he would see things only in shadow, only in half glimpses" (430).

The weather plays a large role in foreshadowing danger. This is portrayed through air raids which obstructed Olanna and Odenigbo's wedding reception. Adichie describes the condition by writing thus: "The sky was overcast. The wet smell of the coming rain mixed with the smoky smell of burning." (203). With the above sentence, it is very easy to draw a relationship between Biafra and Sky. Biafra attempts to be stable but could not, as Nigeria puts constant hazard and ruins on it. The coming rain suggests falling bombs from the Nigerian aircrafts which torment the Biafrans the smoky smell of burning is the destruction which these air raids would have Biafra in total disorder. Another symbol which operates under object is the skull and bones barge next to the half of a yellow sun in the Biafran army uniform. It represents danger which means that Biafra is in ruin and danger of Nigerian troops.

The roped pots are part of ancient Igbo-Ukwu art and artifacts unearthed in Nigeria in 1959-60. They show complex metalworking that existed as early as the 9th century among the Igbo-Ukwu (ancestors of the present-day Igbo). Archeologists now agree that this intricate metalworking developed without foreign influence or aid and was solely invented in the isolated community of the Igbo-Ukwu. This bronze pot, dated from 850 BC, is the most priced object discovered by Isaiah Anozie in Igbo-Ukwu in 1938. These pots are probably musical instruments destined to rituals linked to Nri traditional religion and the Ozo title. These are symbolic of lost civilization of the Igbo, which Richard sees in *Colonies Magazine* in Britain and is the reason that motivates him to come to Nigeria. He confides to the Swedish pilot, Count von Rosen, that "I fell in love with Igbo- Ukwu art" (310). In other words, without his quest to "touch the delicately cast metal itself" (62), he may not have met Kainene and fulfill his role as a character

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

with double destination. This Igbo-Ukwu roped vessel is an object that speaks to a vibrant cultural heritage before both written language and colonial oppression.

This ancient and magnificently designed pot is appearing incessantly throughout the novel, but they are most important in relation to the character of Richard Churchill. When he first comes across a picture of these artistic pots, he instantly becomes fascinated with them, which, in turn, triggers his ensuing lifelong fascination with Nigerian culture. Richard goes on to state that the experts believe that it is a true work of Igbo art as it was not influenced from anywhere else, but was developed right there in modern day Nigeria. These pots represent Richard's love for the area and his love for its people. He sees them as precious works of art, intelligent beyond expectation, and a true gift to the world.

Fellow Europeans assume that Richard is only interested in the pots as an avenue for exploitation, but Richard is honestly and sincerely absorbed by the magnificence of the pots. When Richard goes to visit an archaeological excavation site where some of these pots are present, the guides at the site are surprised that Richard has not brought a camera with him as all the other Westerners do, illustrating that he enjoys the pots for his own sake.

Calabashes are also known as bottle gourds which, since prehistory, have been hollowed and dried to make vessels, utensils and musical instruments. After the first massacres perpetrated in the North, Olanna flees Kano by train and is invited by a woman to look into a calabash, which is unexpectedly revealed to contain a child's head. Adichie portrays,

> Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-gray skin and the braided hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth. She stared at it for a while before she looked away. Somebody screamed … She thought about the plaited hair resting in the calabash. She visualized the mother braiding it, her

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

> fingers oiling it with pomade before dividing it into sections with a wooden comb. (149)

The round shape of the calabash represents children. That is why people screamed when the calabash was opened: the only treasure left to the refugee was destroyed.

The same calabash can equally be seen as a place of remembrance, as it functions as a funeral urn, sheltering the ashes of the dead – a mobile burial ground. The calabash also serves as a reminder of the people's history, as Olanna sat there, "thinking about how a single act could reverberate over time and space and leave stains that could never be washed off" (245). Adichie chooses to identify with her family history, and she now, like the woman with the calabash, opens her novel to readers and invites them to see, to know and understand.

The Igbo-Ukwu roped pot grows smooth, organic and stands as a sign of natural product of evolution, while the calabash assumes ornament, gets crafted and acts as evidence of advanced civilization. The outside of the pot and of the calabash only gave a glimpse of the beauty of the Promised Land. Each has a head in it: together they are one. Whereas the roped pot talks about Richard and Kainene, the calabash, that represents both massacres and Biafra, belongs to Olanna who told its story.

The symbol half of a yellow sun signifies Biafra's emblem of hope, but the horrors and misery Adichie's characters endure transform the promising image of rising sun into that of a sun setting grimly over a blood-soaked and starving land. Half of a yellow sun represents the Biafran flag: a yellow sun, which is not fully risen, thus not enough for maximum illumination. This indicates the short lived Biafran war. The Biafrans are not fully ready to match the Nigeria side, despite their bravery. "Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafran would have and finally the half of a yellow

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

Sun stood for the glorious future" (281). Thus the novel is a mosaic of rich nature symbols that makes the novel unique and unitary.

The nature symbols appear in Adichie's novel serves as reminders of the rich relationship between human and the nature. Adichie's use of nature symbolism is not only a way to enrich the writing and create an added layer of interest, but it is a vital part of her novel. Thus symbols play a dual role of enhancing her style of writing and helping one to understand the central views and ideas of her novel.

Works Cited

Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

Primary Source:

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. London: Fourth Estate, 2006. Print.

Secondary Sources:

Abram, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. USA: Dryden Press, 1985. Print.

Hawley, John. "Biafra as Heritage and Symbol Adichie, Mbachu and Iweala." *Research in African Literatures* 39. 2 (2008): 15-26. Web. 22 July 2015

Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors