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Symbols Of Struggle: Unveiling Socio-Economic Realities In Kota Neelima's Novel

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Abstract: Symbols resemble or represent reality indirectly. They capture truths and the essence of concepts by conveying abstract ideas rather than literal facts. Similar to footprints, symbols provide clues that help us analyse and understand deeper meanings and contexts. They act as signals of existence through ideas, offering various literal meanings and multiple interpretations. Additionally, symbols can embody concepts of both good and evil, reflecting their diverse and context-dependent significance. In the context of India's economy, farmers serve as a profound symbol. They represent the backbone of the agricultural sector, which is crucial to the nation's economic stability and growth. Farmers embody not only the vital role of agriculture but also the challenges and aspirations associated with it. Their significance reflects broader economic themes such as sustenance, development, and the connection between traditional practices and modern economic strategies. Kota Neelima's use of symbols in *Death of a Moneylender* provides a nuanced commentary on contemporary issues in India. Her symbols illuminate various dimensions of Indian society, including economic disparities, social hierarchies, and the tension between tradition and modernization. By engaging with these symbols, readers are offered a lens through which they can explore and reflect on the intricate realities of their own lives and communities. This symbolic representation not only enhances the narrative depth but also encourages readers to critically consider the broader implications of these issues, fostering greater awareness and empathy towards the challenges faced by different segments of society.

Keywords: Martyr of Moneylender, Lamp Post- Warning, Farmers, Rain- Evil, Cotton Dhoti- Poverty



Introduction

Indian Writing in English (IWE) refers to the body of literary works written by Indian authors in the English language. Indian Writing in English emerged during the period of British colonization in India and has since developed into a rich and diverse tradition. This essay explores the origins, themes, and significant contributions of Indian Writing in English. It delves into the challenges faced by Indian authors in adopting a foreign language for creative expression, examines the cultural and social contexts in which these works are situated, and highlights the impact of IWE on the global literary landscape. Indian Writing in English has emerged as a dynamic literary genre that embodies the complexities of a multicultural and diverse society. This essay explores the evolution, significance, and impact of IWE in capturing the intricacies of Indian culture, society, and identity. It delves into the historical context, major themes, and prominent authors within IWE, while highlighting its role as a mirror to societal transformations, a bridge between cultures, and a vehicle for social commentary. By examining the diverse narratives and innovative expressions within IWE, this essay emphasizes its contribution to the global literary landscape and its ability to inspire cross-cultural conversations. The essay also discusses the influence of prominent Indian authors such as Arundhati Roy, and Salman Rushdie, Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, V.S. Naipaul, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, Meena Alexander, Salman Rushdie, Kota Neelima is an Indian politician, author, researcher, political commentator and artist. Her writing, art, and academic work include a focus on the themes of rural distress, gender, farmer suicides, and the peripheries of democratic societies. She obtained a Ph.D in Political Science from University of Delhi, and a Master of Arts in International Relations from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. Neelima has also been a Senior Research Fellow, South Asia Studies at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC. She also studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Literature led by Arpana Caur. She has received Exceptional Women of Excellence, Women Economic Forum (WEF) 2019. Neelima is also a painter whose work often incorporates charcoal sketching before paint. Her works have been featured at the Lalit Kala Akademi and the India Habitat Centre in Delhi, and in art shows in Mumbai, Bangalore, Kolkata, among other cities in India. Her works have also been featured at several international exhibitions, including The Nehru Centre, London, Museum, and China Art Museum, National Museum of Fine Arts, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Her works are part of the permanent collection in Museum of Sacred Arts, Belgium. Neelima has served as General Secretary, Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee. In 2023, she was the Congress Party candidate from Sanathnagar for the Telangana Assembly.

Neelima is married to Congress Party spokesperson Pawan Khera. Her non – fiction works are Tirupati: A Guide to Life, Penguin (2012), Tirumala: Sacred Foods of God, Roli Publications (2017), Widows of Vidarbha: Making of Shadows, Oxford University Press, (2018), and fictional works Riverstones, Penguin (Reprint/2016), Death of a Moneylender, Penguin (Reprint/2016), Shoes of the Dead, Rupa Publications (2013), The Honest Season, Penguin (2015). Etc.

Lamp Post: Prioritizing Farmers and Cautioning Moneylenders

Serving as a symbol of hope and positivity, the lamp post plays a crucial role in the lives of the villagers. It reliably illuminates the paths of the impoverished, helping to dispel darkness and enlighten the community. Beyond its practical function, the lamp post fosters knowledge, promotes development, and inspires hope for the future, all while enhancing safety and awareness. But in Kota Neelima's work of "The Death of Moneylender", initially, lamp post was used as a tool of warning and deterrence against unscrupulous moneylenders. Though it started as a symbol of negative pressure, its role has evolved to represent positive change for the farmers' future. By illuminating their path, it not only addresses immediate problems but also empowers farmers to find their own solutions. Today, the lamp post stands as a beacon of safety and security, guiding farmers and enhancing their overall well-being and sense of life security.

"The dead man was identified as Desraj Sahukar, age of fifty- five, resident of Bapapt" It was victim was hanging from a lamp post... we have these new, stylish lamp posts only on Tank Road in the village. That is where the important people live. There are no light fixed yet, though." (Page-56)

The above lines reflect the tragic story of Desraj Sahukar, who was hanged from a lamp post and died. Despite the lamp post's lack of illumination, the legacy of Sahukar's support remains obscure to many. Poor and innocent farmers fail to recognize that he was the person who provided them with invaluable support and a brighter future.

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"Take it out to the lamp post and tie it to the top-most end of the pole, where it is almost horizontal. All you then need to do is shift my body from the backroom to the lamp post." (Page- 264)

The person of Desraj Sahukar committed suicide himself as shake of goodness for farmers, he addressed his death, asked his body to hang on lamp post which can viewed by all people.

“It will begin a time when farmers will not be looks down upon, when moneylenders will be fair to the poor. If power can be had only through death and fear, then it will be with my death and their fear.” (Page-266)

Martyrdom In Action: The Significance of Desraj’s Sacrifice

Desraj’s suicide in Kota Nelima’s novel epitomizes martyrdom through both its symbolic and strategic dimensions. His death becomes a potent symbol of resistance against the oppression faced by marginalized farmers, drawing attention to their plight and advocating for their cause. By framing his suicide as a murder, Desraj protests against systemic exploitation and corruption, exposing the unethical practices of moneylenders and other powerful entities. This dramatic act transcends personal sacrifice, functioning as a strategic maneuver designed to instill fear among the corrupt, disrupt the status quo, and provoke systemic change. His sacrifice aims to inspire continued activism and reform, leaving a lasting impact on the struggle for justice and the improved treatment of farmers. Through this profound moral and ethical commitment, Desraj’s death underscores his unwavering dedication to justice, embodying the essence of martyrdom as a lasting legacy of resistance and advocacy.

Then he remembered Shambu had given them to him. Saying he should read and decide...

I was the truth. An old enemy, an old friend, a familiar stranger, a familiar god...

Then his eyes filled up slowly, despite himself, thinking of the words on the papers.

The tears flowed down the corners of his eyes. (Page 232)

In Kota Neelima’s *The Death of the Moneylender*, the narrative ultimately reveals that Desraj’s death, initially suspected as a murder, is actually a suicide. Through the character of Falak, this revelation comes to light. Falak’s investigation into Desraj’s death uncovers the deeper layers of his personal struggles and circumstances leading to the tragic decision to end his own life.

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This twist shifts the focus from a straightforward murder investigation to a more nuanced exploration of the factors contributing to Desraj’s despair. It underscores the complexity of the situation, illustrating how appearances can be deceptive and how underlying personal crises can drive individuals to extreme actions. The revelation of suicide rather than murder adds depth to the story, highlighting themes of personal tragedy and the impact of societal pressures.

Farmers – Economic and Social Struggle

Farmers are often regarded as the backbone of India. A significant number of them rely heavily on moneylenders, which highlights their vulnerable position. These individuals are genuinely honest, and this situation has unfortunately led to instances of suicide, as evidenced by recent news reports concerning farmer fatalities. Many impoverished farmers lack the necessary knowledge to identify appropriate sources of financial assistance.

Farmers often depend on moneylenders for financial support, as they are frequently their only option due to limited access to formal banking services. This reliance creates a cycle of debt, with high interest rates and a lack of collateral making it difficult for them to secure loans from traditional banks. Additionally, challenges in accessing government subsidies and loans, such as cumbersome application processes and bureaucratic delays, further complicate their financial situation. As a result, many farmers find themselves trapped in a cycle of borrowing that undermines their profitability and financial stability.

It was in the middle of series of huts in one corner of the village, quite a distance away from the better households. It also spoke of the social status of the residents, apart from their obvious lack of economic standing. (Page167)

The scene of the huts in the village corner reflects the faded life of Indian farmers, characterized by economic hardship and minimal material wealth. The dilapidated homes, with their crumbling walls and thatched roofs, starkly contrast with the more prosperous areas of the village, illustrating the financial struggles faced by these farmers. Their lives are marked by a constant battle with poverty, limited access to education, and dependence on local money lenders.

Yet, amidst these challenges, the farmers exhibit a profound sense of unity and communal support. Their shared hardships have forged strong bonds within the community, where cooperation and mutual aid are deeply ingrained in daily life. Despite their limited resources, they come together to support one another, whether through collective agricultural efforts, shared knowledge, or pooling resources during times of need.

Their hospitality extends beyond mere tradition; it is a reflection of their collective spirit. When guests arrive, the farmers, despite their own struggles, provide a warm and generous welcome, offering what little they have with genuine kindness. This unity and shared resilience, coupled with their commitment to traditional values, highlight a powerful sense of community that persists even in the face of economic adversity.

That was because the entire staff of the police station was on duty, seemingly preparing for a backlash from the villagers. (Page180)

This unity and shared resilience, coupled with their unwavering commitment to traditional values, underscore a powerful sense of community among the farmers. Despite enduring significant economic adversity, their collective spirit and mutual support create a vibrant and cohesive network. Their ability to maintain such strong communal bonds, even in the face of hardship, not only highlights their resilience but also illustrates how deeply ingrained their cultural values are in their daily lives. The strength of their unity provides a beacon of hope and solidarity, ensuring that their community endures and thrives despite the challenges they face.

Rain- Adversity

Rain traditionally symbolizes happiness, rebirth, growth, and agricultural prosperity. It is often seen as a great gift to farmers, enhancing crop yields and meeting their expectations without discrimination between rich and poor landowners. However, in Kota Neelima's novel *The Death of the Moneylender*, rain takes on a different symbolism. Rather than representing renewal and abundance, rain in this narrative signifies sadness and isolation. The characters Falak, Vani, and their colleagues face considerable difficulties due to the rain, which obstructs their journey to investigate Desraj's murder and help the village. The rain acts as a barrier that exacerbates the characters' struggles, symbolizing the emotional and logistical challenges they face. This use of rain highlights how natural elements can convey varied meanings based on the story's context, showing rain as a force of adversity rather than just a source of life and growth.

Cotton Dhoti: Poverty And Cultural Identity

“The old cotton dhoti has become a symbol of poverty in the villages. it is some ting to be fought against and the victors are rewarded by never having to wear it again. the dhoti may be chic in cities and in theme parties, not here in the villages” (Page 137)

In *The Death of a Moneylender*, the old cotton dhoti symbolizes the profound poverty experienced by the village farmers. Its worn and tattered state reflects their financial struggles and harsh living conditions, starkly contrasting with the attire of the wealthier individuals in the village. This humble garment embodies the daily economic hardship faced by the villagers, serving as a visible marker of their limited resources and constrained opportunities. Beyond its physical deterioration, the dhoti represents the on-going battle against poverty, highlighting the stark economic disparity and the relentless struggle for a better life that characterizes their existence.

Conclusion

Kota Neelima’s use of symbols in *The Death of a Moneylender* profoundly enriches the narrative, offering a deeper understanding of the socio-economic realities of rural India. The lamp post, initially a tool of warning against moneylenders and later a symbol of hope, reflects the evolving struggles and aspirations of the farmers. Desraj Sahukar’s death, portrayed as martyrdom, underscores the themes of exploitation and resistance against systemic corruption. The cotton dhoti represents the persistent poverty and limited opportunities faced by the rural poor, while the rain, typically a symbol of renewal, becomes a harbinger of adversity and isolation in the novel. These symbols collectively illuminate the complexities of the characters’ lives and the broader socio-economic landscape, prompting readers to engage with and reflect on the multifaceted challenges experienced by different segments of society.

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