
Water symbolism in literature

It has been seen that almost all authors use symbol within their works of literature in order to pull the attention of their readers. Using such symbolic concept it helps the poets in creating a secondary meaning. It also helps in connecting the gaps. Symbols need a careful analysis while in some circumstance it is quite clear. Water can be seen in many forms in literature including waterfalls, lakes, rivers, streams, or rain. The meaning of water symbol in literature can be taken in many ways. The most obvious are life, being born, purity, cleansing, or the washing away of sins. Water is very important to life and growth and it mainly appears as a birth and rebirth symbol. It is used in the baptism service which solemnizes spiritual births. Even the appearance of rain in the work of literature it suggests a spiritual birth.

April is the cruellest month for the denizens of the modern wasteland, for it signifies rebirth and they prefer winter or spiritual death, for rebirth implies some efforts on their part and any spiritual effort is hateful to them. The spring rain brings new life to the landscape but all it manages to do is stirring/ dull roots. It suggests that nothing new will grow out of the symbolic wasteland.

Through a protagonist named Tiresias, Eliot gives his impressions about the modern people. Tiresias has come across a German princess. She is fond of travel. She is an example of a rootless modern person. She has no connection with her family, community and nation. She is a kind of international globetrotter, fond of the physical comforts of life. Eliot considers such ties necessary for culture, for real life- spiritual and moral. The modern humanity, like German princess, lives entirely on the physical plane, and is entirely forgetful of religious and moral values. In winter, as they go through Munich they are overtaken by a shower of rain. They do not realize the purifying power of rain but rather seek shelter from it, as she is ignorant of its purifying and fertilizing significance.

Shelly's poem Cloud has treated rain in totally different manner. Rain which comes from cloud and it is supplied to the soil so that it regenerate. Cloud become a gardener through rain it brings water to thirsty flowers as well as to the birds through the dew on the buds. It helps in harvesting the crops. Here rain is very significant while in the Eliot's Wasteland people are unaware to the fertilizing power of rain. They try to save themselves with the showers of rain.

In this lines the protagonist, Tiresias, then surveys the panorama of modern civilization and finds it spiritually barren and dead. The stones, dead trees, dry stones without any sound of water, all symbolize spiritual desolation. In the book 4 Paradise Lost by Milton Eve tells Adam about her first awakening and how she wondered when she come to know about her who she is and from where she came to life. She sees her image in to the lake through which she discovers herself as well as also aware that she is relative to Adam. Through the voice which she hears she come to know that she is the mother of the human race. Here Eve recognition looking in to the water symbolizes that Eve consciousness about her existence, the awareness of being born. We notice that when Tiresias surveys he finds nothing. But when Eve sees her image into the water she comes to know about her existence.

The Tarot Pack of 78 cards, originally used in Egypt to foretell the rise of the Nile waters, and

the return of fertility. But now the function of the pack has degenerated. It is used merely for fake fortune telling, an illegal activity. The Madame Sosostri is telling the fortunes of some client, who might be the protagonist himself. The drowned Phoenician sailor is the symbol of the fertility god whose effigy was thrown into the river to symbolize the death of the summer. The drowned Phoenician sailor is related to the English myth of the Fisher King, whose wound causes the land to stop impregnate or regenerate. In this case he might represent the terrible curse that has fallen over Europe in the 20th century.

The warning 'fear death by water' suggest that you need to avoid dying like the Phoenician sailor but it also true that fortune tellers are full of tricks you need to remember there is other way to "die by water." So this warning refers to the spiritual drought which has fallen on the wasteland. In the poem of William Wordsworth *The Prelude* he describes water in the form of a lake, remembering a time when he was a young boy here it symbolize freedom and entrapment. Wordsworth recalls his time when he was a curious boy. In order to take a ride he borrows the boat of a shepherd one night. However, when he starts to row out into the lake he believes that he sees a cliff in the distance rise up in front of him, which petrifies him. Before this incident lake is described as a shining clear among the hoary mountains. A young boy slips his oars in the lake.

The water seems peaceful and serene, begging to be rowed upon. Wordsworth enables to quell his desire to take the boat out for a ride. When Wordsworth witnesses the supernatural event into the lake he finds this place is no longer safe but rather fearful and wretched. His pleasurable ride becomes a panic stricken and he tries hard to make it back to land. The lake still peaceful and quite but a change has come in the attitude of Wordsworth. He tries to escape the water. The lake and ocean symbolize both freedom and entrapment. Wordsworth cannot row fast enough to escape the one peaceful lake. In the cases of both poem water is giving a kind of horrid experience. In one poem they are warning to fear from death by water while in other water is very calm and it is begging to be rowed upon by Wordsworth. But while rowing poet is full of fear which he experiences in the expedition on the lake.

The lady asks the lover whether he knows anything, whether he sees anything, whether he remembers anything. The reply of the lover is that he remembers one line which is a quotation from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. This line is: "those are pearls, that were his eyes," this line is reproduced mechanically by the lover. It has no spiritual significance for him. It does not give an idea of the transformation of man through death to something higher and nobler. This lines is taken from the William Shakespeare *The Tempest*, it refers to a person who drowned and has been underwater so long, his eyes has turned into pearls. It reminds the warning to avoid Death by water. Turning of eye symbolizes how the modern souls have become hard and lifeless.

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door. (Eliot 134-137)

It is a brief summary of the dull, meaningless routine of life in the wasteland. Waiting for some excitement, for something to happen, this will enliven for a moment the dull routine of their life.

While in the poetry of John Donne we see how a poet is very sad when he has to leave his beloved. He shows much concern for his beloved. In the poem A valediction: of weeping by John Donne image of water is shown with the use of tear. In the beginning of the poem when he is departing from his beloved he does not embrace her before going. Instead of it he finds his beloved reflection in his tears. Their separation cannot separate them it is undeniable separation. Next he takes tears of his beloved both "fruit" and "emblem". It is fruit of his pain because which he is enduring in his present time while it is an emblem of his future grief because he will be away. Further he says that as his tears falls his reflection will also fall. He and she will become nothing. When her reflection falls thus she vanishes as he departs for his sea voyage. Then the tears of the lovers are endlessly generative and endlessly decay. When we both cry our eyes will fill with tears, and we won't be able to see each other anymore. It has been noticed that people of wasteland is also waiting for any kind amusement in their dull routine of life whereas in Donne poetry instead of waiting he is departing leaving behind his beloved. 'If it rain' symbolizes that waiting for spiritual birth or reborn while fading of reflection in tears symbolizes to lose spirituality.

The section 'The Fire Sermon' opens with Tiresias surveying the Thames scene in the autumn. The leaves have fallen down and the wind moves without any rustle. The Thames is deserted. In the summer, it had been the haunt of nameless ladies in search of momentary pleasure, and the rich sons of business directors equally in need of pleasure. After having their round of pleasure, they have all left. The river is strewn all over with empty bottles, cigarette cases, papers, handkerchiefs, etc, the reminders of the orgy of pleasure on its banks.

The protagonist mourns the pollution of the river water. As he sits on its banks fishing in the dull canal near the gas house, a cold wind blows. It brings to him the sound of the senseless laughter of London crowds who move about rattling like dried bones. Memories crowd in upon him, and he is reminded of bonnivard in the prison of chillon in Byron's famous poem, lamenting the loss of freedom on the banks of lakes leman; or the captive jews in the bible weeping by the river Babylon. Since he is the spokesman of humanity, one who has suffered all, one whose memories go to the remote past, the scene also reminds him of the brother of the fisher king, fishing for the regeneration of his brother and of Ferdinand, mourning the death of his father, the king.

In the past water and fishing were the symbol of regeneration and transformation but today they have lost their spiritual significance. The poet now refers to another scene: fishing near the river. The poet tries to fish in the canal behind the gas house, where a rat creep near him. Instead of finding a fish, he comes across an ugly rat. This reminds him of the story of Ferdinand where the king was exiled by his brother who usurped his throne. The real king may be compared to a fish while the usurping king may be compared to a rat. Today the scene of the river bank is very depressing. White naked bodies can be seen on the buildings of the bank. They are disturbed by the rats to be found on the bank.

Today the roads along the bank are full of motor cars; the hooting of the horns is a signal for Mrs. Porter to meet her lover Sweeney. The face of Mrs. Porter shines under the moon-light. She is accompanied by her daughter. They wash their feet not in the river water but in soda water. They are doing so not for their self purification but to make their flesh fairer to attract males. We find such is the degeneracy in the modern wasteland. If we read the poetry snake by D.H Lawrence we find water is essential for drinking purpose without it nobody can think of leave. Everyone in the past or in the present always talks about the preserving of water but in

the modern wasteland it is used for making their skin fairer. They are wasting water. People do not bother about its purification.

A snake came to my water-trough on a hot, hot day, I in pyjamas for the heat, to drink there. (Lawrence, 1) In the beginning lines of DH Lawrence poem, the water symbolizes as a drinking water. As we know that when water come into the mouth of snake it transforms in a poison. A snake comes to water trough in order to drink water. The poet finds himself in a queue in which he has second number before him a snake which come as guest. The poet watches the yellow brown soft bellied snake at his water trough. It is drinking softly through its gums silently. While the poet is watching the snake drinking water snake lifts his head and looks at the poet vaguely, flickers his two forked tongue from his lips, take pause a moment and then drink a little more.

With the sound of music in his ears, Tiresias goes along the strand and queen Victoria Street, and reaches the lower end of Thames Street. This is the part of the city where the poor live. There he hears, coming out of a tavern, the sweet music of a mandolin, and the chanter of fishermen and sailors who are resting in the tavern. There stands the church of St. Magus Martyr, the interior decoration of which is highly praised by Eliot. However, this haunt of the poor is also not pure from sexual perversion and sin as is brought out by the songs of the three Thames daughters, i.e., these poor girls living on the banks of the river. First the three sing together and then separately. They bemoan the polluting of river water symbolized by the oozing out of oil and tar. The river which is river Thames, sweating oil and tar, symbolizes the modern commercial pollution of the waters of the river.

In Matthew Arnold poem Dover Beach, he is obsessed with water. It is constantly referred throughout the poem. Water symbolism has been treated like a sadness, misery and tears. It is clear to the very outset of the poem when he says the sea is calm; the tide is full; the straits of Dover look bright in the light of the moon; the cliffs loom large in the bay; the sand seems white because of moonlight. The poet draws the attention of his beloved to the sound of waves which alternatively advance and withdraw, carrying away pebbles from the beach each time they withdraw and throwing them up against the beach each time they advance. The poet finds a note of sadness in this sound. He recalls that of the Greek dramatist Sophocles also interpreted the sound of sea waves as sad. Sophocles, on hearing it, was reminded of tragedy of human life.

The poet then points out that once upon a time the sea of religious faith was full, but now doubt and disbelief have combined to throw back the waves of faith from the world, leaving the world barren and cheerless. He means that religion has lost its hold upon the minds of people who have now become skeptical. The world has now become barren and men live in the darkness of ignorance, carrying on aimless struggle. The sea is everywhere in the poem Dover beach. It shows in different places and in different forms, but we feel its power all over the place.

In the section 'Death by water' we see symbol in title. Water is the traditional symbol of purification and regeneration, but in the modern land of desolation it has lost its functions and has become a source of destruction. This is so because man has become beastly, given to the pursuit of wealth and sensuous pleasures. It is very similar to the poetry of The River by A.K Ramanujan. He is not praising river like the other poet mostly do instead of it he shows the flood which kills the inhabitant of the villagers like one pregnant women, Gopi and Brinda etc. The poet much concerns about the damage which the flood annually does to the people.

The Phoenician sailor; Phlebas was young, tall and handsome, but he was drowned because his life was a sordid round of business activity and pleasure without any spiritual motivation. He was caught in a whirlpool and passed the various stages of his age and youth. The reference is to the ritual immersion of the effigy of the vegetation god, Orisis, who was supposed to pass the various stages of life in the reverse order. He is old when he is immersed in water, he is young as he rises and falls on the waves, then a boy, and is finally reborn. But there is no rebirth for the Phoenician sailor or modern humanity because of their moral degradation. The remedy lies in their being guided by moral and spiritual principles. At present they turn the wheel of life themselves, i.e., lead a life uncontrolled by spiritual considerations. Complete secularization and rejection of the supernal is at the root of the contemporary decay and disintegration. The influence of symbols in Indian literature also A.K. Ramanujan is a very famous poet of modern era. He has written a poem A River in which he has discussed about the flood which destroys everything. Through the symbol of river he describes about the havoc which is spread by flood. Here, in this poem water is a symbol of disaster and destruction. Madurai is a city of temples and poets. The poets living in this city write poems about cities and temples. Their poems also contain accounts of how every summer a river flowing through Madurai is reduced to a narrow stream and how; soon afterwards, it is flooded with the water of rains. When it is reduced to a narrow stream, its water cannot pass through the Watergates because of the piles of straw and women's hair which obstruct its flow. The bridges over the river are marked with many patches of repair. Those stones of the bridges, which become wet, begin to glisten, while the dry stones retain their original dull colour.

The poets merely write poems about the floods in this river. A visitor once happened to spend one day in Madurai when a flood in the river was imminent. He heard people everywhere talking about the level of the water rising quickly. The people talked about the water rising over the steps leading to the river, and the water rising on the bathing places. He also heard people talking about the flood waters sweeping away three village homes, one pregnant woman, and a couple of cows, almost every year. Sailors himself cannot save from drowning in to the water as same to the villagers of Madurai. Both the poets at some extent have similar thought in order to show the destructive power of water.

Last section 'what the thunder said' "Here is no water, but only rock", the reference is to the journey of Sir Percival or Parsifal, the quester, to the kingdom of the Fisher King in search of the Holy Grail. The knight and his followers reach the mountain on the top of which is the chapel perilous in which is kept the lost grail. There have been no rains for a long time, and it is a scene of desolation and barrenness which meets their eyes. There is no water at all and the rocks are cracked. There are gaps as in the mouth of an old man. There is not even silence, for there is the unpleasant noise of the wind passing through dried grass, the desert insects singing with a jarring sound, and the sound of thunder without rain. As the searchers climb the hill and near the chapel, they have hallucinations. Red ghostly figures seem to look out at them from mud cracked houses and mock and jeer at them. Such has been the experience of all those who have searched for truth and spiritual salvation. The path of spiritualism is difficult and those who follow it often have such hallucinations. The repeated cry of "water, water" brings out vividly the intensity of the suffering they have to undergo. The poet turns his back on the dead land and sits fishing on the shore of the river, i.e. he makes efforts at his spiritual re-generation.