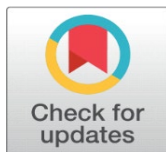
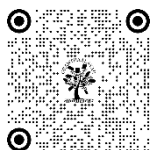


EMBLEMS OF EMOTION: SYMBOLISM IN THE SELECT WORKS OF PREETI SHENOY

A. Archana ¹, Dr. E. Anita ²

¹ Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, St. John's College of Arts and Science, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundranar University, Tirunelveli, India

² Research Supervisor, Department of English, St. John's College of Arts and Science, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundranar University, Tirunelveli, India



DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4991](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4991)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

ABSTRACT

Preeti Shenoy's *The One You Cannot Have* describes the emotional aftereffects of lost love, broken relationships, and the nuances of healing. The novel focuses on realistic elements, she weaves smoothly many symbolic elements that highlight the psychological domain of the characters. This article delves into the symbolic devices used in the novel, including different kinds of objects and settings, to recurring motifs, which exhibit how these elements aid the character to develop, articulating themes, and the novel's emotional depth. In *A Place Called Home*, the author, Preeti Shenoy, presents an energetic narrative of a woman's journey from submission to self-empowerment, woven with deeply connected emotional problems and the reality of society. She has the power to tell stories in a naturalistic manner, she employs a superset of symbolic elements to lightly shadow the themes of the class system, identity, displacement, emotional struggles, and belonging. This paper analyses how she has used the symbols in both material and environmental aspects to show the inner meanings and portray the protagonist's internal and external conflicts. Her other novel, *The Rule Breakers*, also has exotic realistic elements, even though she skillfully utilises the symbolic elements that exhibit the Veda, the protagonist's emotional and social struggles and problems. These symbolic elements are used not merely as decorative elements, instead, they act as narrative tools, mirroring internal struggles and societal ties and restrictions.

Keywords: Symbols, Realistic, Psychological, Environmental, Self-Oriented



1. INTRODUCTION

In literature, Symbolism serves as a bridge between the perceptible and also provides deeper insights into the characters and themes. In *The One You Cannot Have*, the author employs symbols not to create puzzles, but to boost the emotional truth. She has used routine experiences as symbols, even though they are the bearers of emotional resonance. This paper describes how symbols like the black suitcase, the scrapbook, weather and nature, and urban living spaces act as effective narrative tools to evoke memory, loss, transition, and inner conflict.

2. THE VESSEL OF MEMORY AND PAIN: THE BLACK SUITCASE

Aman finds the black suitcase, which is one of the most significant symbols in the novel, in his attic before leaving for India. It is stuffed with memories of his past relationship with Shruti. It consists of photographs, handmade cards, and personal keepsakes, which act as a container of disputed emotions. It depicts the emotional weight that Aman has carried all these years, at the bottom of his heart. Even though he has been very far from the physical and geographic areas, he still clings to the old memories. He remembers and utters "She had made this scrapbook painstakingly, by

hand... It was like a precious phase of our lives was captured in these pages" (OH, p. 25) The suitcase acts as an eminent parable for the power of memory which loiters and traumatises the present innately with its cruel teeth without being invited. Its unexpected advent collapses Aman's belief of having moved on and speeds up the retribution of emotions. He mutters, "These are what is left of the four happiest years of my life... physical evidence of something that no longer exists except in my memories" (OH, p.27)

3. THE SCRAPBOOK: SYMBOL OF SENTIMENTALITY AND LOST PROMISES

The handmade scrapbook portrays a sharp difference from the black suitcase. The suitcase was forgotten a long way before, but Shruti's handmade scrapbook is an artefact of beautiful memories. It involves Shruti's deep emotional efforts in the relationship and her view of a perfect love relationship. The book comprises pictures taken together, heartfelt poems, and intricate messages that portray love's permanence in this changing world. The scrapbook can be considered as solace as well as disharmony to Aman in the context of how happy his life was and the things that he had lost. It acts as an emotional criterion to Aman that is irreparably tied to Shruti, despite her physical absence.

4. SHEPHERD'S POINT: THE PERSONAL SANCTUARY AS INNER CONFLICT

A picture of Shepherd's Point shows Alka in search of peace upon a rock encircled by shrubs of Nilgiri Champa, it is the only thing that witnesses her loneliness and her torment. The white flowers of the Campa, blossoming around her, stand for purity and fleeting peace, whereas the rock appears as a site to ruminate undisturbed over her inner turmoil. Alka now grapples with the return of Krish, her former lover, and perhaps the dredging up of emotions she had suppressed over time. In this scenario, nature serves as a mirror to Alka's restlessness, where the still morose serenity is in sharp contrast with the turbulence in her heart. The way that Shenoy establishes this symbolic site means that nature itself can be endowed with the sounds of emotion. "Alka gazed at the bright blue skies just as a flock of white cranes flew overhead." "A hornbill swooped over their heads... it had a fish in its mouth." (PH, p. 27)

5. NATURE AND WEATHER: EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES

Occasions that lead Shenoy to use nature imagery like rain, rivers, changing skies, etc, are always very curiously linked with the character's association with emotional states. For example, the memory of cuddling together in a storm becomes a very intimate moment of remembering Aman and Shruti, while a calming view of the riverside in Norwich accentuates Aman's loneliness and longs to be somewhere else. Nature becomes as silent a witness to human vulnerability as a mere semblance of quiet grief, momentary joy, and irretrievable change that exists within the hearts and minds of characters. Though it is not easy to lay hands on, it sure creates a poetic beat within a narrative and creates a wonderful amalgamation of mood and tone.

6. IDENTITY AND DISPLACEMENT

Movement between places – UK, Mumbai, Bangalore, Gwalior – deals with the transiting identities as well as emotional displacement among the protagonists. Aman fixes his rental apartment in Norwich, after which he is about to leave. It forms a way of closure and transition because it is a kind of literal and metaphorical erasure of all past marks. A sharp contrast between living in a cramped apartment in Mumbai and nostalgia for the Bangalore home throws light on Shruti's inner conflict regarding identity, class, and marital adjustment. The urban living spaces then become symbolic of the emotional topography the characters have to traverse.

7. INHERITED PRIVILEGE AND EMOTIONAL ENCLOSURE

It's not just simply this coffee estate of Sakleshpur, where most of the current tales play, but also a representation of old masculine inheritance and societal hierarchy. This estate named "Anandi Estate" exhibits old colonial names like Silver Brooks and Poet's Paradise: it is a symbol of continuity and constraint alike. Alka considers it a place of material comfort and emotional conflict – a place where great beauty and transient moments of solace coexist with the exigence of family expectation and unfulfilled desire. "The deep green mountain peaks tiptoeing to kiss the cobalt-blue clouds... Nilgiri Champa bushes... the sweet scent." (PH, 56) These ancient colonial vestiges against the backdrop of the

exuberant grounds reflect Alka's antinomy: she has moved into a life of wealth through marriage, and yet the emotional price of that transition, her silenced past and agency echoes sadly in every brick and tree.

8. DISTANCE AND DISCONNECTION

The use of Facebook and email in Aman's quest to find Shruti adds a modern symbolic layer. These platforms, often viewed as tools of connection, here represent emotional distance and the illusion of intimacy. Aman's inability to find Shruti online - even with technology at his disposal symbolises how certain connections, once severed, resist digital recovery. This underscores the novel's central theme: some people, though unforgettable, remain unreachable.

9. CONTINUITY AND SACREDNESS

As Alka visits the slums with her mother, she notices a peepal tree that has a sacred red thread tied around it. In the Indian tradition, the peepal tree is often the symbol of sanctity, endurance, tradition, and wisdom from ancestors. For Alka, the image creates discomfort and reminds her of the life she has tried to distance herself from. Yet, this very tree also speaks of roots, belonging, and forgotten identities, questioning Alka's denial of her origin and hinting at the overlapping jigsaw of class and self-image. "The bricks for lighting the sacred fire for the rituals had been arranged in a rectangle... The rituals went on for an hour." (PH, 80)

10. SOCIAL ASPIRATION AND SHAME

In the book, garments have a societal role to make a person or a thing, just as effective in delving into an internalisation of class boundaries. Alka wears Tanvi's old clothes all the time, reminding her that she is an outsider. Such clothes do not signify something material: they become representations of desire, resentment, and invisibility. The discontent lingers still when she glimmers up for an event that Harish is hosting, the satin gown may glimmer, but it will only not be able to hide the invisible tag of 'maid's daughter.' This is how she used to critique performative social integration and the illusion within inflexible hierarchies of being able to move back and forth.

11. ESCAPE AND EMPOWERMENT

The meaning of books and the school library is emotional and represents intellectual freedom and silent rebellion for Alka. The characters she reads about become symbolic allies for her to deal with pain and injustice. The other two are brought together by the relationship with Ms Jalan, who is the librarian, because Alka is not just in this library; she is held, seen, and acknowledged. Alka opens up in a world where her voice is often drowned out. It is then that literature becomes her secret weapon, her escape route beyond the limitations of her birth, a symbolic escape.

12. THE ABANDONED HEATER AND THE DENIED COMFORT

Mrs. Shetty just laughed at Alka's request for a heater, yet it is a moment that could be trivial but is charged with symbolic injustice. The heater itself, unused in a guest room, becomes synonymous with withheld dignity and denied humanity. It's the mundane object that Shenoy uses as a weapon to expose the arbitrary nature of privilege and the way such an ordinary thing as comfort becomes a power struggle.

13. FORCED FEMININITY AND COMPLIANCE

The pink saree, which Veda is supposed to wear for the marriage proposal, represents societal pressures to conform to traditional expectations of womanhood. This piece of clothing signifies not only that but also an imposed identity that epitomises yielding, propriety, and preparation for domestic life. For a person like Veda, who seeks education and later in education and later independence, this saree becomes a literal symbol of the burden imposed by gender roles.

14. STAGNATION AND LONGING

Veda's hometown, Joshimath, is depicted with natural beauty and historical weight. Yet to Veda, it becomes a symbol of entrapment, a place that stifles her dreams and potential. The stepped garden, which she visits for reflection, symbolizes her inner life - ordered but confined, cultivated but limited in scope. This setting illustrates the paradox of having space, yet lacking freedom.

15. LIBERATION AND INTELLECTUAL AGENCY

The love of books and storytelling that Veda shared with her siblings became the signs of her intellectual hunger and emotional refuge. More than just knowledge, books incarnated the means of non-violent resistance and silent rebellion for her patriarchal world. When Veda performed the dramatisation of the stories, she claimed her own territory of imaginative liberty that told literature to offer the freedom denied in real life.

16. SISTERHOOD AND SECRET BONDS

Veda and his sister Vidya meet every day at a place marked by a banyan tree – a strong cultural symbol in India. Traditionally associated with wisdom and life span, this tree here serves as an emotional crutch and secret ally for the sisters. It becomes a symbol of unspoken support that women get from one another in oppressive systems.

17. LOST CHILDHOOD AND CONTESTED SPACE

The tiny flat patch of land used by the siblings for games vividly symbolises freedom within restriction. Even though it is small, bordered by rules of parents and restrictions of society, this land gives children a moment of joy and creativity. The fact that the land needed to be “fought for” against the adult notions of productivity (as farmland) makes it a metaphor for youth agency amid constraint.

18. EMOTIONAL NEGLECT

A single moment illustrates Veda asking for a room heater is a moment that suddenly leaves her without a room heater. Shenoy turns an ordinary object into a symbol of indifference like this heater that is available but inaccessible to Veda, whose environment is an emotional condition of coldness. The heater is an emotional reflection of her surroundings is perhaps the most glaring representation of her comfort and opinions and desires at the constant marginalisation of her environment. This motif brings the disjunction between visible resources and emotional generosity.

19. INNER TRUTH AND SUPPRESSED EXPRESSION

Part of Veda's inner voice finds an echo in the succinct, yet often unuttered letters, in most silent reflections, and those symbolic writings which mostly serve as frames of honesty, emotional rawness, introspection, and for all that against what she may be able to express in real life. They bring out the gap between what's shown in society and what's a personal truth.

20. CONCLUSION

Preeti Shenoy further enhances knowing one's characters against the backdrop of the societal contradictions he navigates through these well-embedded symbols. Whether through objects or spaces, *The Rule Breakers* contributes more to the themes of gender, tradition, and aspiration, often ambiguously arguing for strength and self-definition. They are used with the talent of Shenoy, not to obscure but rather to lay bare the emotional stakes in the journey of the young woman to selfhood. Through her beautiful use of symbols, Preeti Shenoy adds much emotional texture to *The One You Cannot Have*. The black suitcase, scrapbook, and many symbolic landscapes like homes and weather patterns all serve to deepen the understanding of loss, love, and personal transformation in the story. These symbols will not be

ornamental but integral to the structure of the novel regarding how they allow Shenoy to capture the subtleties of human emotions amid the greatly changeable world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

Shenoy, Preeti. *A Place Called Home*. HarperCollins, India, 2022.

Shenoy, Preeti. *The Rule Breakers*. Westland Publishers, 2016.

Shenoy, Preeti. *The One You Cannot Have*. Westland Publishers, 2013