TAFFD's Journal
ISSN 2643-4938 (online) · ISSN 2769-0490 (print)

OPEN ACCESS

An Excursive Reference to Symbolism

Hadayat Rashidi

Published in TAFFD's Journal, Vol. 1, Issue 2, pp. 22–33, 2019
Article page https://journal.taffds.org/articles/an-excursive-reference-to-symbolism

CC BY 4.0 **Licence**

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Transdisciplinary Agora for Future Discussions Inc. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Licence terms: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

This page was added by the journal. The article begins on the next page.

An Excursive Reference to Symbolism

Dr Hadayat Rashidi- Department of Islamic Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Shoushtar branch, Iran

Abstract

In this article, the author expressed views on general discussions related to symbol, symbolism, and general excursion of symbol in human thought and its effect in life. The discussion bases on viewpoints, and theories offered by scientists in the field of symbolism and contain new discussions related to the point of the resemblance of symbols and evolutionary outlook on the science of symbolism. The author carried out this research with views based on pure wisdom on evolutionary of outlook related to symbolism. The study argues that the significant effects of symbols include expressing the facts and directing the listener unconsciously toward reality.

Keywords: Symbols, Symbolism, Human, Sign, Thought

Introduction

Expressing artistic concepts does not always occur explicitly. Some authorities in this field prefer to use metaphoric and inexplicit language instead of explicit language and using the real meaning of the words. The methods to use the language indirectly and metaphorically are as follows: symbol, allegory, metaphor, analogy, satire, among others. The elements of communication intended to represent or stand for a person are the object, group, process, or idea. Symbols presented graphically (e.g. the Red Cross and crescent for the global humanitarian agency) or as representation (e.g., a lion representing power). They may also involve associated letters (e.g., C for the chemical element carbon), or they may be assigned arbitrarily (e.g., the mathematical symbol ∞ for infinity). Symbols are devices by which ideas transmit between people sharing a common culture.

Every society has evolved a symbol system that reflects a specific cultural logic; and every symbolism functions to communicate the information between members of the culture in much the same way as, but with more debt than, conventional language. Symbols tend to appear in clusters and to depend on one another for their accretion of meaning and value (Britannica, 2004). The symbol is a para-sign of an object or a subject as an abstract word, which implies a different meaning (Rashidi, 2009). This term comes from ancient Greece from the word symbollen meaning sign, mark, used frequently (Wikipedia.symbol). We

believe that each symbol has got three components: Appearance, Context, and Object.

Meaning related to each symbol affects the sentence, structure and has a profound effect on meaning as well. For instance, the words: Golden calf of the children of Israel- is complex of three words: Calf, Gold and Children of Israeli- each of which has its interpretation but while combined with the context "the golden calf of children of Israel- relates a new interpretation in our mind. This combination directs us to a new mental image with proper interpretation related to its significations, offering a new and original meaning. So each symbol has got a unique concept which makes effective communication possible. The clearer and fluent the symbol, the more it will reflect the "sense of creativity" of the speaker and the level of his knowledge. Each symbol causes the knowledge of the day to propagate because idea and concepts connect like bricks in the wall. Each symbol is a picture which talks to human and conveys a message. The more precise, the better it reflects the ability skill and the knowledge of the maker (Rashidi, 2009).

Huxe (2001) suggests language takes a frame, which in addition to the object includes personality, position, and personal purposes which makes it possible to express internal truth through words, expressions and imagination; and imposes itself to the external world. Consequently, language and reality are connected (Huxe, 2001). Symbol interfere the world through secondary imagination and shapes it because pictures and images are tools which enable us to reach this goal, so the inner pictures create a reality and impose it to the world in which we live. We call this process "symbol". Each symbol wants us to take part in cognition (Huxe, 2001).

Symbols and Young's views

Young describes a symbol as follows: It is a term, a noun or a picture which may be related to something familiar in daily life, implying a special meaning. He said, a word becomes symbolic, which carries a special meaning, and nobody expects to get a clear explanation related to the word. Since there are numerous things in the world which are beyond human understanding, we frequently make use of the term" symbolic". So that we can present and demonstrate the concepts which we cannot put in ordinary words, and this is why almost all religious make use of symbolic language. Symbols are natural; they are products of nature which have appeared symbols come to sight in dreams. Almost all of our knowledge is related to symbolism (Young,1972).

Young notes the history of symbolism shows that anything can get a symbolic meaning. He

believes that natural objects such as stones, plants, animals, humans, mountains, valleys, the sun, the moon, wind, water, fire, or anything made by men such as ship and objects like numbers, geometric shapes, like square, triangle, and circle have symbolic connotation. The entire world is potentially a symbol (Young, 1972). Symbolism is also one of the oldest, developed; complex ways man has ever created to assist him to demonstrate his capacities and imagination (Nazerzadeh, 2000).

Symbol and combination

The author thinks that no symbol can be found in literature, art, and religion to be simple without combination, like the golden calf of Israel children. We should say: Man is a symbol maker; he creates it, finds it, rears it and introduces it. A symbol appears in arts and religious literature more than anything else. The significant effects of symbols include expressing the facts and directing the listener unconsciously toward reality as the main aim of an author (Rashidi, 2009).

The difference between symbol and allegory

Another literary term used instead of a symbol is" allegory" which is related to symbol and is close to it. These two literary crafts (style) used for the deep meaning of literary concepts. Some critics in literature believe that, though allegory is something like a symbol, however, there exists some difference between the two.

In the allegory, we do not value the pictures and images for the sake of their physical beauty; their meaning is crucial for us. However, the poet interested in symbolic uses pictures a lot and his reason for making use of symbols is the beauty which exists in the pictures. Symbol affects on context and spirit of the content genuinely to convey the meaning to the addressee in the best possible way. The author thinks that symbol has always got an abstract meaning, so it is quite different from allegory since allegory is a sign and refers to something which can be touched and it is natural. For instance, if "cow" implies farming and production it is "allegory", but if used for "foolishness" it is a "symbol"; and if "chair" is used for management it is "symbol", but if used for "country " it is an allegory. So, the two symbols and allegory are different, and allegory belongs to signs, and marks, not symbols.

Code: the symbols whose meanings agree can be used as codes because symbols can be arranged for use as a concept, and anybody familiar to the coding system can decode the system. In this situation, symbols are not codes because their word to word meanings are not of importance, and the reader considers the symbolic meaning to discover the code.

Most of the applications of a symbol have its feature, and this position gives it special meaning (Umr, 2004).

One of the critical points often ignored is that sometimes a picture (image) is both a sign and a symbol in religion, so most of the existing symbols in religions are both symbols and sign and contain different meanings, and there is no conflict between meanings. For example: "Olive tree" is both a symbol for "peace" and a sign of "Jerusalem city." Paying a little attention, we remember that Jews forbids fighting and killing. So the meaning no conflict with each other (Rashidi, 2009).

Human evolution and symbols

Many factors are thus state as factors of interests toward symbols. Young's view seems to be the most important, which says that symbols intermingle in the unconscious human mind as part of the mentality. However, one perceives symbol from the evolutionary point of view. The human wisdom and thought go through evolution stages as well as the body, and it is a constant process, and this is what we call: cognition evolution. Men continue his intellectual thought toward cognition and even mystic and religion to interpret affairs in a better way, thus moves in the direction of religious cognition. This evolution has taken place in nine stages.

Cognition of existence

The first step aimed at realizing the features of objects. As mentioned in the bible and Quran, the problem of cognition is an essential part of human evolution (Quran.Surah 2:31), since it is related to mutation of animal life to human life. As mentioned in the Bible, general cognition of objects is man's characteristic which makes human unique among other creatures. All the accomplishments of human language are due to familiarity with nature and labelling names to different natural objects in early ages. This nomination bases on religions needs, spiritual affairs, superstition, imagination, scientific concepts, romantic, law and the like based on human feeling and his impression at first sight. Men learned to nominate objects and concepts and took benefit from them. The second stage was the identification and nomination of the objects. Despite limited language skill, they classified all the objects and selected suitable names for them; and created new words and expressions to meet their social and educational needs.

Cognition of original life is an essential principle in the development of human language and thought. Animism appeared at this stage of human life. It may have taken men for

many centuries and thousands of years to recognize this principle and discover symbols. Through attention and observation to objects, animals, and daily affairs of man moved to language and through a domain, superstition, magic, then mystical thoughts and religion. Through daily experience and the contacts with objects and his environment observed life and succeeded in producing two kinds of symbols known as "absence and presence of objects" for classification.

The fourth step toward the thought evolution of man understands the two concepts known as presence and absence. Man succeeded in classifying all the existence into two dimensions called "goodness and evil" and explains about each ominous symbol related to destruction and holy symbols and goodness as well in different degrees based on his imagination. The evolution of thought in imagination dimension can be claimed to be related to the appearance of imagination in the human mind as one of the most important blessings from God. The appearance of imagination and daydreaming made it possible for symbols to appear in mind and set the foundation for literature, religion, and Gnosticism.

In fact, symbols took shape due to imagination related to existence. Being inspired by symbols, literature, philosophy, and Gnosticism appeared gradually in human life. Man learned to admire and appreciated his beloved when he got the awareness of the beauty and made use of the concepts to admire things or people of interest. Realize abstracts aspects like this stage of human life. For instance "cow" is the symbol for" fertilization" however, it took man thousands of years to it reach these concepts because it had to be realized within the frame of human imagination then put into operation.

Considering Young's "archetypes" we can claim that man first gets familiar with nature then forms good or bad concepts related to the objects, every existing object is meaningful to man, it has got a message related to cognition. It can be said that appearance is not everything; we should get within an objects to attain the real meaning. Based on this assumption, we witness the use of these symbols in religious concepts for worshipping, and we make use of symbols in art literature and archaeology. All of this progress originates from religion.

Selecting of symbols enabled people of every tribe, artists and votaries to guide humankind through language, metaphors, allegories, and poetry. Symbols played a leading part to propagate religion and get closer to God. Votaries originated the first mental sparks in different religions. They made full of symbols to explain the unique qualities of the creator

of the world, God. The author believes that symbols used by religious magicians and scholars of religions were unique. They also played a leading part to develop science and literature among nations. Most of these votaries knew all about the culture of different nations and tried to make full use of them. Before the general propagation of knowledge, there is a limitation of science to religious leaders; others were unaware of science as some symbols are called "priest" symbols (Rashidi, 2009).

The evolution of human wisdom helped to avoid and reject many superstitions and consider reality. Symbols played a leading part in this intellectual evolution and man was directed to recognition and promotion in realization. This evolution cycle definably guided man to Gnosticism. Mystic cognition of existence helped man to get rid of physical and material descriptions and get to the maximum amount of pure knowledge sincerely. Man has always required a vital role of symbols to reach perfection and evolutionary stage.

Understanding the symbols

To understand symbols depend on comprehending the content as well as harmony and close connection with the subject matter to get a better understanding of the symbols we should consider: The symbol in the text through frequent use and emphasis on its condition gives us a clue to the subject. The symbol's meaning should emphasize the background and the whole subject so that the meaning can be obtained and grasp in this context. The subject matter can be called symbolic provided that it offers a different meaning from the correct and the real meaning of the word. Generally speaking, the meaning attached to the symbol is beyond the real meaning of the word, class, and people. The symbol may convey different meanings and concepts, and it may offer a collection of meanings; it is like a piece of the gem exposed to light, creating a variety of rays in different directions.

The meaning is however, not under our control; it depends on the subject matter and the context of use. It is the subject matter which determines and gives direction to meaning, that is to say, a variety of qualities are shown in the text by symbols which can never be demonstrated by words and simple language immediately open (Mir, 1996). In order to understand symbols, we should get assistance and support from three sources:

1. Pieces of evidence which is probably based on the viewpoints of the author.
2. Pieces of evidence obtained from the first addressees.
3. Awareness of conditions about author's cultural environment.

Vagueness related to symbols

Generally speaking, symbols are complicated and multi-dimensional. Despite its close connection with the concept explained by it, it remains as a symbol and does not correctly explain the thought; consequently, it is not a simple sign. The two are different; moreover, a symbol has its features. Thoughts do not have obstructive quality, like "force" "trick" and the like. It may have some complexity, and hidden meaning.

Consequently, the symbol may also suggest a variety of implications, that is to say: lion does not always mean strong or "fox" frisky. On the other hand, all the characteristics attributed to God cannot be demonstrated or explained by figures or numbers, so the form and context are not related to each other. Regarding symbols, the external object has already contained what it wants to demonstrate.

Moreover, it is not selective or unconcerned; it has already got its meaning (Hosaini, 1988). When a man encounters a symbol for the first time, and asked himself whether it is a symbol? If it is approved, it may possess different meaning, and then the proper meaning must be decided. So most of the connections between sign and consequence may be far from each other (Whitehead.1986). Related to the concept of symbol an error may occur regarding the incorrect transformation from the symbol to meaning (Whitehead, 1986). There should be some partnership between symbols and meaning, even if it is opposite, consequently both of them can be interchanged. Whitehead argues "there exists no single element to be either a symbol or a concept."

Shephered (1987) opines that a symbolic structure has got more than one surface and one role, so man situates symbol in a variety of ways which are hidden and apparent. Thoughts and behaviour are affected by symbol unconsciously (Shepherd, 1987). Making a change in the position of symbols in sentence structure has an essential effect in meaning and concept. The characteristic created, and mystery in each symbol is due to some conflict between author's viewpoint and the reader. Lewis(2004) therefore, explains some of the reason for vagueness in symbols:

He agrees one main reason for complexity in symbols is the lack of true comprehension of real meaning existing in symbol and sign. He notes that the meaning of the symbol is not understandable through human sense alone. So when a word or an expression is used for a single affair and the addressee cannot distinguish it by sign, there is a creation of the complexity and vagueness. The new condition arises because the expression can imply two

applications different from each other; one is economy, the other one is static's (Lewis, 2004). For instance, the red light has a specific meaning for traffic police as a sign and is considered a sign of stopping. However, if the chief of police organization says to a colleague "you should take the lights into consideration" the sentence is ambiguous and symbolical. So the addressee should be aware of the speaker's purpose as well as the situation and give great attention to grasp its symbolic meaning. It is something related to the threat by troublemakers, crimes and the like.

Misconception and wrong judgment of other customs and culture causes us to fall in pitfalls and make the wrongs judgment in interpreting the symbols and make terrible mistakes in evolution and assessment. Any ignorance related to the features of a single symbol creates a wrong interpretation, and it is one of the burdens on signs to convey the message to the addressee. This is why every symbol sent by the speaker should pass a culture or anti-culture, context. Yet, it shouldn't be symbolic for the receiver of the message or be different from the culture of the receiver; that is to say, we should put ourselves in the cultural position of the addressee to establish effective communication (Soneson, 2002). One should remember that one of the essential features of symbols is ambiguity existing in them. Potentially, a limited group of those who take benefit from knowledge and thought are in the position to comprehend this point.

The ambiguity of the symbol involves its dynamic nature, which evolves its meaning and gets richer and deeper based on the nature of the image and imagination. The more ambiguous the symbol, the more difficult the interpretation. An image characteristic takes the symbol away from its material origin, and the distance from surface interpretation gets longer and longer. The complexity will increase so much that the grasping of meaning because possible to those who have some awareness of the governing thought on the environment and history of culture. Reading the right book may enable us to establish communication with the given message. Any change in the symbol will create change in meaning and accurate interpretation.

Clinging to symbols: Basically, why do we cling to symbols?

One can something clings to symbols based on obligation and other times, it is evolutionarily. This happens when the author thinks of enriching his work and decides to make use of symbols; to add to the quality of his artistic work, since most of the success stories have taken much benefit from "brevity" and briefness"; and the author has done his best to simplify his work and make it intensive. It does not imply the success of literary

works and short stories is base on brevity and briefness. However, simplification plays a part in writing, and every single word has its effect and delicacy. Depending on the way such elements assists the writer to obtain this set goal is "symbol". The use of symbol here will increase the depth and totality of the given image as well as brevity and briefness.

Through the use of symbols" literary texts" are identified and differentiated from "work of art". When the usage of a symbol is compulsory, the writer is limited and controlled by the governing atmosphere over the society so he cannot write his mental concepts conveniently. When the symbol is specialized and does not reflect ideal concepts and meaning of the author, the work will automatically be hidden in ambiguity without any meaning. The author is not satisfied, and his work will appear meaningless and mixed up (Mir 1996). From the viewpoint of the author, the third and fourth agents are as follows: the sense of liberty to express the author's awareness attracts him toward symbols and through their usage explains openly and sincerely his intention to those is interested in the issue.

Instinct of pleasure along with the sense of pleasure causes each author to share others in the sensational pleasure and get them to a common reaction. To get to this goal, the author makes full use of symbols. To sum up, the discussion, when "thought" and sensation get together, language by itself cannot explain human sensations and why man seeks support from symbols to express his sensations and convey them to the addressees (Rashidi, 2009).

Non-common meaning of symbols: Do similar symbols refer to a single meaning?

The author believes that symbols have the same characteristic by word, but are quite different regarding feature and quality. For instance, when a teacher in the Arabic language makes use of the word "cow" (baqarah in Quran) the Arab speaker of the region assumes it is the same buffalo, but for non-Arabic tribes, it means ordinary "cow "and buffalo never comes to their mind. Making use of the word "fire" has a variety of concepts in literary texts. Fire attributed to "hell" is darkness, and it is different from the fire Moses, the prophet, observed. The white and shining colour or the fire of love in cinema is red colour, and it is quite different from the fire of "fever". The word "fire" is a universal symbol, but our concepts are very different. The word fire related to "hell" and connects to sin, crime, and wrongdoing. The "fire" Moses observed is something supernatural above the sense of "Cherub" angels (Mahdi, 2009). The fire of love and passion is red colour in our concepts and romantic and has got no smoke. The fire which heats us in cold winter weather is also a different thing referred to as temperature. Fire may have two different concepts for two different tribes, and two different symbols. Every single word is affected by the existing

culture in a nation or tribe in an ambiguous and meaningless concept. From the viewpoint of outsiders, yet meaningful for the region in which it has created.

Symbols are wings for languages by which phrases, expressions and sentences are conveyed to others. For instance, advertisements possess their meanings in the same language yet it may seem risky to use them in another language. Failure to use symbols knowingly may lead to ambiguity, and the meaning may remain hidden in a "corona of ambiguity". The qualities and features of each symbol can be obtained through written texts, objective pictures such as drawing, archaeological work, or mental pictures transferred by them. Consequently, by getting hold on these arts we will be able to interpret them effectively. Since no symbol's appearance is simple, precisely symbols always possess complex compounds made up of more than one material feature. The fire, related to the Mount Sinai tree has never been drawn by any artist to demonstrate its burning with black smoke or red flames (Jewish gallery, 2004).

Making some changes give a spiritual dimension to that fire, so demonstrates it in white to reflect Moses pure connection with God. Consequently, we conclude that the more exclusive the drawing feature of a symbol, the more complexity we face to explain and interpret the symbol. Additional characteristics of picture and imagination of the symbol get it farther from its material surface. Consequently, its vagueness increases and few authorities in the field will have a complete awareness about it, because symbols are well – connected with the mentality of the observer, his cultural atmosphere and historical evolution. Some many concepts come to his mind automatically, unattainable through reading a textbook on the subject. Any reform and modification, even a single spot in the picture affects the frequency of the inner (internal) messages related to symbols. Considering the above facts, the author suggests the following to facilitate understanding of a single symbol easily with its characteristics to get to desired goals:

No universal symbol exists by itself.

Any symbol which seems to be common seems to be so regarding the surface and word grammatically. The interpretation is definably different; no simple symbol exists since all of the symbols are compound. Every symbol is an image to limit other aspects. The interpretation remains unachievable unless we consider the image. In some cases, the comprehension of the interpreted symbol offers us so much knowledge and so many concepts unobtainable from an insipid, lifeless scientific book (Rashidi.2009).

Conclusion

The interpretations given to symbols came as the result of human thought evolution. Human thought has passed through different internal stages of evolution to be successful in reaching to symbolic thinking. All about arts and religions will be absorbed by symbolic language in our centuries and next; material thoughts on religion will be swept away in a calm behaviour. People thoughts in the next centuries will have a higher cognition of spiritual understanding of religious symbolism; though not to their religious text translation. The understanding of human-relation to symbols increases, the evolution of religious text's interpretation, not translation.

Reference List

The Holy Quran

AL- Mahdi, (2009). Mohammad bin hasan, Al- ,Samat pray, mafatih al- janan, qommi, sl Abbas.

Lewis, C. (2000). Fundamental theories of sociology (1st ed).transl Fahang Irshad. Tehran:

Huxe, T. (2001). Metaphor, transl FarzanehTahiri. Tehran: *Markaz Pub*,

Mir Sadeqi, J. (1996), Stories fundamentals. Tehran, Iran.

Nazerzadeh, K. (2002). Symbolism in the theatre literature.(1st ed.). Tehran: *Barg pub*.1st Vol 1

Rashidi, H. (2009). PhD theses, Icis University.

Soneson, G. (2002). Encyclopedia of semiotics. Sweden: Lunda University.

Shepherd, A. (1987).Fundamental of art philosophy.(1sted.). transl Ali Ramin, *Scientific cultural pub*, Tehran, Iran.

Young, K.G.(1972). Human and his symbols, transl Aboutallibsaremi,. 2nd ed. Tehran, *Amir pub*,. (10), Pp22-24.

Hosaini, S. R. (1988). *Art journal*, (17), khavaran pub, Tehran, Iran.

Whitehead, (1996). *Questia journal of aesthetics and art criticism*, 46

Encyclopedia Britannica,(2004) CD.

Retrieved from http://en/.www.Jewish gallery.com

http://en// www.Umr.Edu

www.wikipedia.com