Symbol Analysis in the Poetry of Afif Bahktari

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www.ijrah.com || Vol. 4 No. 3 (2024): May Issue

**ABSTRACT**

Symbolism has evolved over centuries to express ambiguous concepts and has manifested in various forms in the thoughts and dreams of different writers. Symbolism encompasses thought and guides humanity into the realm of speechless contemplation. This article aims to meticulously study and extract various types of symbols in the poems of Afif Bahktari. By examining and analyzing this significant literary device in Bahktari's discourse, we will present the types of these symbols and their outcomes scientifically. Symbolic or symbolic poetry is a crucial current in contemporary poetry. According to many critics and theorists, contemporary poets are inclined towards symbolic poetry. Besides this viewpoint, other factors such as poets' familiarity with Western poetic movements and the symbolist school, changes in poets' perspectives towards existential and societal aspects, creation of artistic ambiguity, and deepening of poetry, can be mentioned. In fact, one of the objectives of employing symbols or symbols in the poetry of contemporary poets, including Afif Bahktari, is to create a vague and profound poetic fabric, influencing the audience and engaging them in the creation of poetic meaning, shifting poetry from a single-meaning state to a multi-meaning one, and prompting readers and audiences to pause and contemplate the meaning and concept of poetry. Therefore, this article attempts to address the important role of symbolism in Bahktari's poetry by interpreting and analyzing several symbols in his poems.

**Keywords:** Interpretation, Contemporary Poetry, Symbol, Afif Bahktari.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The selection of symbolic language by contemporary poets, influenced by their familiarity with Western poetic schools and movements, alongside cultural and social factors, significantly enriches poetry. This choice adds depth, creates artistic ambiguity, and impacts the audience, transforming poetry from a single-meaning state to a multi-meaning one, prompting readers to pause and reflect on its meaning and concept. The shift from traditional poetry with its educational, ethical, or romantic foundations to symbolic and interpretive poetry signifies the modernity of poetry. Symbolic language, being interpretable and fluid, resists constraint and limitation. The relationships established among symbolic vocabulary produce structures with multiple layers of meaning, which are interpreted differently by audiences according to the time and spirit. Moreover, the examination of symbolic language in contemporary poetry reveals a limited inclination towards positive symbols and uplifting meanings, with negative connotations often dominating the linguistic elements used by these poets.

The background and history of symbolic and cryptic poetry in Persian literature can be traced back to the works of Sufi literature; works such as "Kashf al-Mahjoub" by Hujwiri, the letters of Ain al-Qudat Hamadani, the commentary on the "Sharh-e Shatahiyat" by Ruzbihan Baqli, "Qut al-Qulub" by Abu Talib Maki, parts of Ibn Sina's mystical writings such as the final sections of "Kitab al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat" and "Risalah al-Ishq," the mystical works of Suhrawardi such as "Aql-e Surkh," and "Marasidal-Ibad" by Najm al-Din Razi, as well as the mystical poems of poets like Sanai, Attar, and Rumī, especially the ghazals of Shams, Hafez, and Sheikh Mahmoud Shabestari (Poornamdarian, 1375: 57-58)
In mystical poetry, the poet, due to the conditions prevailing in the structure and form of poetry, is influenced by intense emotional and spiritual states; therefore, they cannot express their emotional and spiritual states clearly. In such cases, under the influence of intense emotional states that cannot be expressed in simple and ordinary language, the poet resorts to symbolic and symbolic poetry. Therefore, in their poetry, both the discussion of multivalence and ambiguity and a particular type of experiential intuition come before the emergence of poetry. Apparently, the view and perspective of Ain al-Qudat Hamadani were also devoted to these points; where he said: "O youth! Consider these poems as a mirror. Know that the mirror does not have a form in itself, but whoever holds it can see his own form; and if it seems to you that the meaning of poetry is what its proponent desires and others put forth different meanings, it is still as if someone says: The form of the mirror is the form of the face reflected in it that it first manifested." (Ain al-Qudat Hamadani, 1348: 1/2169)

Saying that poetry is a mirror and anyone can see their current criticism in it means that the intended meaning of the poet is only one of the possible and multiple meanings of poetry, and other meanings are equally valid. The concise words of Ain al-Qudat about poetic observation are in line with modern literary criticism theory. The theories put forward in modern literary criticism, especially those related to new poetry and fiction writing, such as structuralism, semiology, and new hermeneutics, suggest that language is not just a tool for the poet to convey a preconceived meaning to others. (Poomamadian, 1375: 85)

II. IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

In this article, the issue of whether some of Bahktari's poems can be considered as symbolic and ambiguous poetry or not will be elucidated and explained. Considering that a rigorous theoretical framework is often required for the interpretation of literary works, this research seeks to determine the extent to which the poems in this collection will adhere to symbolism. And every research, whether scientific or practical, is of particular and extraordinary importance, indicating the significance of research in your university. Research that has been conducted has special importance because this poet is different in terms of the domain of ghazal from examining the content in his poems, which to what extent he has shifted similar and different contents in his poems.

III. RESEARCH ISSUE

In new theories, the existence of a preconceived thought or meaning before the creation of poetry is often denied. Therefore, when the discussion turns to interpretation, the debate about codes, symbols, signs, and even allegories without parallels arises; the source of this ambiguity is the absence of a counterpart, which many of the ghazals of Sanai, Attar, Rumi, and Hafez possess the quality of being symbolic and allegorical. Symbol is the equivalent of the word symbol. The origin of the word symbol is Greek, meaning to put together two separate pieces, derived from the root "symbolo," which means something that has been divided into two halves, and the poetry of Afif is the crystallization of images arising from the heart of the text and from within his poetic discourse. In some of his poems, there is no marginal image, and the play of poetic imagination does not play a role, but rather the systematic structure of his poetry is woven from the combination of agreed-upon sounds and intonations.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research is to investigate the symbolism in the poetry of Afif Bahktari, based on his collection of poetry. The present study aims to identify some of his poetic features by examining symbolism in Afif Bahktari's poetry. Furthermore, the reader should be able to become aware of the themes of his poetry, which mostly deal with emptiness and death, and also to gain insight into social situations and new perspectives for understanding poetry, thereby making the text and symbols understandable for themselves.

V. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH:

Research has been conducted by authors and researchers regarding the poetry of Afif Bahktari; however, specifically regarding symbolism in the poetry of Afif Bahktari, no research has been conducted so far. Several articles and theses have been written on the poetry of Afif Bahktari separately. Among them are the dual confrontations in the poetry of Afif Bahktari by researcher Sayyid Ahmad Ra'fat, and another article titled "The Poetry of Afif Bahktari According to the Collection 'The Father of World Poetry' Based on the Perspective of Samuel Taylor Coleridge." Other theses have also been researched, which I could not find because they were not accessible. Although the collections of Afif Bahktari were prepared by the poet himself before his death, they did not have enough time to be published during his lifetime. Therefore, after the poet's death, with the help of other individuals such as Mehdi Sarbaz, Mohammad Hossein Mohammadi, and Jafar Hosseini, the poetry of Afif Bahktari was entrusted to a period of world poets for publication. In any case, this current research is a novel and fresh endeavor.

Research Questions:
1. Are symbol and symbol different concepts?
2. Are the poems of Afif Bahktari derived from imaginative and symbolic imagination?
3. How has symbolism manifested in the poetry of Afif Bahktari?

**Research Method:**
This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and a structuralist approach, with its information gathered through library research. All the poems of Afif Bahktari collected in the anthology “Living in the Wine of Passing” have been examined, and the discussed content in his poetry has been identified and categorized accordingly.

**Introduction to Afif Bahktari:**
Asadullah Afif Bahktari, the son of Mohammad Amin Afif Bahktari, a poet, writer, and member of the Writers Association of Balkh, was born in 1962 in Mazar-e-Sharif. He completed his primary and secondary education in Mazar-e-Sharif and pursued higher education at Kabul University. Afterward, he worked as an educational officer in the literacy department of Balkh province from 1994 to 1998. From 1998 until now, he has been serving in the cultural and publications department of the Red Crescent Head Office in Balkh province. Afif predominantly focuses on the genre of ghazal in his poetry, employing his unique language and style to create poems rich in imagery, imagination, emotion, and thought. Praise of love, beauty, homeland, humanity, and addressing the deep inner sorrows and pains of human beings are among the main themes of his works (Khaliq, 2008, p. 548). Bahktari was born in Balkh province in 1962 and lived there until the end of his life. Several collections of his poetry, including “Gray Melodies, I Speak with the Language of the Sea,” “How Are You with a Cup of Tea, My Dear?,” “Two Kisses of Apple,” “One Hundred Ghazals,” and “The Father of World Poetry,” have been published. Furthermore, his complete works were published under the title “Life Passes in the Wine of Passing” in 2019, which was postponed due to quarantine and the COVID-19 situation until a few days ago. Bahktari has achieved honors such as being selected as the special poet of the past decade in Afghanistan, receiving a special award at the Fajr International Festival from Iran, and receiving the National Excellence Medal (Saber Herawi, 2010, p. 123).

**Analysis of Symbolism in the Poetry of Afif Bahktari:**
Afif Bahktari once said that the best texts to read are the poems written on the walls of the city. This statement highlights an important point in Bahktari’s poetry, as it indicates that a poet should not merely focus on describing the “beloved’s locks.” For Bahktari, societal text and critique of the current situation are more important symbols than description of the beloved and the wine (it is by coincidence that the description of the beloved and the wine is something that the majority of our poets are captivated by and apparently, they do not see anything else) (Arian, 1393, p. 17). Since literary analysis based on symbolism has become prevalent in literary theories in recent years, some researchers in the field of literature have focused on the symbolism in the poems of poets. This allows them to make the subject understandable by exploring the layers of text and their poems' meanings. Afif Bahktari's poems move from the social position of humans toward their individual and existential solitude. His early poems, for example, are very concerned with homeland, and symbolism for homeland is used extensively, expressing sorrow (Khaliq, 2008, p. 548).

**Symbolism in Afif Bahktari’s Poetry:**
- **Forest:** Another characteristic of contemporary symbolic poetry is poets' use of personal symbols and the utilization of elements of the specific region in its symbolic meaning. In the poetry, the symbolic word "forest" is one that other poets may have also used, but in Afif's poetry, this symbolic word is used with high frequency. Bahktari often considers the forest as a symbol of a society trapped in oppression, injustice, chaos, and destruction, as well as a society suffocated by severe congestion, where people are also hopeless and desperate.
- **Garden:** This symbolic word has often been used in contemporary poetry with attributes such as “withered,” “looted,” “fruitless,” and “frozen,” which, considering the overall structure and composition of the poem, the poet's mindset and personal experiences in dealing with surrounding issues, and other symbolic words and elements of the poem, are used in different meanings. For example:
  
  "Tomorrow, every step of ours will be to the corner of the garden  
  With a thousand red roses, another springtime will grow"
  
  (Bahktari, 2003, p. 78)

  In the poems published in his latest poetry book ("The Father of World Poetry"), he is much less engaged with society. Less engaged in the sense that society is less present in his later poems. It is not completely absent, but rather, like a clear mind, it does not have that burning sensation in its existence, and it does not say, like the warm-bloodedness of his youth:

  "Horses, not stags, are dragging the cart in the battle queue  
  Oxen have become dull, and dispassionately carry the burden"
  
  (Bahktari, 2003, p. 111)

  In the concluding verses of "Paykar," silence prevails. In the final lines "I fall under the table, I break a plate," he expresses. His human conditions, which initially began with a sense of responsibility within a particular geographical context, have gradually evolved towards a detachment from responsibility and a rupture in dependence on geography. However, this rupture is not a detachment from humanity; it is rather a deeper immersion into humanity, shifting the focus from
breadth to depth, which is existential. Ultimately, he becomes a spectator of moments and events, and his work resembles that of July, who lives with him in a room.

**Lantern:** Amidst the symbolic and symbolic words laden with negative connotations, there exist words that symbolize positive concepts and convey positive meanings. Nevertheless, contemporary symbolist poets, including Afif Bahktari, are so imbued with shattered spirits and despair that they employ these words within a poetic context that articulates the poet's sorrow and grief. The term "lantern" is one of these symbolic words that, due to the juxtaposition of dualities within words at the poetic level, the fabric and context of poetry, simile constructions, and elements such as light, warmth, and illumination that result in opposition to darkness, guidance, direction, truthfulness, and disclosure, can carry a positive symbolic meaning in poetry.

**Repetition:** Another instance of repetition in Afif Bahktari's poetry is something from which we all somehow recoil, and this repetition always trails us like a stone in the slope of a valley. Through this repetition, we engage with our perception of existence and vitality. Human beings are a pit filled with repetition, endeavoring to empty their own essence; Afif Bahktari, in his spectacles, becomes weary of repetition. In his view, all the days of his life are akin:

"A day when existence is like the other days of the year
Constantly giving reminders of dead transfers
Snow is a possibility at night, snow is a possibility in the morning
Curses for prediction and such a multitude of possibilities"

(Bakhtari, 1382, p. 110)

These repetitions in Master Bahktari's poetry are manifested through repetitions of expressions and various symbols; one such repetition is found in the form of repeating the first verse of a ghazal at the end of the same ghazal. Ancients referred to this poetic technique as "from discourse to impotence," which is evident here in the display of repetitive despair. Anyone engaged in creation and creativity constructs and plays a trick on themselves to rescue themselves from the futile cycle of repetition. The issue of death, which in Master Afif's poetry is expressed in various forms of repetition, is a tendency to assert oneself for liberation from repetition:

"Helpless am I who have passed so much from myself
More helpless than a woman who has become a captive in herself
Take another path and go towards non-being
Take another cup and die on that side."

(Bakhtari, 1382, p. 121)

**Window:** The window is one of the positive symbols of contemporary poetry, which, considering the overall structure of poetry, the personal experiences of the poet, its relationship with other words, combinations, and the background of composing poetry, can be a symbol and a glimpse into the poet's perspective and insight, leading towards freedom and liberation.

"Jump out of the window, let's go for a walk
Two people walking on the pavement warmly"

(Bakhtari, 1382, p. 123)

Jumping out of the window, entering his poetry, you get lost. Life in his poetry is not the description of life itself, but life itself. He does not describe the eyes facing him. Instead, his language and mind create such a space that we see it without any description:

"Unless my fear of my shadow was not enough
That I become more scared when I look at you"

(Bakhtari, 1382, p. 66)

**Love:** Love is one of the symbols, especially in the poems of Afif Bahktari, a love that is gone and a longing. Throughout his poems, he delves into his own longing:

"What a pity, your pair has gone with the wind
Cursed be the wind, look at your wings and feathers"

(Bakhtari, 1382, p. 21)

When love leaves, it becomes eternal. This eternity is very entertaining and deceiving for those involved in beauty and art. One of Afif's ways to escape repetition is this very love, which, of course, is repetition itself, but each time it has a unique manifestation:

"In your imagination, the farther I go
In the river of love, one night I become buoyant
Daily, I wish two hundred times for happiness
Speaking more poetically and becoming eloquent"

(Bakhtari, 1382, p. 42)

Similarly, when love departs, it becomes so deceitful that the noble trait of this worldly existence is lost, and it seems as if a superior love resides in a sublime world. Afif Bahktari's love becomes Platonic. According to Afif Bahktari's own words, "You turn from a woman to a bee," this woman who becomes a bee, her choices become sweet. Afif Bahktari's love, with the peculiarities he mentions about love, is an idealistic love. One of those peculiarities is timelessness. Afif goes to the grave with his love, but this love cannot be buried, and time has no effect on it:

"After a thousand years, if I see you again
My beloved! This is it, and I'm even more in love with you"

(Bakhtari, 1382, p. 32)
In addition, another characteristic he counts for his love is that he does not consider his love to be of the ordinary kind. He divides love and expresses his discomfort with the miserable state that the people of the time have brought upon love:

"I wrote an everyday poem for love
A love that they drag back to absurdity
A love whose ridiculous image is set aside
We pulled a heart shot with coal"
(Bahktari, 1382, p. 45)

**Autumn, Winter/Spring**

The symbols of autumn and winter, in contrast to spring, appear in Bahktari's poetry after the confrontation of death/life, in the form of an eye-catching presence. The confrontation between these two is mostly formed implicitly with some spring items such as garden, orchard, forest, greenery, autumn flowers, pine, etc. This type of symbolism can be clearly observed in his ghazal, which is intertwined with the confrontation of death/life:

'I'm fed up with these autumn days,
No longer interested in mixing colors.
I'm fed up with you falling into yourself,
What plans do you have for my murder?
Both you and I are knots in the rings of death,
Two steps further, you're hanging on a noose.
If you're not alive, why did you give your heart to living?
If you're not dead, why don't you rise from the grave?
Alive again, dead again, alive again, dead...
Again, you're at odds with yourself these days.
Again, hosting daily programs,
Again, witnessing breakfast on a table.
Pour the wine, it won't stick anymore,
My heart is taken these days, by everything.'
(Bakhtari, 149, p. 191)

The poet's spiritual and intellectual state or the environment of his life is such that he either sees the symbol of spring very transiently or experiences another winter without seeing spring.

"The new year has not been two days old
That the swallow has traveled and it has become winter"
(Bahktari, 149, p. 103)

In many of these symbols, the poet shows his self-identification with natural elements; for example, in autumn, the migration of birds and the autumn flowers upset him.

"It's autumn, and whoever thinks of travel
Including a loved one [,Gul Suri', red flower], my dear"
(Bahktari, 149, p. 97)

In the opportunity of the autumn attack on the garden,
It was the migration of birds that passed through the sky.
(Bahktari, 149, p. 140)

Similarly, he sees a pine in himself that receives a hundred fresh wounds from autumn every moment but does not fall off its feet:

"In me, there is a pine tree that every moment of autumn Receives a hundred fresh wounds but remains standing"
(Bahktari, 149, p. 105)

Or elsewhere, he asks about the condition of the garden:
"Oh garden! From which old crow? Have your green voices turned gray?"
(Bahktari, 149, p. 122)

**Pigeon/Cage:**

"Without you, I am condemned to flapping
The cage, big and small, is dark in my view"
(Bahktari, 149, p. 41)

**Wolf/Cage:**

"How does the wolf submit to the law of the jungle?
A wolf that howls from inside the cage"
(Bakhtari, 149, p. 189)

Often, his poems reflect his pain from social instability and people's indifference to each other's suffering, and this bitterness even appears in his seemingly romantic poems. This issue has led to a sense of irony in his language about this bitterness.

"Shiraz twists in his pain,
Each person's pain is their own affair."

Various factors have led Afif Bakhtari to create and utilize symbols in his poetry. One of the influential and fundamental factors in the creation of dual symbols in his poetry is his contemplation of death. The presence of death and the absence of life are among the main and prominent symbols in his poetry. This primary symbol serves as the foundation for the formation of many other symbols. Dual symbols in Afif Bakhtari's poetry exist in three categories: verbal, literary, and intellectual. Many of the verbal and literary symbols, despite appearing to be in conflict, have also acted as examples of the poet's intellectual symbolism.

**Layla/Majnun:**

"And the wind came and twisted around Majnun's willow
Spreading Layla's scent to every corner"
(Bahktari, 149, p. 159)
Night/ingale/Poppies:  
"Facing the valley where you, my nightingale, sing  
Your torch has become the lantern of poppies"  
(Bahktari, 149, p. 10)

Existence/Non-existence:  
"Open a door to existence in my eyes  
So the whirlwind of non-existence won't engulf me"  
(Bahktari, 149, p. 95)

Cold/Warm:  
"When the cold and warmth of the world is all within me  
Why wouldn't the measure of the world be my vastness?"  
(Bahktari, 149, p. 108)

Root/Tide:  
"In root and tide, my song is fervent  
I play you in the instrument of the sea"  
(Bahktari, 149, p. 109)

Symbol of collective nostalgia in Afif Bahktari's poetry:  
What comes to the poet's tongue are the sorrows and pains that have made the memory of people in a region troubled, and they are, in fact, collectively unpleasant. Remembering it from the poet's tongue evokes a universal pain in the minds. In the symbol of collective nostalgia, the poet or writer pays attention to a specific and special social situation. In the symbol of collective nostalgia, formed unconsciously by the collective subconscious, a longing for common pains is expressed, and elements such as mythologizing, archaism, and inclination to utopianism are used alongside some linguistic functions. Collective nostalgia, compared to personal nostalgia, is more important because of its longing, memories, and collective and common sorrows. It can transcend the borders of time and space through poetic imagery. This type of nostalgia is related to the collective subconscious. When our poet looks at the social conditions of his time, a mood of disillusionment, darkness, and the gloominess of a life misled by some people in society emerges. Instability and betrayal, the incompetence of individuals, and the like in social space increase the poet's pain and sorrow. He sees himself in this chaotic market with those who share his suffering, saying:

"Rain, sidewalk, bread grief, severe cough  
No one saw your busy loneliness  
This is not a poem, it's my letter from the border of purgatory  
After reviewing me, tear me apart  
And my eyes will open to the world anew  
If the door of my room hits the key  
Oh death! Reveal my destiny  
Let me disappear into you again"  
(Bahktari, 1382, p. 151)
represent most of the dual intellectual symbols in the poet's work. Afif, in various parts of his divan, without any deliberation or hesitation, depicts his despair; wherever he speaks of himself, he also uses qualities such as helpless, exhausted, miserable, incapable... Perhaps this despair has increased when the sun of his life has set behind the mountain of sunset, and that child bird that he could not place in his desired nest and take care of is flying away; because old age has a more affecting and discouraging concept and carries the message of death and decay. The overt symbols used in his poems are mostly the same symbols that exist in Persian poetry tradition and are still present in everyday language. Another type of dual symbolism in Bakhtari's poetry is literary symbols that, with less frequency than overt and implicit symbols, are present. In summary, most of the themes and symbols used in Afif Bakhtari's poetry are about death, life, and the vanity of the world. Afif has witnessed the death of his loved ones, so with the arrangement of burning words, he has depicted his heartache and chest pain in losing his loved ones; because the death of loved ones is one of the psychologically devastating sorrows of human beings. Those who are sitting in the center of mourning for their loved ones are more affected by the emotional and mental consequences of their death and experience special psychological and emotional states. The regret of loved ones is the regret of losing life, not bread, because the death of loved ones creates various reactions ranging from physical reactions to mental states in human beings, and each of these reactions creates feelings of guilt, anger, anxiety, insecurity, disbelief, sleep and appetite disorders in human beings, and humans are always thinking of the deceased in the delusion of hearing their voice and seeing them.

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