



# ARUNACHALA COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING FOR WOMEN

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...Chimamanda...Ngazi...Adichie's...  
...Americanah.....*

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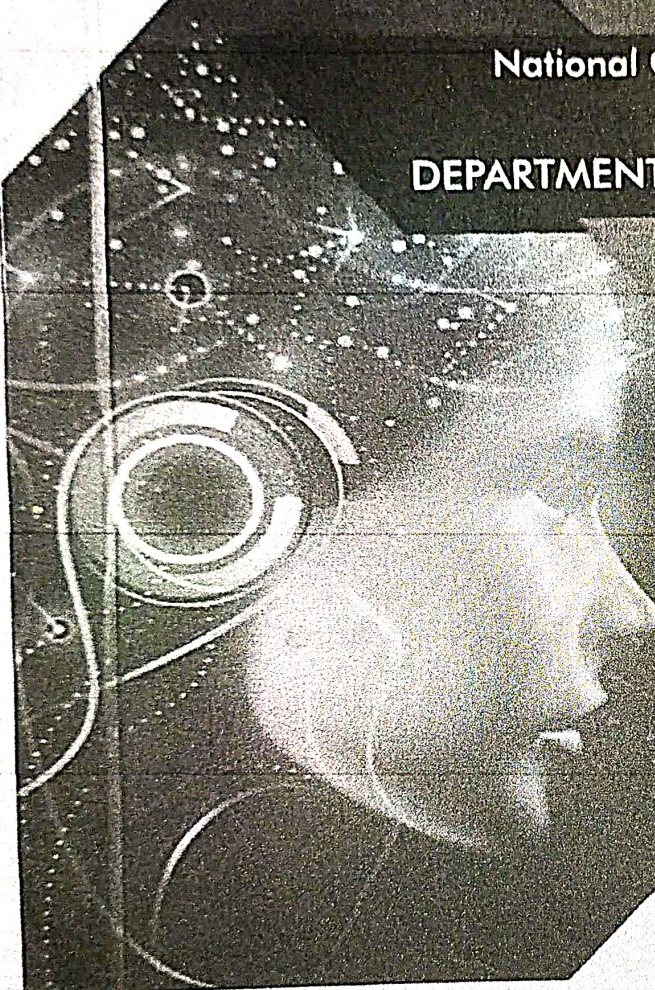
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**MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES  
ON THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**National Conference 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

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Symbolism of the Natural Objects in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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**Abstract:**

Nature is one of the most powerful and mysterious forces of the universe that influences man greatly. Nature has always been an indispensable part of literature. In *Americanah* nature is given a place of prime importance, both as provider of symbols and images, and as a tangible realm. The symbols and images of the novel are drawn from the natural world, and are used predominantly to explain and give significance to the protagonists and their emotions. Adichie uses nature, both as a character in itself and as an essential element in the creation of his main characters.

**Key words:** Nature, Symbols, Birds, Myth, Trees.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist, essayist, poet, playwright, and short story writer. She also writes under the pseudonym Amanda N. Adichie. Adichie's third novel *Americanah* is a work that spans three continents and revolves around the love, migration, return and reunion of the two main characters, Ifemelu and Obinze., who both grow up in Nigeria. Some few years into college, Ifemelu obtains an American visa and migrates to continue with her education. The writer handles this separation by developing two plot lines that trace their different experiences: Ifemelu in America and Obinze in Nigeria, Britain and his eventual return to Nigeria.

The word symbol is derived from Latin word 'symbolum' which means 'creed, token, mark' and from Greek word 'symbolon' which means 'token, watchword, sign'. It is taken from the root words 'syn' which means 'with or together' and 'ballein' which means "throwing" or which nearly means "throwing together." (McCormack, 1) Symbolism is a genre of literature that evolved from symbolism. It is also a specific literary trend that expresses ideas and emotions by suggesting rather than directly describing or defining who they are. Symbolism can explain that an objective item corresponding to a particular meaning or idea can be captured in daily life or the surrounding environment. Symbolism does not only give powerful message (Green, 2013), but also adds the richness of a story and shares the author philosophies (O'neal, 2013).

This paper gives focus to some recurrent nature symbols that appear all through the narrative and play a vital role in Adichie's novel. Nature symbols in her novel, foretells what is going to happen to her protagonists and they are closely connected to the main plot of her stories.

In her novel, nature is seen as a living character that leads and controls the action. The novel takes place, move and end in a formidable situation of nature. The novel is abundantly rich with symbols drawn from nature. Throughout her novel Adichie uses symbols from nature to describe various emotional situations. Whenever nature symbols appear in her fiction, it suggests something deeper, more abstract, than the literal, sensual aspect of the image itself.

Adichie's third novel, *Americanah* is one that captures the love story of the protagonist, Ifemelu and Obinze through different stages – finding love, separation and reunification. It is a novel that narrates not only the love story of the two protagonists, but one that focuses on contemporary issues such as migration, dislocation, race, alterity and identity as they affect African migrants in Western diaspora.

Adichie frequently use nature symbols as subject matter in her third novel *Americanah*. She uses such symbols to represent what he wanted to discuss in the story. Nature Symbols used in the novel influence psychological development of the characters. They represent mostly human concepts of life, sense of identity and self-esteem of the main character in Adichie's *Americanah*.

Adichie's treatment of nature is extremely symbolic. So it is obligatory to know the symbolic significance of nature used by Adichie in order to have complete understanding of her fiction. Adichie, through her usage of animal symbols, indicates the kind of nature towards sorrowful and tortured mind of human beings. It indicates that man, in the lap of nature, is always happy and satisfied.

Adichie treats Nature in her novel *Americanah* to communicate human experiences such as psychological, mystical, spiritual and other spirits of the characters in the novel. She treats Nature highly symbolically to reveal to the reader abstract world of the novel to the reader. Adichie have used nature to show the hidden and abstract life as well as the psychological condition of the characters reflected through the objects of nature. Nature becomes an active participant in the novels.

Ifemelu's relationship with Blaine, who is African-American, seems to go smoothly at first, since both of them are interested in discussing race and its role in America. As time passes, however, it becomes apparent that Ifemelu does not fit in with Blaine, his friends, and their intellectual discussions. She becomes fed up with their constant criticisms, seeming to view them as closed-minded and snobbish group of people with whom she does not want to associate with. From that perspective, it is understandable that Ifemelu would want to end her relationship with Blaine.

When she moves all her cloths from his apartment, Blaine said " Take the plant" (7). It was Blaine's house plant with hopeful green leaves rising from three bamboo stems. When Ifemelu received it she felt strange feelings. She had sudden loneliness inside her heart. Blaine plant is a symbol of Ifemelu's past days with Blaine which she unable to remove from her heart. The plant is a constant representative of reminder of your favourite memories together. In order to overcome her loneliness Ifemelu decided to come back to Nigeria.

When Ifemelu searching for a job, she answers an ad looking for a female personal assistant for a tennis coach. The blonde man invites her into his office, which is in the basement, and says that he's looking for an assistant to help him relax. He'll pay one hundred dollars a day. Ifemelu feels uneasy, and finally decides to leave.

Ifemelu's 'American dream' is definitely over by now, as she finds herself unable to find any but the most unappetizing job and is constantly panicking about money. When she is waiting for the train in the station, she noticed the trees. Adichie describes, "The trees were awash with color, red and yellow leaves tinted the air golden, and she thought of the words she had recently read somewhere: Nature's first green is gold. The crisp air, fragrant and dry, reminded her of Nsukka during the harmattan season, and brought with it a sudden stab of homesickness, so sharp and so abrupt that it filled her eyes with tears" (144)

In many African myths and stories, the tree is portrayed as an ancestral symbol of wisdom, authority and custom, providing a bond between the dead and the living. Rituals and ceremonies which draw on tree symbols often serve to link people with their cultural heritage, as well as their ancestral past. The tree is a maternal symbol: a protector and provider who gives fruit, other foods and medicines, provides a reservoir for water, protects against the elements and evil spirits. The tree often symbolizes human fecundity. It may also be a phallic and paternal symbol, symbolically linking people with their ancestors while being a symbol of political unity.

Here trees are the symbol of nostalgia. It is our sense of smell that most often triggers a feeling of nostalgia: "Anatomically, the nose directly connects with the olfactory lobe in the limbic system – that area of the brain considered the seat of the emotions. The olfactory lobe is actually part and parcel of the limbic system" (MacLean, 1973). The sweet fragrant of the tree, immediately make her to remember her hometown. Symbolism of tree remind Ifemelu of what she has lost and provide her with a moment that she has once again.

Aunty Uju starts dating a divorced Nigerian man named Bartholomew. Later she leaves Bartholomew because of his inability to provide her with a comfortable life by either American or Nigerian standards. Because she dated Bartholomew in part to recreate her relationship with The General, she expected Bartholomew to take care of her financially and behave as a father to Dike. Instead, Bartholomew takes ownership of Aunty Uju's money and refuses to allow her any control over it.

Aunty Uju decides that she cannot put herself aside for someone who gives nothing in return, demonstrating new growth and confidence. Finally she leaves him. She and Dike move to a town called Willow. Aunty Uju reclaims her life when she moves to Willow. Adichie states, "Ifemelu liked the name of the town, Willow; it sounded to her like freshly squeezed beginnings" (220).

'Willow' is a tree name. The willow trees have always had positive symbolism. It is a symbol for all the women who come through our doors. A symbol that represents each journey, struggle, and pain as well as a symbol of recovery and hope for the future. The willow tree is one of the few trees that is capable of bending in outrageous poses without snapping. This can be a powerful metaphor for those of us seeking recovery. So like the willow tree, the town named Willow bring bright future for Aunty Uju.

At the later part of the novel, Ifemelu, who has been homesick for nearly thirteen years, quits her job as a prolific blogger and moves to modern and lively Nigeria. Adichie says, "Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (6).

Birds are ecological beacons in the environment. African societies attach different beliefs to different birds. Some birds are viewed as signs of bad omen yet others as the reverse. For instance, the vulture is regarded as a sign of death whereas the dove is seen as a bird of grace or good fortune. In addition, some African societies believe that certain birds possess significance for specific occasions or ceremonies like *circumcision*. Traditional African narratives include many bird characters, demonstrating the widespread idea that birds are closely related to humans. Since birds are generally appreciated as guardians of human life, they play a positive role in African story and myth, often appearing in times of crisis. Birds can carry urgent and important messages about a protagonist, hence opening up possibilities of salvation for the latter. In addition, birds can also reveal human character by testing for such virtues as patience and faithfulness. Ultimately, there is a certain reciprocity between birds and humankind in African story and myth.

Ifemelu's new apartment in Lagos is situated next to an abandoned residential compound. A peacock and two peahens live there. Peacocks are known for their striking plume of blue and green feathers and their bright blue bodies. Most of the time, the peacock's feathers trail behind its body like a long train. When a peacock wants to impress a peahen, his feathers unfurl in a fanlike display. When Obinze first visits Ifemelu's apartment, Ifemelu tells him she's disappointed that she hasn't seen the male do the mating dance.

The peacock's unwillingness to do his mating dance in front of Ifemelu is symbolic of Obinze's own reluctance to do his own version of a mating dance for Ifemelu, namely ending his relationship with Kosi so that he and Ifemelu can be together. In her mind, his calls and texts after their breakup are half-hearted at best, and she is hurt by the limpness of his efforts, which are equivalent to the peacock's tail dragging behind him. Like the peahens, Ifemelu does not engage with Obinze's attempts to reach out.

Ifemelu's desire to see the male peacock dance culminates in an anticlimax where the female peacock rejects his advances, highlighting the ultimate failure of superficial splendour. Ifemelu has just returned from America, which, despite its glossy promise of success, has only led her to return to the more chaotic Lagos, which she feels is authentic to her identity.

Like the glossy images of America, the male peacock is beautiful, but his beauty does not seduce the female peacock. The failure of the male peacock also echoes Obinze's failed attempt to carry on an affair with Ifemelu. Although Obinze has shown Ifemelu his new wealth and even implied a willingness to invest in her new blog, she finds it to be no substitute for living with him honestly.

Like the male peacock, his lavish display of wealth does not hold up, and results in Obinze looking as ridiculous as the bird itself. Ifemelu's growth throughout the novel is centered around embracing authenticity, and the female peacock's rejection of the male succinctly summarizes her newfound self, who prefers reality to a beautiful image. In the book's final chapter, Ifemelu finally sees the peacock's dance. Not long after, Obinze shows

up at Ifemelu's door. He has just left Kosi and begun the first steps of the mating dance for which Ifemelu has been waiting for so long. In Adichie's *Americanah* nature symbols play a crucial role in writing and reveal hidden messages to the readers. Such symbols give opportunity to the readers to connect with the novel from a different point of view. The contribution of nature symbols provide with a vehicle to understand the psychological experiences that were associates in the Adichie's work. The development of psychology that entails the estimation of maturation and environmental influences is the one that can analyst the environmental intervention in the face of genetic constraints. The nature symbols appear in Adichie's novel serve as reminders of the rich relationship between human and the nature. Adichie's nature symbolism is not only a way to enrich the writing and create an added layer of interest, but is a vital part of the novel and that without the symbolism, communicating central views and ideas to the reader would not have been possible. Adichie is believed to have revolutionized nature by resorting to it as a source of symbolism and inspiration.

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