

Symbolism of Identity, Resistance, and Community in Samira Ahmed's 'Internment' During Conflict

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Abstract:

Literature is a vast and complex field of written expression that includes a variety of genres, including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama. At its core, literature is an art form that uses language to convey ideas, emotions, and experiences, offering a deep exploration of the complexities of human existence. Samira Ahmed's *Internment* is a thought-provoking work that explores a dark and oppressive future that targeted American Muslims in concentration camps only because of their religion. The main character, Leila Amin, finds herself in one of these camps and suffers from the loss of freedom and daily injustices that come upon her community. Symbolism uses symbols to convey deeper or figurative meanings in a literary work. The symbols can be a word, sign, object, or image whose meaning does not match its literal or implied meaning. Symbolism can represent abstract concepts such as love and death. Symbols can provide a more accurate understanding because they can convey complex ideas. In this research, the researcher applies the qualitative method by gathering data from text examination, investigation of behaviors, or interviewees.

Keywords: Literature; Symbolism; Ideas; Emotions.

Abstrak:

Sastra adalah bidang ekspresi tertulis yang luas dan kompleks yang mencakup berbagai genre, termasuk fiksi, puisi nonfiksi, dan drama. Pada intinya, sastra adalah suatu bentuk seni yang menggunakan bahasa untuk menyampaikan ide, emosi, dan pengalaman, menawarkan eksplorasi mendalam tentang kompleksitas keberadaan manusia. *Internment* karya Samira Ahmed, adalah karya yang menggugah pikiran yang mengeksplorasi masa depan yang gelap dan menindas di mana Muslim Amerika menjadi sasaran kamp konsentrasi semata-mata karena agama mereka. Tokoh utama, Leila Amin, mendapati dirinya berada di salah satu kamp ini dan dia menderita karena hilangnya kebebasan dan ketidakadilan sehari-hari yang menimpa komunitasnya. Simbolisme adalah penggunaan simbol-simbol untuk menyampaikan makna yang lebih dalam atau kiasan dalam sebuah karya sastra. Simbol tersebut dapat berupa kata, tanda, benda, atau gambar yang maknanya tidak sesuai dengan makna sebenarnya atau tersirat. Simbolisme dapat mewakili konsep abstrak seperti cinta dan kematian. Simbol dapat memberikan pemahaman yang lebih nyata karena dapat menyampaikan gagasan yang kompleks. Dalam melakukan penelitian ini peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif, dimana data dikumpulkan dari pemeriksaan teks, penyelidikan perilaku, atau orang yang diwawancarai.

Kata kunci: Sastra; Simbolisme; Ide; Emosi.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a complex field of written expression that includes a variety of genres. Literature provides historical context and insight into the past and allows readers to understand different eras' perspectives, beliefs, and challenges. One of the exciting literary works is *Internment* by Samira Ahmed. Samira Ahmed's *Internment* is a thought-provoking work that explores a dark and oppressive future where American Muslims are the victims in concentration camps solely because of their religion. The main character, Leila Amin, finds herself in one of these camps, and she suffers from the loss of freedom and daily injustices that befall her community. The novel raises important questions about discrimination, the erosion of civil liberties, and the impact of unchecked prejudice. Her journey of joining others in the struggle against oppressive systems and becoming a symbol of resistance highlights the importance of unity and courage in the face of adversity. Through its powerful story, *Internment* functions as a social commentary that invites readers to reflect on the potential dangers of discrimination and the importance of confronting injustice to protect an inclusive society.

Samira Ahmed wrote *Internment* in response to the increasing xenophobia, discrimination, and Islamophobia in today's society. The novel serves as a dystopian examination of what happens when such prejudice becomes extreme and leads to the incarceration of entire religious communities. Ahmed aims to shed light on social justice, civil liberties, and the impact of discrimination on oppressed communities.

This study focuses on how Samira Ahmed uses symbols in *Internment* to reflect and critique modern social issues such as discrimination, civil liberties erosion, and xenophobia. It guides this study to dig into the symbolic elements in the novel, such as the internment camps, wristbands, and the title itself, and how these symbols mirror real-world discrimination, aiming to foster empathy and social awareness among readers. This research will further examine how Ahmed's use of symbolism invites readers to consider the consequences of indifference toward social injustice and to recognize the importance of resistance, resilience, and empathy in the face of systemic oppression.

The significance of studying *Internment* by Samira Ahmed is to understand the exploration of systemic discrimination, Islamophobia, and the erosion of civil liberties. Through the use of symbolism, the novel emphasizes the real-world dangers of prejudice when it goes unchecked, illustrating this through a dystopian portrayal where American



Muslims face internment solely based on their religious identity. This fictional yet poignant depiction reflects a critique of rising xenophobia. It serves as a reminder of historical injustices, like the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII, reinforcing the need to recognize and counter similar forms of discrimination in modern society.

Some researchers discussed the internment by Samira Ahmed. Researchers found an article entitled *Discourse and Power: A Foucauldian Analysis of Samira Ahmed's Internment* by Sonayana Saeed, Asma Kaleem, and Yasir Arafat (Saeed et al., 2021). This study focused on analyzing discourse as an instrument used by American elites to influence the masses and exploit the Muslims living in America. The study shows that discourse becomes a weapon of resistance used by Muslims against their persecutors as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Symbolism

According to (Of & Science, 2019) Symbolism is something that means deeper than actual meaning. The symbols can be a word, sign, object, or image whose meaning does not match its literal or implied meaning. Symbols are used to represent ideas and thoughts that can evoke various thoughts, emotions, or interpretations. It is necessary to identify symbols, understand the context, and then explore the meaning of those symbols in order to analyze symbolism in a literary work. Symbols can also reflect culture. The meaning of a symbol can be different due to cultural differences. Cultural differences and periods or histories can make the interpretation of symbols different. Fadaee (2011) defined symbols as "a communication element intended to simply represent or stand for a complex of person, object, group, or idea." It is a kind of figures of speech used for increasing the beauty of the text and has figurative meaning besides its literal meaning. This step explores how the identified symbols connect to convey a broader message and develop a central theme. Symbolic motifs, recurring elements that enhance the depth and coherence of the narrative, further enrich the analysis by revealing patterns that resonate throughout the text. At the end of the analysis, the researchers combine all discussions. The aim is to summarize critical symbolic elements, trace their development, and reveal their collective influence on a literary work's overall meaning and thematic richness. Through this comprehensive exploration, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the complex

network of symbols, revealing the subtle networks that make up the story's deeper meaning.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the researcher uses a qualitative method. Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study (Stadtländer, 2009). Qualitative research aims to explore the complexity of human experience, cognition, and behavior. This method focuses on collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, often collected through techniques such as interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document analysis. In this way, researchers aim to understand in depth the underlying meanings, motivations, and social contexts that shape individuals' lives. This method is beneficial when investigating new or poorly understood phenomena, generating hypotheses, and gaining a deeper understanding of social and cultural contexts. Qualitative methods can significantly contribute to developing theory and studying various aspects of human behavior and society.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The symbols analyzed in the book "Internment" by Samira Ahmed reveal the theme of oppression. Based on the analysis, various symbols were found, such as the title "internment" itself, the internment camps, and the wristband, which became the main discovery.

The Title Internment

Internment is a loaded symbol, carrying historical weight and evoking specific themes in *The Internment Camps*. The title immediately draws parallels to historical cases of internment, such as the forced relocation and internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. By choosing this title, the author suggests a connection to injustice and discrimination in real life. The term "internment" refers to the suspension of civil liberties, denial of personal liberty, and targeted persecution of specific groups based on prejudice and fear. The symbolism in the title sets the novel's tone, preparing readers to confront issues of systemic discrimination and encouraging them to reflect on the impact of such actions in today's society. This also encourages consideration of society's responsibility to prevent the recurrence of injustices that occurred in the past and critically examine the consequences of discriminatory policies. The title is a practical entry point into the novel's exploration of themes surrounding identity, resilience, and the struggle against oppression.

The Internment Camps

The internment camps serve as a powerful symbol representing the dark consequences of unchecked prejudice and fear. These camps reflect examples of injustice in history, such as the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. This symbolism extends to broader issues such as discrimination, loss of civil liberties, and dehumanization of target communities. By placing his characters in these groups, the author emphasizes the dangers of allowing fear and prejudice to shape government policy and encourages readers to consider the natural consequences of such actions. This symbolism also encourages readers to reflect on the impact of discriminatory practices on individuals and communities, thereby encouraging empathy and understanding.

The Wristband

The wristband worn by individuals in the internment camps symbolizes control, surveillance, and the loss of personal agency. These bracelets are a factual representation of the government's repressive actions. By forcing individuals to wear them, authorities exert control and establish a system of ongoing surveillance. This symbolism extends to real-world examples of discrimination, that oppressed communities face surveillance and limited freedoms.

CONCLUSION

The symbolism in Samira Ahmed's *Internment* is a powerful tool that adds meaning to the story, allowing readers to connect deeply with the complex social issues and the profound impact of discrimination. Through symbols representing confinement, oppression, and defiance, Ahmed illuminates the resilience of oppressed communities, encouraging readers to reflect on the importance of standing up against injustice. Each symbol becomes a call to action, urging readers to confront social structures that perpetuate inequality and to consider their roles in advocating for civil liberties. By weaving these symbols into the narrative, Ahmed enhances the story. He provides readers with a lens to critically engage with the themes of resistance, solidarity, and the fight for a more compassionate world. In doing so, *Internment* becomes a work of fiction and a timely exploration of the ongoing struggle for human rights and social equity, inspiring readers to imagine and work toward a world free from discrimination.

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