

## **Knowing Through the Senses: Vision, Touch, and Smell as Epistemological Gateways in *The Sorcery of the Senses***

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### **Abstract:**

This paper attempts to explore the role of senses presented in the novel entitled *The Sorcery of the Senses* written by Tanima Das, emphasizing the senses as vision (Dristi), touch (Sparsha) and smell (Ghraan) which serve as doors to knowledge, recollection and spiritual awakening. The novel is amalgamation of fantasy, mythological concepts and contemporary social concerns. Tanima Das personifies the senses which create innovative magical realistic structure. It has a connection with reincarnation. Das presents the senses as moral as well as metaphysical representations. However, the novel seems the unique interfusion of modern theories and philosophical traditions. The attributes such as remembering or recollecting, healing and awakening have direct connection with the senses of vision, touch and smell. The senses become the guides of Dhruv which guide him as moral agents for his redemption and universal balance. The novel proves to be the best contribution to fantasy literature. The senses have become mediums of knowing, spiritual awakening and emotional bonding. The novel explores the significance of healing that comes from synthesizing separate parts of the self. Memory is presented as intuitive instead of being always rational.

**Keywords:** Vision, Touch, Smell, Truth, Fantasy.

### **Introduction**

*The Sorcery of the Senses* renders a remarkable contribution to the world of fantasy literature by making fusion of bodily experience with philosophical traits. Tanima Das is one of the greatest Indian novelists, who through her novel entitled *The Sorcery of the Senses* presents the magical power of the senses that reside within human body. Tanima Das is also great short story writer for which she won awards. Her short stories are published in Magazines as Woman's Era. She also won Write India Contest. The novel *The Sorcery of the Senses* unveils not only physiological functions of the senses but also as epistemological mediums that counsel the characters for the truth, spiritual and moral awakening. Dhruv is the chief character of this novel around him the story revolves. Dhruv is shown to be modern man who gradually realizes that he is the reincarnation of various past lives as Ghriz, a tribal girl

who is given the task of protecting the holy stone of creation. Mong, is entangled in betrayal. Vision (Dristi), touch (Sparasha), and smell (Ghraan) are personified as divine guardians. These senses are active agents. Vision allows him to see the present as well as past and future. Touch is not shown merely physical contact but also attribute of redemption and healing. Smell is intuitive force that presents recognition.

The novel shows the protection of the holy stone by the five senses. Dhruv, the protagonist of the novel, is middle-aged man who struggles with misery and personal loss. He is portrayed as emotionally detached. His personal sufferings make his life sorrowful. He lost his parents and is divorced from his wife Juthika. For the sake of solace in his life he returns to his ancestral house situated in Raukipur. He encounters one of the senses as Dristi (Vision). However, Dhruv has gone through several lives in the past and was entrusted with significant mission of protecting holy stone. But in his both lives he is shown to have failed in protecting the holy stone. The senses tell Dhruv that holy stone is significant for keeping sanctity and balance of universe. The novel is a journey of Dhruv's past lives. He is shown to have gone back in his past two lives (Two births) where he was Griz as a tribal girl and Mong as a blind girl respectively.

### **Review of Literature**

The *Sorcery of the Senses* is a kind of great fantasy novel. However, the fantasy novel delves into magical realms, presents quest, mythical creature, and characters' complexity. Fantasy novels also present good versus evil. There are several fantasy novels written by several writers as *The Ocean at the End of the Lan* written by Neil Gaiman, *The name of the Wind*, written by Patrick Rothfuss, *A Discovery of Witches* written by Deborah Harkness, *The Night Circus* written by Erin Morgenstern etc. However, Tanima Das's *The Sorcery of the Senses* is the greatest Indian fantasy novel. It is deeply delved in spiritual and sensory epistemology. The novel presents vision, touch and smell as the ways of knowing.

The novel explores the journey of soul and unveiling of hidden powers of senses. Dhruv, through his present and past lives, is presented with different experiences and tasks. Reincarnation of his soul gives him experiences of different facets of life. His task of protecting the holy stone, which maintains the cosmic balance. For creative writing and amazing plot Tanima Das is praised by several book reviewers. One of Book Reviews published in Wizardencil blog an imaginative power and the fantasy world that Tanima Das created in this novel is appreciated. In it, Das's sensitive manner and her subtlety for touching the subjects as female foeticide, adultery and imbalance in domestic life is also praised. To appreciate Tanima Das Wizardencil blog writes, "The absolutely unique idea. A fantasy journey around senses just blew my mind. The authors rich imagination run high and one would be stuck at the beautiful imagery created by her." (Wizardencil blog).

*Aura of Thoughts* comments on Das's idea of presenting importance of the senses in the life of the human being. According to *Aura of Thoughts* Das has presented ideology of the senses, as the Five senses of the human beings help them throughout the life even when the rational mind of human beings cannot do that thing. Chandrika R. Krishnan expressed her frank opinion in her book review of *The Sorcery of the Senses*. She likes the life of Ghriz.

She says, “The life of Ghriz as a tribe head and her journey in the forest. It was an enchanting experience.” (C. Krishnan). Chandrika R. Krishnan refers the line from the novel as, “In those seven days, she found more flaws in herself than she had in the previous 26 years,” which Chandrika R. Krishnan considers this line as one of the best lines of this novel.

### **Vision (Dristi)**

Here, the value of the Vision is enhanced into perception not merely a sight. It enables Dhruv to unfold the truths of his past lives. Vision takes Dhruv to the past to see his self as Ghriz. Ghriz was a tribal girl who was offered the task of protecting the holy stone. It amalgamates personal memory, metaphysical obligations and mythic lineage. Inner sight and intrinsic motivation enable us to see true knowledge. Significance of insight at the inner level is highlighted in the novel. Dhruv in his past life where Dristi takes him was Ghriz, a tribal girl having some powers and the responsibility of guarding the holy stone. Anita Desai portrayed the scene of taking Dhruv to his past life attractively and skillfully, as it is presented in the novel as:

*He stands stiffly while Dristi comes and touches him on the forehead at the point between his eyes, where the third eye is supposed to be Dhruv feels the blackness around him disintegrate in an instant and it takes him to a place so unknown yet so familiar. And he begins to observe the lives of people from another land, another time.* (Das, p. 9)

### **Sparsha (Touch)**

Sparsha (Touch), as an effective sensory metaphor plays a significant role in Dhruv's life. As vision allows Dhruv to see the truth, Sparsha (Touch) makes him able to feel it. Sensing and feeling the truth becomes imperative. He is involved in suffering, restoring of others and also in healing. However, the novel shows that knowledge can be felt and is tactile, it is stored in memory, nerves and within. knowledge remains deeply rooted inside. The writer presents how the knowledge gets outlet through him. His memories do not come before his mind directly but are felt through aches, longings and warmth. As Das writes,

*With these words Sparsha conjures up a light at the tip of his ring finger and touches Dhruv in between the eyes. Everything in front of Dhruv begins to melt down to give way to idyllic mountains from a faraway place. It is a place that is completely unknown to him, yet Dhruv knows that he has been there. He has lived there in another body, at another time.* (Das, p. 110)

Touch enhances the significance of ethical understanding, as a kind of moral accountability. Thus, Dhruv, who was passive now becomes agent of morality and reconnection. In incarnation of Mong, Dhruv inherits physical and moral understanding.

### **Ghraan (Smell)**

Third sensory is Ghraan (Smell), which plays significant role as intuition and familiarity. Smell is vital sense. It works for recognition. The smell's unique importance is presented as it embodies memory. The inner parts of the body work with direct attachment of the smell. Working of the smell also emerges from within. Its sudden and spontaneous eruption enhances its value because many of the things can be grasped from within that we cannot grasp from outside or rationally. Smell bears sacred importance. Through this sense Dhruv recollects his buried memory and thus gets guided for his sacred mission and spiritual

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understanding. Ghraan transforms Dhruv from passive to active and renders him spiritual and ancestral knowledge.

Tanima Das's unique concept and reconstructing of fantasy and imaginative world is praised widely by the readers and reviewers. Presentation of different cultures, indispensability of spiritual, moral and ethical values, narrative structure and Dhruv's journey through previous two lives really make the novel praiseworthy. Tanima Das effectively created fantasy world with very significant message to the world.

Thus, *The Sorcery of the Senses* presents the senses as Vision, Touch and Smell with their core values. Touch, Smell and Vision reflect the invaluable path that reaches the hidden memories and emotions. The truth of the life is brought forefront with the active involvement of the senses. The significance of the senses in the life and their role in shaping the life become core thoughts of the novel.

### **Conclusion**

*The Sorcery of the Senses* being fantasy novel deeply rooted in the spiritual philosophy. The novel depicts the journey of the soul throughout life and awakening of hidden sensory powers. During Dhruv's mystical quest, he comes across Dristi (Vision), Sparsha (Touch), and Ghraan (Smell) which become his spiritual guides. This journey helps Dhruv to understand the truth, his soul and karma (deeds). Personal transformation, mythology and philosophy are synthesized with great effect by the novelist. Spiritual awakening of Dhruv seems to be deeply symbolic. Thus, novel explores reincarnation, the power of senses, good versus evil, redemption, self-discovery, fantasy and mythology. Dhruv's returning to the present world is transformation of Dhruv that returns to the present world as awakened human being. As vision brings forth truth and clarity, Touch is associated with empathy and also with presence and Smell brings intuition.

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