



Role Of Senses In The World Of Literature

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Introduction

Sensory studies are an interdisciplinary field that examines how literary texts represent human perception and the five senses as a cultural, historical and aesthetic phenomenon. Senses play an enormous role in Literature which stands as a lens to scrutinize a literary work depth from many different perspectives. There are five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Literally, they are called as Vision, Audition, Olfaction, Gustation and Haptics. Senses have the power of hypnotism to control the mind of the reader to feel particular sense it conceives. Senses are considered to be interconnected where all five senses activate at the same time. For an instance, if a rose is thought in a mind immediately senses are activated to bring the memories of color of the rose, it's texture, fragrance, taste and even a song by its name.

The prominent factor in senses are memories, as it helps to recollect the past. A French theorist Marcel Proust in his work *In Search of Lost Time* (1913), he explained that senses are activated when brain forgets to remember the past. "The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine" (Proust 47), which helped him to remember his nostalgia, once immediately after tasting a piece of Madeleine. Though senses may bring the memory of pain and disaster from the past that even helps one to heal at present using it. Many religious books teach how to control the senses to attain peace and wisdom but Literature throws light on the problems faced because of the senses and to find the solution. Comparing to other literatures, Indian literature has its specific place for senses culturally, historically and emotionally. Even colors have been seen differently like white can be worn on wedding in western but in India colors are worn on special day. This, dimensions and perspectives vary according to its region and culture. In literature, senses are incorporated in the form of art, aesthetic, metaphor, disability, boon, culture, emotion, history and memory.

Basically, the concept of senses was commenced by the French historian Lucian Febvre. In his work *Sensibility and History* (1942), he preached the historians to study the emotions, feelings and sensory experience towards the impact of war. He was considered as an early intellectual Precursor of Sensory Studies. Alain Corbin was the next historian who focused on how society approach the social odour in Paris in the work *Foul and Fragrant* (1982). Apart from this earlier foundation, in the modern era, the "Modern Sensory Studies" was established by David Howes in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience* (1991).

Sensory studies were then expanded in 2000s by Constance Classen, a cultural historian in his work *Worlds of Sense* (1993) and *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (2012). *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination* (1998) book explore sensory symbolism in Western history, particularly relating to gender and cosmology. Mark M. Smith was a preeminent scholar in the field of sensory history, his works include *Listening to Nineteenth Century America* (2001), *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting and Touching in History* (2007) and *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (2014).

Globally, the senses have been used in all literatures, but initially it is used Indian Literature around 200 BCE. The prominent figure in this field was Bharata Muni who wrote *Natya Shastra*, he contributed a concept called Rasa theory, where aesthetic experience is created through sensory perception. Followed by him, Abhinavagupta wrote *Abhinavabharati*, that explained how senses create aesthetic emotion. There is wide space as there is no one brought the theme of senses in literary works but used in Western culture. After many decades, Indian writers inspired again and commenced to incorporate sensory images in Indian Literature. In modern era, Arjun Appadurai wrote *How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India* (1988) which talks about the taste, food and cultural identity in India. He was the one who opened the discussion on gustatory culture in Indian society. Presently Amit Chaudhuri, Amitav Ghosh, Krishnendu Ray are the prolific writers used senses as an essence in Indian Literature.

The first and foremost sense is vision, as eyes are the gateway to get attracted towards a thing and then experienced or felt by other senses. The literary works projects visionary sense as light, dark, blind and hypocrite. Eyes are the light to see the darkness and they are the boon to admire the God's creation. Vision is considered as boon and curse. In the great epic *The Mahabharata*, King Dhritarashtra born as blind because his mother Ambika closed her eyes out of fear when she met Vyasa. There is a curse on Dhritarashtra from his previous birth. In that life, he was a cruel king who mercilessly gouged out the eyes of a swan and killed her hundreds of cygnets. As a result, he was born blind and lost his hundred sons in the war of Kurukshetra. His blindness deeply affected his wife Gandhari, who chose to blindfold herself, refusing to see a world her husband could not. Blindness is seen as a boon in the life of Helen Keller, who, despite being born blind, achieved great success in both education and her career. Her life proves that blindness did not hinder her accomplishments. *All the Light we cannot see* (2014) by Anthony Doerr sheds light on its protagonist, Marice-Laure who is blind. Set during World War II, the novel shows how, in the absence of vision, she relies on her other senses. The smell of sea provides her with a sense of safety, while the smell of smoke evokes the fear of war. At the same time, familiar everyday smells bring her comfort. Doerr narrates "open your eyes and see what you can with them before they close forever" (Doerr 48). Thus, her senses become essential tools for survival.

Vision in literature critically talks about the perspectives of the people towards the society or a person. The wrong assumption on widows, transgenders, lower caste people and complexion shows the plight of inequality in the society. Hypocrites are the one who behave blind in front of the pleading voices of beggars out of the holy places and they simply kneel down in front of the God and pray to protect and provide wealth to them. In current situation, crimes and murders caused terribly by the unethical minds allow every individual to shut their eyes out of fear and intolerance. At the same time, higher authorities who supposed to question against these woes acts as a hypocrite.

Audition is the sense based on sound, silence, hearing, listening, music and oracles. It has the power to recollect the memories when we hear or listen to music, voices and words. There is a huge difference between noise and sound. The voices which can be heard for understanding that helps to recognize the faces of the voice. It helps the life of a blind to build their imagination with the assumption by listening to them. Noises are unbearable and unpleasant that recollect the trauma of the past like partition and funeral. Silence is the powerful sense which has sharp and deep meaning without uttering. In Ashapura Debi's *Subarnalatha* (1967), Subarna remains silence against the patriarchy. She never quarrels with mother-in-law who tormented her all the time. Her silence speaks more than the words. In *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015) by Anuradha Roy, the sound of temple bells triggers the trauma of Nomi who was abused by the temple priest. To her the sound of the bells digs her painful past.

Generally, Church bells and temple bells are considered as a good omen and positive vibration. The sound of Lord Shiva's conch creates a sense of piety in the soul. Similarly, the voice of God which is also called as oracles are considered the sayings or messages of God. In the Holy Bible *Genesis 1*, Eve disobeys the words of God and ate the forbidden fruit that caused the greatest fall from the garden of Eden. In *Genesis 19*, Lot and his family were escaping from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, they were strictly commanded by angels not to look back. But Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt which shows her disobedience. Even in Hindu Mythology, Kunti uttered the Mantra from Atharva Veda taught by Sage Durvasa playfully made her to give birth to Karna. Her disobedience for chanting the Mantra at wrong situation made Karna's birth a pitiful one. This shows the significance of listening and obeying.

The sense of smell is called Olfaction which indulges aroma, fragrance, odour and foul. Olfaction plays a significant role in literature to connect memory, emotion and identity. It has the ability to preserve the nature's love in the form of petrichor, the smell of the rain. The tangy smell of mangoes makes to remember the summer. The smell of banana tree which is tied in the houses brings a festival vibe. Fragrances like incense sticks, camphor, flowers, candles and attar creates a devotional feel. The aroma of the food creates the craving and tempts to taste it. In the novel *Book of Everlasting things* (2022) by Aanchal Malhotra, the usage of attar, perfumes, flowers and calligraphy ink builds a firm foundation for olfactory imagery to project the theme of memory, love and tradition. The coppery smell of blood talks about the plight of partition and corpses. "Fragrance lingered long after everything else had gone" (Malhotra 78).

In the novel, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (1985) by German writer Patrick Suskind used Olfaction as a symbol of crime. The protagonist Grenouille is born in a filthy fish market who has a strong smell of rotting fish and waste. He kills young women to capture their fragrance. It reveals the theme of social neglect as he born and brought up in fish market. In an Indian novel *Smell* (1999) by Radhika Jha, she talks about her heroine who can smell everything strongly feels discomfort with people's body odor which made her to stand different among normal human. Similarly in the novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), Arundhati Roy used the aroma of pickles and spices as an olfactory image to represent the life of a family and their culture. The smell of river, mud and decay used to connect death and tragedy happened in that village. The protagonist "Sethe" in the novel *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison can smell the trauma wherever the places she goes. In general, olfaction literature used as imagery to recall the memory, trauma, tradition and happiness.

The sense of gustation plays a prominent role in literature as well in daily life. As other senses follow different culture according to their region, food is treated as an elixir by everyone tasting it. There are too many varieties, cuisines and cooking style but the passion for the taste is unique. In Indian tradition, for the special occasions the arrangement of all the dishes on the plantain leaf shows the respect of food. The salt and Pickle kept on the leaf first is to appetize the one who eats it and tempts to eat further. The value of the food changes according the place it is served. The taste of the food is rich when it is served in holy places. Similarly, the famous sweet of Tamil Nadu is *Halwa* which is made in "Tirunelveli Irutu Kadai" stands unique for its taste but it is not recognized when it is prepared in any other shops. The sense of taste stands as a pillar of culture, tradition and emotion.

Taste is used as a tool of therapy to heal the internal wound. In the Indian novel *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Tilo uses magical, evocative tastes of spices to cure the emotional and physical ailments of customers who has the ability to sense their memories. Similarly, in the novel *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake* (2010) by Aimee Bender, a nine-year-old Rose has a supernatural power to taste the raw emotions of loneliness, betrayal or joy of the one who prepares her food. Taste is used a preserving point in the novel of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) where taste becomes a sensory container for memories, emotions and chaotic flavor of India. Tasting of words are called synesthesia, which is incorporated in Monique Troung Linda's *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010) by can taste a specific flavor whenever she hears or says a word, using this secret sense she navigates her hidden family history. *The Vaster Wilds* (2023) by Lauren Groff is the story of a servant girl who flees from an American dying colony. She searches for berries, fish and insects for survival which shows the dark side of famine and poverty in the life of a servant.

In literature, Haptics is the sense of touch explains how characters feel things through their skin. It allows the reader to feel the emotion of the author which he tries to convey through his words. In *Lallan Sweets* (2022) by Srishti Chaudhuri, the author used sense of touch as "the softness of dough, the heat of sugar syrup, and the act of shaping food by hand" to reveal the tactile experience. In *God of Small Thing* (1997) by Arundhati Roy, touch is used to show forbidden love and social boundaries. The story of Eve, the first woman in garden of Eden sinned by touching the forbidden fruit caused a great fall. Touch is used to stand for social rules and discrimination. In *Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand, the idea of touch is linked to caste. The protagonist is treated as impure and shows how touch has become a symbol of exclusion. The sense of touch portrays different aspects of life like love, care, sympathy, empathy, kindness and magnanimous rather than physical touch. Haptics also helps to express trauma or comfort. A gentle touch can show safety while a harsh or painful touch can show violence or fear. In *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, touch expresses both love and trauma. The author narrated the pain of physical suffering and the longingness for the touch of care to show the scars of slavery.

In the *Holy Bible* (Mark 5.25-29), there was a woman called bleeding woman who has been suffering from her mensural cycle for 12 years cured within a second when she touched the garment of Lord Jesus. This incident is approached by the sense of touch in two dimensions internal and externally. Her faith on God cured her disability as well her humiliation. In *Mahabharata*, Ekalavya was a talented archer who wanted to learn from Dronacharya but Drona refused to teach him as he belonged to low social status. Ekalavya made a statue of Drona and practiced archery on his own by treating Drona as his Guru. He became skilled and better than Arjuna. When Drona saw this, he asked for Guru Dakshina as Ekalavya's right thumb. Without any hesitation, Ekalavya cut off his thumb and gave it to him which shows the significance of fingers and the respect of the student towards his Guru. Haptics plays a vital role in literature to highlight the emotions and feelings through words.

Memory is used as central point in senses. Human do not remember the past only through the facts or events, it is remembered by memories which are connected to senses. Memories are stored not just what happened its about how one felt. Memories are activated when the brain is empty to think and senses triggers to think of. One of the most important ideas related to this is the concept of involuntary memory, explained by Marcel Proust in his famous work *In Search of Lost Time* (1913). In this novel, a simple sensory experience of the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea which suddenly brings back a flood of childhood memories. This shows that senses act as powerful triggers that unlock memories stored deep in the mind. Among all the senses, smell is often considered as the strongest trigger of memory. This is because the brain processes smell in close connection with the areas responsible for emotion and memory. In *Perfume: The Scent of Pepper* by Namita Gokhale (2016), when the protagonist encounters the rich aroma of pepper in the spice trade setting, the scent instantly evokes a sense of desire and historical connection. The lingering smell of spices blends sensuality with memory, showing how scent shapes both personal experience and cultural past.

Touch also plays a vital role in memory. Physical sensations such as warmth, pain, or comfort are often stored in the body. In *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, the characters carry the memory of trauma through their bodies. The color "purple" means royalty but the story talks about the dreadful life of Celie. Painful experiences are not just remembered mentally but are felt physically again and again. This idea connects to the concept of "embodied memory," where the body itself becomes a site of remembering. Touch can also represent care and safety, showing how memory is linked to emotional healing. taste can evoke strong personal and cultural memories.

Food is often connected to family, tradition, and identity. In *The Book of Everlasting Things* (2022) by Aanchal Malhotra, the sensory details of perfumes flowers and inks, along with taste and smell, bring back memories of love, loss, and partition. These sensory elements act as archives of history, preserving emotions that cannot be expressed through words alone.

Sound is another important sense that shapes memory. Music, voices, and environmental sounds can trigger deep emotional responses. In *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) by William Faulkner, fragmented sounds and voices reflect the characters' inner memories and psychological states. Similarly, in *Monsoon of Music* (2011) by Mitra Phukan, music becomes a medium through which characters connect to their past. Sound here acts as a bridge between memory and identity, showing how auditory experiences can preserve emotions over time.

Visual memory or sight is the most commonly used sense in literature. Writers often describe images, colors, and scenes to help readers imagine the past. However, visual memory is not always reliable; it can be fragmented or influenced by emotion. In *Unseeing Idol of Light* (2018) by K. R. Meera, the contrast between light and darkness symbolizes memory, perception, and loss. The novel also shows how memory can exist even without sight, suggesting that other senses can compensate and create meaning.

Memory in senses is also important for understanding trauma. Traumatic memories are often stored in sensory form rather than as clear narratives. This means that a smell, sound, or touch can suddenly bring back painful experiences. Literature uses this idea to show the lasting impact of trauma on individuals. Sensory triggers can cause characters to relive past events, making memory feel immediate and real. Memory in senses is significant because it connects the body, mind, and emotions. It allows individuals to relive the past in a vivid and meaningful way. Through sensory experiences, memories become more than just recollections and they become lived experiences. Literature uses this connection to explore themes of identity, trauma, love, and history. By engaging the senses, writers create powerful narratives that resonate deeply with readers, making memory an active and dynamic part of human experience.

The relationship between culture and senses is a prominent sector in literary studies. Senses are not just biological but also shaped by culture which means that what is felt, tasted, or heard is influenced by our traditions, beliefs, and social practices. Literature uses sensory experiences to show how culture is lived and remembered in everyday life. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) by Arundhati Roy, sensory details like the smell of streets, the sounds of protests, and the visual chaos of cities reflect India's complex cultural and political life. Smell is often linked to place and belonging. In *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid, migrants carry memories of their homeland through sensory impressions like smell and atmosphere. Even when they move to new places, these sensory memories keep their cultural identity alive.

The senses help readers to experience cultural diversity, conflict, and identity in a realistic way. In *Sweet Neem* (2018) by Mohini Durgampudi, the author narrates the story of restarting the family's traditional restaurant under the chapter titles as "Samosa or Baggi", "Uthappam", "Pakodi and Chai", "Midnight Biryani" which relates the story with traditional foods of the state. Touch and bodily practices are also culturally shaped. In *The Vegetarian* (2007) by Han Kang, the body becomes a site of cultural control and resistance. The protagonist's rejection of meat challenges social norms, and physical sensations like pain and discomfort reflect the pressure of cultural expectations. Sight reflects cultural meaning through symbols, colors, and rituals. In *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) by Bernardine Evaristo, visual images of clothing, bodies, and urban spaces reflect different cultural identities and histories. The novel shows how culture is visible in everyday life. Culture and senses are deeply connected because senses act as carriers of tradition, memory, and identity. Through sensory descriptions, literature shows how culture is not just learned but also felt in the body. This makes stories more vivid and helps readers to understand different ways of life. Sensory experiences turn culture into something alive, emotional, and personal.

The relationship between the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) and the five senses (smell, taste, sight, touch, and sound) can be effectively explored through literature. Sensory descriptions often reflect these elemental connections, showing how humans experience the cosmos through the body. The element earth (Prithvi) is closely linked with the sense of smell. In *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandaya, the smell of soil, crops, and fields plays a vital role in shaping the characters' lives. The protagonist Rukmani's connection to land is deeply sensory, where the scent of earth represents survival, poverty, and emotional attachment. Smell here becomes a way of grounding identity and memory. The element water (Jala) connects with taste for symbolizing life and nourishment. In *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh, water dominates the landscape of the Sundarbans. Taste is used to describe the dependence on water for food and survival highlights its importance. Water reflects fluid identity, migration, and the delicate balance between humans and nature.

The element fire (Agni) is related to sight, as fire provides light and visibility. In *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, vivid visual imagery such as light, explosions, and historical moments makes the reader to relate the fierce of fire. Sight becomes a tool through which characters understand political and personal transformations. Fire symbolizes destruction, and revelation. The element air (Vayu) corresponds to touch, as air is felt through movement and sensation. In *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khaled Hosseini, the feeling of wind during kite flying is significant. The touch of air represents freedom, childhood innocence and later emotional loss. This sensory experience connects the physical world with inner emotions. Finally, the element space (Akasha) is linked to sound. In *The Guide* (1958) by R. K. Narayan, sound plays an important role through temple bells, silence, and spiritual discourse. Sound exists within space and becomes a medium for inner reflection and transformation. It connects the individual to a larger spiritual reality.

Conclusion

The motive of this research paper is to focus deeply the literature to find that how senses are used in literary works. Senses are used since 200 BCE in Indian Literature and later used globally but it is less focused after modernism. The works majorly talks about science and technology rather than humanity. As senses are not used directly, both author and reader feel the story by sensing it vividly and audibly, by tasting, smelling and touched sub- consciously. In recent times, author used the senses directly in their novels under the theory of disability, queer theory, feminism, climate studies and science fiction and fantasy to reveal the perspectives of the people over the universe owing to senses. This paper is to highlight the assumption of senses that they are basic and fundamental elements which act as a lens to view the literature, they are not used widely in the current works which follows new trends. This made

the view on Sensory studies as out dated. The study highlighted that senses are the heart of literature which gives life to the words. Without senses words are obscure. From the earlier period of literature to present, senses are used directly or indirectly in literary works which is perceived by the readers as well the writers. This research paper concludes with a note that far from being outdated, the study of the senses has become a vibrant and evolving area in contemporary literary studies.

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