

UGC - Minor Research Project in English

Summary

Symbolism of Dreams and Shadows in Religion and Literature

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A lay person might dismiss a dream and see nothing of value or significance in it. A shadow has for the most part been inconsequential. This study examines religious texts to establish the importance of dreams that very often were prophetic and were seen as a visitation of God, directing the dreamer to act in a certain way.

The epics too used dreams to communicate messages from the gods. The Indian epics of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the Mesopotamian epic of *Gilgamesh*, Homer's epics of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* use the dream element most effectively. Often dreams were prophetic and warned the dreamer of future events that were about to unfold. *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus, *Julius Caesar* and *Othello* by Shakespeare, *The White Devil* by John Webster show how writers down the ages were aware of the power and place of dreams in waking life.

Dream analysis received an impetus with Sigmund Freud and his path breaking work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). With this work a new angle is added to understanding dreams. Unconscious motives and desires of the individual come to the surface in dreams and provide a more complete understanding of the individual. The study investigates these dream symbols which are complex but used in fascinating ways in religious and literary texts. Carl Jung advocated a theory of racial unconscious. He believed that hidden deep in the unconscious recesses of the mind were desires that were common to all people everywhere in all ages, races and religions. He called them archetypes. He also believed that the Shadow played a significant role. It was the dark other of the individual and coming to terms with the shadow was seen as achieving balance and wholeness. The significance of the Shadow is also evaluated.