

Trauma and Pain: A Study of Ajay Kumar Patra's *Resonance of Life*

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Abstract:

Ajay Kumar Patra is one of the most distinguished poets of this century. His poems incorporate his pain and predicament. He is a poet who considers life to be lived with an experience. His poetry collection *Resonance of Life* celebrates his voice to live life with a set of varied experiences. In his poems he talks about nature, culture and society. This paper tries to personify his concept of pain that corresponds to the theory of trauma. Memory and recollection play a key role in inflicting his inner mind. This paper intends to focus on the inner psyche of the poet. He seems to be concerned about man nature relationship, societal disturbances, individual alienation and preservation of culture. His poems address the socio-cultural scenario of today's world. His poems explore the Odisha landscape, culture and civilization. This is in connection with his nationalistic spirit and reformative zeal. The main objective of this paper is to create consciousness about Patra's sense of affiliation.

Keywords: pain, trauma, memory, recollection.

Ajay Kumar Patra is one of the most eminent poets of the 20th century. Being born on 2nd January, 1952 in Odisha he has a good number of poems to his credit. He is a poet, a scientist, a scholar, an intellectual and a welfare worker. He is a versatile genius not only in India but also outside the country. His poetry mainly deals with the quintessence of nature class disparity and social disharmony. He appears to be in agony in his poems. His agony makes him emotional. This paper aims to examine how Ajay Kumar Patra's poems ascribe to the representation of pain and the subject of suffering. Further, this paper analyses the manner the poet's feeling accelerates between man's attitude towards nature, culture and social disparity. This paper also makes a study of the concept of pain which is related to the theory of trauma and its aftermath.

With the advent of trauma theory that emerges in the early 1990s- memory and the process of remembering also gains impulse. Representation of pain gets related with individual and instinctive experiences. Manifestation of subjective pain is what that gets revealed in his poems. In the words of Kleinman as quoted by Zoe Norridge: "Pain is explored both as an essential part of being a human being and as a culturally specific experience which is inherently subjective" (1). Moreover Kleinman also says pain involves 'modes of experience'(1). The poems of Patra express and explore his varied experiences. Here pain acts as a contextual analytic concept. His poetry collection explores his individual and discrete sentiments. His poems show his inclination and acclaim for his art, culture, nature and society. He endeavours to be responsible enough to safeguard his country, his hometown and the environment.

Cathy Caruth, the pioneer of Trauma theory writes in *Unclaimed Experience*: “trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon.” (1) But here Ajay Kumar Patra differs and deals with reality and truth. He rightly points out that his self gets engaged with the process of self-assimilation. All his diverse feeling mirrors the truth of realisation. He recognises his self. His poems present nature in personification. This natural environment invokes the poet’s emotion to speak his mind.

Cathy Caruth further provides, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* ‘the impact of trauma as a concept and a category’(3). Ajay Kumar Patra furnishes a particular poetic language to capture his inner mind. As a distinguished poet he criticizes the contemporary society and class discrimination. He conceptualizes through memory, recollection, remembrance, introspection, retrospection and self-analysis.

Michelle Balaev in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* in the chapter titled ‘Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered’ writes trauma ‘is an unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation’. But Patra appears to be different in his approach. His traumatic experience exerts an affirmative incorporation in his poetic philosophy. Traumatic pain gets integrated into the narrative voice of his poetry. Here we get a glimpse of the poet’s individual traumatic experiences. His painful exploration involves his concern to protect the natural and the social environment.

His poetry collection *Resonance of Life* published in 2017 refers to his real-life experiences and his potential towards life, his cultural consciousness and his conventional strategy of life. The poems like “My Great India” and “I’m an Indian” begin with his sense of affinity. He celebrates the glory of his country. His country seems to be a ‘temple of God/A blessed abode’ (60) He corresponds to the aspect of secularism, superstition and religion. He claims his Indian spirit and identity. The poem talks about beauty in terms of nature, culture and his panoramic view of life. The key phrases ‘my poem of long memory’, ‘unknown presence’, ‘bright or dark days’ refer to the kind of pain that the poet accepts in his life. His concept of India and its multi-coloured synthesis sway him away with pragmatic approach. This particular poem emphasizes on his emotional bond that again alludes to his pain: ‘... a synthesis of wave after wave of ideas/ And of currents and cross currents/ Of mental and material processes/ Seem through centuries’ (62) He here measures the issue of social and cultural disparity that exists since time immemorial.

Having said these lines, Patra goes on to mention about his land and people who are always in love with their ‘land of Gods and Goddesses’. Similarly, P.K. Patra, another eminent poet of the 20th century, in his poetry collection *The Winding Path* talks about his place of origin Puri as the ‘land of thirty-three crore Gods and Goddesses’ in the poem titled “Puri”. Both the poets hint at the heavenly, cultural and traditional beauty of Odisha- the land of their origin. A.K.Patra here through this poem endeavours to reanalyse the lives of the people of Odisha. His mental state exercises his concern to preserve the beauty of his sacred land

which is – ‘An art of land, majestic in body/ And superb in beauty/ Having neither an equal/ Nor a rival’.
(62)

Here when he empowers India, there is also an association with his land Odisha. The word ‘land’ in the poem is remarkable in the sense that it refers both to his country and his place of origin. This binary brings up his painful experience as a poet and his perturbed worries about preserving his land and people. In the poem titled “I am an Indian” he admits that he is an Indian by heart and soul. He belongs to the country of universal love and hope, where he is born and brought up. As he writes, India is a land of ‘pride and ambitions’(73).

The poet was awarded the Best Citizen of India award in 2008. His love and respect for his country made him a poet. He writes about his land mainly. His emotions recollected in the form of memory in a very comprehensive manner. Memory and emotions play a crucial role in his poetry. He seems to be concerned with the Indian immigrants and their condition in their adopted land. He appears to deal with belongingness and quest for identity. Thus he addresses his pain in a postcolonial third world country. His elates his devotion for his country.

As Morris in *The Culture of Pain* believes that ‘pain is always reshaped by a particular time, place, culture and individual psyche’ and pain is always personal and always cultural’(6,25). The poet encounters mental pain when he finds ‘deforestation’ and ‘illegal’(13) aspects in the poem “The Nurture”. He tries to nurture the richness of soil to keep his ‘nation rich and green’(13). He considers his place and nation as ‘prosperous’ (13). He explicates his pain through natural glory and cultural values. He expiates the past in living the Eresent and revealing the passionate future. He rejoices the Odisha heritage and culture. He as a poet pays respect to the Mother earth. In the poem “The Great Mother” he writes: ‘I love my motherland, her greatness, wisdom, virtue/ And endurance’(26) He loves his country but he is against the class conflict and class discrimination.

The poet gets tangled in a filthy environment. He is of the view that the human beings suffer for their self-interest and self-conceit. The joy that nature provides wonders the poet. Still, he questions the existence of human beings that do not value and ensure the glory of nature. He finds peace, solace and joy in the various aspects of nature. He is of the view that humans get solace in the lap of nature but does not value nature anymore. People are busy cutting trees for their self-interest and engrossed in making social inequality.

The poet believes that the sanctity of the past heritage is lost as the environment envisages dirt and deceased. In the poem “Woodland” he talks about the murder of nature by the ‘sordid men’(49). He says: ‘My throat chokes is remembrance/ At the touch of momentous pain/ My emotions get shuttered/ Dream vanish’ (49). He insists on how nature becomes ‘silent’. Here the word ‘silent’ symbolises how nature sometimes seems inaudible. He senses nature as ‘her heritage dwindles’ and ‘her chastity gone unsung’. Nature invades the poet’s heart with content.

Zoe Norridge in her essay ‘Comparing Pain: Theoretical Explorations of Suffering and Working Towards the Particular’ writes about British Pain Society’s response to the definition of pain: “Pain is what the person feeling it says it is” (209). For the poet, pain acts as an emotional process for self-representation.

The poet projects his pain of being alone in his thoughtful world with his individual psyche. In the poem “A Solitary Song” he writes ‘Eased of unpeaceful thoughts/ Make me feel/ Lovely dark and deep.../ And kilometres to go.../ I have promises to keep’(54). His pain corresponds to the ‘silent’ and ‘motionless’(56) earth, that gets lost. As he says in “Music of a Flute”: ‘life itself is a mere beautiful/ Than living, than mere existence’. In “My Throb” he writes about his childhood, family, village, cottage and his country and says ‘The pain so hard tangible’(69). As he writes ‘My poem of long memory/ Symbols of time my ancestors/ Forged in fear and love/ To overcome their world/ anxieties and anxiousness’(69). Here also memory plays a pivotal part in making the poet rejuvenate his tenderness. This revitalization uplifts his perception of trauma which he endures as a responsible lover of nature and curator of culture. Moreover, it is a kind of an individual trauma that his poems embrace. Pain plays a substantial role in his life.

In this poetry collection, Trauma is represented in the form of memory that shapes the individual and cultural identity of the poet. In *Studies on Hysteria* published in 1895, Freud and Breuer mention that the original event was not traumatic in itself but only in its remembrance. As they write ‘Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences’ (7) Thus, it is defined in regard to the process of memory and thereby remembering.

In his poem “Truth of Timeless Life” he writes how ‘life gets revolutionised’(87) when migratory birds come and go. He here traces back to time and refers to the ‘origin of new species’. He talks about his ‘unfold memories’(90). Memory acts as a consolation for the poet. His mind oscillates between what he sees and what he aspires. In the poem “Goldmohur, Honest Endeavours” the poet posits his childhood memory as ‘a beauty incarnate’(98). He recalls his ‘quite, calm sweet home’. In “Radha-Krishna, my poetry of Love Song” he refers to his love for the Yamuna that unfolds the untold tales. He admires the immortal love of Radha-Krishna. His poetry ‘blossoms and flourishes’(106) and strengthens the ‘bond of unity’(108). In the poem “The Great Harvester” he says ‘Let noble thought prevail upon/ Let the truth uphold by noble man each/ Be again revived and honoured most/ Let the truth uphold by noble man each/ Be again revived and honoured most’. In this poem his urge to reshape and redefine thoughts become evident: ‘Stop homicide/ Return to the temple of peace/ Save Earth, Save life’ (109). His memories drive him afresh. He wishes to begin afresh his innocence and childhood. The pensive mood of the poet awakens with the cry of nature.

Life is all about pain and pleasure. The poet concentrates on understanding life. In his poem “Philosophy of Life” he defines life in his own way. His spirit and will appears to be enlightened in his zeal to reform the society. His reference to ‘casteism’ and ‘untouchability’(126) envisage his life of solitude. With this view he accelerates between social harmony and social disparity. As he quotes: ‘Let all understand life/ You in me and I in you’(126) He admits that his mind suffers through this conflict and this is the hidden truth of his life. He wants the entire humanity to awake and arise to this call of equality and fraternity. The

conceived love in his mind remains in the form of memory. His memory lane mirrors his mind and concern for a meaningful life on this beautiful and rhythmic earth.

The poet seems to be very intimate with the evolution of nature. According to the poet the bond between the man and nature is a blessed one. It is no less than a symbiotic relationship. In his poem “Symbiotic Relationship” he talks about a ‘life of pleasure and nature bound’(136). The nature in its varied forms enchants the mind and soul of the poet. Further, he gets pleasure in comprehending life. In his poetry collection he shares his concern for the living legend Kalijai. He talks about how it is lost in the horizon yet remains alive in his mind. He seems to be cordially attached with the Chilika lake in Odisha. The poet worships the ‘still alive and alight’ Kalijai. In his words joy and sorrow are ‘mere mental emotions’ as quoted in “Sorrows and Happiness, Peacefully co-exist” (147). He considers life to be an entity. Thus, he personifies his commitment as a stakeholder of the nation and society.

The poet presents nature in the form of his mother. Further he says, when in the lap of nature, he forgets his true self. In the poem “Eternal Truth” he regards winter to be his ‘lady love’, spring to be charming and ‘merry’, summer to be ‘burring’, Autumn to be hopeful and pleasant. He elucidates his love for the rain which is a ‘wet experience’ for him, the sun is his Lord and the ‘mystery of the mortal world’, the moon is his uncle and it is rhythmic. He ends the poem with his Holly prayer: ‘I can see the whole earth/ The river ghat, the sea-beach, the bath terrace/ Of the country ponds, rivulets and rivers/ Everywhere the utterance of Lord Krishna, Christ,/ Nanak an Allah, irrespective of caste and creed./ How restless is my heart to hear holy incantation.(154) He here clarifies his restlessness at the thought of social inequality and cultural disassociation. He struggles to eliminate the disharmony in life.

Resonance of Life shows his love and concern for the night bird, the weaver bird, peacock, the magical butterfly, Kingfisher, playful dolphins, water chestnut, Goldmohur, the sensibility of Ansupa, the auspicious Shreefall, the waves of Chilika, the cowdung gatherer, the four seasons, Kalijai, Champak, Jasmine, lotus, rose, the Sun, the moon, the significance of rain, the flute so on and so forth. His love for his homeland, Odisha and concern for nature are interrelated. In the poem “The Nurse” he talks about the effects of flood. How the flood water engulfs the ‘earth in misery’(71). He here ‘looks forward in anger’ to take care of our beloved environment who is ‘the nurse’(72). His annoyance and exasperation come in the form of personal anxiety and pain. “The Secrecy of Timeless Life” writes about ‘the truth of timeless life’ (158) which the poet drinks to his heart’s content. He tries to see the universe with nature’s love and blessings. He epitomises this reality of life in his poems. He admits in his poem “Dear Champak” that he dies a ‘thousand deaths every minute’(161).

These features in his poems manifest his proposition about life. Patra worships nature that stands by the side of man both in pleasure and pain. He talks about nature’s declaration of love and devotion for human welfare. The poet seems to complain about the class division and class conflict in the society. He tends to be a socially aware person who is pained from inside about the ill effects of this kind of discrimination in our society. He alludes to the mankind to be kind hearted towards others and to protect our

natural beauty and elegance. Patra transcends the different dimensions of life and human existence in connection with nature and culture. The poet becomes more acute in representing pain.

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