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## Re-Reading Literature from Pandemic Angle: A Study of Select Poems of Pradip Kumar Patra

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*Abstract: There has been a lot of reading of literature before Pandemic from various angles. But the Pandemic comes as a turning point affecting life at each and every level. The paper will use Pandemic as a method, not as a field. It will look at Pradip Kumar Patra's poems and show how it reflects aging, disease and death. The study will be a kind of re-reading because the purpose will be to show the physical decadence of humanity in relation to mental change. It will take into consideration the poet's seven volumes of poems namely Panoramic Shillong, Summer Implications, The Winding Path, Denouement, Dewy Morning, Midnight Divinity, The Rain Speaks. At the background, the paper will also discuss the similar issues in relation to a few contemporary Indian poets writing in English. It will also use trauma as a method for successfully exploring the issues relating to Pandemic. The paper attempts to examine Patra's select poems that elucidate the phenomenon of aging, disease and death. Moreover, it tries to encapsulate a kind of link between aging and disease with trauma and pain. The main objective of this paper lies in its delineation of death as a form of physical and mental struggle. The theorising link between aging and death and disease and trauma mark the basis of Patra's poetic philosophy. This paper analyses the select poems of Patra from the perspective of trauma and pain. It examines the way Patra's select poems envisage his realisation and awareness about aging, disease and death. The qualitative approach makes the study more focussed and substantial. Patra posits a new proportion towards understanding the value of living and experiencing the pain of death. The sustainability of this relationship finds an important room in the select poems of Patra. The paper directs on the poet's functional self in emphasising the underlying association between life and death and living and dying. The study re-reads patra's select poems as from Pandemic angle. It gives special insistence on the traumatised self and strategic philosophy.*

**Keywords:** Aging, Death, Disease, Death, Pandemic, Trauma.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Pradip Kumar Patra is one of the most distinguished poets of today's century. His poems incorporate his pain and predicament. He is a poet who considers life to be lived with an

experience. His poetry collection glorifies 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.

Due to the Pandemic, the human beings face a lot of differences and difficulties in leading their lives. The entire lifestyle of the people has changed. Regardless of age, caste and class all has become a victim of physical weakness and mental imbalance. The way this Pandemic has changed the entire scenario of human life marks the basis of truth and reality.

The paper attempts to examine Patra's select poems that elucidate the phenomenon of aging, disease and death. Moreover, it tries to encapsulate a kind of link between aging and disease with trauma and pain. The main objective of this paper lies in its delineation of death as a form of physical and mental struggle.

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).

Panoramic Shillong generalises his idea of life as a reincarnation of joy and sorrow. Here he becomes curious about the different facets of life. Patra enforces an optimistic equilibrium to fathom all sorts of apprehensions and possibilities. In "Flash" he writes: 'Desperately I try/ to dissipate apprehensions/ and face possibilities...' (22). He gets guidance from memory and thereby acquires the strength to face the reality. For him; 'Memory exists everywhere...' (24) as he says in "Guided by Memory". He goes through his disintegrated self and perceives clearly the varied resultant actions. He calls himself a lunatic. The growth of his experience subscribes to the integration of his alienated self and inner sensitive being. He hears an echo of his tempestuous mind. The calm and tranquil consciousness of the poet marks his refinement and sustained self. 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 *Summer Implications* poems like "A Rare Insight" and "Living without Ambition" talk about Patra's obscurity and despair. In both the poems he idealise the period of childhood that serves as a force for him. The poem "A Rare Insight" begins with: 'My fear for mankind grows/ and grows day by day' (18). His fear makes him a silent aspirant to witness the reality of life. Human precision and artificiality give rise to his fear and frustration. He finds enjoyment and enlightenment in the magical avenues of nature. The second poem says: 'And now I feel it is time for me/ to live a life of content and peace... even at the cost of/ hopes and achievements' (19). This shows the pain that the poet undergoes. The amount of frustration and alienation that make him suffer inertly becomes the main cause of his trauma. "Electioneering Frustration" posits his concept of change that makes no difference at all. Here he refers to both his pessimism and optimism that further clarifies more of his inner psyche. The memory of the 'rugged past' and 'celluloid future' (40) subscribe to his critique

of contemporary world. His silent and fragmented self directs him to act motionless. What he urges for appears to be spiritual pleasure. He tries to uplift man-nature perception. He strives to form an alliance with his silent character. The prospect of hope and memory accelerate his spirit and response as a conscious human being. The folly of humankind makes him insane. "A Shred of Realisation" discusses about human degeneration and decay. The poem reads as: 'And the mercurial human mind/ is compatible enough to react/ and bow down with disappointment/ just on seeing the fading glow/ of the mortal gloom' (41). Here the poet realises that not only he, rather the entire human folk faces the same sense of challenge in fostering their life and living. His realisation marks his existence as delightful and captivating. At times of exasperation he remains faithful to the moments of the past and relies on the future by being true to the present. His inner fight takes place between cause and effect that turns into an act of trauma. The situation of the poet appears same as that of human beings during the Pandemic. The conscious self of the poet yearns for a healthy life. The self-eroding thoughts of the people sweep away every dream and longings.

In *The Winding Path* the poet talks about his strenuous journey in living life and in realising death. He grows old in thinking and imagining his real and existent self. In "Old Age" he writes: 'I don't know/ what old age is:' (45). Here the poet refers to his aloofness and loneliness which comes as a preparation for attaining perfection. Further, he believes in the process of growing old that helps him learn the art of living. His conscious, subconscious and supraconscious-self bestow him an unseen grace. As he writes in the poem "Unseen Grace": 'Through self-mortification one/ gradually moves towards toleration and submission...' (70). This kind of force grants inspiration and determination in grasping the different connotations of life and death. The poet speaks about his sensitive being. In the poem "Realm of Darkness" the poet says: '... I proceed deep into/ the darkness and amidst a grand/ silence I feel the distinction between/ my body and soul for the first/ time in my life' (64). Here the poet attempts to recollect the memory of his childhood. He is reminded of the 'dark cool night' and his grandmother telling him stories about ghost. The word 'dark' here symbolises the prospect of hope for his inability to realise life's subsistent verisimilitude. This equals to the phenomenon ranging from aging to disease and death. In this collection words like 'old age', 'toleration', 'silence' and 'darkness' confer to the idea of the poet's traumatised self. The select poems from this anthology idealise Patra's inner pain and attainment of his mental well-being.

The philosophical mind of the poet delves deep into the spontaneous overflow of memories and reminiscences of life. It happens in relation to his matured mind that aids him for an expectation in saturating varied sensitive experiences. Aging and death are a complete realisation for the poet. For him 'death is truth' (52) as he says in "Realising Truth". Further, the poem reads as: 'Truth comes/ but I fail to realise it within;/ it rather helps me attain the knowledge/ that endows me with faith/ as well as patience' (52). The process of self-assimilation helps him to recognise his own awakened self. The memory of his past life helps him to revert back to his spiritual consciousness and relieves him of all his fatigue and agony. In the poem "Monsoon Night" the poet writes: 'My instinctive identity/ incapable of lending me strength and confidence' (43). This particular line refers to the link between his ideal state of mind and his experienced self. In the poem "Looking Blank" he writes: 'Looking blank/ simply signifies nothing' (38). With a greater clarity all fascination and obsession merges with his experience. The memory of the past shows the way to a transcendental maturity. As the poem "In Pursuit of a Light" reads: 'It is a gloom, bereft of its/ nostalgic beauty, that has

its affinity/ with the ... experiences of my life;...' (36). The fountain of memory appears to give sustenance to his sense of optimism.

In Denouement the poem "Largescale Expansion" talks about the poet's psychic self. He tries to penetrate and think about his own existence. It seems that he speaks with the realm of darkness. The dark part of his life refers to his lack of knowledge and his loneliness as well. His lack of interest in life makes his inner content instable and exhausted. As he says: 'I experience death by being alive, I see its image in dream' (26). His knowledge about life begins from his loneliness that again appears as a support to him. His knowledge of death begins from the study of the self. Moreover, he refers to his experience as well: 'I experience a largescale expansion of my inside' (26). The mind of the poet faces conflict by the idea of attachment and detachment. He seems to be lost in the process of his own spiritual quest. The poet passes through inner mental conflict. The poem "Loneliness and Mystery" reads: 'I have a clear perception of my own self/ that wavers because of the inner cyclone/ caused by loneliness and mystery' (29). The phrase 'inner cyclone' refers to his understanding of the difference between body and spirit. In this respect he looks inward and relates to his own extant. In both the poems the poet regulates the 'I' in him. This 'I' within the poet symbolises seclusion, recognition, peace, living and dying.

Moreover, "Mute and Uncompromising" stages his suffocation that corresponds to the phenomenon of trauma. He writes: "Each time even after a determined resignation/ I return to live a life which is mute and uncompromising" (40). The use of words like 'mute' and 'uncompromising' typify the abstract meaning of life. The poet assumes a step towards realization. That the larger obscurity and complex perseverance form a part of his existential traumatised self. He regards his self to be an abode of astonishment and mystery. In the poem "Suffering" the poet actually refers to the 'trauma' that 'he can hardly recover from' (55). With the thought of both hope and despair Patra faces a kind of duality in his mind. This kind of mental conflict makes him suffer. To him suffering is endless, beyond human imagination, a dream sequence and 'catastrophic'. In this instance Patra's confidence remains submerged and he yearns to acquire inner mental strength. He suffers in the battle between hope and hopelessness. The poet ascribes to the fact that his mental and physical decadence arouse with the idea of disbelief and disappointment. Still he believes that in the course of time he will replace his pain by unclassified hopes and inspiration. He further decides to live through the frustrations of his life. He feels delighted to move nearer to an unknown acknowledgement. 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).

During the Covid-19 pandemic people always refer to their past and rely on their recollection of memories to gather solidity to fight against it. The consequences of the Pandemic make the humanity live a life of content and peace keeping ambience with nature. Thus in this regard Patra and his take on memory set in tone with the peoples association with the past. Further, invocation to the past memory pertains to the context of trauma and pain. 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'. For Patra identity seems to be a matter of emotional stability and percipience. 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 conserve his spontaneous overflow of feelings and emotions.

Cathy Caruth further provides, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* ‘the impact of trauma as a concept and a category’ (3). Pradip Kumar Patra furnishes a particular poetic language to capture his inner mind. As a distinguished poet he makes a critique of man. He tries to conceptualize his inner being through memory, recollection, remembrance, introspection, retrospection and self-analysis. In *Midnight Divinity* the poet writes about his inspiration and experience. In the poem “Sense of Belonging” the poet alludes to his own thought sequence. He begins the poem with: ‘When nobody understands me/ I never think that I am helpless’ (41). He speculates about the memorable moments that provides him assurance and happiness. He clarifies how he belongs to the world of wonder and silence. In the poem “Beyond Causes and Effects” Patra entangles the prospect of hope in his life. The causes and effects of a hope nourish his existence as a human being. As he says: ‘And the hope, however unrealistic, ... reincarnates as a joy later...’ (10). This is how he feels joyous at the wake of his embodiment. His obsession with faith and doubt reminds him of his happy past. Thus, he awaits for repetition and extension of the same. This perhaps makes him restless. His earthly consciousness sets him to announce his insecurity and diffidence.

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. For Patra the existence of hope in his life seems to be in question. The agonised being of the poet unfolds to be engrossed with experience, memory and knowledge. The characteristic of forgetfulness marks his psychic isolation which emerges out of his understanding and learning of what is life. He dies every moment at times of his sorrow and distress. In *Dewy Morning* the poem titled “Emergence” reads: ‘I simply cannot believe the plight/ which I’m in; although the truth/ incarnates, my mind doesn’t acknowledge it’ (24). This poem endures his doubt about his existence. He rather tries to give a new dimension to his mental impotence. The sense of wonder and speculation of death grow broader for him. He becomes a victim of his interpretation of life and living. In “My Own Inside” Patra’s thoughts oscillates between his inside and outside. He tries to visualise his own self and become an ‘I’ (36). Most of the times he speaks to himself. He admits that sometimes with no understanding is in itself an understanding. He here aims to posit different connotations of the word ‘understanding’. He theorises the concept of empathy and cognizance.

It is his understanding of the past that boosts his energy about the present. Past is always a pleasure for the poet. It provides him a charm to live with memories, to feel the obscurities of life and to judge the consciousness of his being. The poem “Past” correlates the poet’s visionary approach with his past. For him: ‘... past is a memory/ past is a subconscious’ (40). It symbolises recognition of one’s creative self, transformation of one’s own being and banefactor of strength and durability. At the same time, past also acclimatizes to the fact that it is a past and thus he begins the poem as: ‘Past is a past, ...’ (40). It is only a memory and this makes him grieve. He wishes to relive it. The memory of the past sets him to worry about. His “Self-consciousness” mirrors his analysis and judgement about his maturity and evolution. His spontaneity to grow gives him satisfaction. But again he eyes to look for a self-contained whole. The relation between knowledge and reality appear to be a meaningful one for him. To him knowledge is to surrender before the divine agent of heaven and earth whereas reality is to envision the true realisation within himself. The inner helplessness of the

poet mirrors his depressed mood and sorrowful days. The poem “Wild Seclusion” reads as: ‘I’ve a clear perception of my own self/ that wavers because of the inner cyclone/ caused by loneliness and mystery’ (57). His own self arouses confusion and betrays his sentiment. He evaluates himself as a secluded self who eagers to have a new life with peace and serenity. In The Rain Speaks the poem ‘Living in Soul only’ talks about his soul that is living. He here aims to see and feel his joyous soul. He tends to participate in the experience of his possession of his ‘own soul’ (21). He observes that the entire earth witnesses his living self. The poem reads as: ‘... but also/ makes one see his own soul/ in and out of himself’ (21). He concludes by saying that: ‘one’s earthly obsession/ does not allow one to believe/ that one lives in soul only/ when the earth is not worthy for living’ (21). He praises the trajectory of a soul in relation to life and living. In “A Feeling of being Extinguished” the poet tries to visualise his ailing self. The soul within him generates his ability to understand his inner being. He tries to define his soul as: ‘I try to visualize/ my ailing soul that ultimately resembles/ the cyclone victim of Orissa’ (24). His voice and his ideas are well acquainted with the fact behind ethics than practice. His feeling of getting obliterated grasps him more. This sort of feeling helps him to extinguish himself from being distinguished as a man of possession. The unsavoury experience of the poet entangles him in illusion. As he says in “Beyond Suffocation”: ‘Yet life is worthy living/ with no fixity, everything/ that is tumultuous becomes/ a part of realization’ (60). This very idea of realization makes him more traumatic from within.

Similarly in the poems of Indian writers writing in English we find same kind of reference to the idea of pain and trauma. Jayanta Mahapatra is of supreme importance in this respect. In his ‘A Rain of Rites’ he deals with the concept of rain and its consequences. He tries to moderate the true significance of rain in his poetry. He acknowledges the fact that rain occupies an important place in his life. It further acts as a pervasive force that dominates the mind of the poet. His mind hovers around the patterns of beginning and end of a rain. This makes the poet cry for a new path of hope and a stagnant thought of surrender. With this kind of conflict in the mind, the poet feels painful and traumatised. As he writes: ‘... my own soul quivers on the edge of answers’ (07).

In the poem “Myth” Mahapatra writes about his memories and desires that remain ‘unfulfilled’ and ‘dark’. The poem reads as ‘Old brassy bells/ moulded by memories, dark, unfulfilled,/ to make the year come back again--/ a recurring prayer’ (15). For the poet, the present appears impressive in the sense that it gives a lot of hope and aspiration. But to him the future is really uncertain and unpredictable. As he writes: ‘The dried, sacrificed flowers smile at me’ (15). He grieves over his past glory and sanctity as a poet. At the same time, he craves for an unexhausted present and a faithful future. Such grievance of him sets him to be grief stricken and experience pain and hardship in believing his own self. Thus, the trajectory of pain creates a traumatised self of the poet.

## **2. CONCLUSION**

Finally, it can be said that the kind of trauma that the Pandemic creates and the pain that Patra as a poet goes through are the outcome of mental imbalance. The Pandemic appears to be merciless that affects the voiceless human beings. People were unable to do anything. They just suffer and become traumatised. This trauma affects the mental being than the physical being of a person. This paper seeks to recreate the concept of mental illness that implies to the theory of trauma with reference to post Pandemic and Patra’s select poems. The one who

suffers from Covid even after recovery seems to be a little traumatic who mostly think about disease and death.

Thus, Patra's select poems serve the purpose of defining pain from different angles. It also caters to the reality of the Pandemic. Literature acts as the mirror of every society and every culture. It foregrounds the epistemological fact of human lives. The existence and the survival of man depend on the way he faces the real life situation. To talk of Patra, he seems to be engrossed with his imagination that helps him to deal with his different connotations of the faculty of mind.

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