



Transcending the Awareness of Pain in Poetry: A Critical Focus on the Poems of Pain by Jane Austen and Emile Dickinson versus Jayant Mahapatra and Bibhu Padhi

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Abstract— Portrayal of pain or any emotion through poetry is an eccentric way to feel disconnected from the outer world in order to minimize the intensity of that emotion unlike pleasure does with its form. Pain is an inseparable part of life. It comes to us in different forms and makes us feel it. In this context, this paper attempts at comparing four poets of different modes of temporal as well as geographical set-ups dealing with the theme of pain. At first, it focuses on the scientific and philosophical meanings attributed to pain. Then, through the poetic revelation of pain, it critically delves into 'I've A Pain in my Head' by Jane Austen, and 'After Great Pain, a formal feeling comes' by Emile Dickinson. It is observed that Jane Austen uses the concept of pain casually by a narrating a conversation between a doctor and a patient complaining of a headache. On the other hand, Dickinson's concept of pain indicates a funeral in the poem. It is the mental pain she focuses as her concern. The focus then shifts to the revelation of pain in the poems of the two well-known Indo-Anglian poets Jayant Mahapatra and Bibhu Padhi. Jayanta Mahapatra's 'Pain' deals with the emotion in a unique way. He focuses on the concept of pain by putting a rhetorical question at the human existence. According to him, pain is the pain of being a human being. Bibhu Padhi in another way talks about physical pain covering all the body parts those who suffer and then concludes with a critical discussion correlating scientific, philosophical and poetic interpretation of pain.

Keywords— pain, emotion, scientific, philosophical, human existence, culture, poetic concept.

I. INTRODUCTION: INTERPRETATION OF PAIN

There is an antithetical saying, 'No pain, no gain'. During one's life time, one obviously encounters painful situations. Pain and pleasure happen to be the two sides of a coin. Both are feelings that everybody experience sometime or the other. But, pain is an unpleasant and/or agonised experience of mind and body, and it gives different reactions to the humans in their behaviour. Worth saying, this anguish has been variously attributed to the human sciences. Pain comes in suffering; in tragic or sad feelings. Aestheticians of *rasa* tradition often say that this pain incurs at the loss of something or somebody which ultimately leads to realisation at an emotional height.

Pain in medical science has been identified under four titles. They are: Nociceptive pain is related to tissue injury; inflammatory pain caused by an inappropriate response by the body's immune system; neuropathic pain: pain caused by nerve irritation. This includes conditions such as neuropathy, radicular pain and trigeminal neuralgia. Then, the other is functional pain which is without obvious origin, but can cause pain. (Sentiger, April 29, 2019)

Similarly, philosophically pain has been named variously such as Plato in his 'Timaeus' (Plato 1998) conceptualised pain in the fourth century BC as an emotion that occurs when a stimulus is stronger than usual. This theory is based on Aristotle's concept that pain resulted from excessive stimulation on the sense of touch. This is known

as Intensive Theory. In addition, Specificity theory by Von Frey (1895) says that specific pain receptors transmit signals to a 'pain center' in the brain that produces the perception of pain. (Moayed). Strong's theory proposes that pain is an experience based on both the noxious stimulus and the psychic reaction or displeasure provoked by the sensation. (Strong, 1895). Pattern theory states that any somaesthetic sensation occurred by a specific pattern of neural firing and that the spatial and temporal profile of firing of the peripheral nerves encoded the stimulus type and intensity. (Moayed).

The Biopsychosocial model states that pain is not only simply a neurophysiological phenomenon but also involves social and psychological factors like culture, family, nociceptive stimuli and environment influence pain perception and thus ultimately affect a person's emotions, behaviours and cognition. (*Physiopedia*, Source No. 1)

Whitman (2007) states the interpretation of pain and suffering according to Hinduism that it is to be viewed from multiple perspectives. It says that everything, including pain and suffering, is given by God/ The Ultimate. Suffering can be positive if it leads to progress on a spiritual path. Some even embrace suffering as a way to progress on spiritual path in which one gets tested and learn from a difficult experience. (*Journal of Pain*, 609).

1.1 Portrayal of Pain in Poetry

The literary expressions of pain are immense. To quote the much popular lines of John Keats(1795-1821), 'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains/ My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk.' (Ode to a Nightingale' (1820) Stanza. 1). This pain that expresses in greater philosophical height by expressing the transience of human life that is entangled with plight, agony, loss, suffering, death and decay as opposed to the permanence of the nature, creative freedom, art and beauty. Thus he says:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs,
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow. (Ode to a
 Nightingale, Stanza 3)

These immortal lines precisely philosophises the pessimistic reality of human life. However, Bob Dylan (1941-) is of the opinion that behind every beautiful thing, there's some kind of pain. Pain brings victory and achievement is in fact an optimistic notion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Apart from Keats, four authors have selected here for interpreting pain in their own ways. They are Jane Austen (1775-1815), Emily Dickinson (1830-1860), Jayanta Mahapatra (1928-) and Bibhu Padhi(1951). Austen is a well-known British author. Her poems do not come up for much of public and readers' attention. However, the multilayered petals of her creative genius are apparently visible from her poems too. Dickinson's poetry in some critics' opinion is loaded with transcendentalist intuition whereas some others say that it was heavily influenced by the Metaphysical poets of seventeenth-century England, as well as her reading of the *Book of Revelation* and her upbringing in a Puritan New England town, which encouraged a Calvinist, orthodox, and conservative approach to Christianity. (poets.org).

Critically focusing on the poetry of Mahapatra, Beg opines, 'Verily, Mahapatra is extensively conscious of the poverty, the plight of the masses and women as victim of male lust in our society; it gives his poetry a tragic disillusioned tone. (73). According to Mishra, Bibhu Padhi '... is capable of transcending territorial, ethnic, and political limitations in order to come to terms with the larger issues of life. He finds that his poems are multi-directional and romantically his self migrates into domains of varieties of life....' (*Kavya Bharati*, 133, 2002). Arora finds that Padhi in his poems, '...has exploited the technique of memory and to a great extent, succeeded in his purpose as he made it a vehicle for disclosing his tragic consciousness and voicing his viewpoints regarding landscapes, rain, dreams, loneliness, loss, past, absence, time waiting, etc.' (*Creation and Criticism*: pp.7-8).

It seems that critics have invariably focused on the diverse issues and ideas prominently visible in the poems of such poets. But, it is worthwhile to focus on the intricate, subtle and sensitive contents of their poetry as well.

III. PAIN IN JANE AUSTEN'S POEM 'I'VE A PAIN IN MY HEAD'

Jane Austen's 'I've a Pain in my Head?' is short light-hearted dialogic poem in which a doctor and a patient interact with each other. The patient is complaining of a headache. The conversation between the doctor and the

patient seems casual and of their conveyance of words towards each other is pleasant and respectful.

'I've a pain in my head'

Said the suffering Beckford;

To her Doctor so dread.

'Oh! what shall I take for't?' ('I've a Pain in My Head', Poem Hunter)

'for't' in the place of for it expresses a casual nature of their conversation unlike the regular formal conversation that occurs between a patient and a doctor.

The friendly, light hearted behaviour sounds satiric later on the poem when the patient suggests the drug for her own disease and the doctor agrees with the patient.

'For this pain in your head

Ah! What can you do Ma'am?'

Said Miss Beckford, 'Suppose

If you think there's no risk,

I take a good Dose

Of calomel brisk.'— ('I've A Pain in My Head', Poem Hunter)

This conversation projects three dimensions of satire, where firstly the doctor shows his ignorance about the medicine to suggest the patient who is suffering from a headache. This questions the doctors' profession of that age. Secondly, it mocks the mentality of people who consider themselves superior. Thirdly, it mocks the people called hypochondriac who become serious with a headache they become headache for the doctor. So, the poem gives us the simple fact that some people are ironically very sensitive to simple ailments or physical pain whereas and call it pain whereas the word pain bears immense gravity it its philosophical sense.

IV. EMILY DICKINSON'S 'AFTER GREAT PAIN, A FORMAL FEELING COMES'

Emily Dickinson's 'After Great Pain, A Formal Feeling Comes' is one of her most remarkable poems rendering the extinction of consciousness by pain in terms of a funeral. The attention of the poem is centred on the feeling and the pain projected here is not a physical; it is the mental pain which leaves the mind numb.

The Feet, mechanical, go round-

Of Ground, or Air, or Ought-

A Wooden way

Regardless grown,

A Quartz contentment, like a stone- ("After great pain, a formal feeling comes" 372 Poetry Foundation)

The body is portrayed as a mechanical object, a toy puppet, aimlessly dangling on its strings in a terrible parody of life's vitality. The quartz contentment is picturing the state of the body when a person goes through a trauma the mind works as a machine life becomes motionless, that numbness is compared with a stone.

This is the Hour of Lead-

Remembered, if outlived,

As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow-

First-Chill-then Stupor-then the letting go- (After great pain, a formal feeling comes 372 Poetry Foundation)

Dickinson reflects on pain as it progresses from the chill followed by a physical numbness and eventually let go of death and then move on. Paradoxically, Dickinson concludes that the real effect of pain is its absence, the utter numbness that only a severe wound could physically produce.

V. JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POEM 'PAIN'

In Jayanta Mahapatra's poem 'Pain,' he metaphorically manifests the message of human sufferings through nature.

The dark tree that stands

over the fields of my blood

has failed to leaf and bud. ('Pain', *The Lie of Dawns* 19)

The dark tree is the human agony which stops the progress of human mind and put an end to further exploration.

He then expresses the root which disturbs the peace of human mind.

Where are the inessential leaves

that commanded the heart,

disturbing those clouds which only are

the secrets of the sky? ('Pain', *The Lie of Dawns* 19)

The unnecessary leaves are the veins that command the human body and informs the mind about the pain for which the person becomes able to sense the pain. This process of perceiving pain is the reason why the human mind becomes disturbed. Human beings are swallowed by guilt, lifelessness, loneliness, poverty and other sufferings for which lost in earthly responsibility. Jayanta Mahapatra put questions for this process by asking:

What ceremony veils its world? (19)

This covers many folds of procedure which proceeds to the pain.

VI. IN BIBHU PADHI'S POEM 'PAIN', HE SPEAKS ABOUT PHYSICAL PAIN.

The poem discloses that the physic or the human body controls the peace of mind because even if the mind wants to celebrate life the physical pain does not cooperate as it experiences pain.

The poem gives a complete elaboration by mentioning the particular body parts where it feels pain including the hair root and skull. Padhi then ironically put the usage of different kinds of pills available to cure the physical pain of human beings and also stated the ancient remedies for that are in use:

And there're the prescribed pretensions
of success and cure. Round, gray, pink, white.
And still others, like a faithful hand's
Magical pulling at the hair, anointing
the forehead, the eyeballs, the skin
under the earlobes with ancient remedies. ('Pain', Magic Ritual 20)

Padhi reveals towards the end of the poem that the presence of pain can never be erased from human life. The pain will continue with the life. He believes the existence of human being is the reason of pain and pain is the concurrent art of life.

VII. A CRITICAL FOCUS ON THE THEME OF PAIN IN THE FOUR POETS

Poetry is an artistic achievement of the poets. It evokes all forms of emotion and imagination while the perspective varies with poem to poem and poet to poet. These four poems taken in the paper have different perspectives.

Emily Dickinson writes poems from her observation from reality that leads her to develop imaginative sensibility. She lived in a world of paradox that is evident in her poem. In her poem 'After Great Pain, A Formal Feeling Comes' shows Dickinson's withdrawal from life and a tragic vision towards it. In the poem, the situation is presented through interlocking images of ceremony and crystallization and through acute psychological observation while Jane Austen portrays the pain in a sarcastic and jovial way in her poem "I've a Pain In My Head". Pain in Dickinson's poem exhibits the reality of death as the consequence of disintegration of the parts of the body as the nerves, the heart, and the feet where the dull instinctive reactions of the entire system gradually subside to a static, frozen immobility. In Jayanta Mahapatra's 'Pain,' the burden of sufferings in human mind stops the flowering of human soul while Bibhu

Padhi's 'Pain' defined pain as the fundamental law of life considering pain as an unavoidable aspect of human existence.

Jane Austen mocks the professions of the doctors of her time for not having knowledge to prescribe medicines for a painful headache while Bibhu Padhi ironically mentions colours of pills for physical pain occurs in human body and Dickinson constitutes the antithesis that after a great pain everything becomes normal. Jayanta Mahapatra at the other hand believes the complete opposite to Dickinson, whose main concern is the blockage in the way of a smooth progress of any rudimentary possibilities because of pain.

Both Bibhu Padhi and Jayanta Mahapatra showcase the impact of the experiencing pain is possible for existence of human being in the world. Mahapatra brings out the scientific truth of human body and questions about existence and importance of it, while Padhi's poem takes this one step further by elaborating the anxiety of human beings while experiencing pain in major body parts. The struggle is between the body and its pain. The poetic concept of the four poems has no biographical or historical significance. They cherish their own sake. The state of mind is discussed in Padhi, Mahapatra and Dickinson. Jane Austen takes it to another form where pain is used as a satiric element. The state of mind which Dickinson renders the extinction of consciousness by pain in terms of a funeral is akin to the Hindu concept of *smashanbairagya*. The attention is centred on the feeling and not on the pattern of figures. The heart is obsessed with pain and lost the sense of time and place.

In Jane Austen's poem the state of mind is casual and the pain itself has no certainty. When she takes a particular situation of a headache, Dickinson separates the lesser pain that will heal, from the greater pain that will not heal and her concern is the latter category. The state of mind in Bibhu Padhi delivers a realisation that human beings find no help for the pain outside. He finds no healing balm or advanced medicines for human agony. Jayanta Mahapatra put the state of mind as if it is lost in the earthly responsibilities. He connects the human suffering with Nature which shows his fascination with it. The glory of the sky and other ceremonies hides conceivable variation of pain, misery, despair and loss that the human spirit becomes motionless.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Medical science can never measure the intensity of pain caused to philosophers and poets. The psychic reaction provoked sensation in such cases represents pain as a universal phenomena manifested through feeling and

emotion. However, all the four poems described and distinguished the states and motions of the pain with great accuracy. Paradox in Dickinson, Irony in Bibhu Padhi, satire in Jane Austen and imagination in Jayanta Mahapatra show the vital lights of genius that illuminates their poems. They have shown a wide range of pain by extending their radiant vision of circumference with each of their succeeding generation. Each of the poets comes to a conclusion one way or other that mind collapses in pain and its intensity numbs the mind's ability.

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