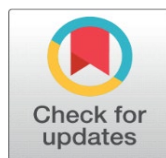
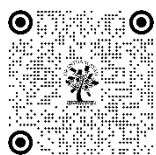


IN THE ANGST OF THE INVISIBLE EXISTENCE: MIRRORING THE EXISTENTIAL DILEMMA USING BODILY METAPHORS IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA AND KEKI N DARUWALLA

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ABSTRACT

Indian English poetry since the culmination of the colonial phase took a decisive and deliberately marked shift from the slavish imitation of the romantic writers like Keats, Byron, Shelly, and Wordsworth to a more progressive and experimental style with methodical and thematic innovativeness. It was known as post-independence poetry which heralded the arrival of a new way of composing poems with an indigenous 'Indianness' essence, sabotaging the strong clutches of its colonizer's English mother tongue. Some of the greatest contributors include Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, P. Lal, Adil Jussawalla, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel, Arvind Mehrotra, Pritish Nandy, Kamala Das, K. N. Daruwalla, Shiv Kumar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Meena Alexander, Agha Shahid Ali, Vikram Seth, Manohar Shetty, etc. A large section of poetry produced by these avant-garde writers was based on raw human experiences and expressions with overtones of psychoanalysis, existentialism, surrealism, etc. Another major experimentation conducted by the modern Indian poets was the incorporation of symbols and metaphors, which made an allusive reference to the unvoiced pathos of the survival guilt of the modern Indian man. With the emergent uncertainties and disillusionment of the post-independence scenario, themes like an identity crisis, alienation, feminist concerns, Marxism, etc were projected as close allies with the existential concerns of the era. Using Foucault's discourse of society on 'subject' and 'power' in the molding of the individual's self, the present study marks an attempt to demonstrate how the two selected poets Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki N Daruwalla try to reflect their existential concerns and post-colonial 'angst' by meticulously employing differently disabled bodily metaphors.

Keywords: Existentialist Angst, Body, Post-Colonial Poetry, Jayanta Mahapatra, Keki N Daruwalla, Michel Foucault, Power, Discourse

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian English poetry which underwent considerable transformations and revivals since its advent is compartmentalized into three different phases: imitative, assimilative, and experimental. The imitative phase began around the 1850s and extended till the 1900s, reflecting the romantic sensibilities of the British romantic writers by incorporating narratives of Indian myths, legends, and ballads with

poems, thus igniting the flames of the Indian literary renaissance. The identity of the second phase of Indian poets was marked by an effort by unchaining themselves from the firm holds of “Englishness”. However, they painted the ethos of the age by carefully blending romanticism with nationalistic consciousness, mysticism, philosophy, spirituality, etc. [Background to Indian English Poetry. \(n.d.\)](#)

The last and final phase of the post-independence or experimental phase parallels the modern and post-modern phases of Indian English literature. Some of the major contributors to the phase include Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, P. Lal, Adil Jussawalla, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel, Arvind Mehrotra, Pritish Nandy, Kamala Das, K. N. Daruwalla, Shiv Kumar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Dilip Chitre, Saleem Peerdina, Santan Rodrigues, Eunice De Souza, Silgardo, Meena Alexander, Agha Shahid Ali, Vikram Seth, Manohar Shetty, etc. It was after the publication of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry collection *A Time to Change*; the pillars for Indian English modernistic poetry were erected. [Daruwalla \(1970\)](#)

Unlike their predecessors, who tried to picture a more idealized and romanticized world, the modernistic writers insisted on presenting the harsh realities of everyday mundane lives in a direct, bold, and frank tone. They were influenced by their dynamic socio-cultural backgrounds as well as the literary productions of the modernists primarily Browning, Yeats, Auden, Ginsberg, Pound, William Stevens, etc. The focus of the poets got shifted from nature, ancient mythology, and legends to the dirty poverty-stricken dingy cityscapes. Almost all the poets of the post-independence era suffered from a sense of alienation and loss and they continually searched for integrity in their cultural roots, which was constantly echoed through their writings. To showcase these unvoiced concerns of their newly formed fragile identity, these poets extensively employed numerous metaphors and symbols throughout. [Daruwalla \(1976\)](#)

In the present paper, an effort is made to comprehend the inextricably intermingled relationship surviving between bodily metaphors and the fragile identities that were mirrored in their literary creations. Different themes like identification with the body, the significant role played by the body in identity formation, etc. are analyzed extensively. An individual's identity is constantly subjected to a state of 'flux' and is persistently evolving with the addition of new experiences and expectations, to compound in the coherent unity of the body-self. However, with some life-altering events that could articulate considerable transformations in the body, a crisis of this identity shift could emerge. Though a considerable number of theories were proposed to enlighten the relationship between the body and identity, very less research studies were conducted on the effects of 'power' on the body in identity formation, thus underscoring the research gap of the study. This is materialized by prudently employing the concepts of 'subject' and 'power', which were proposed by the French historian Michel Foucault, who considered that an individual's body with its identity and characteristics exists within the nexus of power, knowledge, and discourse. [Daruwalla \(1982\)](#)

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study is to demonstrate the operation of 'power' on 'subject' the notions proposed by Foucault in the selected poetry to show how ideologies were 'interpellated' into the minds of 'subject[s]' of the poetry, to fashion them as a 'passive object[s]', more receptive and understanding towards the 'truth/knowledge' about the distinct discourses that they are a part of. The main focus of the study is to observe the existential dilemma and traumatic mental agony

experienced by the protagonists within the labyrinth of power structure while undergoing the metamorphosis from the subjective position to the objective position. [Existentialism. \(2004\)](#)

The present paper also aims to report the notable role played by the body as a metaphor by applying the Foucauldian bodily theory, considering notions like 'power' and 'subject' for narrating the different ideological power structures that are present within the discourses of society, by analyzing the poems of Keki N Daruwalla and Jayanta Mahapatra. It also tries to reflect the unfeasible dreams of attaining identity in the theoretically discrete post-structuralist post-colonial India by the minority communities. Through this, a kaleidoscopic understanding of the different hues of meanings encompassed within the distinctly essentialized bodies of the protagonists could be transparently observed. [Foucault \(1977\)](#)

3. METHODOLOGY

The present paper tries to exploit the functionality of metaphors to meticulously decipher the unvoiced pathos and concerns that are internalized and inexplicable in the subconsciousness of the poets considering the theoretical lens of body theory. The paper analyses how bodily metaphors are employed to express the existential dilemma of the soul which is confined within a body, in a world of fragmented realities. To materialize this, the theoretical framework proposed by Foucault is utilized with special attention to notions like 'subject' and 'power', by primarily focusing on his works *Discipline and Punish* and *The Subject and Power*. This enlightens us to comprehend how a 'subject' gets produced and disciplined through different 'strategy[s]' employed by 'power', subconsciously without any visible outward exertions. With the acquisition of 'truth/knowledge' developed as an outcome of these conflictual constraints of power, subjects get transformed into 'mechanical' individuals, who perform according to the whims and fancies of ritualized society. [Foucault \(1980\)](#)

4. ANALYSIS

The poets like Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki N Daruwalla belong to that generation of revolutionary Indian English poets of the seventies, with their enchanting compositions contributing significantly to enriching modernist poetry, less intrinsic in its linguistic boundaries and more individualistic and realistic in themes. They were celebrated as two eminent poets of post-colonial modern India, who through their poetic contributions brought into the limelight the conflictual dilemmas that were found in association with the age. Both writers shared common ties of possessing a minority communal existence within a Hindu chauvinistic nation. While Mahapatra constantly explored the themes that brought into the limelight the stark realities and the horrendous truths of confinements in the lives of Indian women by hunger, starvation, poverty, human suffering, sex, etc, Daruwalla attempted to portray the multitude hues of violence and trauma that ensued in catastrophes like death, deprivation, misery, hunger, corruption, public life, lovelessness, etc in the lives of the common men with a quintessential Indian background. [Foucault \(1982\)](#)

Mahapatra belongs to one amongst the trio of Indian English poets A K Ramanujan and R Parthasarathy, who laid the foundations of modern Indian English poetry. Though he took birth in an orthodox Christian family, his upbringing was predominantly in a Hinduistic surrounding conceived by myths and superstitions, which significantly shaped a number of his poems. The socio-cultural milieu as well

as his explorations in the soils of Orissa, mainly Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, and Puri furnished a series of variegated themes for his poems. The literary influences by modernist Western poets like Emily Dickinson, Valery, Eliot, etc created in him an interest for working on themes like silence, death, and impersonal search for the universal 'truth' of existence, etc. [IGNOU \(2017\)](#)

Keki N Daruwalla belonged to one of the Parsi Quartet, along with Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel, and K D Katrak in the row. Having had hugely impacted by the writings of British poet Ted Hughes, he extensively employed animal imagery and wild nature in his poems. Further, his exposure to the nightmarish unpalatable realities of violence during his career as an IPS officer, his paradoxical existence, and his experiences as a member of a minority Parsi community in India, etc. contributed remarkably to his body of verses. [Prasad \(n.d.\)](#)

Though the poets Mahapatra and Daruwalla try to dexterously encompass various mishaps and misogynies of the quintessential Indian through a spectrum of thematic and metaphorical explorations, the metaphors of body and violence become an underlying common denominator in most of their poetic productions. Another common dilemma shared by them is the paradoxical existence within a Hindu chauvinistic nation, which denied them a privileged life they were celebrating as minorities in the colonial times of the British Raj. [Prasad \(1984\)](#)

Here, in the present paper, the body is utilized as a metaphor that connects the 'self' with the outside world, through experiences and memories. The poets Mahapatra and Daruwalla succeeded to bring forth the unvoiced and conflictual dilemmas as well as the frustration of existence in post-colonial India, using a wide range of bodily imageries that are mentally or physically dysfunctional, like sickened bodies, dead bodies, amputated bodies, minority bodies, gendered bodies, marginalized bodies, ruled over by the whole bodies of power, which condemned them a meaningful identity.

The present study analyses how once the power gets bestowed on the human body it dissociates, isolates, examines, and then recasts the identity of the individual into a new configuration with a distinctly novel property of its own. Most of the subjects are the products of the 'anarchist' struggles that are 'transversal' in nature. By analyzing the selected poems of Daruwalla and Mahapatra using Foucauldian notions, it could be probed on how the corporeal identity of the protagonists is subjugated and humiliated not only in the hands of the 'sovereign power', but also the 'immediate' enemy who could be located around the subject in various forms.

In the poem "Epileptic", Daruwalla tries to reflect on an incident where an epileptic woman is victimized by society psychologically, socially, physically, lexically, and individually. There a series of dramatic events that erupts as an outcome of the mishap, question her very existence through 'double-marginalization', and 'gender discrimination', for being diseased, as well as being a woman. The impact of the crisis is further extended to the other members of her family, as the lines say,

As a limp awareness slouched along her face
I found it was the husband who was shaking. (42-43)

It got even escalated when the privacy of the woman was invaded by a statement made by a 'pedestrian' on the condition of her body

Her seizures are cyclic
They visit in her menses. (25-26)

Society jeopardizes and disavows to excuse the woman and her family from being callously probed by the convoluted assumptions that were made about her ailing and frail body.

Though the protagonist tries to lurk herself from being “raped” by these statements imposed upon, as Foucault says:

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher judge, the doctor judge, the educator judge, and the social worker judge it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, is subject to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements. (D&P p-304)

The various discourses in the poem catalyze the mental agony in the woman as well as her family, from people who belonged to various sectors, like the rickshaw-puller, the pedestrians, the doctors, etc, for the judgmental analysis of the physical condition she is into, as her body failed to function in the ‘normative’ expectation it is supposed to belong.

Keki N Daruwalla provided a great deal of significance to dead, amputated, or injured bodies that were formed as a result of the trauma of socio-political upheavals. In the poem “Ruminations” the poet describes multiple imageries of dead and disintegrated bodies that were placed in a mortuary. He states that even the fragrance of incense sticks could not conceal the stinking odor of the decomposing bodies, thus proclaiming the harsh realities of violence. The poem then presents the dead body of a woman whose “nose is being sliced off” (11), for having fallen as a “victim of her husband’s jealousy” (11), as he believes that she has indulged in an adulterous relationship with another man. After disfiguring her body with a series of violent acts like stabbing her breast and puncturing her lungs, she is brutally murdered with no ears for her plea for mercy. Here, through the imagery of the amputated body, the poet tries to amplify the voiceless cry of the deceased, slaughtered and victimized for attempting to escape from the firm clutches of the patriarchal labyrinth, by committing to an extra-marital affair. Here it is not her body alone which is butchered, but her identity too which is intrinsically woven with it. She is denied the authority over her personal space and choices and is predicted to function as an embodiment of the power that regulates her.

In another poem “Fire Hymns”, the poet Daruwalla tries to analyze his experiences on a burning ghat, he visits with his father. The poet witnesses “the grey ash, that swallows, all half-cooked limbs” (6), which according to the poet is not only the sacrosanct role played by the fire, as perceived by the Hindus but also the dubious nature too which is referred in the poem as “cruel redness” (5), that could mercilessly engulf anything through its wild ashes. The conversational discourse made by the father to the son, further adds the existential angst of a Zoroastrian Parsi asking his son to “see those half-burnt fingers and bone-stubs” (8-9), that was fiercely feasted on by the atrocious fire, which at times even “forgets” its prey is “dead”. This very act symbolizes the paradoxical existence that the minority Zoroastrians within the hierarchical power structures in Hindu chauvinistic India, regardless of any consideration for the spineless liminal space they had to hold since the departure of the colonial elites. The poet after witnessing these unburnt corporeal remains, as “a Zoroastrian”, “clenches his child fingers” (10) with aberration, due to the unmindful act performed by the fire in condemning to fulfill its duty of cleansing the whole body of its sins by metamorphosing them to ashes. However, “twenty years since” (14) the occurrence of this incident, the poet had to consign his first-born baby to the merciless flames of fire which he once denied to “forgive”, as he was hampered from burying the deceased since the “nearest Tower

of Silence was a thousand miles" (16) away from where the poet resided. In these lines the phrase "twenty years since" could be considered as a symbolic predicament of the conflicting position, the Parsis are still ordained to exist in the absence of even a "Tower of Silence", to ceremoniously bid a proper burial of their loved ones. Towards the conclusion of the poem, the poet comes into proximity with the very 'truth/knowledge that, as a minority community in a Hindu-dominated country, their sustenance could only be approved with the very reification and self-ascription of the discourses of the dominant community, which the poet finally welcomes, "broken, yet rebellious" (18).

Mahapatra who is similarly obsessed to voice such concerns, resonates through his poem "The Lost Children of America", with the deepened sorrows of uncertainties the marginalized bodies had to endure, due to the surging rates of crime and corruption. Different thematic concerns that are associated with the corporeal identity of an individual in a newly formed postcolonial India, like poverty, hunger, begging, and rape, are widely discussed throughout the poem by employing multiple bodily imageries. The poet describes the plight of a "squint-eyed fourteen-year fisher girl" (120) who was raped by the "priest's pomaded jean-clad son" (119) mercilessly. However instead of lodging a case against him, "at the police station" she was "assaulted over and over again by four policemen" (124), further amplifying her helplessness and hopelessness. In this poem, the protagonist is denied a voice to claim the intense barbarity that is inflicted on her body, for holding an inferior stance in the hierarchical power structures of a misogynistic male-dominated society. More than the agony of the physical torture, it was the denial of her basic human rights to existence, which traumatically paralyzed her. Moreover, she was addressed and subjugated as a "fisher girl", who could be merciless, by any random person, even the supposed law-keepers of the society like the priest, policemen, etc., could be exploited. Safety and security for her life here seem far-reaching extinct dreams.

Mahapatra reflects a similar existential wail through another poem "Hunger", which paradoxically juxtaposes two contradicting ideas of bodily 'hunger' that engulf the poet as well as the fisherman's daughter, the teenage prostitute he approaches. The poet once meets a fisherman, who puts forth an offer for the poet to have sexual intercourse with his teenage daughter, objectified as a commodity that could appease the poet's appetite by offering "will you have her" (2). The fisherman presented his frail young girl to the poet and asked him to "feel her" (17). The girl to ease his hunger, without any denial, wide opened her "wormy legs" that were too thin due to starvation. She surrendered to his animalistic urges to confront the "fish slithering", that was "turning inside" (21), to fill her as well as her family's empty stomach of poverty. Here the poet shares the deeper existential dilemma that the frail and distressed damsel is placed into, by the men within her society as well as her family. She is imprisoned and inscribed with a bodily identity that is fabricated to incline to a characteristic self, which contains within it the manifold discourses of a distinct matrix she hails from. Foucault defines this technique as "body politic", which "is a technique of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication roots and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning into objects of knowledge" (D&P p-28)

In the poem "A Missing Person", the poet pictures the life of a nameless cum identityless 'missing' ordinary village woman, who is supposed to lurk in her very corporeal existence in the "darkened room" of her leaf-thatched mud house. She is presented as drowsy and weak, being burdened by a whole day's hefty labor,

“waiting as usual” (4), for the arrival of a male member of the family. Though the “drunken” flames of the “oil lamp” succeed in the limelight of her disintegrated spirit visible in her face, it fails to reflect her corporeal existence as a distinct individual, with an identity and voice of her own. She is expected to hide her “lonely body” (9), which is to be shielded from the truths proposed by the medieval fanatics of Indian societies. Her freedom to express her inner plight is curbed with her “lonely” existence, where only half-truths about her identity are mirrored. As Mahapatra in “Truth and Power” states:

Truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power ... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, how each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Interview, “Truth and Power” p-131)

Similarly, in his poem “The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street”, Mahapatra details his experiences on his visit to a ‘whore house’, which welcomed the poet with a beckoning call “Walk right in. It is yours”. This very discourse suggests the very commodifying power of society which further displays women as ‘objectified bodies in “posters” and “public hoardings”’. These women according to him are alienated creatures distant from any ties to society, and confined within the recesses of the “house’s dark spaces” (20). Just like in the poem “Hunger” the whore tries to self-ascribe her identity as a whore and initiates to function accordingly. They become part of a man-woman relationship, devoid of any emotional investment, which shocks the poet when a statement is made by the whore whom the poet is engaged with, “Hurry will you? Let me go”(39). The poet depicts the ‘strategical’ exploitation of the repressive society they are exposed to, using several discourses which supposedly ordain them to contain within their subjugated body or their ‘whore’s house’. In Foucault’s words,

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his subjection. (D&P p- 202)

5. FINDINGS

The paper has highlighted how Indian English poetry since independence has evolved and departed from the clutches of “Englishness”, which was prevalent during the pre-independence period, to a newly formed tradition that thematically and methodically concentrated on individualized, realistic, and experimental tones, by considering two revered poets of the age, Keki N Daruwalla and Jayanta Mahapatra. These writers through their prolific and praiseworthy compositions triumphantly reflected the various pathos and complexities of the age like absurdity, alienation, identity crisis, hopelessness, cultural pessimism, etc.

Though they successfully depicted the survival trauma of minority communities in their works to reflect the internal and external convolutions in the existential crisis of postcolonial India, the distinct role played by corporeality and violence was extensively examined in greater detail. The different hierarchical categorizations that compartmentalized normal and disabled bodies like sickened

bodies, dead bodies, amputated bodies, minority bodies, gendered bodies, marginalized bodies, etc, present within the poems of these writers were intensely analyzed as citations discussing poignant dilemmas of existence. The poets through these disabled bodily metaphors meticulously transferred their internal subjective concerns of the existential 'angst' residing within the marginalized body, which was tamed to function within the permitted limits of the norms that were set by society.

The study has further focused on the different ideological power structures existing within the poems using the metaphor of the body, as well as tries to educate the futile efforts to form a unified identity in a post-structuralist world. It further, narrates how ideologies of discourses produced from the foundation of power structures within a society, ensnare the thoughts and fantasies and eventuate the functioning of the human body from that of an 'individual subject' to a 'docile object'. The study then finally contemplates how substantial strategies like communication, language, and social practices, succeed to coach an individual to perform the desired traits and conduct without resistance and ignorance, unlike the coercive methods of punishments employed in the preceding times.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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