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An Ecopoetic Study on P. K. Patra's Select Poems

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Abstract:

Pradip Kumar Patra is one of the most prominent poets of the 20th century. He is a worshipper of nature and its resources. His poetry contributes to his delicacy towards plants and trees. He appears to be comprehensible and satisfied with his alliance with the psychology of plants and anatomy of trees. His postulation towards life and living furnish him as an amenable and receptive poet. His integrity as a poet lies in his awareness of plant world. His poems entitle a new facet to plant life and living. This paper aims to establish his love for plants and its movements. It further insists on the aspect of ecopoetry in showing man-nature binary.

Keywords: ecopoetry, plants, trees, consciousness, existence.

Pradip Kumar Patra is one of the prolific poets of the 20th century. He is an eminent poet. His poetry idealizes the value of life and living. In a steadfast manner, he reiterates the varied possibilities of staying in the midst of nature and its resources. His poetry contributes to the varied essence of nature. He celebrates the glory and generosity of nature. Nature seems to be playful, joyous, royal and grand for the poet. As a poet, he tries to locate the glory of the present and wonder of the past in the sights and sounds of nature. His poems define the rich natural landscape in the form of plants and trees. The plants and the trees give him a soothing sensation to embrace the captivating horizon of life. His poems are a realization of the poet's inner self. He finds peace and prosperity in the existence and survival of plants and trees.

Patra as a poet, attempts to display the correlation between plants and man. His projection of plant domain, explores manifold raptures in dealing with the sphere of plants and trees. His recognition and realization of the consequence of plants and trees gauge his individualistic endeavour as a poet. Ecopoetry is a dynamic and growing discourse today.

This genre provides a different style that signifies the aspects of ecology and environment. As an eco-poet, Patra asserts a new dimension towards understanding nature and its relationship with man. To him, the harmony between the two constitutes a dramatic truth and a celestial beauty. The excellence of Patra lies in his delineation of creating emotional poetic consciousness. The sensibility and desirability of the poet invokes a kind of cognizance among the readers,

Bryson in his *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* asserts: 'Ecopoetry is a mode that, while adhering to certain conventions of traditional poetry, advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues ... a deep humility with regard to our relationships with human and non-human nature ...' (5-6). Patra seeks to make people ecologically conscious. He sets up a new trend by exhibiting the contemporary issues of the present-day society. He strives to disestablish man's decrepitude towards nature in general and plants and trees in particular.

Moreover, John Elder in his *Imagining the Earth* comments on the principles of ecology that changes one's vision towards nature. To him, poetry is a 'solitary voice from the mountains calls upon the community to renew itself; a socially eccentric impulse makes possible a more balanced culture, concentric with the planet' (Introduction, 01). Patra also communicates the way he visualizes nature and the genealogy of plants and trees. His poetic expression gets recognition through his characterization of plant taxonomy. He employs the balance between plant world and human world. Through his poetry he establishes his relationship with the leaves and his attachment with the grass. In his poetry collection titled *Summer Implications* the poet writes in the poem "In Eerie Silence": 'For me every mood of nature/ is an occasion for celebration' (29). He finds peace and strength standing under a tree. The different mood of nature makes him observe every occasion with triumph and exultation. The shade of a tree provides him inspiration from the stagnant and tired life. As he says in the poem "Transcending Despair and Stagnation": 'The ghostly tree standing thoughtful/ as a messiah seems to be pacifying/ the revolting fear in me' (30). The trees are able to transcend the fear and anxiety of the poet. It appears as a source of solidity for him. They provide a sense of sustenance and reassurance to him. The trees look tall, thoughtful, friendly and happy to the poet. He actually communicates with the trees.

The representation of plants is one of the dominant features in Patra's poetry collections. Molly Mahood, a renowned scholar and an academician focuses both on

literature and botany. Her book titled *The Poet as Botanist* envisages the connection between plants and the poet. She writes that poets must have a passion for the world which is green. She hopes for the ‘revitalization of poetry about the natural world by ecology’ (252). Moreover, her *Poetry and Humanism* facilitates the role of plants in human life. Patra’s different poetic devices like metaphors and symbols anticipate the poet’s objective in personifying plants and trees. Patra also demonstrates the connection between plants and humans. He views plants as active, powerful and sensational living beings. The poetry of Patra dwells upon an ethical relationship between plants and humans. He considers plants to be very much part of his life.

In the words of Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura Gray Street, ecopoetry represents a non-anthropocentric way of thinking. In the Introduction of *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, they write: ‘In recent decades, the term ‘ecopoetry’ has come into use to designate poetry that in some way is shaped by and responds specifically to that crisis’ (Introduction). Likewise, Patra’s way of looking at the reality doesn’t only rely on human values. He moves further to manifest the exemplary plant recognition in the life of humans. Plants hold an inherent part in Patra’s poetry. Plants are introduced as conscious and responsive creation. The blushing beauty of plants fills the poet’s heart with pleasure and charm. In Patra’s poetry collection *Dewy Morning* he talks about coconut tree, pine tree, palm and eucalyptus tree. In *Denouement* he refers to coriander leaves and palm trees. In *Winding Path* he sheds light on golmohur, peepal and palm trees. In *Panoramic Shillong* he talks about Banyan tree and in *Midnight Divinity* the poet insists on tulsi plant and palm trees. Most of his poems with reference to different plants and trees accentuate his perturbed nature towards man’s misconduct and delinquency. The poet takes it as a challenge to prompt and awaken man to be responsible towards the endurance of plants and trees.

Here it becomes clear that the poet establishes abiding relationship between man and tree. He finds ecstasy in the world of plants and trees. Gerrard in *Ecocriticism* writes: “ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment ...” (i). In the same manner, the poet gets delighted at the enthralling company of plants and trees. It makes him experience life anew. In his poem ‘Living a Life Afresh’ he admits that the shedding dewdrops inspire him to love life. The ‘yellow leaves’ help him appreciate the happy and content life of the past. He envisages on the beauty and significance of the ‘fertility of the sterile earth’ (48). Trees and plants play a crucial role in the life of the poet in particular and in the life of human beings in general. The

bond between the two is of joy and wonder, hope and desirability. In the poem 'Therapeutic Effect of Silence' he writes: 'The trees are the ones/ to drink all the ecstasy / which silence bestows' (58). He hovers over the spontaneous credibility of the trees in pursuing relief and sustenance to human beings. The subconscious mind of the poet moves towards conscious when he acclimatizes with the emotions of trees and plants.

Patra as a poet delves deep into ecology and environment. Plants and trees occupy a special place in his heart and soul. Patra acknowledges the moral perspective in plants. As a nature poet Denise Levertov writes "my poet's sight I was given/ that it might stir me to song" (Selected Poems, 91). To him the poets must have the credibility to explore and reveal the unseen beauty and truth of nature. In a similar manner, Patra also advocates his spell to look into the dichotomy between man and plants. His integrity lies in the potential to encapsulate the association between man-plant binary.

Further, Matthew Hall in his book *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* says 'the recognition of plants as morally considerable (as persons)' (158). Hall moreover situates a philosophical survey on plants and its development. He considers plants as persons. Patra's poems similarly speak about how plants and trees are philosophical in nature. Their identity lies in the sketch of yellow leaves, scented flowers and fresh greenery. In his poetry anthology *Dewy Morning*, the poem "Dewy Morning" refers to the coconut leaves and the green paddy field. This again acts as a symbol for the poet's happiness and satisfaction. He regards that the trees try to express its delight 'over the divine occasion' (23). To the poet trees are meditative, occasional and divine. He firmly believes that there is always a spiritual bond between the trees and the man. In the poem "Knowledge" he concentrates on the aspect of 'artificial afforestation of pine and eucalyptus' (30). Here the poet's concern for tree plantation comes to the core. He values the idea that plants are sensational living beings. They breathe, feel and have senses. His assertion over plants and trees reflect the development of his earthly consciousness. His earthly engagement materializes his aspiration for plants. He feels delighted at the communion between his self and plants. He wishes to liberate plants from human dereliction and negligence. The conservation of plants materializes his metrical composition.

In *Sustainable Poetry*, Leonard Scigaj writes: 'environmental poetry must contain an activist dimension to foreground particular acts of environmental degradation and degraded planetary ecosystems' (21). He further says: 'We need a poetry that treats nature as a separate and equal other and includes respect for nature conceived as a series of ecosystems ...' (5).

Patra also has a concern for protection of environment. The poet always views life in terms of his delicate relation with plants. He says in the poem “Past” the past ‘is an inner brooding and a shadow of a tree’ (40). Plants and trees provide power and durability to the poet. They seem to be most intimate with the poet. The poem “Previous Birth” captures the idea of how the poet ‘becomes conscious’ (42) of his past when he sees the palmtrees. The recollection of the past makes him rich with tolerance and modesty. The geneology of plants and trees intrude his mind with innocence and wonder. The sense of hope and the concept of life are bestowed upon him by the stand-still trees. In the poem “Self-contained Whole” he writes: ‘My sense of loneliness had vanished;/ In the meanwhile, I do not know/ how I have become a self-contained whole’ (49). He tries to preview his lonely future in his dedication for trees and plants. His sense of loneliness and alienation gets emphasised through his reference to different plants. As a plant lover, Patra shows his admiration and regard for trees and plants.

Ryan writes his objective in *Plants in Contemporary Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Botanical Imagination* as: ‘to disclose the power of verse to anticipate and parallel scientific thought through a freedom of imagination ...’ (4). Patra as well discloses his poetic power to foster his imagination with the reality of the plant world. His treatment of trees and plants confer his concern towards conceptualizing the varied aspects of nature. In his collection of poems namely *Denouement* Patra deals with coriander leaves and palm trees. In the poem “Impaired Joy” he meditates on the scent of coriander leaves. He alludes to the powerful nature that remains unaffected by years of environmental degradation. As he says: nature ‘retains its pristine appearance still’ (24). He disdains the intricacies of civilized life that impairs the celestial glory of nature in general and plants and trees in particular. The rise of modernism makes him specify his objectives. In “Forceful Survival” he says: ‘I want to flutter among the leaves by being/ transformed to a tiny leaf and relish the delight/ of wind, rain and sunshine’ (19). He gets enlightenment from nature and its objects. In “Abstracts” he writes: ‘nature teaches us/ not through speech but through silence’ (9). He communicates with nature in a direct manner. The silence in nature serves as a sense of consolation for the poet. The poem “Memory” insists on the growth of palm tree, which he again associates with the growth of his memory. As he writes: ‘Sometimes memory turns to a cobweb/ sometimes to a rainbow/ sometimes to a cluster of palmtrees too’ (34). Tree in his poems appear to be symbolic of spiritualism. In “Spontaneous Spiritualism” he says: ‘...I see the vermilion smeared/ stones worshipped as Goddess Kali under a tree’ (52). Moreover, in the poem “Long Term Survive” he finds the ecstasy of falling leaves on the water which resembles ‘the

historic boat floating ceremony of/ Kartika Purnima in honour of the erstwhile/ merchants of Orissa' (30). His spiritual bonding with trees and plants confers his recognition of sublime nature. He further tries to locate his self in and within the 'worth-seeing' (59) trees. All his wishes lie hidden among the leaves. His "The Image of my own Self" refers to the artistic sensibility of trees. His consciousness, association and interest complete his analysis of trees in his life. The mystery of time, the product of memory and the shadow of future is an extinguished experience for the poet.

In *Midnight Divinity* he emphasises on tulsi plants and palm trees. Here, he also speaks about how he gets solitude in the lap of trees. His obsession with plants and trees makes him forget all his tension and grievances in life. He embraces his feelings for the plants and trees. In "Life and Nature" he writes: 'Nature becomes the best support of/ my life ...' (25). He gets relief from his restlessness and disappointment from the natural resources. In "Love and Devotion" he mentions about tulsi plant, nearby which he used to worship Lord Jagannath. He goes on to say in "Man and Tree" about the unending relationship between human and tree: '... never look upon the trees for any lessons/ for they are mere trees and we are/ human beings, the superior creatures/ of the world' (28). Here, he considers human beings to be the superior creatures of the world, who seem to be always busy in their own world and involve themselves in destroying nature by cutting trees. His sense of concern to protect and preserve the plants and trees make him a dedicated devotee of plants and trees. As in the poem "Perception of the Earth" he talks about the 'pleasant warmth' (37) that he gets from a tree. His perception of plants and trees heighten his faith and hope about a better future like plantation of trees, preservation and protection of natural environment. In this anthology he aspires to speak on the existence and survival of plants and trees.

In *The Winding Path* he depicts the beauty and grace of goldmohur, peepal and palm tree. He gets a divine elevation in his intimacy with these trees. His experience with them is subtle enough to be preserved forever. From these poems we find transcendental maturity on the part of the poet. The image of plants and trees provide a message of love and peace to the poet. To him, they embody Nature's intense greenery. They help the poet to be nostalgic. The colour and fragrance of plants relishes his celestial rapture. The pristine beauty of trees, gives him a distinctive identity. In the poem "Coping with the Change" he talks about the petals of goldmohur that mirrors his youth. In "Previous Life" the poet says: 'My presumption of a previous life/ is a shadow of a peepal tree' (48). The view of peepal tree illumines his thought about the previous life. His awakening about the prosperity of plants arouses his poetic spirit.

In “Taste of Infinity” he refers to his visualization of palm tree. It helps him envision his mind and thought. The unseen grace of plants thrills him with happiness and immense love.

His reminiscence of life revolves around the ethereal presence of plants and trees, its fragrance and rhythm. His spiritual consciousness arouses with the evolutionary nature of plants and trees. He enjoys the consistent majesty of trees. He feels nostalgic at the innocence and the implication of the trees. Charles Darwin in his *The Power of Movement in Plants* says in conclusion: ‘... I think that I have succeeded in showing that all the more important great classes of movements are due to the modification of a kind of movement common to all parts of all plants from their earliest youth’ (03). They concentrate on the receptive nature of plants. They talk about the evolution and general movement of plants. Patra casts his interest in the movement and motion of plants and trees. His generalisation of plant movement identifies his implication towards the sensational activity of plants.

From his poetry collection titled *Panoramic Shillong*, the poem “Benevolent Canopy” casts the spirit of Banyan tree that speaks about ‘disintegrating humanity’ (16). As he says: ‘The spirit of the earth/ I have seen sitting under/ the old Banyan tree ...’(16). He further says: ‘She has been a force of integration/ for the birds but never the same/ for the mankind, a misfortune/ the shock of which she cannot stand’ (16). The tree symbolizes empowering unity among humanity. His subtle faith in the tender-hearted tree makes him a contemplative intellect. Here the poet tells how a Banyan tree gets neglected by mankind in general. Human beings have no time to stand and look at the beauty of the sights and sounds of nature. His Banyan tree epitomizes his strong faith in solidarity between man and tree. He seems to communicate silently with the trees. The enlightenment and wisdom of mankind depends on its association with plants and trees. The manner in which he records the sensitive proposition of trees indicates his exquisite inspection of trees.

Jagdish Chandra Bose, a renowned academician talks about sense organs and nervous system of plants. He analyses different plant movements. In his paper *Voice of Life* he writes: ‘My investigations show that all plants, even the trees, are fully alive to the changes in the environment, they respond visibly to all stimuli’ (21). Patra, as well, corresponds to the human inability to react to the potential and skill of plants. He also deals with plant intelligence and movement in a different way altogether. He believes in the skilful doctrine of plant entity. For him plants and trees do have the power to retort to all kinds of situation. However, each plant and every tree shows action and reaction to human pursuit.

P.K. Patra appears with solemn excitement and sheer creativity to unveil the elegance and grace of plants and trees in developing human consciousness. His craftsmanship lies in

his classification of trees and plants. His poetic landscape sheds light on his intense observation of the interplay between his personal feelings and plant psychology. His intellectual and emotional concern shows his profound sense of appreciation of the plant world. His engagement with the plant world makes him challenge the aesthetics of the modern-day society.

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