

**MEMORY, NATURE AND COUNTRYSIDE : A STUDY
OF THE SELECTED POEMS OF
LES MURRAY AND PRADIP KUMAR PATRA**

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Abstract : *The paper not only presents two contemporary poets from two different continents, but also their distinct ways of thinking and articulating the lines of their poems with deep conviction and realization. With allegiance to the respective country, each expresses his own construction and vision of the countryside with clarity and warmth . It is a common phenomenon in both Australia and India that the countryside is vanishing very fast with migration, industrialization and urbanisation. Les Murray and Pradip Kumar Patra are very sensible to such devastating phenomena. They express their concern for such havoc and build an alternative world or space in their poetry which the readers could understand and appreciate. The tone of the poets is calm, their emotion is also not fluctuating and thematically they are large and varied. When Patra is meditative like Wordsworth , Murray is imagistic like Keats. Needless to say, both the poets breathe a life of their own to their experiences and perceptions. Their poems , actually , say what imagination is . They just add wings to the realistic elements. Those just fly with the motion of ideas that the poets give.*

Keywords : *Mind, Spirit, Memory, Nature, Adventure, Experience, Perception, Relief, Sensibility, Muse*

Contemporary Australian poet, Les Murray and Indian poet, Pradip Kumar Patra explore the regions in their poetry and show the unseen aspects of countryside with all its beauty and aesthetics. For both of them landscape is an important site for understanding life to its bottom. There is a vivid portrayal of places, memory and culture against the backdrop of landscape signifying the poets' desire for moving towards a future where emotion and

feeling have greater importance than the rule of ideologies. The paper explores the major poems of the poets and show that their poetry is not a critique of contemporary life steeped in scientific advancement, it rather is a reminder of the pristine life that could be lived in association with Nature and landscape. In the time of global environmental hazard the said issue has relevance both to Australia and India.

Les Murray has had a long career in poetry and literary journalism in Australia. When he was 38, his *Selected Poems* was published by Angus & Robertson, alongside respected Australian poets such as Christopher Brennan, A. D. Hope, Kenneth Slessor and Judith Wright, signifying his emergence as a leading poet. They said, his poetry garners both praise and criticism. Biographer Peter Alexander writes that all Murray's volumes are uneven, though as Bruce Clunies Ross would remark, There's less good and "good", but it's very hard to find really inferior Murray.

Les Murray has published around 30 volumes of poetry and is often called Australia's Bush-bard. Academic David McCooney described Murray in 2002 as a traditional poet whose work is radically original. His poetry is rich and diverse, while also exhibiting an obvious unity and wholeness based on his consistent commitment to the ideals and values of what he sees as the real Australia. He is almost universally praised for his linguistic dexterity, his poetic skill, and his humour. However, these same reviewers and critics tend to be more questioning when they start discussing his themes and subject matter.

Twelve years after Murray's induced birth his mother miscarried and, after the doctor failed to call an ambulance, died. Literary critic Lawrence Bourke writes that Murray, linking his birth to her death, traces his poetic vocation from these traumatic events, seeing in them the relegation of the rural poor by urban élites. Dispossession, relegation, and independence become major preoccupations of his poetry. Beyond this, though, his poetry is generally seen to have a nationalistic bent. *The Oxford Com-*

panion to Australian Literature writes that the continuing themes of much of his poetry are those inherent in that traditional nationalistic identity - respect, even reverence, for the pioneers; the importance of the land and its shaping influence on the Australian character, down-to-earth, laconic ... and based on such Bush-bred qualities as egalitarianism, practicality, straight-forwardness and independence; special respect for that Australian character in action in wartime ... and a brook-no-argument preference for the rural life over the sterile and corrupting urban environment. Of his literary journalism, Bourke writes that in a lively, frequently polemic prose style he promotes republicanism, patronage, Gaelic bardic poetry, warrior virtue, mysticism, and Aboriginal models, and attacks modernism and feminism.

Pradip Kumar Patra, a winner of Michael Madhusudan Award from Michael Madhusudan Academy, Kolkata, for the year 2003 for his poetry like Murray draws inspiration from his native state, Orissa. It is a matter of great concern for Patra when he sees that in the name of modernity environment and traditional values have been polluted. Poetry for him is a resort or a kind of alternative world. When depressed, he goes back to that world for comfort and solace. Hence, he believes that it is a powerful tool which can transform the humanity. For him the world of poetry is not just possessed by muse, it is for him a real world which one can strive for. As a university teacher who at present teaches and also heads the department of English in the Kokrajhar campus of Gauhati university he is concerned with both theory and practice of poetry. Though he belongs to the coastal Orissa, he has accepted Assam as his domicile for the last eighteen years. Mapping the link between Assam and Orissa is one of the recurrent themes of Patra.

As a poet he has always been associated with the countryside. He feels that the soul of the earth rests peacefully in countryside than the urban area. Among the most important poets, he is influenced by are William Wordsworth, John Keats and Jayanta Mahapatra. Just as Murray breathes in an Australianness in his

poetry Patra's poetry has a flavour of India in general and Orissa in particular. Patra has seven collections of poems which explore the nature, culture and people of the rural area. His poetic sensibility captures the minute details of the rural life. For him even the smallest rural phenomenon matters. His rural portrayal not just ends in itself, it rather culminates in the integration of human mind and spirit in it. Within this broad range, history and memory and corresponding yearning figure prominently. Though a lover of rural beauty, Patra is not averse to urbanization. His concept of urbanization is constituted of human habitation alongside natural setting. For him modern life is consisted of scientific invention as well as water, trees, birds, animals and humanity without any hierarchy.

When asked about poetry and its relation to mundane life, Patra says that there is hardly any difference. We have poetry in life. It is more poetic than the poetry of language. He says that we do not underline it in real life. As a poet Patra feels that he links the life which is already fragmented and makes it meaningful. He says that one should stop and see everything attentively. Then only poetic feeling erupts. But the observation should be sans the preconceived notions. Learning to practice ignorance is very important for him. It is a state which brings trance, an ideal condition for poetic sensibility to develop.

Patra is not a perfectionist. For him each and every poem is a process. It is never a finished product. Thereby he obstructs closure and promotes openness. It is time, not individual, who plays an important role in his poetry. That is why one marks that there is no conscious effort by the poet to go in a particular direction. There is a readiness to accept everything, whatever it may be. There is a covert philosophy of adjustment, blending of real and imaginary, preference of natural to artificial and coexistence of past and present. The vision of future in Patra's poetry is noteworthy.

Needless to say that Patra as a poet is enlightened, who just like Keats transports the readers to an ethereal world at least

for some time that brings immense joy. Although both the poets use countryside as a backdrop or a medium, they go beyond it towards a metaphysical existence. It is the countryside that comes in close association with the nature and the mysterious universe that matters. The poem 'Performance' of Les Murray best expresses the communion of the earthly with universal. The poet here is adventurous and seeks a relief at least for the time being from the stress of the earth.

I starred that night, I shone:

I was footwork and firework in one,

a rocket that wriggled up and shot
darkness with a parasol of brilliants
and a peewee descant on a flung bit;
I was blusters of glitter-bombs expanding
to mantle and aurora from a crown,
I was fouéttés, falls of blazing paint,
para-flares spot-welding cloudy heaven,
loose gold off fierce toeholds of white,
a finale red-tongued as a haka leap:
that too was a butt of all right!

As usual after any triumph, I was
of course, inconsolable.

Patra while churning the memory of his grandmother identifies himself with the 'sun', 'sky' and the 'clouds' in the fourth stanza of his poem, 'My Grandmother'.

The paddy fields at the end of my village
just like the village women gossip
with the playful wind and blush at the
masculinity of the sun above.

The sky looks on; the clouds with mysterious shapes
join each other before raining on the dizzy paddy fields. ("The Rain Speaks" 53)

Patra here doesn't seek any relief from the earthly tension. He rather gives a divine touch to his worldly experience. Then again the wisdom of existence is best expressed by Murray in the poem 'The Meaning of Existence'.

Everything except language
knows the meaning of existence.
Trees, planets, rivers, time
know nothing else. They express it
moment by moment as the universe.
Even this fool of a body
lives it in part, and would
have full dignity within it
but for the ignorant freedom
of my talking mind

Patra also links his intense relationship, fond memory and the warmth of his village life with nature and the universal forces for a greater meaning and significance in the poem, 'Perception of the Earth'. The climax of the poet's feeling reaches in the last stanza.

Startled I am by the ghostly appearance
of the earth; ghost and darkness, darkness
and ghost, I find no clear meaning.
The only feeling that follows is fear,
but fear does not scar me; it is the only force
that deepens my feeling, emotion and
impressions and make me most human
for a complete perception of the earth. (Midnight Divinity 37)

Patra feels proud of his native state, Orissa so much that in exalted mood he writes in the poem, 'Orissa'.

To live in Orissa is to live amidst past
and present both and march towards an epic
the kind of which Homer would have failed to create. (Dewy Morning 37)

For Patra countryside is an image of his own personal feeling. That's why he deftly writes in the poem 'Suffering':

When the evening is sleeping
in the shamble of hope and despair
I grope for the image of suffering. (Denouement 55)

Patra highlights countryside not only for its natural beauty and innocent people, but also for its joy and mirth relating to various festivals in 'Indian Festival'.

No precision
no artificiality
and no conscious improvisation,
only an expansion of muddle
in memory of some legend or myth. (Summer Implications 43)

Again for Patra, his village is a source of imagination. It is obvious in the poem, 'Evening in a Village'.

The village evening flares the
dying creativity in me. (The Winding Path 27)

In spite of his knowledge, experience and enlightenment relating to his native land he sometimes wonders at it. His attachment to his native land increases more and more because of his own sense of wonder. In 'Native Land' this particular feeling is noteworthy.

What native land is,
what characteristic
makes a difference nobody knows. (Panoramic Shillong 36)

In the poem, 'Flowering Eucalypt in Autumn' Murray like Patra projects his observation of Australian rural beauty with all the details. There is a Keatsian flavour of the Autumn.

When the Japanese plum tree
was shedding in spring, we speculated
there among the drizzling petals

what kind of exquisitely precious
artistic bloom might be gendered
in a pure ethereal compost

Bristling food tough delicate
raucous life, each flower comes

as a spray in its own turned vase,
a taut starbust, honeyed model
of the tree's fragrance crisper in your head.

When the Japanese plum tree
was shedding in spring, we speculated
there among the drizzling petals

what kind of exquisitely precious
artistic bloom might be gendered
in a pure ethereal compost

of petals potted as they fell.
From unpetalled gun-debris
we know what is grown continually,

a tower of fabulous swish tatters,
a map hoisted upright, a crusted
riverbed with up-country show towns.

Both the poets take countryside as a background. But the directions in which they gradually move are different. Patra just like Wordsworth spiritualizes nature whereas Murray reflects numerous aspects of Australian life through the image of countryside.

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(All poems of Les Murray in this article are quoted from this website)

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