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Reinterpreting the 'Maladies' of 'Self' and 'Exile': A Study on the Select Poems of Adil Jussawalla

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Abstract

Life beyond the homeland can resemble a sugar-coated pill meant to comfort, like a gentle balm for a feverish child. Yet for a grown man like Adil Jahangir Jussawalla, the sweetness only masks the bitterness within. The transitions between Europe and India feel less like a journey of discovery and more like a relentless carousel, spinning him from one disillusionment to another, with every change of scenery revealing a deeper layer of disappointment beneath the glossy surface. The bitterness of exile and alienation has always been a source of trauma in Jussawalla's observations (Wong and Hassan). As we know, a precise thought needs an accurate expression. Jussawalla's observations on such issues are precisely expressed in his two anthologies of poetry, Land's End and Missing Person. Are these anthologies a remembrance of such chaotic trauma that ultimately left Jussawalla disillusioned regarding his homeland? Is the aspiration for homeland a new way to define the 'self' of the observer? Can problematic issues like 'Self', 'Exile', 'Alienation', and 'Disintegration' be called a malady? If they are, they require interpretation and re-interpretation. This essay will attempt to address the problematic issues already touched upon in the discourse's title.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adil Jahangir Jussawalla (1940-) is a highly acclaimed English writer. Born in Bombay in 1940, he spent most of his time in England. Adil was determined to become an architect. He returned home from England after a thirteen-year absence. He was a Parsi. During the 1970s, he served as a lecturer in English at St. Xavier's College in Bombay. The literary output of Jussawalla is relatively meagre, with only two collections of poetry to his name. Land's End (1972) was published when he was twenty-two, a rare feat for a young writer. Missing Person is Jussawalla's most highly appreciated collection of poetry. These two collections are not easily accessible in India (Barbuddhe). Adil was exceptionally talented, having published his first collection before the age of twenty-five. In addition to poetry anthologies, Jussawalla wrote an anthology of Indian prose in English, Statements (1976). He served as the editor of New Writing India in 1974. He writes for regional newspapers, including The Times of India. In 1976, he participated as an Honorary Fellow at the International Writing Program in Iowa. Jussawalla has always been interested in essentially metaphysical subjects, exploring metaphysical predicaments arising from colonial and partially colonial encounters.

II. JUSSAWALLA AND THE COURSE OF HIS POETRY

The poetry of Jussawalla has transcended the boundaries of being a mere remembrance of the post-colonial impulse (King). *Land's End* (1972) is often hailed as the Bible of chaos after the birth of the universe (Chevalier). The focus is unique to the poet's own. The encounter between Europeans and non-Europeans is not viewed through the naturalistic eyes of Joseph Conrad, but rather from the standpoint of a Parsi who resides in London. This unique perspective offers a fresh and intriguing take on the post-colonial experience, inviting readers to delve deeper into Jussawalla's work. (Bate). The encounter has multiple interpretations. Jussawalla's reactions are intricate and warrant our contemplation. Colonialism and post-colonialism are both dissected on the blotting paper of a Parsi who is neither content in London nor at ease in India (King). *A Missing Person* is the more mature reaction of an Indian who is disillusioned and has lost the dream of a homeland. The chaos in 'Land's End' is much more intricate in the second collection. The dreamer has now become a shocker. The metaphysical disillusionment has now sunk into the pool of post-colonial boredom, a testament to the depth and complexity of Jussawalla's poetry. This complexity is not a barrier but a stimulating challenge for readers to unravel the layers of meaning in Jussawalla's work. (Biswas).

Jussawalla's reputation gradually gained momentum among academics in India after the 1990s (King). Indian receptions of Jussawalla deserve special attention, where many metaphysical and theoretical issues have come to the round table of ruminations (Dodiya). In the title of this paper, many of these problematic post-colonial issues have already been addressed. It is high time to inhale them all in a single breath. Malady comes via Old French from an unrecorded Vulgar Latin male habitus, meaning in bad condition'. 'Malady' is a psychological term that gained entry into the literary lexicon earlier. It has an international currency with a post-colonial flavour, right after the publication of Interpreter of Maladies: Stories of Bengal, Boston, and Beyond (1999). Jhumpa Lahiri has exquisitely expanded the etymological geography of the word. The word malady has become a prism through which changing angles will give birth to new meanings and interpretations. Closely reading the title story, "Interpreter of Maladies," will provide a deeper understanding of its meaning. Mrs. Mina Das is an Indian-origin American. She kept Bobby's birth secret for eight years. Such secrecy has resulted in a disorder, essentially a disease of the mind. She found a failed scholar, Mr. Kapasi, to provide a remedy. It remained untouched, though. So, Mrs. Das is a woman caught between two cultures and finds herself a misfit (Chatterjee). Hence, there originates the malady. Like the literal character of Jhumpa Lahiri in *Interpreter of Maladies*, Adil Jahangir Jussawalla is a misfit, caught between two cultures that he can never entirely leave behind and cannot fully adopt (Bhat). In the following section, we will conduct an in-depth analysis of the disorder prevalent in Jussawalla's writings, providing a comprehensive understanding of this crucial aspect of his work. This thorough understanding is desirable and essential for a full appreciation of Jussawalla's literary contributions.

III. MALADIES OF THE 'SELF'

The nefariousness of the indemnities of World War II prompted a group of thinkers to conduct a phenomenological survey of defining life, its meaning, and its purpose in the context of the homeland (Conference). The result that it finally produced was thoroughly ontological. Phenomenology is a way of understanding one's life and existence through 'consciousness' and 'being', which have complex and multi-layered explanations. This 'consciousness' is the new knowledge. It is knowledge of the 'state of being' (Melnick). When anyone realises this, it alters into a kind of self-knowledge. The formulation of such knowledge is a direct outcome of Western metaphysics. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus made an expensive use of it. So, the Second World War brought this ontological knowledge (McBride). Colonialism and post-colonialism emerged as a spatiotemporal phenomenon that brought new knowledge and consciousness. Under the compelling influence of this knowledge, poets like Adil Jussawalla emerged strongly and participated intensely. Jussawalla spent nearly fourteen years in London and returned to India. This 14-year period has been extraordinarily functional for him. It gave him a new perspective on

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life. When one is in England, every moment of life seems to be magical. This magical spell captivated Jussawalla earlier. When he returned home, this spell was over. Like the Western thinkers, as I already mentioned, Jussawalla kept himself busy surveying the detachment from white European culture. This separation from Eurocentric culture presented him with a new way of realising the very truth of one's existence (McBride). Although the approach is not phenomenological, the extracted knowledge is almost ontological, meaning it involves self-knowledge and knowledge about the self, as well as an exploration of the self. The state of being in phenomenology is the knowledge of the self in post-colonial terms (Conference). Jussawalla knew that this knowledge of the self was distorted and made vague by the illusions of the desire for a homeland. When the old dog returns to the old basket, it somehow no longer matches the earlier residence. Jussawalla muses deeply that after spending some 14 years in Britain, even the homeland puts him into question when one returns. Is this self as authentic as the old one? In Land's End, Jussawalla poses such questions through third-person narration. The primary reading of the collection may not prove very effective. A close reading of Land's End may introduce the reader to the chaos that originated from the poet's frequent self-quests through the third-person narrator. Therefore, if one dwells in both heaven and hell, the question of being better will haunt them (Bhat). Jussawalla believes that the question regarding the comparatively better homeland is the metaphysical chaos from which he has no escape. So, the self is always in question. Is England better? Is India the best? These interrogations would make life miserable when the self is studied in-depth. *Missing Person* is a more genuine collection by Jussawalla, re-interrogating the question of self. The voice is still chaotic. This time, the third-person narrator is absent. Jussawalla employs a first-person narrator, Naik. Many may think of the first-person narrator as the poet's alter ego. Nevertheless, uneasiness vanishes. The consciousness that interrogates the self persists. Jussawalla never leaves an inch from the ground. The more he frustrates, the stronger the query grows (Roberts). A poet like Arvind K. Mehrotra says, "Missing person is a problem". This enigmatic identity of the missing person has made the identity of the self of Jussawalla much more problematic:

> A river of pills brings him no raft.
>
> Death goes awash with washing
>
> Cripples his mouth then, sits
>
> Killing his tongue, sites
>
> Barred up behind his teeth.
>
> (*Missing Person*, Part-I, stanza-9, line 4-8)

More profound studies of the problematic identity of the 'self' have multi-layered interpretations. Is Jussawalla's analysis of the self's identity a malady? Is this approach of questioning the self a malady? Where does Jussawalla's sickness differ from Jhumpa Lahiri's disorder? Is the sickness of self-equal to the disorder of the mind? Is Jhumpa as uneasy as the disintegrated, as the endangered self of Jussawalla? Is there any need to re-interpret such a disorder? These inquisitions prompt the reader to conduct further inquiry.

The universe of diasporic writings of Mrs. Lahiri eventually connects her with the Indian cultural landscape. She is an Indian-origin American. The originality of her mental map is deeply rooted in Indian tradition and culture. In sharp contrast to Mrs. Lahiri, Jussawalla is a Parsi, meaning not a pure Indian or of Indian origin (Jaidka and Dhar). Like Mrs Lahiri, he lived in England for almost a decade. He ultimately negates this 14-year dwelling. The question of self has always put Jussawalla in the face of further questions. The disorder of Mrs Das in Interpreter of Maladies was purely mental and psychic. On the other hand, Jussawalla's malady is ontological, which has become more complicated by getting the flavour of post-colonialism. Even at the end of *Missing Person*, these complications of self and its malady remain undecided (Roberts).

IV. EXILE AND ITS DILEMMA

Exile is the next important issue we will engage in in the next ten minutes. According to *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, "exile involved the idea of a separation and distancing from either a literal homeland or a cultural and ethnic origin." (Payne and Barbera). Exile is the moment of consciousness when one feels that they are distancing themselves

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from their homeland or ethnic group. Is there any fundamental difference between exile and expatriation?

For the first generation of free settlers, exile can be referred to as expatriation. Those born in colonies did not have the chance to return to the 'place of origin' even if they desired to. Jussawalla had free access to return to the place of origin. As he was a Parsi, his homeland or birthplace was always in crisis. He could never emerge from this crisis (González et al.). Physical escape does not exclude all the related issues. Jussawalla returned home after a decade and a half. How was he after the return? What was he before the return? First, we should know what happens when one moves between two cultures. The Fortunes of Richard Mahony (1917) is a book by Henry Handel Richardson. The hero of the text was depicted in a pendulum-like manner, bridging Australian and European cultures (Richardson). He was unable to understand the proper sense of belongingness. The reason is his ambivalent identity. Jussawalla was not a pendulum, but he subtly influenced both cultures—Indian and English. Now, let's return to the question posed earlier. Jussawalla was out of the illusion when he came back. Here, the illusion may mean the spell of white culture. It was a burden of the Whitman that every coloniser was willing to carry (Mishra). Now, after his 'return, he feels the growing distance.' He realises the worth after separation. Even when he was in England, the imaginary homeland haunted him much. Jussawalla could not embrace England as his homeland before returning (González et al.). He equally fails after his return. Even the real homeland has lost its ontological essence. So, exile is there before and after his return. Jussawalla may not be regarded as a diasporic writer. However, the lives of diasporic people have complicated the issue of exile more than can be explained. Jussawalla had a home. He still has a home. Where is the home for diasporic people? Jussawalla left India and is coming back here again. Then, who is an exile? What is exile? Exile is the loosening of a sense of belonging. Exile is more a matter of spirit than of mind. During his life in England, Jussawalla always felt a widening horizon of belongingness. When he returns home, the epilogue of life outside the homeland does not leave him (Mishra).

Exile may also mean the growing distance from God that Yeats felt much earlier (Stumpe). Yeats' primary concern was spiritual disintegration in post-war Europe. Reading the Bible may determine the exile of Adam and Eve from Paradise. So, the sense of distancing from our homeland is in our blood, inherited from our first parents (Doukhan). Again, when the goodness of Eurocentric cultures poisons one's feelings, one feels exile from oneself. What happened with Jussawalla? Is it a passion for hatred or a preparation for hatred?

Jussawalla believed that English traditions and culture were like shadows, and their poetry was like ants. He knew that their poetry would never cross such a shade (Mehrotra). Jussawalla does not think, like Kipling or E. M. Forster, that the East is afraid of inhaling the poisonous air of the West. Exile is the enlarging and unbridgeable gap that operates mostly negatively. Exile always bears the sense of permanent loss (Naik). The collections of Jussawalla's poetry may bear the stamp of the originality of loss that is very irretrievable. The voice that speaks through the narrator in Land's End (1972) is the voice of such loss. Land's End is the end of possibility. The influence of T. S. Eliot on the formation of Jussawalla's dilemma is evident. So, the land of Jussawalla reminds us of the 'Wasteland,' which has become an iconic metaphor for sterility and loss (King). Understandably, right after his comeback from England, India seemed to Jussawalla to be a land that had ended, if not physically, at least spiritually. *Land's End* is a tragic loss, where the speaker's voice mourns such a loss. Missing Person is another cult poem celebrating loss from the start. In *Missing Person,* exile has resulted in the form of missing, meaning an indeterminate loss:

> No Satan
>
> warmed in the electric coils of his creatures
>
> or Gunga Din
>
> will make him come before you,
>
> To see an invisible man
>
> or a missing person
>
> trust no Eng.
>
> (*Missing Person*, Part II, stanza I, lines 1-7)

The speaker's voice is more subjective and natural here. The sense of loss has become more driving for

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the Jussawalla. Considering the early literary influence of Eliot, *Missing Person* may have some affinities with *The Hollow Men*, if not in terms of physical resemblance, at least in terms of existentialism (King). The problem for the hollow men was that they could neither die nor they can think of death. Death was their crisis. As we know, death is a necessary step because it paves the way for rebirth. In Missing Person, the situation is precisely reversed. The voice determines the uneasiness of living and life altogether. *Missing Person* deals with the difficulty of smooth living:

His hands were slavish;
but fingers burst out
from time to time
to point to fresh rustling of tails
in the dustbin of history,
a new inflexion of sails
on the horizon.

(*Missing Person*, Part II, stanza II, line 1-7)

A person is missing if one cannot live spiritually and ontologically well. Here, exile may evoke the idea of loss arising from a previously smooth life that has been disrupted.

V. EXILE AND COLONIAL LEGACY

Has exile any therapeutic remedy? Exile is a growing distance between a human being and their homeland, between the individual and themselves. It is a kind of disintegration between the person and the soul-self. Again, exile may lead some to experience the never-ending disintegration between the person and his consciousness of being. As noted earlier, does Mrs Das, the Interpreter of Maladies, get a remedy for her sickness? Has Mrs Lahiri given any hint of it? A nuanced reading of Mrs. Lahiri suggests that the malady is a problem of the self, and exile has no remedy (Chatterjee). "Exile … is the unhealedable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (Said). While commenting upon the disorder of exile, Mr Said has focused more on 'personal desolation' and 'cultural empowerment'. In *Land's End,* Jussawalla is swallowing the same personal desolation:

Where seas grip, the sirs kick and squall,
Atlantic breakers boom, the sea-gulls fall
Downwind to sheets of spray, the fast
Seas race, roil, slump and shower
Across the thrusted coastland,

(*Land's End*, line 1-6)

However, the issue of cultural empowerment remains vague. Missing Person by Jussawalla is a subterranean exploration of a personal metaphysical predicament, manifesting as personal desolation (Coetsier). There are many who very often foretaste the Hopkinsian shadow in the lines of Jussawalla, keeping the same desolation in mind:

Bats, bats you cried, and shutting up your ears
Scramble for cover, while we dived and bombed
Peasants, beggars, rich fathers, more affluent sons.
We dropped like jackfruit by hunters guns,
Or tore like paper on your sizzling wires

(Bats, line 7-11)

Exile is a colonial orientation that persists into the post-colonial era (Lamming). Colonialism is such a poignant force and decisive motion that it leaves no choice. Exile was a matter of compulsion for the colonised people. These people did their best to live as well as possible in the face of such force. They became forcefully adapted to such a domain of life and its living. One lives even if one is exiled from one's name (Ruman and Ruman), and Jussawalla's formative years in England produced Land's End and Missing Person anthologies. Both these collections have become offbeat figures in literature. In both collections, no voice speaks of any possibility. What they discuss is primarily distorted, fragmented, and debauched.

No harmony is there. No chronology is there. In Jussawalla, post-colonial exile has shaped him. This is why Jussawalla has given up poetry for so long on the theme narrated. Currently, he is the editor of several regional newspapers. If Jussawalla's return to India can be considered the exile of exile, it has had a positive outcome. Nobody has ever dared to forget the proverbial verdict on exile, such as "to be an exile is to be alive" (Lamming).

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VI. CONCLUSION

Exile has ever-deepened relevance in diasporic literature. Said has insisted that the existence of exile sharply depends on the dialectical value and relation between a nation and its literary product, mostly diasporic fiction (Said). Jussawalla can be best understood in terms of this dialectical relationship. Mr. Said further believed that no nation could offer a resolution for such a disorder as exile. Exile is a 'discontinuous state of being' where the nation proves helpless (Said). Shelley defined poetry as an "Aeolian harp." Aeolian is a wind-operated harp. The wind's blowing will determine the intensity of the music it produces. The stronger the wind blows, the more intense the music becomes. For Jussawalla, the disorder of self and exile is the wind. It is expected that the more they touch Jussawalla, one by one and sometimes jointly, the more they will foster a further sense of exile, alienation, and disintegration. The heart of Jussawalla is like the Aeolian harp. The more they blow, the longer the malady will persist.

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