

The Speaking Body: Corporeal Symbolism in Arya Gopi's Poetry

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Abstract

Poetry is an amalgam of both melancholy and bliss for Dr. Arya Gopi. She is an Indian bilingual writer who handles a wide variety of themes, the analysis of which would perhaps be a herculean task for a scholar. Her poetry contains everything. It speaks of inner and outer conflicts. It addresses intricacies of human psyche; confronts with life and death alike. Seldom do her words wither to be of a particular theme; instead it embraces everything general. Gopi's collection of poems, *Sob of Strings* (2016) reveals her keen observation and unique poetic techniques. Her poetry can perhaps be considered synonymous with several of the confessional poems of Sylvia Plath, Emile Dickinson and Kamala Das. Basic human emotions, life, death, nature and the like never really are redshirts here. Another significant aspect of Gopi's poetry must be the vitality of corporeal imagery made use of in *Sob of Strings*. Body can best used in theatre rather than literature, however, systematic development

of bodily symbolism can make a work of literature complete. Body plays a vital role in meaning-making, which is a complex process. Plath and Emile Dickinson have constantly made use of several body centred symbols in order to depict intricacies of the human psyche. So does the author of *Sob of Strings*. Her poetry thus is a celebration of versatile themes, to justify which the author, without deliberate interruption, uses a handful of corporeal symbols.

Keywords: Corporeal Symbolism, Body as Metaphor, Dr. Arya Gopi, Indian Writer, *Sob of Strings*, Indian English Poetry, Sylvia Plath, Emile Dickinson, Kamala Das.

Incorporating corporeal imagery into writings has never really been a deliberate act. Instead, it takes place gradually, since body occurs everywhere. Body fundamentally is a 'known space' therefore it is universally intelligible too. Many authors, poets in particular have emphasized on this metaphorical function of human body indeed. The eminent Indian poet Arya Gopi too is never an exception. Her poetry through its unique developments makes use of bodily imagery very often. In "In Search of an Unwritten Name" she laments the existential crisis she confronts with. She says: "My eyes, lips and fingers/thoughts, looks and tastes/were all worn out..." (*Sob of Strings* 18) A collective depiction of corporeal symbolism occurs here. She describes how the lack of an identity affects her in various unimaginable ways. Even if the poet is 'name-less', she has 'her eyes', 'her lips and fingers'. Later in the poem the speaker incorporates sensory experiences. She says:

Then I was blind

I couldn't see it.

Then I was deaf

I couldn't hear it.

Then I was dumb

I couldn't reply quickly... (19)

This shows how one's psyche and body combine together to resist having an identity. These bodily images thus capture the existential dilemma at its peak.

In "Metaphor of Hypocrisy" the readers get to know a pessimistic poet lost in agony and pathos. She is frustrated about the ways of the world, and her urge to escape is predominantly apparent here. She proclaims bravely, "I am a tear drop..." (*Sob of Strings* 64) and then, "I am a deep sigh..."(65). These melancholic diction reminds us of Emile Dickinson and Sylvia Plath; their poetry too. The poet reaches peaks of severe agony when she declares, "I am dead, my words are silent..."(65). Similar desperate, melancholic reflections occur in "Stillborn" too when she says, "I can't see/nor hear anything..."(15) One's sensory perception tends to be limited and blurred once his or her psyche is amidst chaos. In the same poem Gopi distinguishes between herself and her voice, death and life. She identifies her voice to be herself. She declares with enthusiasm and delight, "...And I am my own voice..."(15). The same voice can be a suggestion of her own poetry through which she lives and fights. Death occurs very often in her poetry. It is these concepts of 'death' and 'rebirth' that make her poetry both optimistic and pessimistic simultaneously.

When she sings "At each dusk/ I am dead again!" ("Entrails of Desires" 15) death repeatedly turns up to be a metaphor. An undeniable influence of Sylvia Plath can be observed here. However, unlike Plath's poetry, Gopi's finds its way to excitement and delight again, only to return to the dark once more. It is this perfect balance between these binary oppositions that make her poetry worth reading. Life and death are interconnected for Gopi. Both occur together or one after the other in her poetry. A line that describes the bliss and excitement of life is usually followed by a series of words that adorn death here. "Breath by breath" is followed by "corpses by corpses" ("Shadow Wagons" 20); "I am alive again!" is followed by "I am dead again!" ("Entrails of Desires" 14) in this manner.

As a young poet who admires poetry she speaks of her language in "Chessboard": "It lived on my/Flesh, blood and bone!"(22). Where else should language be, in a poet? She establishes her poetry, her language to be her very core, her essence. A direct, perhaps deliberate corporeal metaphor takes place in "Touch-Screen" when she says:

Now, I can feel
 Thousands of finger tips
 Faceless touches
 Voiceless approaches
 Anonymous clicks
 Encountering my lost body... (35).

The narrator calls herself a touch screen and says she owns a 'lost body' which means her identity is being interrogated. She doubts if her existence is valid. We see a poet who is exhausted and confused. The physical realm seems to be confusing the poet. In "Be a Mannequin" she asks the reader to be a Mannequin, so he/she doesn't have to eat or drink, since dishes, she believes, can "torture"(45) one. Gopi's "Wired Statues" too incorporates bodily imagery abundantly. She prefers to call herself "A statue with infinite blood shreds"(48) here. She speaks of love and love-wars; of her fears; and certain traumatic experiences occurred in the past. She questions her own ability to handle responsibilities and duties; finds herself exhausted and weak, thinks loudly of "pain of the past years"; doubts her "weak shoulders"(48).

Conclusion:

Effective and appropriate symbolism proves the competence of an author, be it poetry or prose. Dr. Arya Gopi in her poems, predominantly in her anthology entitled *Sob of Strings*, incorporates various bodily symbols in order to justify several themes. It includes love, pathos, nature and femininity. While doing so she refuses to conform to the traditional

notions of versification. She wanders aloof from the chaos of bitter social realms, yet she is not lost. She looks into her own heart and psyche; she is her own poetic amusement. *Sob of Strings* is thus a declaration of love and pain alike; the title itself suggests affliction and music; joy.

Body is a space to be filled. When it occurs in poetry, however, it never ceases to have certain metaphorical functions. The 'lack' that a body creates is not really the 'lack' that it creates; it's the 'lack' that is created by the absence of emotions. This must be why death brings us pain. It's not the body that leaves us crying; it's the emotional, psychological aspects that count. Similarly, Gopi's corporeal images contain excessive emotional abundance. It either speaks of happiness, or of sadness; there is nothing intermediary between these. Very often her body centered symbols create moods of happiness, gratitude, affection and love, and it sometimes represents the celebration of the poet's own femininity and motherhood. Most of these metaphors nurture life in general, and concepts such as 'rebirth', 'breath', 'life', 'survival' take the front seat in *Sob of Strings*. Body as a whole, its tone, and various organs like the hand, feet and fingers take place as metaphors to create the desired meaning here. Similar is the case of 'negative symbolism' used in *Sob of Strings*. Death, cold and emotionless bodies, non-movement, screams, tears- all these occur repeatedly in this anthology indeed. This depiction of a vast, wide realm and its sense of containing multitudes must be why Dr. V. Sukumaran addresses *Sob of Strings* as "The Distant Roar of an Ocean" in his preface.

Work Cited

Gopi, Arya. *Sob of Strings*. Redcherry books, 2016.