

HEALING PAIN THROUGH DANCE: A CRITICAL READING OF ADHIKARI'S "KHUCHCHING!"

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes an attempt to analyze the healing pain through dance in Dinesh Adhikari's poem "Khuchching" by applying cultural trauma perspective. The poem's idea is similar to New Zealand's tribal dance Haka. The poem shows a poor and insurgency affected persona living with traumatic experience and fleeing away from his grief and finally takes refuge to dance which helps him relieve with pains and suffering. Similarly, Haka, a traditional dance of a tribal group – Maori, is performed to pacify the pain and helps them strengthen themselves to face more challenges and strife courageously. In doing so, I have used the critical insight of Caruth as well as cultural ingredients of Haka dance as theoretical parameters to analyze the primary text. Here, I examine the poem linking it with the aim of performing the tribal dance Haka which would, subsequently, help one get relief from personal trauma to the conflict generated consequences in the lives of affected people and their socio-political factors associated with contemporary Nepali society. Discussing the expected findings, this article centers on the common people's aspirations and embedded peace in the society.

Keywords: agony - folk dance - Haka - stamping feet - trauma.

INTRODUCTION

In this article I have assessed dance as an art form to heal or console the human pain associating with New Zealand's Maori, a tribal dance form Haka which the Maori people have been performing at different social and cultural functions specially to entertain the guests, to regale the community, to invoke the community people for actions and to heal the pain if anyone is undergoing with. For this, Dinesh Adhikari's poem, "Khuchching" has been analyzed and discussed how dance has become an integral part for agonized people to get relief from the pain they are living or reliving with

for a long time. Art in any form can have this soothing power which always relieves traumatized people as an ointment to live longer and better life. As Cathy Caruth (1995) once said “Psychic trauma involves intense suffering, but also involves the recognition of realities that most of us have not begun to face” (p.vii). It is human life which needs to come out of destined pain and suffering at any condition to lead a meaningfully pacified life. Dance, in this context, can have the potential to let one forget the pain and live in reconciliation.

Dinesh Adhikari is a well-known Nepali poet who has written many poems bringing a realistic pictures of Nepali youths undergoing with severe pains because of socioeconomic outcomes. His poem “Khuchching” is one of those poems which illustrate the mentality of the present Nepali youths who are living with different kinds of physical and mental hardships. And art, an accomplished form for healing trauma, has been considered a great source of entertainment for a long time. Singing and dancing have taken apace to entertain or be entertained in human society from the nomadic period until now. In different parts of the world along with the development of various cultural forms, aspects and asymmetric forms of dance have attracted the attention of people of any cultural groups. Haka is a ceremonial dance in Maori culture inhabiting in New Zealand. It is a posture dance with a song rhythmically sung in group which is performed by a group with vigorous stamping of the feet. It is part of their culture with somatic posture which allures the participants with drastic emotions and illuminations to surge themselves in the mission. Historically related to the preparation of male warriors before the battle, it has been performed by both male and female at various social functions within this particular culture to welcome distinguished guests, to celebrate praiseworthy achievements, happy occasions as well as sad occasions like funeral. Besides, it is also taken as pacifying performance to heal the pain one is undergoing with for a long time. In today’s time, along with the part of universities’ curriculum, it has drawn the attention of the international people as part of cultural phenomenon for the study of somatic traditional folks. It is a dance which can lure any grief-stricken or stone-hearted people in such a way that they can feel much relief or soft to the human emotions and can behave normally onwards. And this is the point that strikes me: despite a cultural form of art, would dance help one get relief from the pain, and motivate one to face challenges prevailing in society? And I find the persona in Dinesh Adhikari’s poem “Khuchchig” who is trying to heal his or her grief by dancing and feels aspired to go ahead.

DANCE AS A PART OF CULTURAL ACTIVITY

Cultural studies has been a centre of attention resisting the dominant form of culture and identity and creating its own style and identity. Individuals who conform to hegemonic dress and fashion codes, singing, dancing, behavior and political ideologies would produce their own identities within any mainstream groups as associations of particular social groupings. Here, continuing this remark, Colin Spark (1996) outlines, “Individuals who identify with subcultures, like punk culture, or hip hop subcultures, look and act differently from those in the mainstream, and thus create oppositional identities, defining themselves against standard models” (15). It is either by making a dance group or creating dance pattern one would try to make his or her own identity which would be different from the rest of the world. The implication of the equally famous shift from the aesthetic to the anthropological definition of culture were indeed profound but the rupture was a complex process and at least three features of cultural studies – “its omnivorous concerns, its populism and its relative institutional marginality” (15) – are marked by the continuities and discontinuities of the rupture itself.

With the beginning of human civilization, dance has been an important activity to express the emotion and feeling. It has been defined as a conscious way of rhythmic movements of the body in a defined bounded way. Marusa Pusnic (2010) is in the opinion that art theories of dance usually overlook many symbolic aspects of dance, and the multiple roles and meanings that dance has for the society that it appears. She further explains, “The purpose of this anthropology of dance issue is to unfold various meanings and nuances of dance in contemporary societies, with different contributors with different examples from around the dance world illustrating how dance can be observed, investigated and theorized in all its variety” (5). This way, dance can be defined as a culture practice and as a social ritual, besides, as a means of aesthetic pleasure and a means for establishing ties and specific structural form even in the disturbed community. In many parts of society in the world, it as a social ritual has been considered in the light of symbolic aspects of a specific culture and in the light of the processes of identification and differentiation through the meaning that it produces for the individuals in this culture. There is no doubt that it always, “bears a specific meaning, which depends on the social setting in which it appears” (5). In dance, bodily moves, dance figures or even dance styles would not be taken as indecent or inappropriate, but noticeable semantic baggage is seen on them by the experts of the concerned societies.

DANCE: A PROCESS OF HEALING PAIN

On the other hand, dance also involves the culturally mediated body, emotion, and mind with closely related to illness and pain. Judith Lynne Hanna (1995) opines dance can promote wellness by strengthening the immune system through the regular movement of muscular action and physical process. The steps taken in dance makes an individual moderate, eliminate or avoid tension, chronic fatigue, and other disabling conditions which result from the effects of stress. She further states,

Dance may help the healing process as a person gains a sense of control through (1) procession by the spiritual in dance, (2) mastery of movement, (3) escape or diversion from stress and pain through a change in emotion, states of consciousness, and/ or physical capability, and (4) confronting stressors to work through ways of handling their effects. (323)

The movements during the dance are frequently accompanied by music and it can have acting quality such as pantomime and be performed alone or with others. It always involves sight, sound, touch, smell and kinetic feeling. Thus, dance provides a person with captivating multisensory experiences which subsequently help one forget the pain and rake up with new enthusiastic phenomena. This intricate combination of movement, rhythm and music involves simultaneous right and left brain which make the performer or observer purgate the suffering and pain he or she would be undergoing for a long time.

Dance normally involves the body, emotion, and mind which are culturally mediated as all these three are culturally interrelated in the process of healing pain and suffering. And pain involves in the intertwining of body, emotion, and mind. In the process of healing pain, James W. Carey (1996) points out that the body dimension of dance refers to its discharging energy through muscular-skeleton responses to stimuli received by the brain. In the same way, the emotional dimension of dance refers to the subjectively experienced state of feeling in engaging in or emphatically observing dancing. Here, he believes that emotions combine a psychological response with a cognitive evaluation because dancers can also symbolize emotions without experiencing them. The last but not least, the cognitive dimension of dance refers to the mental activities which involve memory, imagery, perception and attention, evaluation and reasoning and decision making (324). It is so because dance is not only movement but it always conveys events, ideas, and feeling just like a language text in motion. While analyzing the cultural dimension of dance, he further says,

It refers to the cumulative values, beliefs, norms, and rules of dance shared by a group and learned through communication. Health practitioners need to be aware of cultural differences and to be flexible in their work in order to accommodate diverse groups. For example, among the Vietnamese, a smile communicates not only happiness and assent, but also the sentiments of anger, embarrassment, stoicism, and rejection. To look directly at a person with whom one is speaking is a sign of disrespect and rudeness. (325)

In considering dance, health, and healing, it is very important to notice that there are different kinds of dance, degrees of involvement in dance and reasons for dancing which ultimately help a sufferer to brood over his or her pain and can feel relief.

HAKA, A CULTURAL DANCE FOR HEALING PAIN

Haka, a ceremonial dance in Maori culture in New Zealand, is a posture dance performed by a group or groups with rigorous movements and stamping feet along with rhythmically shouted accompaniment. Although it is used to provoke the male warriors for battle preparations, it aims to fulfill social functions within Maori culture, to welcome distinguished guests, even to acknowledge great achievements, occasions or friends, and to console the pain one is undergoing severely. Ojeya Cruz Banks (2017) points out, “The haka has been erroneously defined by generations of uninformed as war dances and as the dance about the celebration of life” (65). The New Zealanders gather to thump chest, stomp feet and stick out their tongues staging impromptu performances of haka dance to show solidarity with those people who suffer from any destructive events. He further states,

Kiwis ranging from heavily tattooed bikers to business executives, and the elderly have lined up to perform the intimidating ceremonial dance which begins with fierce chants roughly translated as “I live! I Die!” But the haka is not only meant to intimidate, but also to mourn, melding both hostility and beauty into an outpouring of true emotion. (67)

Since it is used for death and mourning, it is an integral part of the Maori mourning process. Besides, it shows love, healing and compassion along with lifting the spirits of the bereaved ones.

While Maori contemporary dance might not meet particular aesthetic criteria assigned to haka, it is an evolving, living tradition and not just about certain bodily qualities but also the embodiment and activation of the internal phenomena. Jessica Christine Lai (2010) opines, “No matters how angry or scared we are feeling at the moment, we must come together as one strong community to show care and compassion for those who have

lost precious loved ones”(7). Along with its cultural assumption, haka, a dance form for a long time, has been a platform to soothe the sighs and relieve one’s painful experience. Here, as much as one dances, she or she relieves pain and forgets it. In this context, Judith Lynne Hanna (1995) opines, “One can actually experience a change in his or her perceived mood toward that which is being expressed physically. The therapeutic implications are obvious”(327). This way, chronic pain patients can learn to refocus awareness from painful to pleasurable body functions.

ADHIKARI’S “KHUCHCHING!” A POEM FOR RELIEVING PAIN WITH A DANCE

One should view well-being as a holistic process which would emphasize the interconnected nature of spirit, body, society and the natural environment. With the artistic forms like poems, individual well-being and interpersonal relationships relied on a complex and sophisticated process can best be exemplified with the feelings of the persona. Marusa Pusnik (2010) elaborates, “Dance as a art form can make a balance between men and women whose primary aim is to get solace from the pain they might have been suffering for a long time” (7). The narrative seen in this form can encourage one to honour the sacredness of intimate partners relationships. It further nurtures “healthcare practices which are employed within a wider philosophical and theoretical context” (Wirihana and Smith, 2014, p. 201). Along with this, it also provide “specific methods for recovering from emotional distress, a way of healing from grief”(Lai, 2010, p. 13). Either performing dance or listening songs, one would get more relief from “trauma which needs to be healed or cured for retrieval of the past” (Pandey, 2009, p. 136) and can live peacefully for a long time.

“Khuchching!”, a poem published in KantipurKoseli on 1st June, 2019 written by a prolific Nepali poet, Dinesh Adhikari, illuminates a person with innumerable pathos and pains “befallen and disrupted the homogeneous structure of experience” (Newmark, 1995, p.238) seeking ways for relief from various sources. His pain outnumbers all the surpasses of human emotions, feelings and even beyond the human aspirations from which one would only suffer and would not get any relief. Having undergone through severe obstacles of life in the present time of turmoil and harassment as “psychic demands upon the body” (Bloom, 1995, p.114), he is in high spirits to flee after people for their works, progress and diurnal activities, hence, he has become a subject of hatred, gossip, manipulation and above all extermination of possibilities. As a result, his own friends, relatives, and colleagues have stopped liking his presence here and there, and he has become an outsider to them. One, as socially and culturally

alienated from his or her peers, would normally seek for self-extermination from the world. As a speculated consequence, what else he could do except following his friends for help, support and coordination in his endeavors so that he could have relief and he could rake up all the things he had lost. But, as a human nature, everyone manipulates him due to misunderstanding and misappropriation, as Adhikari(2019) states his condition,

I supposed you to be a heaven,
Poorly,
Your are the hell,
You have been the same for a long time,
Perhaps something has been grown up into your mind,
Go! Do treatment in time. (3)

He is on the verge of either extinction or departure from the abnormalities, from which if he wants to flee away, he would follow some somatic provinces which normally humans do to get relieve for sometimes. Again, Adhikari (2019) writes,

As everyone has right to be entertained,
You too have,
I have been in tour, and still I am,
Dance with stamping your thigh,
Forgetting all, do dance,
What else you want to be happy while turning in circle except being like Champaty?

You remember your natured songs,
Sing them, dance a lot,
Dance continuously,
Khuchching! Khuchching! Khuchching! Khuchching! (3)

The speaker who has been victim of “depression, sleep disturbances, repetitive dreams various chronic syndromes, and chronic anxiety” (Kriystal, 1995, p,77) has finally recommended this uncompromising personality dancing to get relief from all his pathos and so-called prejudices which he had been charged for a long time in every nook and corner. One can cope with the worldly challenges, but would not be able to face himself or herself

because he or she is the slave of his or her own mind which is “to reassert the veracity of the past” (Laub, 1995, p.62). Those traumatic memories which he or she is in “are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences” (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995, p.174). In such condition, it is the art ie dance, song, and other entertaining sources which can give more relief to him or her and can live rest of live peacefully. For him or her, this complicated past experiences, as Dominick Lacapra (2014) puts forward, “should be disclosed truthfully in order for a process of working through to be informed and to have some chances of being effective in creating both livable society and a national collectivity” (44). Whatever pathos he or she is living with must be endured and disclosed in any forms which, ultimately help him or her reconcile with the societal norms and dimension developing a personality in a complex web of interaction between “the internal, phenomenological experiences of the individual and the external, social context in which the person lives” (Brown, 1995, p.103). By doing this, one might attempt to make central the experiences of the victims to attend to the diverse and complex aspects of socio-political dimensions.

“Khuchching!” a poetic testimony of the persona’s painful life “to record events and to report the facts of a historical occurrence” (Felman, 1995, p.19) illuminates traumatic facts which he or she has been “on the return to origins in memory and on the return of the repressed” (Caruth, 1996, p.13) for a long time and is on the need “to retell the lost truths of pain among us” (Ibid, 1995, p.9). For some victims like the persona, this kind of feeling can be “a kind of calling, a status, where people are drawn to others similarly marked” (Erikson, 1995, p.186) and the dancing activity can develop a spiritual kinship and comradeship among the former victims and perpetrators.

With the development of the situation, one thing is clear that dance can be taken as a preventive medicine or an inoculation by conditioning an individual to be able to moderate, eliminate or avoid tension, chronic fatigue, and other disabling results from the effects of stress. Judith Lynne Hanna (1995) further explains, “Exercise is associated with the prevention of such illness such as heart disease, obesity, non-insulin-dependent diabetes, hypertension, and osteoporosis” (335). This way, dancing can induce the release of endorphins to produce analgesia and euphoria, and can build up a spirit of elation, and a strong emotion such as joy which can block pain and thereby provide an escape or diversion from all kind of suffering as “an endless possibility of a new future” (Caruth, 1996, p. 68). Besides, it can improve muscle tone, flexibility, coordination, and balance, and hence, be helpful in recovery from some injuries and reducing or escaping some rigorous pain.

CONCLUSION

In short, Haka, a cultural folk dance, has been performed as a ritual to pacify the pain and agony for a long time and in Dinesh Adhikari's "Khuchching !", dance has been taken as a remedy to cure the agony of a socio-politically disturbed denizen. The most important dimension of this kind of cultural activity would be the attempts to engage each one suffering from seen or unseen pain collectively in order to create conditions for more desirable future. The present era has seen many grieved people like the one seen in Adhikari's poem across the globe and facing worldly challenges. So almost all humans are in agony. Dances like Haka can have some soothing ointment to them. This can work to any other people who want to feel ecstasy in any form. The world has become a place where humans have been destined to suffer at any conditions either due to their own fate or sometimes due to the sociopolitical occurrences from which each one has been immensely aggravated. They have long been searching ways to soothe their agony taking refuges to different activities ie living in isolation, going to forests, doing mental exercises like yoga, meditation, penance, or even committing suicide. But a lot more people have not seen dancing as a somatic group activity can pacify one's agony or forget one's pain. Those who have gone through such situations can take refuge to the art forms like dance, which would ultimately help victims of the situation get solace.

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