

METAPHORS OF THE PAST IN NATHACHA APPANAH'S 'LES ROCHERS DE POUFRE D'OR' (2003)

Anisha Badal-Caussy

Lecturer, Mahatma Gandhi Institute
Moka, Mauritius
charisma91@live.com

Abstract

This paper aims at discussing the main features of 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or', a French novel by a Mauritian-French novelist, Nathacha Appanah, with the scope of uncovering the various common metaphors associated with the indentured labourers' experience in Mauritius. Dwindling between facts and imagination, this novel brings the metaphors of the Indentured labourers' past in a narration that resembles a diary entry format. Engaging in associating Indentured labourers' stories found in Mauritian history with the author's imaginative flair of writing stories around indentured-ship, Appanah's novel delineates metaphors of land and sea as originated from the past to a compelling subset of the Mauritian indentured narrative. Mixing historical facts with imagined narratives of Indentured labourers, Appanah engages with metaphorical representations in her novel to channel the cultural experiences of the Indentured labourers with the aesthetic quality of her prose. Hence, 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or' constitute the parcours of the Indentured labourers from India to the ship Atlas to Mauritius, imaginatively constructing imagined lives of Indentured labourers from metaphors confined in the Mauritian history of Indentureship. Proceeding as such allows a broader engagement with investigating the aesthetic cultural experience of the imagined lives of Indentured labourers with a view to appreciate myriad human experiences in the novel.

Keywords: metaphors, cultural experiences, imagined narratives, aesthetic cultural experience.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Nathacha Devi Pathareddy Appanah was born in 1973 in the village of Mahebourg in Mauritius. She is a Mauritian-French author who is a novelist. Her first book entitled 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or' in 2003, was published by Editions Gallimard, and received the 'Prix RFO du Livre 2003' and 'Prix Rosine Perrier 2004'. In all she has written nine novels but the focus of this paper is solely on her first book as this book provides an exposé on the imagined lives of the indentured labourers who came by the ship Atlas, a ship which is in archival records of ships which embarked in Mauritius during Indentureship, but used for the purpose of fiction in the novel.

INTRODUCTION

A country's history and its oral historical narratives reveal a lot about the lives of the ancestors to its people. To stop a country's history from sinking into oblivion, stories with common metaphors of the past are informally told to its people through folk tales (Penjore, 2005), raising in significance the cultural experience of the ancestors. With a rich colonial and indenture history, Mauritius has a wealth of cultural experience pertaining to its dual historical experience. For this paper, consideration on the indenture history in Mauritius is given as the novel under study 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or' by Mauritian-French author Nathacha Appanah deals extensively with the displacement of the Indentured labourers from India to Mauritius, relating their experience in India, in the ship Atlas, and in Mauritius. The choice of this particular novel for this paper is to contribute to the wealth of materials in Indentureship written texts through the diary narration form of 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or'. The diary narration form devotes one chapter to each main character in the novel, foregrounding their felt experience before and during the Indentured period in a written format. While the fictive diary relates about imaginary events in the first person narration (Morton 2006), diary narration in 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or' is about fictive reality supported with a shared historical experience of Indentureship. Fiction writing based on the historical narratives can provide an aesthetic formal structure to the past experiences of the people. To analyse this fictive reality of Indentureship shared historical experience, the metaphors known to be salient during Indentureship are presented as aesthetic formation of the Indentureship imagined narratives proper to the Indentured period. Concentrating on the aesthetic quality of the metaphors explains the imagined narratives as explored in 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or'.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Metaphors: Definitions

Many definitions are proposed to delineate metaphor from the Greek word 'metaphora'. The Cambridge dictionary defines metaphor as "an expression that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to possess similar characteristics" (Cambridge dictionary website) in literature. Seminal research on defining the way metaphors work to produce intended effects on the readers depends on a 'conceptual interaction' (Davidson, 1978, Tourangeau and Sternberg, 1982). This meaning of the metaphor relies on the presence of anomalous sentences in a text (Tourangeau and Sternberg, 1982) so that association between the object and the metaphorical purpose of the object can be traced. The conceptual interaction of the metaphor has the purpose of incorporating metaphor in contexts and Glucksberg and Keysar (1993) have concluded that the metaphor interpretation leads to an alternative meaning. These definitions and workings of the metaphor have been concerned with only the object and the target of that very object.

However, the contemporary definition of metaphor interpretation is expressed as experimental in literature. The experimental nature of the metaphor allows an interaction of visual and verbal modes through the readers' response of the text, (Gibbons, 2013) otherwise lacking in seminal research of the conceptual metaphor. Perceiving the metaphor as experimental in 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or' generates an engagement with not only the object and object target relation but also consideration on the time, and space in which the metaphors are used is emphasised. This engagement of the metaphors in the novel produce the effects of what metaphors embody and 'thinking out of the box' (Leung et al. 2012) is encouraged when the 'embodied metaphors physical constructions can be touched, moved, and examined through various angles' (Heracleous and Jacobs, 2008). Zinken, Hellsten, and Nerlich (2008) have argued for a discourse metaphor that creates stable metaphorical mappings in discourse and this discourse metaphor can also be cultural imprints depending on specific contexts and timeframe. Drawing from Zinken's perspective of adopting 'discourse metaphors' (Zinken, Hellsten, and Nerlich, 2008) in this paper, helps to provide mappings of the cultural imprint of metaphors used in 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or' when the characters travel from India to the ship to Mauritius.

The past in metaphors

Using the contemporary definition of discourse metaphor in a novel to deal with imagined events and characters during Indentureship is under study in this paper. This idea is supported when the past is theorised through the discourse metaphors in 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or.' When the chronology of the novel is considered that is the year 2003, the past in the novel that is the Indentured period 1892 (Appanah) plays an important role when the indentured characters situation is analysed in three spaces that is from the time they spent in India, during their sea voyage in the Atlas, and at Poudre D'or in Mauritius. Appanah keeps the past of the Indentured characters as sad and nostalgic, which can attribute to the 'mental metaphors' (Spatola et al. 2018) of motherland (India), kala pani (Indian Ocean), and hostland (Mauritius) in the form of discourse metaphor in the novel.

The discourse metaphors in 'les rochers de Poudre D'or construct cultural affiliations with the three spaces in the novel. Discussing the discourse metaphors of motherland and sea provides avant- gout of what would be the future of the characters in Poudre D'or, Mauritius. The novel showcases elements of the supernatural such as the doomed destiny of character Ganga by a fortune teller, and the myth around the Indian Ocean as Kalapani when characters die in the Atlas to yield a metaphorical context of the 'desired meaning and emotional tone' (Silva and Beaty, 2012) around the supernatural is achieved. The metaphorical context is mapped according to the culture in which the discourse metaphors are contained to gear the event sequences of the characters' past towards "culturally specific experience will generate culturally specific metaphors." (Culley, 2008) This cultural logic behind the discourse metaphors develops the actions and consequences in the past as depicted in 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or.' Appanah weaves a narrative around cultural specific fears and retribution whenever the discourse metaphors of land and sea are mentioned at strategic sequences in the novel.

Past Metaphors for aesthetic cultural experience

The culture of the indentured labourers in the novel underlined by discourse metaphors provides an aesthetic approach to the indentured experience. This aesthetic approach revives the memoirs of the indentured when the form of the novel's structure is taken into account. The form of the novel in diary form provides the outlook for defamiliarising the historical torments of the Indentured labourers as the novel engages with discourse metaphors to transport the characters into the worlds of sea and lands. This defamiliarisation of the Indentured labourers is propelled in the novel of Appanah as reader responses of 'sensitivity, sentiment, and sympathy' (Marshall, 2005) are aroused as Appanah in the early 2000s showcased the aesthetic side of the 1892 indentured cultural experiences in her imaginative prose.

Creating an aesthetic cultural experience of the Indentured labourers in 'Les rochers de Poudre D'or' presents the discourse metaphors in an unfamiliar way. The discourse metaphors for aesthetic cultural experience is presented through "repeated exposure to culturally transmitted values and beliefs" (Yang et al., 2019) in the

diary narrative of the characters in the novel. Offset to the proposed binarism of “aesthetic preference to one’s culture versus the other” (Yang et al., 2019) this paper sets the reader-responses of proposing the aesthetic preference of the Indentured in relation to the others’ cultures (English in Atlas ship and French in Poudre D’or in the novel) through the presentation of the discourse metaphors. This aesthetic cultural experience of Indentureship promoted in the novel demonstrates engagement with the discourse metaphors of Indentureship as extended ones with the others’ cultures and this relational view creates “situated experience of [Indentureship] marked by local specificities and surprises within global flows of culture, economics, and practices of belonging.” (Khan, 2015)

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Metaphors channelling the title ‘Les rochers de Poudre D’or’

Plus loin, derrière les rochers de Poudre D’or (Les rochers de Poudre D’or, Partie 2: chapitre 8)

Further, behind the rocks of gold dust (Les rochers de Poudre D’or, Part 2: chapter 8, My Trans.)

The title ‘Les rochers de Poudre D’or’ is supposed to be an eponymous novel. However, Appanah’s novel is structured in elaboration on the lives of the characters in India and the ship Atlas in part one before eventually delving into the chapter of Poudre D’or in part two. Far from mistaking the novel to be digressing from its eponymous quality, the discourse metaphors map the embodied cultural constructions of these very discourse metaphors. Further, behind the rocks of gold dust is the translation of the eponymous chapter title of the novel, reverberating the purpose of the quest for gold metaphor instilled in the indentured labourers in India as Badri Sahu hoped to find once reaching Poudre D’or.

A salient feature of the discourse metaphor is that it changes according to contexts and timeframe. The lingering discourse metaphor of using the cultural knowledge of stories around travelling the kala pani as profane in the novel has a common view instilled in the characters that kala pani crossing will make them become insects in their next birth (Appanah, Part 1, chapter 6). This metaphor of the sea becomes the discursive topic of fear as characters like the old Vishakhapatnam and Chotty Lall die and the kalapani swallow them as the other Indentured labourers pray for their souls in incantation of their native language “Ram Naam Satya Hain.” Similarly, the fear of the kala pani gets heightened as Ganga is nearly raped by the English doctor Grant but rescued in time. The discourse metaphor of the sea acts as a word of caution before the Indentured labourers encounter the island Mauritius. The same kala pani as a discourse metaphor was adapted and changed when Badri Sahu, Chotty Lall, Vythee Sainam, and Ganga wanted to pursue a better future in Merich, which their deplorable condition in India, whether be it due to their pitiful economic circumstances (Badri Sahu, the pauper gambler and Chotty Lall, the slave of the Zamindar) or religious obligation (forced sati-pratha [self-immolation] imposed on Ganga) acted as a setback. This instance of changing the perception of the kala pani as discourse metaphor is also changed when the indentured labourers are ill-treated in various forms of violence, with Badri Sahu being chased for being a vagrant and Ganga is raped by Rivière.

Kalapani as adapting and changing is vested with the cultural knowledge according to changing contexts but what is retained from the kala pani metaphor is that it is circular, circulating in contexts for another metaphor discourse of gold dust. In this respect, kala pani as discourse metaphor emerges as a discourse metaphor within the discourse metaphor of gold dust quest. True to its title, the gold dust raises in significance as the characters watch their hopes gone in dusty despair as they are confronted with the harsh reality of hard work in plantation and French household in Mauritius.

Discourse metaphors for dreamers and awakeners

Le cousin qui fit fortune à Merich (Les rochers de Poudre D’or, Partie 1: chapitre 2)

Quelques étoiles de leurs larmes étaient de chagrin (Les rochers de Poudre D’or, Partie 2: chapitre 4)

The cousin who became wealthy in Merich (Les rochers de Poudre D’or, Part 1: chapter 2, My Trans.)

A few starry tears were those of sadness (Les rochers de Poudre D’or, Part 2: chapter 4, My Trans.)

Discourse metaphor of kala pani within another discourse metaphor of gold dust quest releases effects of introducing a creative imagination to the experiences of the indentured. Rather than an archival historical account, ‘Les rochers de Poudre D’or’ creates an aesthetic cultural experience of Indentured through the discourse metaphors of kala pani and gold dust aimed at attributing indentured experiences as dreamers and awakeners. The cultural specificity of the three spaces; the motherland, the sea, and the hostland are dealt in isolation in the characters’ diary narratives but what connects these three spaces is the imagined experience of the Indentured characters at different times in the plot as the two discourse metaphors unfold themselves in the novel.

Discourse metaphors are incorporated in the narratives of the Indentured characters along the events of the novel. This attempt becomes an aesthetic cultural experience for the characters as they engage with the discourse metaphors differently in their diary narratives. Following the attribution of the characters as dreamers and awakeners is how the novel seeks to weave the discourse metaphors. The dreams and

aspirations of each characters are triggered when they are in their motherland and in the kala pani. Dreams become the source of their gold dust quest as the characters hear a better place to be hostland experience from hearsay of the cousin who became wealthy in Merich (meaning Mauritius is spelt Merich by the Indentured in the novel). Similarly, the kala pani weaved dreams of Merich as bad weather shook the Atlas, the Indentured characters experience “dans l’enfer du kalapani, ils fermaient les yeux et pensaient a Merich.” (in the kala pani hell, they closed their eyes and thought about Merich, My Trans.) However, the discourse metaphor of kala pani serves as a reminder of the fears and retribution for transgressing the boundaries of their motherland. This aesthetic experience is incited by the discourse metaphor of kala pani to fore ground the abrupt awakening of the Indentured characters as they apprehend becoming mosquitoes in their next births before embarking on the Atlas, as they dread death when they see the kala pani swallowing their dead kinds Vishakhapatnam and Chotty Lall, and as Badri Sahu encounter “hubshis” (hubshis are people with dark complexion in Appanah’s novel) as better in disposition than indentured labourers in Poudre D’or.

Metaphors of dreamers and awakeners are then incorporated not only in instances spent in India or kala pani or Poudre D’or, but the discourse metaphor of kala pani within discourse metaphor of gold dust become connected as the discourse metaphors kala pani and gold dust are discursively depicted from the point of views of the characters differently each time they encounter a new event in the novel.

‘Les rochers de Poudre D’or’ interacting with discourse metaphors kala pani and Poudre D’or

Save yourself from depot wallahs

It is not a service but pure deception

They take you overseas

They are not colonies but jail

Pamphlet distributed in Uttar Pradesh, India

at the end of the 19th century (Les rochers de Poudre D’or)

The novel’s engagement with the discourse metaphor kala pani within another discourse metaphor gold dust is closely related to the deception the Indentured characters faced in relation to the arkrati (recruiters), the disillusionment they faced with the British in the Atlas, and the reality they experienced with the French in Merich. The aesthetic cultural experience of the Indentured characters becomes relational to their British and French culture counterparts. This idea is supported by the discourse metaphor of kala pani within the discourse metaphor of gold dust.

The discourse metaphor of kala pani within gold dust discourse metaphor under study situate the aesthetic cultural experience of the indentured characters in relation to other cultures. The discourse metaphor of kala pani undergoes various changes in outlook in the novel. From a profane dark water Indian Ocean, the arkati Roopaye spins a narrative around a better place Merich which can be accessed through kala pani. The same profane attribution of the kala pani is showcased in the diary narratives of the Indentured fearing to be insects in their next birth which is similar to Doctor Grant’s view of the indentured as ‘mosquitoes’ (Appanah). The association of the discourse metaphor kala pani coincides with Shakespeare’s ‘The Tempest’ allusions made by Doctor Grant when he has an erotic dream of Miranda as Ganga and Prospero is impersonated as Vishakhapatnam. This instance is relational to the fears and retribution of the myth around kala pani that emerges as delusional for Doctor Grant. The gold dust discourse metaphor becomes the luring agenda of the arkati to set in motion the myths around kala pani and gold dust in Poudre D’or beyond the kala pani, contributing to the relational quality of the discourse metaphor of kala pani within the discourse metaphor of gold dust with the discourse metaphors of the other cultures.

The relational quality of the discourse metaphor kala pani within gold dust discourse metaphor helps in perceiving the spaces of motherland, ship, and hostland as rich in aesthetic cultural experience of the Indentured characters, true to the spinning of the deception around kala pani and gold dust in the novel’s various events as connected to the concluding chapter of ‘Further, behind the rocks of gold dust.’

CONCLUSION

With the discourse metaphor of kala pani within the discourse metaphor of gold dust becomes a window towards seeing the myriad experiences of the Indentured characters in ‘Les rochers de Poudre D’or.’ This paper has associated the metaphors of the past as discourse metaphor within discourse metaphor to produce the aesthetic cultural experience of the Indentured labourers, and by extension this aesthetic cultural experience is also relational to the aesthetic cultural experience of other cultures. The idea of engaging with Appanah’s novel with discourse metaphor within discourse metaphor engages with the aesthetic cultural experiences of the Indentured labourers imagined experiences in the novel.

REFERENCES

- [1] Appanah, N. (2003). *Les rochers de Poudre D'or*, Editions Gallimard, Paris.
- [2] Culley, E. V. (2008). Supernatural metaphors and belief in the past: defining an archaeology of religion. *Belief in the past: Theoretical approaches to the archaeology of religion*, 67-83.
- [3] Davidson, D. (1978). What metaphors mean. *Critical inquiry*, 5(1), 31-47.
- [4] Gibbons, A. (2013). Multimodal metaphors in contemporary experimental literature. *Metaphor and the Social World*, 3(2), 180-198.
- [5] Glucksberg, S., & Keysar, B. (1993). How metaphors work. *Metaphor and thought*, 2, 401-424.
- [6] Heracleous, L., & Jacobs, C. D. (2008). Crafting strategy: The role of embodied metaphors. *Long Range Planning*, 41(3), 309-325.
- [7] <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/metaphor>
- [8] Khan, R. (2015). Art as Aesthetics, Culture and Economy. In *Art in Community: The Provisional Citizen* (pp. 37-60). Palgrave Pivot, London.
- [9] Marshall, D. (2005). *The frame of art: Fictions of aesthetic experience, 1750-1815*. JHU Press.
- [10] Morton, P. R. (2006). Narrative Strategies in the Fictive Diary: Reader-Response Theory and the Grossmiths' "The Diary of a Nobody".
- [11] Leung, A. K. Y., Kim, S., Polman, E., Ong, L. S., Qiu, L., Goncalo, J. A., & Sanchez-Burks, J. (2012). Embodied metaphors and creative "acts". *Psychological science*, 23(5), 502-509.
- [12] Penjore, D. (2005). Folktales and education: role of Bhutanese folktales in value transmission.
- [13] Silvia, P. J., & Beaty, R. E. (2012). Making creative metaphors: The importance of fluid intelligence for creative thought. *Intelligence*, 40(4), 343-351.
- [14] Spatola, N., Santiago, J., Beffara, B., Mermillod, M., Ferrand, L., & Ouellet, M. (2018). When the sad past is left: The mental metaphors between time, valence, and space. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 1019.
- [15] Tourangeau, R., & Sternberg, R. J. (1982). Understanding and appreciating metaphors. *Cognition*, 11(3), 203-244.
- [16] Yang, T., Silveira, S., Formuli, A., Paolini, M., Pöppel, E., Sander, T., & Bao, Y. (2019). Aesthetic experiences across cultures: neural correlates when viewing traditional Eastern or Western landscape paintings. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 798.
- [17] Zinken, J., Hellsten, I., & Nerlich, B. (2008). Discourse metaphors. *Body, language and mind*, 2, 363-385.