

## **Study On The Poetry Of Jayanta Mahapatra: Poetry As Social Commentary**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Literature in English marked by strong local colour had poured out from India since the colonial days. In the beginning the writers were mainly British or Anglo Indians who sought to appeal to the public of England. The English community of India also formed a portion of its readers. This literature is now better known as the Anglo-Indian Literature as distinguished from the Indian writing in English that encompasses writers of Indian origin. The Cambridge History of English and American Literature records a number of Anglo Indian writers who produced the first AngloIndian Literature from India, some whilst their stay in India, others after retiring to their country after years of service in India.

Jayanta Mahapatra seems to show a desire to acclimatize an indigenous tradition to English language and create a new Indian English idiom; he shares some of the concerns of the wellknown Indian English poets of the 20th century. It, being a hard nut to crack to study Mahapatra in isolation, and especially when he has influenced a number of contemporary Indian English poets and brought recognition to this new poetry by winning the first ever award by the National Akademi of Letters for his book of verse, *Relationship*, in 1981, requires a historical study of Indian English poetry to find how Mahapatra has evolved the English he has used in his poetry. R. Parthsarthy, as it were, gives a clarion call to Indian English poets to return to their respective linguistic tradition.

Post-independence Indian English poetry is genuine because Indian cultural, religious, and communal situation forms a vital part of it and is deeply felt and addressed. Recently, existing superstitions and folks' beliefs in Indian society turn out to be a favourite theme of recent poetry. Indians' attitude towards a girl child, their reaction to some natural sorrow, their paganism, their

feudal mentality imprints on their minds. Now considering their subject matter, an evolving Indian English Idiom can be perceived in the Indian English poetry. Here, one should not insist upon the structure more but ideas that are conveyed by that language. The expression results in an ironic observation of reality. On studying the growth of American, African, Australian, and West Indian writers, it is evident that they have discovered successfully their own idioms in English. In this context, Mahapatra's poetry offers no fear of losing Indian Idiom in his language because he has mainly related himself to his province (Orissa), and country, its landscape, its history and its milieu along with contemporary Indian situations, life and living, thus forming the bedrock of his poetry. This pre-occupation with present day life and society, together with his concern for history, myth, and tradition of his country has sufficiently evoked an English which thoroughly Indian. His growth as a poet and his use of language is interwoven. He took poetry as a craft and since he is adopting it, he has been chiseling it. A noticeable change from the other parts is that, "In his poetry, both theme and technique go together as he experiments with language poem after poem in trying to acquire inwardness with it. He is capable of using English language with passionate precision that helps him to establish his identity as India's foremost poet in English."<sup>1</sup>

Jayant Mahapatra's poetry demonstrates a continual rehearsal of dramatizing a human longing for the possible alternatives of the dying process of the Hindu myth, "The Dance of Shiva" or the myth of origins. The myth is predominantly incarnated in the Hindu way of life over which Orissa temple were originally founded. Mahapatra confronts its dying process in the life of common men and women in Orissa. Considering the works through the progressive intentionality of poetic language, rather than the chronology of publications of his poetry, there is a marked intensity and range of themes –temple, whorehouses, nature, and love which diffuse into the poet's consciousness of the dying process in history in history. This process refers specifically to the shattered myth of Hindu India, although it does not earn continuity or a development of thought from his mind's hiding places to generative redemption both of his own and of the reader. But this is not his shortcoming; this is his sense of belonging to the modern condition of human loss. In this context, he is the most intense of Indian poets writing in English and perhaps at par with those European poets who are obsessed with modernistic impulse for man's finitude: his physiology, economics and culture, myth, and thought, to a universal human predicament. His poems, Hunger, Myth, India, and The Accusation are flawless

examples.

Jayanta Mahapatra may draw his images from his memories, he may contemplate on philosophical and abstract things like time or death probing into personal relationship of the self with others but he is never blind to the contemporary situation. Although he occasionally makes a journey to the historical and mythical past of Orissa telling us how his ancestors were slaughtered by the Ashokan army on the banks of river Daya and draws our attention to the incessant labour of the artisans who constructed the sun temple of Konaraka under a tyrannical king, he is sentient of and sensitive to the present scenario of Orissa and to that of the whole of India and actively reacts to it. Thus through many of his images the poet comes out as a social critic.

### **1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The poems appear a continuous relation of aspects of the isolation, loneliness, solitude, alienation of the self from external realities in a world without apparent purpose. This is the existential dilemma of most modern literature. While Mahapatra's world is filled with personal pain, guilt, remorse, hunger, desire, and moments of renewal, his environment is filled with symbols of belief by the ordinary lives of the people of Cuttack, the temples, the Hindu festivals, the ancient monuments. Poverty, deprivation, and prostitution recur in his verses. The memory of his unsympathetic and non-cooperative mother, moving about with an oil lamp in her hand in the listless darkness of that house only intensified his fears further.

### **1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Mahapatra's poetry reflects, throughout, this swinging pendulum of his emotions: darkness represents the unfulfilled man, yet it is only darkness he wants because it throws light on what he has lost both as a poet and a man. The projection of this despair is of course, significantly, without self-pity. However, because of the contrasting emotions, darkness actually remains unmediated, or its mediation takes place only at the level of imagination. Darkness thus becomes Mahapatra's meditative ground, which directs him to look inward, the way people often see, closing their eyes in a mood of deep contemplation or prayer, focusing their whole attention on one single aspect of their meditation. Mahapatra offers a wide spectrum of darkness for introspection, providing diverse points

of view. This is the reason why Mahapatra's poetry does not have one single dominant mood, motif or theme.

### **1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

Social concern deals with Mahapatra's unerring response to the society around him. Positing the role of a distanced spectator, Mahapatra's poetry appears as a truthful depiction of the crisis in civilization-the degeneration of the traditional values of the society to the gruesome picture of the martyrs' unrealised dreams. My purpose here will be to investigate Mahapatra's singularity as a poet as to whether his poetry is able to accommodate the diverse experiences of today to recreate the past in the present.

### **1.4 LIMITATION**

- The study is limited to Philosophical aspects in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra
- The social perspective is studied only through Indian Point of view

### **1.5 HYPOTHESIS**

- A study of the poet and his locale establishes the fact that there lies an inseparable relationship between the poet and his place along with the people.
- The dominating feature of Mahapatra's poetry is its constant oscillation between the known and the unknown
- These images and symbols will enable us to penetrate into the throbs of Indian society.
- Study of Mahapatra's philosophical and psychological poems will be taken up with the purpose of substantiating the mystic in the poetic

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ms.I.M.Sheeba Alorcious (2014) from time immemorial women are considered as the weaker sex, food giver, pleasure maker; but never has her status and dignity of being a woman respected in the society and at home. Though woman has always been considered to be “part and parcel of life”, history is full of instances where she is meted out injustice, deprived of her basic needs and fundamental rights. Mahapatra expresses such discriminated women in his works. The women, in the world of Mahapatra live in penury, hunger and starvation. They are the most important facet of the life of the Indian masses. In Mahapatra’s work, the discriminated are the women who live a meaningless and futile life. They struggle for their own identity and they survive amidst sorrows and hardships. They were allowed to live in darkness and left with nothing expect vacuum filling their lives which is nothing but a hell. This paper throws light on those deprived women through the eyes of Jayanta Mahapatra.

Dr. Mirza Sibtain Beg (2017) Jayanta Mahapatra is indisputably the most innovative, progressive and Anglophile poets of modern India. He is intrinsically touched by the stark realities of our country, and writes instinctively about – hunger, myths, traditions, customs, rituals, love, passion, anger, frustration, sex, the self and the eternity, the socio-cultural diversity with adroitness. His extant work exudes post –colonial leanings and spirit invariably. Post- colonialism refers to those theories in texts, political aspirations and modes of activism that spur to challenge structural inequalities and to establish social justice. Mahapatra’s poetry unravels many facets of post- colonialism as haunting past, search for identity and roots. Mahapatra writes to enliven the native tradition protesting the former colonizers and establishing national identity and integrity. He evokes the sense of Indianness both in content and form thorough his poetry relentlessly. His symbols and images are, however, evocative, suggestive and pivotal for linguistic versatility. The present paper aims at probing various dimensions of modernity and post-colonial proclivity in his poetry.

JAYARAMAIAH.N (2016) the title of the paper presents a sentimental touching story of the daughter of a poor fisherman who allows his daughter to become a whore to keep starvation at bay. Mahapatra’s describes the absence of moral anguish which is quite a contrast to the calculated cynicism of Ezekiel, the flaunting sick melody of Kamala das or the sly indulgence of Shiva. K.

Kumar. Towards the middle of his Career, Mahapatra wanted to project the real life of situations in his poems. The commercialization of sex attracted the attention of the poet. Incidentally, this paper portrays the dual existence of the ideal as well as the deplorable state of women in a male – dominated society. In this paper Mahapatra symbolizes with such a victims of society. He claims that the paper is based on a true incident and asserts that it could easily have happened to him or anybody for that matter on the poverty – ridden sands of Gopalapur – on – sea. Mahapatra proudly proclaims that the landscape of Gopalapur chose him in his poem. The poem begins with the protagonist’s realization that it was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on [his] back.

Dr. S. Chelliah (2018) This paper is an attempt to show how Indian English poetry came into its own as being genuine and sincere in its expression and communication in spite of it being young in years and how Indian milieu forms a vital part of it, projecting especially Jayanta Mahapatra as an adept in exposing Indian sensibility, social realities and picturizing contemporary scene through suggestive and startling imagery with a focus on the misery hunger, loneliness and isolation of the Indian poor so as to attest proof of social reality and Indian sensibility.

Dr.K.R.Vijaya (2016) Jayanta Mahapatra, a contemporary of A.K. Ramanujam, Nizzim Ezekeil and R. Parthasarathy stands out distinctly as a great Indian poet, in the domain of contemporary Indo- Anglican poetry. The poetry of Mahapatra describes what he sees around him. His creative mind changes the incidents into poetry. He comments on the social behaviour of people and the issues which affect them. While dealing with socio-cultural and political issues, he does not sacrifice the artistic quality. Yet, he is more concerned with the survival of man rather than creating a utopian world for the people. His characters are cobbler, hungry street children, slum dwellers, prostitutes and a woman in pain. Like the English Romantics, Mahapatra anchors his poetry in the sights sounds, and experiences of ordinary life and ordinary man. He portrays the people of Orissa and their Hindu religion with all its rituals and beliefs of the ancestors at the same time. Similarly, he embraces the genre of poetry because of its exploratory nature and beautiful rhyme structure.

Vijay D (2016) the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra is an expression of certain kinds of crises that have been witnessed by their generations. He is profoundly and explicitly preoccupied by the predicament of his generation, and his poems have become objects of the expression of that predicament and

weariness. His poems are profoundly marked by contemporary crises and disillusionment, which are prevailed in his respective social panorama. His poems are the dark glasses through which life is seen with strange clarity. Life seen through those dark glasses is grey, monotonous, desolate, empty, grotesque, paralyzed and hopeless with full of weariness and fatigue. Mahapatra is deeply and philosophy concerned with the predicament of his generations, which have been, the victims of squalor, decadence, malaise, morbidity, profligacy, dissipation, depravity and agony of spiritual lapse due to the disillusionment prevailed in his age. The poems are the expression of a devastating analysis of the society of his time which suffers from the psychic blow. The researcher has tried to discuss some of his poems which reveal such images.

Manoranjan Behura (2016) Society and literature are very complimentary to each other like the two sides of a coin. Poetry always portrays society accurately though it is symbolical in nature. Jayanta Mahapatra, a poet of international repute, deals with the most crucial issues of Odisha in his poetry which is the most convincing canvas to understand the real problems of his motherland.

S.F. Filomine White Sheela (2019) This is an attempt to project Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry as nothing but poetry of selfexploration and self-discovery with richest use of symbols, myths, images and similes by showing him as an eminent Indian English poet who shows an eloquent expression of the eternal silence of the unknown and his sensibility is essentially Indian. The secret of his success lies in not disowning his Indian inheritance and not falling prey to what has been called 'a feeling of alienation'.

DHANISHA K.S (2017) during the ancient period women enjoyed high status and played a significant role in society and a feminine term "Shakti" literally means "power and strength". Literary evidence suggests that kings and towns were destroyed because the rulers troubled a single woman. Ilango Adigal's Sillapathigaram teaches us Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas was burnt because Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan mistakenly did harm to Kannaki. But the status and role of woman discriminated in the later periods and they were considered to be the weaker sex, food giver and sex object. Her status and dignity as a woman is not accepted in society as well as at home. Our history reveals many instances how she is meted out injustice, deprived of her basic needs and even fundamental rights. From the position of a deity she is degraded into a prostitute who sells her body

for money due to miserable living condition, poverty and starvation. Such survival sex can be vividly seen in Jayanta Mahapatra's poem "Hunger". The poem presents a sentimental touching story of a fifteen year old girl who becomes a whore to keep starvation at bay with the consent of her father- a poor fisher man. Here her father himself acts as a pimp because hunger reigns over the fatherdaughter relationship. The poem is an unapologetic commentary on our society, i.e., how a girl of fifteen, who should be given a safe environment to live, is used for satiates the hunger of so-called moralistic and upright civilized society. The poem also throws light on the emerging survival sex and child prostitution in India due to poverty and hunger.

Dr. S. Chelliah (2017) This paper focuses on prolific writer Jayanta Mahapatra's poetic art, craftsmanship and vision in the development of Indian English poetry by which his poetry appears to be complex because of its language of allusiveness, sex-exploration and self- discovery with a focus on the effective exploration of the realities of human life in all spheres by attempting to relate his life to his land of birth and making a search for the roots of his inner self.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

- To locate the inner self of the poet which will emanate from the wide range of his poetical works?
- To analyze the innovative manner of handling the theme by Mahapatra where even amidst the exploitations of women in a male-dominated society,
- To investigate Mahapatra's singularity as a poet
- Discovering Mahapatra' s perception and sensibility from the viewpoint of Indian life
- To analyze philosophical and Psychological perspective of Jayanta Mohapatra



#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on the poetry written by Jayanta Mohapatra. The journey of Jayanta Mahapatra through a feeling of anxiety has a very important bearing upon both the content and the form of his poetry. Jayanta Mohapatra used the philosophy, historical aspects and socialism in present and past perspective in India. Therefore, I adopt the following scheme (method)

- Detailed Study of Jayanta Mohapatra novels
- Examined Injustice
- Portrayal of Anxiety
- Study of Indian philosophy
- Study of Indian Socialism
- Use of libraries for books
- Use of magazines
- Use of internet for articles

#### **5. EXPECTED OUTCOME**

Mahapatra himself acknowledges the vital role of imagery in his poetry. His images are thought provoking. The unconventional images that he uses make his poetry appear complex and obscure. The tone of his poetry is almost colloquial and conversational. But the words he chooses are often difficult. They are seldom the words consecrated to poetry. Mahapatra is acutely conscious of his racial identity, the historical and mythical past of Orissa. There is identification with his native locale, a sense of rootedness that we find in the post -colonial poetry, an undaunted representation of the truth cured of idealism and romanticism and a sharp social concern. Mahapatra's symbols turn around the blind faith of the ordinary people of Orissa, the visual images of the Hindu priests, temples and elusive gods and the auditory images of the temple bells. The poems attempt to bring out

the meaninglessness of the religious observances of which he himself remains a detached observer. The images of social concerns include hunger, poverty, the downtrodden, the children, the women, the prostitutes. Memory occupies a large portion in his poetry and much of his world is absorbed by personal pain, guilt, remorse, desire and moments of renewal. One of the major concerns of the poet is poetry and the feat of writing it.

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