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**Poetical World of Jayant Mahapatra:
Depiction of Indianness and Humanness through
Past and Present of Orissa**

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ABSTRACT

A poet is always a sensitive persona recording the events and situations happening around. Its continuum starts locally but in finer poetry it goes beyond region/s and becomes global. Jayant Mahapatra's poetical inspiration stems from his in-depth awareness of inheritance of India, especially Orissa, which dates back thousands of years and continues till date. The state of Orissa, both as a unique socio-cultural entity and as a representative part of India, has played an important role in Jayant Mahapatra's poetry. Mahapatra's poetic sensibility appears to have been shaped mostly by the two parts of Orissa that he encountered. The tumultuous historical past on one hand while on the other, there is the all-pervading presence of religion, which has connections with ancient culture. Then the reality strikes where there is the seemingly unchanged lifestyle of the people of Orissa, who are primarily dependent on agriculture. As a result, Mahapatra's poetry frequently encounters the constancy and changelessness of ancient tradition, myths, and tales, and derives its inspiration from them. It is the purpose of this research paper to examine Mahapatra's depiction of human predicament in people of Orissa and how does it reflect the Indianness and global humanity.

Keywords: Indian English Poetry, Orissa, Humanity, India, Predicament



Introduction:

In Jayant Mahapatra's poetry, there appears to be an ongoing relationship between the depictions of the self's isolation, loneliness, and solitude, as well as its estrangement from peripheral truths of the world with no ostensible persistence. It can be understood as the philosophical quandary that much contemporary literature deals with. Poetry of Jayant Mahapatra expresses a lot of emotional suffering, regret, dejection, starvation, ambition, and instances of revival, his experiences and interaction with signs of belief embodied by the folks of Orissa, such as temples, Hindu festivals, and antique shrines, as well as symbols of belief embodied by Mahapatra's characters.

Jayant Mahapatra's Humanism: A Distinctive Chapter in Indian English Poetry

Jayanta Mahapatra is a firm believer in humanistic ideas. These principles have been refined in his society. Awareness of time represents the insecurity of people's experiences as a journey from the ancient times, travelling to the present and going towards some unknown destination in the future. Through this poetic road, his psyche dwells on issues related to the events happening around and record it in poetic ways. Throughout the hunt for meaning, he is leading a vortex of tough and rebellious reality. Mahapatra's ongoing search is centred on finding feasible verses to transmute his pain and anguish in gravid visuals and metaphors. He employs motifs and iconography that are reoccurring themes in his work, such as death, dimness, past, quietness and so on. The reappearance of these elements as motifs, as well as their continuity within the poems, bring unity and meaning to Jayant Mahapatra's ways of distinguishing an experience implanted either in the exterior world's reality or in the inner struggle of his lyrical fancy, Mahapatra's poetry evokes this environment, depicts social milieu, pictures the setting of past and present. In the unending flow of time, his poetry explains his forms of engagement in modern society as well as what is enduring and unstoppable. His poetry is a self-portrait of Orissa's socio-cultural setting. The language is evolving beyond simple definitions, becoming an echoing, nuanced, and symbolic insignia that inspires his own style of poetry. Jayant Mahapatra is certain about the peculiarity of Orissa's culture which provides an insight to view things and people in a way that the poet can see the landscape as inextricably linked to his fate.

Colours of Poetry and Human Insensitivity in Jayant Mahapatra's Poetry:

The issue of poetic contemplation is described in "The Indian Eye" from *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten*. It is necessary to understand the social and religious tradition of giving coins to the meagre and deserving person i.e. a beggar was thought holy and it earned some *punya*



(religious merit) in order to fully understand the poetry. Beggary can manifest itself in a variety of stages and forms throughout India. Despite the fact that it is largely a societal evil, one cannot ignore it just because beggars face moral consequences. According to legend, even Lord Shiva was forced to leave as an act of restitution for closing one of Lord Brahma's five earholes. Wandering ascetics and *Sadhus* rely on these little gifts to survive: they are inextricably linked to the begging bowl. Beggary was transformed into a delightful and rewarding vocation about the same period by persons who were born lethargic and lazy.

It was not uncommon for pupils to approach wealthy traders or monarchs after completing their education in *Gurukulas*, (ancient Indian schools mostly situated in forests) in order to pay their *gurudakshina* i.e. the fees, and if the benefactor did not aid, the students felt terrible. It's possible that Mahapatra has something to do with this ancient habit. "*The Indian Eye*" the new organisation founded by the poet, is far from noble, as the poet observes:

"Years and years lay claim to safe paralytic tradition.

Turning sharply as if to avoid a muddy puddle,

While their begging hands are at you, sacred God like You.

Now if you part with a coin, you'd reap a solid million.

You are God; they cry, tear your eyes from you". (4-8)

The poet's compassion, along with his ferocious wrath, tears him apart. Betting has become corrupted as a result of a long-standing paralytic tradition. Traditionally held beliefs have been rendered ineffective and have ceased to hold their once religiously sanctioned status, in which society backed the intelligentsia. It also depicts, strangely, the plight of mendicants depending on charitable donations and live as a burden on society. Aside from that, the contributors have lost sight of their noble hearts and spirits. Charitable organisations are also utilised to conceal illegal activities that are carried out in order to amass wealth and achieve notoriety. The poetry "*The Indian Eye*" reflects on the corruption of taste and the commercialization of society as depicted in the poem. Societal reality is just the external manifestation of the degradation that has taken place within us only. Alternatively, one can ignore it and cry out for the regeneration and transformation of one's life-energy to keep the divine rightness and integrity intact.

Jayanta Mahapatra infuses his symbols in a variety of ways, including condensing the images even while dealing with a specific event, such as a beggar on a train, which is a perfectly regular occurrence in every section of India. "*Blind Singer in a Train*" is a poem that depicts a sightless mendicant's horrible desolation in a wobbling coach of a train. The variety of



compactly organised visuals accentuates his heart-rending plight, even without slenderest melodrama, features in the poem.

“Between successive halts of the guzzling train,

This bamboo-stabled man,”

(1-2 Blind Singer in a Train).

An endless sense of hopelessness is depicted in this poem, which reflects the cruel reality of men's condition in an unfair and uncaring world, as represented by the artist. First and foremost, man exists in a physically blind situation for which he bears no responsibility. He was unable to get around tonight due to poor vision, and he was unable to do so without his bamboo staff. He is now imprisoned in his darkness, like a tree, and will never be able to break free of the fogging shadow. A blind man's life depends largely on his stick made usually of bamboo, on which he has come to rely more and more as time passes. In the present compound word "bamboo-stabled man," Jayanta Mahapatra is credited with inventing it. As a result, the person who uses a stick feels steadier, and his suffering is nothing more than the pain of an animal chained to a stable posture. The well-being of the animal is dependent on whether or not its owner is considerate.

Due to his plight at the mercy of his fellow men and the charitable, a beggar has been harmed twice; nonetheless, sympathy and giving are not always evident. There are thousands of angry individuals who are turning their trained faces far from the appearance of a beggar, and he must strive to find a kind guy among them.

*“Then the ponderous song evokes. To turn
cultured heads away is the standard
procedure of the undamaged, who can only hear
the bones' blind beggary and feel the embarrassed
contraction of superfluous substance”.*

(11 Blind Singer in a Train)

People who are representatives of culture, orators, and great-growing politicians who are involved in ferocious discussions about all sides of the social order seem to be undertaking just spiritual things and overlooking actual predicaments because they have never experienced the agony of leading a horrendous and anxious life. They have remained unbothered. The load of lifelong despair carried by a blind beggar, on the other hand, is beyond the perspective of sophisticated officials, who are meant to steer and shape the country's future development. He



is able to communicate the intricacies of societal acts through his poems that counts one's self to be responsible lacking any explicitness.

This dilemma is frequently directed at the reader, who is requesting an honest response. Jayanta Mahapatra's poem concludes without presenting any solutions to the problems it raises. Mahapatra avoids the dangers of a political strategy by preventing his poetry from becoming overly simplified as a result of operational simplification. Generally speaking, this looks to be Mahapatra's greatest essential characteristic. Mahapatra's poetry is unique for the fact that irony and sarcasm, which are very essential part of the Indian English literature, play a little role in the poet's work.

Predicament of Women:

*“Even if another death is planned, it doesn't bother
the sun or the government. Just someone's voice
stranger than any other one had heard before and as though
one has ceased mourning much too soon and knows
it, with the tossing of branches in the languid air”.*

(19 A Whiteness of Bone)

*“Last year on the bend of the Debi river
the rape of a young girl
shocked us like ripe mangoes
dropping from the bare trees in winter.
Last year her murder and dismemberment”.*

(1 A Whiteness of Bone)

These are lines from the poems "In the Autumn Valleys of the Mahanadi" and "Learning for Ourselves". Jayant Mahapatra's caustic mode at a few specific societal problems. This is recorded at such times when ethical values of the society as a whole steeped to a new down. Mahapatra is referring to the horrible and dishonorable social evil where bridegroom marries just to obtain more money via the use of greedy lawyers. A growing number of dowry deaths are occurring, and unfortunately, they are the present equivalent of the equally barbarous and disgusting system of the Sati of the ancient times, under which a widow was either willingly or forcibly placed on her deceased spouse's funeral pyre. A mother's heart is weeping continuously in response to the tormented screams of her kid who has been burned to death,



and she cannot sleep as she is overburdened with grief, and the mother's startled throat is soar as she recalls cruel fate that befell her daughter.

Even as additional similar crimes against helpless women are committed, the judiciary and the administration should not be bothered to investigate. Because of its entire reliance on truths, judicial system is seldom successful in bringing the wrongful perpetrators to justice. The cunning party who committed crime, on the other hand, has no terror of repression and is growing increasingly savage in creating new ways of mercilessly destroying all civilised principles beneath the burden of their own egoism and corruption.

Rape, on the other hand, is a heinous crime that goes largely unpunished. When compared to a rape survivor's experience, dread, grief, vulnerability, guiltiness, anguish along with the agony of a raped girl are all vividly portrayed.

"the trembling in the eyes of cows we see

Being led meekly to the town's slaughterhouse"

(77-78 A Whiteness of Bone)

Even the suffering of the cattle ends at the butcher but the stigma associated with being a victim of rape is greater than being put to death in certain cases. The overall disinterest, lack of compassion and unwillingness to be affected by the burden of human misery that exists in our society are tremendously upsetting and distressing. According to Mahapatra, the dryness is so prominent that human being, as if, have quitted to mourn about any such incidents. Moreover, Mahapatra in *"The Lost Children of America"* again depicts a shameful incident:

*"In the Hanuman Temple last night
the priest's pomaded jean-clad son
raped the squint-eyed fourteen-year fisher girl
on the cracked stone platform behind the shrine"*

(119-123 Lost Children of America)

Such maltreatment by a fisherman's son in Hanuman's holy temple, despite the fact that he is the eternally revered Deity, is nothing short of ironic. Jayant Mahapatra adopted a modern outlook and departed from his expected traditional attitude and piety, according to the media. A fisherman's girl, coming from a lower background in the social system, is raped by an upper caste man, who happens to be the father of the priest's son. A harsh refinement of irony can be found even in the police station, where safety is essential, where it is no better than the ominous shrine. Consequently, the poor girl must face a similar torture at the hands of four law



policemen, the so-called guardians of justice, in order to be allowed to transgress her social class. In this startling and outrageous episode, Mahapatra controls the temperament of the poem by refusing to allow it to be just an outburst of the anger, which might easily incite the mob's fury and enrage the audience.

Mahapatra's irony is never a strong declaration, nor its hurtful, caustic, or biting. Mahapatra neither indulges into sarcasm nor he tries to be hilarious. It is always subtle and understated. Sarcasm of Jayant Mahapatra's poetry is constantly muffled. He keeps it slow murmur frequently leading to self-inspection, agitation faced by oneself, and pondering on one's own mistakes and inadequacies as a man and as a poet on one's own shortcomings. It also does not function as a drug delivered to a large number of sick people, nor does it mock the person who went wrong. Mahapatra is like a sincere missionary, persuading the person to change the ways so that he can contemplate and get rid of his evil.

"A Missing Person", "Hunger," "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street," "30th January 1982: A Story", and "The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of a Republic: 1975" are the perfect samples of Jayant Mahapatra's poems where this awareness for social situations/problems/issues is artistically reflected.

At the same time, the poems bring to light the human predicament of being entangled in a complicated network of social pressure and expectations that act as tight restrictions on an individual's ability to live his or her life according to his or her personal preferences, as well as on the choices available to him or her. An individual's independence is therefore crippled, and he or she is forced to submit to the requirements of social influences that determine his or her fate. When Mahapatra is dealing mostly with women's difficulties, his humanistic tone becomes sorrowful and sombre in tone. A tremendous compassion for the predicament of an Indian lady who carries the burden of womanhood in the face of complete isolation, incapacity, embarrassment, poverty, and frequently horrible degradation. One similar instance is depicted in Mahapatra's poem "Hunger".

*"I heard him say: my daughter, she's just turned fifteen...
Feel her. I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.
The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wile.
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber
she opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
the other one, fish slithering, turning inside".*

(1 Hunger)



Human Predicament: The Bilateral Hunger in Jayant Mahapatra's Poems

Scarcity of materialistic sources and sexuality create mayhem on people's lives, making them subhuman: a father prostitutes his daughter, who is barely out of her teenage years, and unconcernedly calls a potential consumer. This casualty is very shocking element in "*Hunger*". It was because of their terrible poverty that the fisherman resorted to "trailing his nets and his nerves" (3), implying a difficult inner psyche, in which an irresolvable disagreement was taking place. The fisherman is desperate as well anxious, and he may be obliged to sell out his daughter due to his hunger. Perhaps he is unable to come to terms with the unpleasant reality, and his helplessness is a testament to the anguish he is experiencing as a result of his heinous crime. The father, on the other hand, tells the fisherman to inform the customer that his daughter is difficult. The sentence underlines that she is still very young, saying, "*she is just turned fifteen*" (16). "*Hunger*" is a truly humanistic poem that comprises the repressed pleas of sufferers subjected to circumstances prompted by horrific hunger in order to become objects used to satisfy the hunger of the body. Within two days of starvation, these poor people are unable to find any integrity within, relegating themselves to the status of measly shadows, having to drag through one day to the next their unprecedented bothersome life, and becoming forced to resign to their dehumanising destinies without any prospectus of a better future. A tragic reality is that hundreds of men and women are forced to suffer this horrible existence. In this way, the narrator is also a sufferer of hunger, which is represented by his intrinsic yearning, which forces him to seek comfort in a rickety cabin owned by a poor fisherman. "*The Whore House in Calcutta*" can be considered as a sequel of "*Hunger*" but with a different colour of human disgrace where a mere depiction of actions between a prostitute and her customer are depicted without any moral preaching. The prostitute guiles the client into a quicker orgasm and the customer leaves the place with even more frustration contrary to his curiosity was to understand more about woman. In an interview with Aruna Ludra, Mahapatra opens his views on the paradigm of his poetry and its gradual shift in following words:

"My poems deal with my place, my people, my people. . . much of the writing I'm doing right now, more or less deals with the socio-political processes that have been happening in our country. So, I would say that I'm beginning to talk about things that concern me-about the Punjab problem, about poverty in my part of the country which remains as it was 45 years ago, about continuing sexuality that bugs our people". (54)

Statement made by Mahapatra marks an actual shift in Mahapatra's later poetry away from a completely subjective realm and toward addressing the challenges that most people are experiencing. In a way, its periphery is widened. It is crucial to highlight, however, that



Mahapatra portrays the heinous societal reality with a significant extent of objectivity, which prevents him from falling into the trap of sentimentalising the situation.

Conclusion

In part, this is due to the deep philosophic spirit that permeates Jayanta Mahapatra's delivery of facts and truth, which renders his poetry imprecise and distinguished in numerous ways. To be clear, Mahapatra never takes the role of prophet, proclaiming his judgement from a pulpit; he always defers to the reader's judgement in reaching his or her own judgments. Mahapatra's philosophy of life can be described as his never-ending quest to comprehend the incomprehensible that exists in the natural world. This may appear to be a contradiction, but in Jayant Mahapatra, it is necessary for opposites, contradictions, and perspectives and perceptions that are profoundly contradictory to exist side by side. Mahapatra frequently illustrates the inherent uncertainty and difficulty of human existence in his paintings and sculptures. Mahapatra's vision of the world is tense, imprecise, and frequently incredibly inventive. Consequently, the significance of his artistic test at the centre of the humanity is equally mysterious and hard to interpret.



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