
Ethos of Orissa Landscape and Indian Sensibility In The Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra

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ABSTRACT

Publication Info

Article history :

Received : 30.10.2023

Accepted : 30.11.2023

DOI : 10.30949/dajdtla.v19i2.8

Key words:

Oriya Culture, Indian Sensibility, Religion, Psyche, Poverty, Human Relationships, Social Injustices.

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the rising stars on the firmament of this species of Indian poetry. His works is of such intrinsic worth that he has already come to be regarded as the forth great poet in India. His ironic treatment with superb use of imagery with reference- to some of the more representative poems in the perspective of his commitment to a personal vision embedded in the materials practices, values of Oriya culture and rituals to some people of India. This paper attempts at the study of socio-political ethos of his native place, the images of locale, the social injustices that embodies the Oriya consciousness.

The enormous contribution to the growth of Indian poetry in English , although he sporadically ventured in the realms of fiction; he will be remembered primarily for his poetry, his use of irony, imagery on love, sex, rituals and human misery voicing democratic mode.

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Mahapatra is a celebrated poet in the post- Independence Indian English poetry. He was an eminent Indian English poet who began writing poems at the age of forty. Born in Cuttack in 1928, he was educated at Ravenshaw College, Patna and also taught there as a professor of Physics later. Like Shiva K. Kumar, he was "a late bloomer in poetry." In the words of K. N. Daruwalla, "Tradition, a mythic consciousness and the Orissa landscape play a large part in his poetry. There is an abundance of local details like shrines, temples, women prostrating themselves to the day's last sun, homebound cattle and rickshaw-pullers abound...the local touches form an essential part of a wider and more complex poetic fabric."

Mahapatra was an original poet, he hadn't read much poetry, nor was he hugely inspired by any other poet. He even admits this very fact, "You can see, I haven't read much poetry in my life. As a matter of fact, I haven't read any poetry until I started writing myself. No, not even poets like Whitman or Tagore. I was trained to be a physicist but I have veered away from physics in a way." Mahapatra's poetry is remarkable for depth of feelings and true poetic imagination which embraces a wide variety of themes--- Orissa landscape representing India's cultural and religious past running into present, rootlessness and emptiness in modern existence, love, sex, relationships and with superb craftsmanship. Here are some of the finest features of his poetry.

Jayanta Mahapatra's poetic sensibility is typically Indian. He is intensely aware of his environment and vividly portrays the variegated Orissa sceneries throbbing with religious fervour. It also explores human psyche and the intricacies our relationships. Orissa, specifically Puri and Konark looming large has a dominant presence in his poetry as Waverley in the novels

of Scott and Wessex in those of Hardy. The physical landscape reflects the deeper levels of Indian consciousness and psyche which have been shaped by age old traditions and culture. In *Dawn at Puri* he depicts with a touch of subtle irony and pathos, the incongruities in the religious landscape of India.

White-clad widowed women past
the centres of their lives, are waiting
to enter the great temple
their austere eyes, star like those caught
in a net, hanging at dawn's shining strands of faith. (Paniker 110)

Religion can give no solace to the poor and the destitute as Mahapatra says in the following lines:

Stones cut deep... touched by the pain of countless people
Across the temple square the wind
That settles on my shoulders has
Nowhere to go, neither a silence, nor an answer. (*Rain of Rites* 20)

In some of his famous poems Mahapatra deals with contemporary social and political realities in India. 'One cannot just sit back and shut his eyes and write in his escape module. *The Tattooed Taste* is a bitter sarcastic commentary of the hollowness of modern existence.

The astral chariot shines in the neons
Of empty faced women, climbing,
Children slumped open, loitering past
where they were born,
starring out of their fairy-tale windows
where the wizened wind, sweeping in
spins high hopes to the ground in silence... (*Selected Poems* 30)

It exposes the economic disparity and the utter apathy of the politicians to public welfare. In his famous poem, *The Secret of Heroism*, he brings to light the lamentable state of India, that lives under the massive burden of her ancient glory and heritage.

Perhaps all of India is not awake at this hour
Submerged in her immensity, I know I cannot get away
Like a patient crocodile... she leaves her prey to rot into
Softness fastened beneath the roots of some bold
Banyan of our heritage that overhangs the river (Paniker 17)

Prostitution and sexual exploitation results from economic disparity and gross social injustice. *The Whorehouse in Calcutta Street* is a precise, realistic and highly communicative account of the evil of prostitution. Love yields place to commerce and the message becomes quite clear. *Hunger* is more poignant, more moving. The extreme poverty of the fisherman-father compels him to let his 15 years old daughter to resort to prostitution.

She is just turned fifteen.
Feel her, here, there...
She opens her wormy legs wide, I felt
Hunger there, the other one, the fish
Slithering turning inside (*Selected Poems* 19)

Mahapatra's poems are known for their melancholic tone. He is concerned with contemporary situations prevalent in India and day-to-day problems encountered by common native people. His poetic world is filled with various images of wives, beloveds, whores, seductress, village

women, city women and adolescent girls having deeply significant metaphoric evocations and spotlighting his tragic vision of life to which he is essentially committed. Mahapatra has a great reverence and veneration for women who are ancient symbols of suffering and sacrifice.

Our minds were tied to the myths
That womanhood was pure, one With
The repose of the gods (Temple 12)

Mahapatra has developed a genuine voice which is of great interest to diverse Indian and foreign audiences. He belongs to his experience with the world and identifies himself with his roots and realises the meaninglessness in the life of modern man. By and large he gives his voice for the deprived and he is undoubtedly the poet for the people.

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