

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POETRY AS NOTHING BUT POETRY OF SELF-EXPLORATION AND SELF-DISCOVERY WITH RICHEST USE OF SYMBOLS, MYTHS, IMAGES AND SIMILES: AN APPRAISAL

S.F. Filomine White Sheela

Ph. D Scholar, Department of English & Comparative Literature,
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 21

Received: January 11, 2019

Accepted: February 23, 2019

ABSTRACT: *This is an attempt to project Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry as nothing but poetry of self-exploration 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'.*

Key Words: *Poetry, self- explanation, self- discovery, symbols, images, similes, Indian inheritance.*

Indian poetry in English has been variously known as Indo-Anglian, Anglo-Indian, Indo-English, India-English poetry, since there were a handsome number of Indian poets who started expressing themselves in this 'alien' language, some of whom are Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Aurobindo Ghose and Sarojini Naidu. Modern Indian poetry has blossomed on its own, contributing a lot to English languages so as to bring it alive and rich in its syntax to establish an indigenous tradition of Indian English verse without adding the British, the Americans, the Australians and the Canadians syntax in it. The English poetry can be classified into the following such stages as **1.The Age Pioneers (1820-1870)**, **2.The Era of Indian Renaissance (1870-1900)**, **3.The Era of Political Awakening (1900-1947)**, **4.The Era of Independence or The Modern Poetry (1847)**, works produced during the earlier stages which reflect the work of Wordsworth, Browning, Byron, Scott's poem it projects the cultural heritage of India through the composition of Toru Dutt, Swami Ramatirtha, Swami Vivekananda. It also brings out the intense patriotism and political awakening because of the poetical works of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu and Hon Chattopadhyaya. So modern poetry becomes remarkable for fecundity, experimentation and vivid presentation of contemporary reality and consciousness.

The new poetry is the poetry of protest and the new poets are those who discarded Walt Whitman, T.S.Eliot, Erza Pound and W.B.Yeats. They have got lifted to an extensive range of creative experience raising from a Conservation to a Cosmopolitan culture so as to confront the new shape of things and aquire a new vision that neither more imitation nor wanton angularity, neither frantic incoherence nor fabricated obscurity could make words live or sing themselves out and the Vocation of poetry is nothing but "a consecrated endeavour and an exacting discipline", It is to the credit of the 'new poets' then "they are prepared to take their vocation seriously" (Iyengar 649). The modern poets prefer originality and experiment in word craft, intensity and strength of feeling, clarity in thought structure and sense of actuality. Among many modern poets, Jayanta Mahapatra, is the one who did a lot in projecting the qualities of clarity of perception, thought structure, lucidity of expression, coherence and evocativeness, sense of actuality coupled with a sense of protest in poetry.

Jayanta Mahapatra, was born on 2nd October 1928 in a Christian family in Cuttak, Odisha. He was educated at Stewart European School and Ravean Shaw college, Cuttak and Science Reader in Physics, Ravenshaw college, Cuttack. By all standards, Mahapatra's tryst with poetic Muse came rather late in his life for he started writing poetry at the age of 40. So he was called as "a late bloomer in poetry like Shiva K.Kumar". As an eminent Indian English poet, he 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'. His poetical works are of unmistakable authenticity of tone and treatment. All his poetical works have Indianness projecting the life of Indians with a focus on poverty, hunger, starvation, sexuality, and exploitation of women. This becomes as a major theme of his poems. His poetical works are: **1.Close the Sky, Ten by Ten (1971)** as the first volume of poems, **2.Swayamvara and other Poems (1971)**, **3.A Rain of Ricks (1976)**, **4.Relationship (1980)**,

5.Life Signs (1983), 6.A Whiteness of Bone (1972), 7.Shadow Space (1997), 8.Waiting (1979), 9.The False stort (1980), 10. Dispossessed Nests (1986), 11.Selected Poems (1987), 12.Burden of Waves and Fruits (1988), and 13.Temple (1989).

Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry explores Indian sensibility and ethos, especially the Orissa landscape. Religion and psyche and the intricate of human relationships, being remarkable for depth of feelings and true poetic imagination embracing a variety of themes like rootlessness, emptiness in modern existence with support poetic craftsmanship. Emergence of Indian English poetry is from Indian soil, he has his own background to become a poet. Like other English poets, Mahapatra too considers Orissa as the seed-ground of his flourishing art. He admits his indebtedness to the soil himself as:

“To Orissa, to his land in which my roots lie and his past and in which lies my beginning and my end, where the wind knees over the grief of the River Daya and the waves of the Bay of Bengal fail to reach out to day to the firelight soul of konarka, I acknowledge my debt and my relationship” (Niranjan 65).

The strength of Mahapatra's poetry comes from his living intimately with his place. The place, with all its ethos and myths, its loves and beliefs, superstitions and transitions have been governing factor of his poetry. “Orissa” as Parthasarathy puts it, “is the hub of Jayanta Mahapatra's iconoclastic perambulations” (P 207). Orissa, popularly known as the land of Lord Jaganath, remains at the core of Mahapatra's poetic creativity. M.K.Naik is very apt in saying as “Mahapatra's poetry is redolent of the Orissa scene and the Jaganatha temple at Puri figures guide often in it” (207). Puri is a living Character in many such poems as “Indian Summer”, “Poems”, “This Stranger”, “My Daughter” is a good number of poems, Mahapatra tries to evoke an atmosphere of lost glory, lost ecstasy of the culture of Orissa;

“At Puri, the crows
The one wide street
Lolls out like a giant tongue
.....
And at the street's and
The crowds thronging temple's door” (Taste for Tomorrow)

In poems like this, the local environment becomes symbol of India, what is happening in Puri is depicted as typical India as a whole. In the words of S.Viswanathan, “the poet's sensibility is both Indian and modern and his response to the Indian scene is authentic and credible” (PS). **In Summer** too, there is the evocation of such a typically Indian rival atmosphere:

A ten year old girl,
combs her mother's hair,
Where crows of rivalries
are quietly resting
The home will never
be hers.

The quarrelsome nature of the mother is presented in contrast to the daughter's ignorance of her future. After the marriage the girl is sure to leave her mother's house. The minds of the readers get the impression through the lucidity of language and the creation of images.

Mahapatra uses sympathy and precision to portray his women characters. He perceives women from the male point of view, though he didn't suggest any key point for the upliftment of women's status. He is not a crusader of women but his poetry has a tragic pessimistic tone. Indian women are projected through silence and passiveness, and this depicts the red condition of Indian English poetry, on basis 'women' are considered as 'Shakthi' meant for renewing the desire of men. Mahapatra pictures the Indian women as he perceived in his daily life. He projects his women as the ones who are found to be religious to care for everyone. In the poem “Dawn”, the poet paints a picture of Oriye women as;

“White clad widowed women
part the centers of their lives
are waiting to enter the Great Temple”

A typical Indian situation is well portrayed and the image of nameless old women's mass of crouched faces'. In Mahapatra's poem, silence is an ambiguous force, which evokes the secret disturbance, unease and complete darkness. It begins to carry the implications of desolation and loss, both human and metaphysical. While portraying women in his poem, symbol of silence played an important role. Through the image of women, Indian women are represented as a whole. In the poem "Dawn" the picture of a lonely woman is portrayed through the symbol dawn', it is a down travelling alone which symbolizes the lady of ignorance. In the poem **Women in Love** the poet is trying to represent the body of the lady burning with passionate intensity;

And if on the endless blue waves of your body
Sometimes leave a boat, a touch,
It would only drift about, like a child asleep
tried, after the day
the wondering expression on its face,
while perhaps your soul
like the tide, along the windless drift of sea weed
a flow blissfully unaware
what rocks of power if hold our side of it

In the first line, the body is compared to the sea; in the second line, touch with boat, in third line, touch with a sleeping child, and in the sixth line, the soul is compared to tides flowing into the dark and in the last line, power is compared to rocks. These images are significant as they bring forth the passion of women in love. In the poem "The Stranger My Daughter", the image of adolescent girl and the narrator-father's concern for her is vividly portrayed. The father's concern for protecting 'the juices of her body' from being sucked by the bees (the males) and filled in the noisy hives is aesthetically portrayed in symbolic terms:

"Juices from my daughter's body
Are filling the noising hives",

To project the lust of men, he uses typical Indian imagery, ie the symbol of hives and bees. In **Rain of Rites**, the title poem contains the line "What holds my rain so it's hard to overcome?" A Hindu, bound by tradition, cannot give it up. For him, rain symbolizes clarity and wisdom:

"The clear, wise eyes of water"

It enables him to look "the other side of life". It is considered as a symbol of an eye opener to the reality of one existence. It quietly opens the door, and gives up an insight into the reality of our existence, to enable us to be 'someone again'. It is like Eliot's foot falls' reminding us of our blessed innocence. It brings to us the "forbidden memories ringing", Mahapatra tries to express the inexpressible things through symbols. His symbols are sunlight, dawn, water, and other related objects. K.Ayyappa paniker prints out the significance of the rain symbols:

"Scheme of sin and expiation, it is rain that seems to work out the hoped for expiation. The process of purification is also a rain of rites" (P 132)

In the poem "Summer", Mahapatra using symbols he brings out two contradictive types of sexual desire. The mother has lost her sex through age: "Under the mango tree/ the cold ash of a deserted fire", whereas another girl has not yet experienced sex. Her latent sexuality is symbolically externalised. "In a corner of her mind/ a living green mango/ drops softly to earth", the poet's vision of life is that of decay, loss, agony, dejection, rejection, guilt and exploitation. He uses the symbols of sunlight and dawn in order to explore the vision of life. As Rain is a favourite metaphor for Mahapatra, he uses rain as regenerative symbol, so it occurs frequently in a number of poems. His rain poems "In a Night of Rain", "A Day of Rain", "After the Rain" deal with the metaphor of rain more effectively. Through the image of rain he accelerates desire in men and women for physical union. If rain fuels the desire in men for sexual union, it also gives hope for a better tomorrow. He considered rain as a metaphor of life; he loves it as his own life:

"In the end
I come back to the day and to the rain"
(In the fields of Desolate Rise)

The poem becomes significant through the image of rain and it reaches a height by hinting at it in a cool and ordered manner. Rain cautions him against the days wanted and makes him avert of the reality. A kind of self-realization is drawn upon him as an after-effect of the rain fall.

Mahapatra depicts the human experience in a lively manner by using nature's image. Using nature imagery, he brings out the mind of the newly married girl on her wedding night. On parting from her father, she cries:

“Child's tear upon the rock-faced silence of a father's day....
her midnight vigil. Will hopefully crave an artificial dell of joy
from a stranger's synonymous cave”

And she is timed a mammoth's foot falls, while 'as stone to touch, she dreads the thunder and lets':

“The fierce lighting race
wave after wave through her
sun-inflamed flesh”.

Inanimate things are portrayed as if they are having animate character. They are also endowed with attributes of living beings. Hence a rock has 'tensed muscles (Relationship 9), main street/ pounding hugely like to leaning' art (The Blind Beggar, Close the Sky 7). He establish a relationship between man and nature and in the same way places have their sign in terms of human expression in phrases like 'Konarka of the soul (performance, A father's Hours 13). To describe the human nature he uses animal imagery. Astral bodies are described in animal terms as in the moon running white among the cloud/like a jackal, "Orion crawls like a spider in sky" (Relationship 11). Even the inanimate things take on an animal character:

“The clock
stabbing in a cobra's tongue across the air” (Relationship 19).

Animal imagery is also useful in characterizing human responses:

“My Memories are rats scampering in the dark” (Relationship 12)

and my longing sits “Silent like a grey owl” (Summer 219). To depict the human response and to describe the astral bodies in human terms, he uses animal imagery.

In the words of Mahapatra, “Today's poem utilizes a number of images and symbols to form a whole, leaving the reader to extricate himself with the valid meaning or argument from them....”. He believes that as a great poet he uses symbols and images to bring out the human condition. Mahapatra says:

“Perhaps I begin with an image or cluster of images, or as image leads to another, or posing the images belonging to a sort of group... The image starts the movement of the poem” (Syal 203).

Images in his poem are drawn from two works- the exterior world of phenomenal reality and surrealistic world. These two words are significantly related. “The image of Mahapatra is not merely the primary pigment of poetry (Lewis). It is almost his characteristic way of reacting to experience, ordering it and recording it. It becomes in his work a single languages, sometimes so hard for others to need or guess” (P 57).

Mahapatra's poetry is about the contemporary situation, which becomes as his unique identity. He expressed the present day life and society along with the past, history and tradition in two ways, ie by posing questions to himself and also to the world. He tries to explore about the relationship between men and women, through the exploitation of women in a male-dominated society. As Paniker written, “Mahapatra's treatment of sex and love is to write a contrast to the calculated cynicism of Ezekiel, the flaunting melody of Kamala Das or the sly indulgence of Shiv K.Kumar” (P 6).

To conclude, it may be said that Mahapatra as a modern writer tries to lay emphasis on subjective memory and inversely but truly speaking he tries to connect man with his contemporary world. He considered poetry as “craft” which appears to be complex because of its language of allusiveness. His poetry is essentially 'poetry of self-exploration' for in his opinion, the process of writing is nothing but self-exploration and self-discovery. He uses symbols, images, myths, metaphor and similes to bring out rich and effective poetic vision.