

# ROCK PEBBLES

A Special  
Issue on  
Jayanta  
Mahapatra

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Cover: Padmashree Jayanta Mahapatra - the noted Indo-English Poet.

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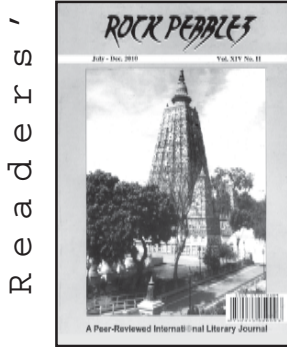
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This special number on Jayanta Mahapatra is a dream come true for Rock Pebbles. The number of articles we received is a mark of his popularity and the amount of research work in progress on him. The scholarly articles that enrich this volume would surely encourage further work on the poet. The interview that he has given us for this number in spite of his failing health would provide a lot more insight into the poet as well as his poems.

We plan to bring out more such special numbers of Rock Pebbles at regular intervals in future.

## Response



..... I have gone through all the articles and it is a wonderful experience to go through these. In July-Dec. 2010 issue, the poem by Sri Biraja Prasad Bal is a heart-rendering one. The essays are unique due to their wide varieties of subject matters so well written.....

- Gopal Roy  
Birbhum (W.B)

..... I have read your magazine. Really it is creative and encompassing all the works of literature in an artistic and beautiful way .....

- Prof. S.B. Desai,  
Bijapur, Karnataka

..... Going through the last three issues of "Rock Pebbles" (July-Dec. 2009, Jan.-June-2010 and July-Dec. 2010) I found that it is a worthy international journal for the lovers of English literature who want to know, explore and exploit more and more about the ever-flourishing and never-ceasing critical and creative world. It is really a boon and blessing to the teachers, students, research scholars and above all to the literary horizon of India and abroad .....

- Bijay Ketan Pattanayak  
R.I.H.S. College,  
Balasore, Odisha.

..... I am a sincere reader of your well-known scholarly journal Rock Pebbles .....

- Kosambi Satyajeet Rajvardhan  
Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India

..... I am awestruck to see the contents of the journal which are really interesting. ....

- R. Sankari  
Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu.

..... At the very outset, let me privilege to congratulate you for running such a wide-ranging and qualitative international literary journal .....

- Shri R.D. Gholap  
Nashik, Maharashtra State

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## CRITICISM

### PEOPLE, CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF A.D. HOPE AND JAYANTA MAHA PATRA

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People, culture and landscape are always of great interest in literature as they stick to memory and promote varied thought and imagination. Australia and India, now far apart and once geologically united in the continent of Asia, have more in common than is usually imagined. Both are countries of fantastic contrasts; with deserts, tropical rain forests and snow-capped ranges co-existing. Primeval, brooding lands-the last of the world's lost species roam here, and the medley of exotic flora and fauna is mind-boggling. Both are so unusual, that nowhere else on the globe can one find a close analogy. India is immensely ancient, culturally, when compared to Australia, where people have a light burden of time, so that it is still personal- to be measured in terms of great-grandfathers, not past civilizations. The nature poetry of Australia and India reveals the uniqueness of the land that inspired them.

A.D. Hope and Jayanta Mahapatra are the two distinct voices from these two lands. They are the most widely read and most widely acclaimed poets whose reputation extends outside their native countries. Though they belong to two different climes and cultures- one in Australia and the other in East India, they have certain points in common while certain others in divergence. However, both the poets have extensively used lands and landscapes in their poems, not just to express the diversities of the people, their culture and their response to the phenomena around, but also to project the human experiences in most pictorial form.

A.D. Hope is entirely a new voice in Australia. Mythology, classics and European culture fascinated him and engrossed his imagination. He is a great admirer of Nietzsche and expressed a scientific concern for survival in the face of weak modes of sustenance. Leonie Kramer has underlined the essential features of his poetry: the poems have "smooth and orderly surface", the tone "moves between extremes of facetiousness and learned gravity", the speaker's voice is "measured and deliberate" and there is a conflict between:

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\* teaches English at Gauhati University, Kokrajhar, Assam, India.

...lust and love, fear and hopeful expectation, the desire for beauty and the recognition of ugliness, between man as predator and man as victim, the world as a joke and as a place of future. Images of brutality, cruelty and destruction are balanced against images of fruitfulness, harmony and, though infrequently, fulfillment..<sup>1</sup>

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the major Indo-English poets, both as regards his themes and his treatment of them. His contribution to Indo-English poetry includes his enlargement of its themes; the originality of his approach to, and treatment of, his themes; the felicities of word and phrase; and his imagery which is sometimes perfectly realistic, sometimes symbolist, sometimes surrealist, and sometimes of the common, familiar, and everyday kind. In this connection it has to be emphasized that Mahapatra belongs to the Symbolist-Surrealist stream of poetry; and, by writing poetry of this kind, he has enriched Indo-English poetry and extended its scope and range.

The Orissa landscape, the Orissa cultural history and background, the social life of Orissa, and the rites and rituals of the people of Orissa constitute the most important and significant theme of his poetry. This, of course, shows Mahapatra's mainly regional outlook. But though regionalism is certainly the most striking feature of his poetry, this poetry is not limited or narrow so far as its themes are concerned. Mahapatra deals with human relationships, Indian social problems, love, sex, marriage, morality, human nature, and Nature with a capital N. Mahapatra stands alone as a poet who has brought a particular region of India on the map of Indo-English poetry and added greatly to the importance, dignity, and stature of that region while, at the same time, pointing out and even emphasizing the ugly and seamy side of the life of that region.

However, both the poets have depicted the natural settings of their own lands in their poetry, though in a different manner. Hope's poetry is new in many respects. He takes a stance, finds analogues, observes the world keenly and develops an objective view towards his time and place. His most celebrated poem "Australia" presents a dual view but he makes his choice clearly:

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home  
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find  
The Australian desert of the human mind,  
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come.

The country is defined variously as "a nation of trees", "a young country", "the last of lands", and a land "without songs, architecture, history". The poet speaks



here as if in a garb, but makes his logic poetically sound. Hope, in his poems, is a mystic, a Nietzschean elite, a celebrator of sexual raptures, and an intellectual with a scientific temper. The more celebrated of Hope's poems are "The Damnation of Byron", "The Return from the Freudian Islands", "The Martyrdom of St Teresa", "The Double Looking Glass", "On an Engraving by Casserius", "The Ballad of Dan Homer". These poems present Hope's qualities as a poet of a different order from any of his predecessors.

Mahapatra is the only poet who has captured sincerely the scenes and sights of Orissa minutely and therefore an examination of the recurring images in his poems reveals that he is Oriya to the core. Mahapatra, a child of the Sun and the Sea, delights in invoking the God of Fire and the God of Water in poems like "Sunburst", "The Exile", "Indian Summer Poem", "This Stranger", and "My Daughter". Puri is a living protagonist in several of these poems. The temple, the priest, the beggar, the fisherman, the crow; these rise before us in all their objective reality and concreteness and then slowly transforms themselves, almost imperceptibly, into monuments-like images and symbols. An important poem "Taste for Tomorrow" from the volume *Waiting*, for instance, is a vignette of Puri with a number of such symbols of reality:

At Puri, the crows  
The one wide street  
lolls out like a giant tongue.  
Five faceless lepers move aside  
as a priest passes by.  
And at the Street's end  
the crowds thronging the temple door.  
A huge holy flower  
Swaying in the wind of greater reasons.<sup>2</sup>

Here the giant tongue and the holy flower point to the deep laden mythic consciousness operating in the best of Mahapatra's poems. This process of the metamorphosis of reality into symbol acts as a connecting link between the objective perception of everyday reality and the imaginative leap of myth creation. The crows of the first line invisibly turn into the crowds of the last section.

In the poetry of A.D. Hope too, frequent use of myths is a prominent characteristic. The familiarity of the oft-repeated tales, is however, offset by Hope's shift of focus. It is like looking at the photograph of a long-familiar, almost drab, scene in which, though the details are all the same, freshness is provided through the capturing of the scene from a different angle of vision. It is in his

imaginative and innovative use of myths that Hope's brilliance most clearly reveals itself and myths provide the most satisfactory answer, both philosophically and artistically, to the problems he encounters as a man and a poet.

Myth has been defined as "a story or complex of story elements taken as expressing, and therefore as implicitly symbolizing, certain deep-lying aspects of human and transhuman existence." <sup>3</sup> For Hope, myth "serves as a pattern of meaning for himself and his fellow men..some of his best poems are those in which he has utilized the mythic core to the best advantage, revitalizing old stories to bring their significance up to date."<sup>4</sup>

The most remarkable and distinctive feature of Hope's use of myths is the way in which he cleverly adapts them to speak directly to the modern man and woman, thus helping them to achieve an identity with an understanding, of the age-old characters. And always, there is the unexpected conclusion, a certain twist in the tale which helps to bring home the point the poet is trying to make, in a thoroughly dramatic fashion.

But, when A.D. Hope describes his land as "a young country", and a land "without songs, architecture and history", Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry, on the other hand, reflects how an Indian poet can derive strength from going back to his traditional and cultural reality. He has occupied a prominent place among the Indian poets and his significant publication of poetic volumes like *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start and Relationship* (1980) and *Life Signs* (1983) reveal "a first rate poetic sensibility" which is saturated with culture, and ethos of Indian life. He is a poet who catches the microcosmic India in the macrocosm of Orissa. In most of his poems, Mahapatra narrates the quality of Indianness without special postures or clichés. To be a real Indian, one has to avoid consciously trying to be an Indian. On the other level of art, the local and the universal must meet together. Mahapatra's Indian quality is perhaps most keenly felt in his poems about Orissa where he sounds more authentic when he writes about Orissa than about India as a whole. This tendency has really enhanced the intrinsic power of his poems derived largely from the local detail raised to universal significance. Most of his poems like "Orissa Landscapes", "Evening in an Orissa Village", "The Orissa Poems", "Dawn at Puri", etc. are Oriya first and therefore Indian too.

We can also notice a sense of pain, loss, and alienation in the poems of both A.D. Hope and Jayanta Mahapatra. In "The End of a Journey"<sup>5</sup>, Hope describes the feelings of Ulysses, the protagonist, on his return to his island

kingdom after all the excitement and danger-filled days of adventure and voyages. The Ulysses we are introduced to here is not the noble hero of Dante, Homer or Tennyson. He is a twentieth century wanderer returned home: a rheumy, disillusioned old man, "a figure, seemingly incapable of mental or physical action, whose only certainty is that "the Gods at last had left him""<sup>6</sup>.

The very first stanza sets the tone. Finally back with Penelope, the night of reunion is not an ecstatic, deliriously joyful celebration of conjugal ties; it is "an old man sleeping with his housekeeper". "The embrace is a 'rape by a stranger' ... Penelope's traditional values of 'faith and valour' are undermined as she finds 'herself, faith wasted, valour lost'"<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the reunion, with all its attendant values of sustenance of home and hearth and for which Ulysses had ignored the seductive song of the sirens, is transformed into a cold and meaningless act of physical union:

And he, for all the bloody passion it cost  
To have heard the sirens and yet have fled,  
Thought the night tedious, coughed and shook his head.

The slaughter of the suitors and indiscreet maidens is focused on with grim clarity. For Hope, there is no justification for the senseless carnage; it is not the cleansing of the state as suggested by Homer- it is a wanton and capricious destruction of human life:

A farm cart by the doorway dripped and stank,  
Piled with the victims of his mighty bow.  
Each with her broken neck, each with a blank,  
Small strangled face, the dead girls in a row  
Swing as the cold airs moved them to and fro.

The picture presented here- that of a farm cart 'piled' high with bodies- is shocking in its implicit reduction of human beings to the state of piled up garbage. Thus, the long wished object of the hero's wandering- the island kingdom of Ithaca- is, for the modern Ulysses, merely a "petty kingdom":

Grimly he watched his enemy the sea  
Rage round the petty kingdom he called home;  
But now no trident threatened from the spray.  
He prayed but knew Athene would not come.  
The gods at last had left him, and the day  
Darkened about him.

Hope's Ulysses takes his place among the other twentieth century anti-heroes. He stands alone, "a castaway" on the "cruel shore" of his

disillusionment. "As a type of contemporary anonymous man, he is a fitting hero, perhaps, for the anxious age: this modern Ulysses, suffering an atrophy of will, is cut off from the sustaining rituals of love and family" <sup>8</sup>.

Hope's poem is, in a sense, an echo of the Australian experience- "castaway" from the shores of England into a hostile, alien environment. The plight of Ulysses also duplicates the plight of creative writers like Hope. With no established literary tradition to draw upon, struggling to form an identity of their own as distinct from that of the British, writers in Australia felt the anguish of an acute feeling of having been cut off from their roots. "Having no focus and no central point of cultural reference, Australian writers have, of necessity, been more isolated" <sup>9</sup>.

A.D. Hope's feelings of alienation and isolation for having been cut off from their roots is in sharp contrast with Jayanta Mahapatra's feelings of deep-rootedness in his culture. Being rooted in India, Mahapatra cannot forget his culture and ethos in which he was born and in his best work, though language is English but the sensibility is Oriya. Mahapatra comments on his relationship with his motherland:

I suppose I can never write anywhere but in Orissa. I would say that my romance with Orissa and my romance with poetry start with my birth, even though I wrote rather late. I was born on the bank of a river; I have been living there ever since. One of my earliest recollections is of my father carrying me to the grounds of a small temple when an earthquake was at its height. From then on I suppose my life has moved with the rural atmosphere, the rural environment of Orissa, the river which comes through in most of my poems, and the temple's bitter-sweet bell. So these things have occupied quite a place in my poems. <sup>10</sup>

The cult of culture and custom, which is the part and parcel of Indian life, is the chief characteristic of Mahapatra's poetry. The superstitious belief, ritualistic attitude, philosophic idea of the eternity of the soul for which India is well-known in the world, has been beautifully portrayed by the poet in the A Rain of Rites and Life Signs. He has vehemently incorporated the tantric design in the line of the unique poem "Myth" enlivened by the spirit of the ritual. The chanting, the incense, the flower, the bells, the prayer, the spiral movement suggested by the stairs, the climax of the peaks, and finally the smile of the sacrificed flowers and the magical metamorphosis into a diamond are the best

exemplar of tantric forms in solid shape. The crumpled leaf through long years turns into a diamond is the symbol of geological ritual and nature's metamorphosis. The scarlet flowers sacrificed to the gods are reminiscent of the devadasis of the temples, who performed ritualistic dances spiraling up the stairs to their salvation. However, in the verse "Myth", the poet dives deep into the ocean of Indian history to find out the cult of life which is beyond cast and creed. For instance:

The dried, sacrificed flowers smile at me.  
I have become;  
a diamond in my eye.  
as a bearded, saffron-robed man  
asks me, firmly:  
Are you a Hindu ?<sup>11</sup>

Like Hope, Mahapatra too, is intensely aware of the alienation and the isolation of the modern man. In the poem entitled "Iron", Mahapatra is conscious of the searing pain that a sense of injustice evokes and the consequent existential anguish which is indefinable and indescribable when the very breath turns into iron choking him in the process. The yearning for life results only in further darkness and frustration. The awareness of evil in the natural cycle of time and also the man-made society is conveyed by the images of roof and leaf:

Darkness from shadows under the roof and leaf  
From the fish's belly white against the hardness  
Of water, from the salt in the blood  
Which carries the body forward like love.<sup>12</sup>

From the shores of the memories of generations "the voice of instants" chums out the history and brings out the searing pain, leaving an open wound:

Touching me like a sad iron  
Awakening under unmined reaches of this river of life,  
And the depths of my body  
Numb fear and fire and air  
To turn on earth like an unjust ploughshare.<sup>13</sup>

The pessimism bordering on despair, which we find in Hope's poetry, is to be met with to the same extent in Mahapatra's poetry. The poetry of Mahapatra is emphatically characterized by the feelings of sorrow, grief, regret, dejection, loss and rejection. Such poems as "Lost", "The Exile", "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore" and "Again, One Day, Walking by the River"

belong to this category; and in this connection the following lines from "Again, One Day, Walking by the River" may be taken as illustrations of his pessimism.

I can't remember hearing anyone  
Saying he will mourn for me when I am gone

... ..

I wonder where the day goes.

Even in the bright sun

This was a world I did not know.<sup>14</sup>

There are poems which depict human nature and probe into human mind. Both A.D. Hope and Jayanta Mahapatra have also shown in their poetry a concern for the silent suffering of women at the hands of society. Both the poets make an attempt to plumb the depths of the emotions of the women left behind. Hope in his poem, "The End of a Journey", describes the feelings of Penelope—the type of the faithful wife, who is left behind for years together while her husband—King roams the farthest corners of the globe, never knowing when he would return or if he would return at all. In spite of the fact that Penelope wanted to rebel, an awareness of the conventions of an orthodox society forces her to suppress her desires. But there is no sense of joy or a sense of faith rewarded, there is only regret. Her faith has been "wasted" as A.D. Hope puts it; there is the pang of a loss keenly felt. Living through the years of barren loneliness, has left her unstable, older and friendless. Hope transforms her fabled patience into passivity, a lack of will, in the process stripping her of dignity and spirit.

In the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra too, the recurring portraits of women point specifically to this aspect; they are drawn with sympathy and with precision. Consciousness of the poverty and the suffering of the Indian masses, and of women as victims of male lust in a male dominated society, imparts to Mahapatra's poetry a tragic-pessimistic tone. In "A Missing Person", he says,

The good wife  
lies in my bed  
through the long afternoon:  
dreaming still, unexhausted  
by the deep roar of funeral pyres.

In the darkened room  
a woman

cannot find her reflection in the mirror.<sup>15</sup>

Commercial exploitation of sex makes woman's destiny a tragic one, and she takes it all mechanically, tired, bored and insensitive. She is merely a passionless

tool, and she suffers both as a wife and a whore. 'The darkened room' is symbolic of tragic gloom that envelops the Indian people, particularly her women-folk, the victims of exploitation, both sexual and economic, since time immemorial. The missing person of the title is her inner self which is not imaged in the mirror. She is tired and bored- waiting as usual at the edge of sleep- and contemplating her figure in the mirror. She holds in her hands an oil lamp shedding a dim yellow light which enables her to see her body reflected in the mirror, but no light is shed on her inner self, her lonely psyche or soul. Her inner sufferings and frustrations are never externalised and never understood. The woman does not speak, but her inner self has been dramatically presented through a few deft touches.

When Jayanta Mahapatra writes about poetry it is an expression of his inner world and problems about relationship between the self and reality. In an essay published in The Literary Criterion (XV, no.1, 1980, pp.27-36) Mahapatra speaks of a poet's mental landscape, an 'inner world of his own making- a world spaced by his own life, of secret allusions, of desire and agony, of a constantly changing alignment between dream and reality'. Rather than moral choices, Mahapatra speaks of being 'uncertain' of his 'very existence' and of groping from poem to poem for the key to human understanding.

Both A.D. Hope and Jayanta Mahapatra have beautifully portrayed their lands and landscapes in their writings closely associated with the experience, culture and thoughts in Australian and as well as Indian perspective. If A. D. Hope looks at the kaleidoscopic aspect of Australian life and tries to explore it, Jayanta Mahapatra goes deep into the Indian life in general and the life of Orissa in particular. Both the poets use myths not just to signify the past existence with greater energy than now, but also to bring to light the inner disappointment of having lost something and yearning to live a life of emotion and passion. Their poems are a good construction of the various faces of a self that never stands still; it rather advances with anxiety, corresponding inner realization and self-expression. Their poems seem to be saying that if reality is at the center of life, art is its freshener. It sharpens human sensibility and makes one capable of assimilating the various impressions of life. □

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## MYTHS IN JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POETRY

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Jayanta Mahapatra (1928-) has earned the reputation of being one of the foremost contemporary Indian English poets. But he calls himself an Oriya poet who occasionally writes in English. He is a surrealist and strong imagist and has amply used several types of myths in his poetry. As such he holds a mythopoeic vision in narrating fictive and real experiences and incidents. The statistical account of myths used by him proves that he has chosen maximum of myths from his indigenous environment and traditions. As an observer of realities and seer of humanist strategies and future, he is conservative like T.S. Eliot, who believes in honouring the tradition, preserving the spiritual and natural ecology. Through the use of various myths, he has proved his status and strategy as an eco-humanist.

Mahapatra has described Orissa, his homeland as a land of forbidding myth (1982:9). The term 'myth' has been repeated by the poet for several times in his magnum opus Relationship, which is the theme song of his life:

I thought : those who survive the myth  
Have slipped past their lives and can not define their reason (29)  
I tried to speak of myth of sleep and action,  
In the hope of soothing myself and those others (30)  
We are delivered by the myth  
which exhorts our sleep and our losses  
that wakes us like toys springing out of box (34)

The persona here attempts to present how essential are myths for life. Myths provide explanations for our losses, our action and soothe lives at the time of our grief. The long poem Relationship celebrates and explains the persona's relationship with the homeland in many different ways, the remembrance of which provides him consolation at the time of spiritual crises.

The landscape of Orissa is littered with temples and holy places. Puri, the prime religious centre is also a place of pilgrimage for Indians. In Relationship, myths relating to the incarnation of Lord Jagannath and the Jagannath cult have been referred in the context of poet's self-exploration to find the unknown in him. The myth of Lord Jagannath's incarnation, "where the grotesque dawn of wilderness wood/ becomes a conceiver of life, nothing else" (ibidem 11) brings into the poet's vision how the great tradition has been

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silenced. According to this myth, the sacred deity of Jagannath at Puri is fashioned from the wood of a neem tree chosen from the dense jungles of Orissa every twelve years (ibidem 42).

The poet has created personal myths by referring to his mother's grave, his quickly-aging father, his gentle daughter in the context of exploring his vision of his relationship with his past and the present. He is much concerned with his individual and racial memories:

while the swords of forgotten kings  
rust slowly in the museums of our guilt,  
while the carved rock loses its light  
and the man with many memories  
doesn't know what to do with them (ibidem13)

In Mahapatra's poetry myth, legend and history have been associated to expose our guilt of forgetting the past glory. The forgotten Orissan kings of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries like Kapilendra Dev, Purushottam Dev and Prataprudra Dev and ancient kings like Ashoka and Kharvel almost gave up wars by surrendering themselves to the Almighty God and accepting Vaishnavism or Buddhism or Jainism. Now the rock edicts have lost their importance and we do not know what to do with them.

In section five of Relationship, the myths of golden deer from the Ramayan and the marriage procession of Siva from the Siva puran have been invoked in the way of referring to the miracle of living in this world. Referring to the ruins of Konarka, the persona ponders over the myths relating to the Sun-god. The monument of Konarka was built in honour of the Sun-god, but the ruins sadden him bringing to his mind a bleak vision of the future. He sings:

It is my own life  
that has cornered me beneath the stones  
of this temple in ruins in a blaze of sun (ibidem 26)

The poet is reminded of the legends about construction of the Konarka temple and the endless toil of the twelve hundred sculptors who were engaged in the work at the behest of the king Languda Narasimha Dev day and night for twelve years. He refers to all that in the lines: "the night of wild elephants pounding down in the undying sun/...the gandharvas and the demons/...the lusting god of the blackest Siva night" (ibidem 27). Here the myth consists "in overturning culture into nature, or at least the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into natural ....Mahapatra transforms the historical, social and cultural imperatives of this myth, as pervasive as it is, in the religious consciousness of Hindu India,

to the contemporary human condition" (Mohan 16). He also envisions "the phallus of enormous stone", "the Linga and Yoni"- the myths associated with the Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar and thousands of Siva temples scattered over Orissa. On the walls of the Konarka temple the engraved motifs of the Kamasutra evoke the moods and phases of human life. The world of love, lust, sex and fertility is recreated through the images of raging pachyderm with its crazy testicles, lusty god, cloud of sweat, valleys, stricken muscles, and violent splashes of sunsets.

His reference to "a giant tree speechless about the sacred hill" (1982:34) reminds us of the sacred hill of Nilgiri on which the temple of Lord Jagannath stands and the speechless tree is the Kalpadruma, the giant banyan tree which is believed to be eternal and where the devotees hang pebbles with strings from branches seeking fulfillment of their desires. The maritime history of Orissa, the myths/ legends relating to Buddhism, Jainism, the vanquished dynasties, the socialist movement referred in his poetry unravel his silent glorification of the bright past of the land:

who have vanished in the black bay without a trace,  
that only live in the sound of the waves  
flinging themselves onto the dark fringes  
of this land from Chilika to Chandipur (ibidem 10)  
... of broken empires and of vanquished dynasties (ibidem 34)  
..Rama Devi, the fifty-six-year old social worker  
raises her head like a triumphant snake which has just shed its skin  
(1976:32)

Myths are idioms in our day-to-day parlance. Though he is a physicist, he could feel power of myths in his poetic idioms. Since his early days of writing poetry he has been using several myths for various poetic explorations. The Oriya/ Pan-Indian myth from the Ramayan about Lord Rama/ Laxman drawing a circle on the ground and advising Sita not to step out of it, as he followed the golden deer, shows the profound man-woman relationship.

For that is how love is, the smells flowing like rivers  
Into each chronic pole aching in the depth of his creed  
(1971: "The Circle", n.p.)

In the title of an anthology, the poet uses myth as a symbolic and apocalyptic sense in the line "close the sky, Ten by Ten", where the importance of the human body in the cosmic void is imagined:

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Rock Pebbles/Jan.-June.'2011/P.19

The roof essential

hides the apocalyptic ideal (ibidem: "Sanctuary", n.p.)

The vision of religious mysticism is eloquent in A Father's Hours where the poet makes a self quest, "to expect nothing from life is that tale's ritual", "not daring to kneel before gargoyle or goddess", "... into unbearable Puri sands" (9). The gargoyle or goddess is worshipped in every Oriya village as the village deity and several myths and tales about the goddess influence the rural life. The same goddess has also been referred as "the vermilion-smeared, whored stone" in the poem entitled, "Village" (A Rain of Rites, 3) in the context of providing a picture of the rural cultish life of Orissa. The myths relating to Lord Siva has been invoked recurrently. Even the sexual life of the gods and animal gods has been projected by the myths (Das 155):

Black icons:

A museum of symbols

Silence the land (ibidem 40)

The Siva Linga

the rhythmic susurrus of chants on wrecks of petals (ibidem 50)

A black humped bull rides the cow:

Two gods copulating on the warm tar (ibidem 30)

The myth of Ahalya of the Ramayan, "some holy curse changed a woman to stone" speaks about the age-old woman-suffering and discrimination. According to this myth Saint Gautam, the husband of Ahalya had cursed her for violation of her chastity. At the touch of Lord Rama's feet the stone changed into Ahalya again. The myths provide cryptic and mysterious senses of Orissan life and its surroundings amidst the ruins and decay of the glorious past. The poet meditates on the same with wide visionary interiority:

Ruins everywhere

Holding dim interiors of myth.

And priests

Always trying to prove they've been (1979:2)

Like Sarojini Naidu, through the use of the Radha- Krishna myth, the poet evokes the scene of Orissan nature:

The warm night wind,

And the breathless voices of the dead;

... ..

Radha, still standing

on the right of warm mists,

abandoned, and yet boundless  
with pain and desire;  
Krishna, far away,  
like the silence on the river,  
secretly always victor. (1979:18)

Mahapatra has used myths as metaphors at many places in his poetry. The typical Oriya myth of limbless God Jagannath has been used as a simile when he describes the misery of the girl-child and her father:

Exhausted, she stood beneath a tree,  
becoming tree herself,  
her face carrying the wisdom about the ancient poetry,  
perhaps the look of some hope,  
like that of the bodiless god of Puri (2001:55)

The legends of Konarka have been referred like myths at several places including the different stanzas of Relationship. The cruelties of the kings and the centuries-old Oriya cultural tradition have been ruminated through the commemoration of the myths:

artisans of stone,  
messengers of the spirit,  
twelve hundred artless flowers in passion  
to the night in humble brotherhood,  
aerial roots of a centuries-old banyan tree;  
not taking lives seriously  
for our lives are only of the seeds of dream,  
forgetting the cruelties  
of ruthless emperors who carved peaceful edicts  
on blood-red rock,  
forgetting our groans and cries (1982:10)

Beyond the history and legends, Mahapatra who quotes from Walt Whitman's Song of Myself, "I am large/ I contain multitudes./ I exist as I am, that is enough./ If no other in the world be aware, I sit content,/ And if each and all be aware I sit content." in the prologue of Relationship, considers this poem, the theme song of his life as a typical self quest which is essential for every human. As such in the seventh section of the poem, his voice seems to echo the philosophy of the Vaishnava saints of Orissa of the the 16<sup>th</sup> century who have been called clandestine Buddhists (C.Das 1982:86) who deliberated on the paradoxical nature of existence, the duality of body and spirit, the Prakriti

and Purusha, the concept of the thousand petalled lotus in full bloom upon which the eternal Radha and the eternal Krishna are in the intensest embrace. This thousand -petalled lotus is at the apex of the Tantric Sadhana along the chakras and the aspirant who reaches it attains the seat of the universal Shakti and fulfils himself. Mahapatra remembering this past tradition of sadhana feels utterly cornered and questions about the length of time needed for a person to know himself:

How long does it take one to know  
That it is he who is standing there,  
Alone by himself in the witness-box  
Of shackled pink muscle (ibidem 24).

Our souls are imprisoned in our bodies which are just "witness boxes of shackled pink muscles". The poet emphasizes on the essentiality of spirit which helps one to realize the role of life and man's real duty in this world of mortality.

The legend of Dharama, the twelve year old son of the chief architect of Konarka, Bisu Maharana, who set the crowning slab of the great temple and sacrificed his life by jumping into the sea to save the lives of twelve hundred artisans have been recurrently referred in many poems. The poet calls this a "legend of baffling idealism" (1976:13). The typical Oriya legend of Topoi associated with the maritime history of Orissa is popular in every home and has been given the religious status as unmarried girls of coastal Orissa worship a goddess called Bhalukuni/ Khudrukuni in the month of September every year to get rid of all dangers. According to this folk mythology, this goddess who was worshipped by Topoi during her time of grief is a goddess of peace and prosperity for the girls. According to this folk- mythology, Topoi, the parentless girl was tortured by her sisters-in-law in the absence of her brothers who were away in the islands of Java and Sumatra on their trade. Topoi's grief vanished at the arrival of her brothers, when the sisters-in-law were punished. This myth reminds us of the sufferings of unmarried girls which have been there in our society since time immemorial.

Mahapatra is a myth-maker. Though he has used myths from Orissan/ Pan-Indian mythologies, he has created several personal myths by relating his own life and activities to his surroundings, and relating them to history and traditions of his homeland. He has been compared with an outcaste devotee poet Salabega, whose mother was a Brahmin widow who was kidnapped and raped by Lalbeg, the muslim invader of Orissa. But under the influence of his mother, Salabega became a devotee of Lord Jagannath and composed many

devotional songs. Likewise Mahapatra whose grandfather converted to Christianity, is an outcaste, but a great crusader of humanity and explorer of glorious traditions of the land of his birth where he seeks to find the goal of life and to understand himself. □

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### Probing Relationships in Jayanta Mahapatra's Selected Short Stories

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Though known for his great poetry replete with symbolism and imagery, Jayanta Mahapatra as a writer is preoccupied with projecting cultural and human values. In an interview he is recorded to have said: "Write whatever you feel, feel from your heart, from your inside. One thing will also help you. Just you write from the level, tilt a little higher level. If we can go somewhat towards God in the guise of writing.. If we can that should be our goal..Your conscience and soul search good things" ("Interview:" <http://retort.brentley.com>). I am particularly attracted by his collection of short stories entitled The Green Gardener and Other Stories, that portray universal human predicaments. In this article I attempt a reading of four stories, viz. "Eyes," "Another Day," "Ringing Silence," and "Turn Left for Happiness," where the fictionist delves into intricacies of

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mutual relationships among couples - their doubts and fears, faithfulness and betrayals, and agony and ecstasy in love.

In "Eyes" Mahapatra probes into the relationship of a husband coping with his wife going blind early in life. The story opens as the man tries to plant a kiss on her shut eyes, which she longed for, giving emotional support in her blinding life. The turmoil she undergoes is lightened by his emotional support: "I put my head down and kissed her lightly on the closed lids. They were warm, slightly wet. She did not turn away..but received me through her quietness..and I could feel it enter my body" (TGG 28). When he enquired about her pain, she merely shook her head and looked out of the window "at the inevitable darkness trying to smudge the wide expanse of the river beyond" (28). There is some solace in pain as she watched the growing darkness in the river beyond. It is a symbol of hope as the river in its perpetual flow is indicative of the passage of life cycle. He experienced a strong sense of loss beholding his pretty wife turning blind at twenty-six. Their constant visits to the eye specialist had not given them any hope, and they had to keep going on as if life had been fashioned that way. The husband, on his part, didn't want to heap pity on her plight though he could read her intense pain evident on her countenance. As days passed by he could only reminisce their happy days immediately after marriage, portrayed in the photographs he had taken. It made him forget for a moment his own pain. But she remained a mystery for him as he recounts: "There was the same smile of acceptance on the face, but beyond that nothing permitted me to know how she was feeling at that moment; the dark interior remained closed, and I wondered whether my own feelings ever quickened her or entered into her need. Probably she didn't need any reaction from me at all" (30).

His helplessness is stated by the fictionist: "There are no laws in the country of the soul of pain" (31). He could only show her sympathy and grieve for her. Consoling her he could only say that everything would be alright. Such daily consoling words fell on deaf years and she grew more and more depressed day by day. One day it happened that she whispered "I love you" making him fall into a deep silence as though it had conquered his present anguish.

As time passed, the regular visits to the doctor were disrupted. He had the consolation that everything possible was done to treat her. To soothe her he made it a point to sit beside her holding her hands and sharing with her sounds



of birdcalls in the morning. But all his efforts to give her some solace ended up in more and more of loneliness. "And I realized that I had slowly become her loneliness, the empty midnight train she would board day after day... But I would not know. Of infinite darkness. And of hopes and ennui" (34). The fictionist presents the intensity of her loneliness comparing it to a lonely journey with no consolation. He could not understand the mystery of her secret longing to end her life. There was no emotional tie that would fill her life with hope. The story is deplete with ennui which no human relationship can dispel.

Living with a terminally ill spouse brings with it a variety of difficulties. There are various steps to cope up with it such as 1) Becoming educated on the disease of the spouse. Attending doctor's appointments with the spouse to improve the quality of life for the spouse. Ask about pain management and what medications may help. 2) Obtain hospice services. 3) Encourage the spouse to participate in everyday activities as much as possible. Continue to spend time together as a family. 4) Make the spouse if she wants to talk about her feelings. Some people may have a need to talk about their fears or express sadness; others may not want to share their feelings. 5). Enjoy time together ("How to Live." <http://www.ehow.com>). The husband tries his level best to fulfill all that he could do, but he is unable to get her cope up with the crisis.

The story reveals how clinical pain leads to depression and suicidal tendencies. The husband is unable to fill his wife with hope and endurance with his emotional support. Hence the story has a strange ending since the woman clings to her suicidal tendency despite her husband's love and affection for her.

In "Another Day" Mahapatra examines a similar situation of a woman in physical agony. Gangadhar Das's happy married life was shattered when he and his wife were hit by a speeding motorcycle. Though he recovered, his wife was bed ridden. Now after thirteen years, she is almost at the end of her life "and his conscious mind turned away from the still shape lying in the bed - in a calm acceptance of his destiny" (TGG 99). Unlike in the previous story, here the lady took pleasure in trusting her husband since "there wasn't much else which time that would accomplish her idea of existence, a time which went on to build that urgency on which perhaps love depends" (99). His only desire is to give her a peaceful death. When she opened her eyes, she could behold all her family around her. That night she passed away peacefully without making any sound.

Sitting beside her body, he began to recollect the locked little box of brass she had brought home with her as a bride. However, he had kept a secret

about their daughter Rina from her. Rina had gone astray having been with many rich businessmen in their cottages. She was pulled up by the police for immoral trafficking, although she always maintained that she was working as an office receptionist. It was a sad plight he endured without disclosing it to his wife, though she suspected some hidden secret. His pain grew all the more as he was a high-caste Brahmin, the temple priest and a man meant to mend broken lives. He wished he had struck her dead, but good sense prevailed and he persuaded her to return home to be with her mother. Though Rina was humbled by her father's plea, she felt it too late to return home once again. When he went to the city to meet her, she sent him back with a box of gifts. After his wife's death Gangadhar Das went to the city to visit his daughter once again. But she was no more in that part of the city. She had moved out to greener pastures in the flesh trade. He accepted his fate from God. "Or perhaps his acceptance of things was just another dimension emerging out of the misty cloud of self-pity, and his choice was not there; he had to swallow the rusty bladders of pain left behind by the ravaging wind of avarice and lies" (109). When at last he met her daughter with a pimp and pleaded her to return to him, he was told: "Go home, Father. Go home, back to your worshipping, to your principles and steely scruples" (110).

In the story, Gangadhar Das keeps the secret of his daughter's waywardness from his dying wife. But after her death, he continues to groan with the pain of the daughter's betrayal. The story is one of physical and emotional trauma, a man has to cope up with.

"Ringing Silence" surrounds the life of a couple Shankar and Minu. Their marital bliss is suddenly disturbed by intermittent telephone calls. Once when Minu picked up the phone, it was a woman on line:

'Is Mr. Gupta there please? A pleasant voice was at the other end.

A woman's.

'Gupta? Are you sure this is the number you want? There's no Gupta here!'

'Isn't this two-two-seven-three-three?'

'No. Wrong number!' she barked and put back the receiver (37).

When Shankar enquired, she blurted out saying it was the wrong number. And it was so. However, whenever, Shankar talks on telephone in a hushed voice, Minu suspects him to be talking to that very woman. Her mind is filled with suspicion. The fictionist symbolically represents her polluted mind: "To Minu, all of a sudden the scene seemed to change. She was puzzled. Some

sort of a veil had dropped across her eyes, it appeared, throwing everything out of focus. A scene had been there, enclosed in a perfect frame, sometime before. But now it lay naked and open, its frame missing" (37). Shankar is exasperated by his office files to be submitted to his boss, requested her to go to her college on her own that day. She, on the contrary, dug deep into his suspicious behaviour, staying home with the excuse of file work. She concluded that he did so to make telephone calls to his mistress. Though he promised to pick her up in the evening from her college, she decided to come away on her own. But her suspicion left her burning with anger and pain throwing her normal schedule out of gear. "She was suddenly uneasy. This kind of thing had never had happened in their two-year existence together. It was hard to understand his behaviour. The demanding, insistent ring of the telephone refused to leave her mind" (38).

Their meeting at home in the evening was one of further brewing tension. When he questioned her harshly why she came on her own when he had promised to pick her up. Her silence and effort to hide her bitter feelings led him to assess the situation better. He changed his tactics: "He thought of taking her in his arms in a tender gesture, as though that would help wipe off the events of a sort. The telephone calls were intrusions, and he could almost see himself go on to explain to her who had called and why. It was simple, so very simple. Instead he chose not to.." (39). She decided not to ask who he called was either. Hence the mystery kept alive the suspense in their relationships as the couple continued to grope in the backdrop of the secret suspicion. The ice breaker came when he took her hand in his and beheld her forlorn and lonely. His lips tightened and couldn't express himself as he was trying to back away to the door. Breaking the silence Minu uttered "I love you"... Yes I love you" (41) making him break out of his male assertiveness and puffed up pride. Holding her arms he explained to her the mystery of the call, educing tears from her eyes. The story is a powerful pointer to trivial things that disrupts spousal relationships in the form of unarticulated thought and suspicions.

The couple need to build their relationship, making appropriate choices in life such as: Trust, Open Communication, Honouring the other's point-of-view, Self-Confidence, Generosity, Forgiveness, Gratitude. Suspicion and jealousy break any relationship as in the case of Minu who keeps building her unfounded suspicion. There is lack of mutual communication between the couple as none of them tells the truth. None is ready to relent and admit the mistake and clear doubts. Their guarding each other's secret thoughts keep breaking their trust

and relationship. Their lack of understanding and respecting each other's point-of-view leads to disagreement. Lacking self-confidence is also a cause of their failed relationships. Generosity and selflessness build relationships as true love is generous in spirit with time, love, and attention. To sustain a happy relationship needs forgiveness. In the story there is much resentments and unforgiveness. Gratitude is essential for sustaining any love relationships. Finally Minu's expression of love breaks their stand off ("Secrets."http://shine.yahoo.com).

"Turn Left for Happiness" concerns the marital life of Appa Rao, a rickshaw puller, wrecked by poverty and illness. He married Malathi after an affair with her when she was merely a girl of fourteen with her pale hands and frail immature body. Now at nineteen, she is rather unconcerned about her sick and dying husband. Living with Malathi and her mother in his shack, he had no option but to fend for himself. With his fragile aching body he kept moving around with his rickshaw. When he was out in the street, Malathi busied herself visiting clients who recognised her worth. "She had learnt to recognise her superiority from the touch of her husband's hands on her smooth limbs, from the grocer's disturbed eyes at the shop where she bought her daily rice, from the ageing Brahmin priest at the Siva temple..and from the young black-marketeers who thronged the local cinema at show times. And most of all, perhaps from the local liquor dealer Kasi Biswal" (TGG 63).

Still Malathi seemed to love her husband. All the same as soon as he had gone out of the house, she began her rounds. The truth behind his story was that he lived for his wife knowing full well "She was his woman.He knew she would do anything he wanted her to do. And yet, at times, he realised painfully, she seemed not to belong to him at all" (64). With such thoughts in his mind, while sitting for his evening meal, he noticed Malathi approach him with tinkle of ankle bells. When asked, she casually said that she got them cheap from a dealer in the bazaar. She continued to take up different errands and odd jobs in the neighbourhood to supplement their meagre income. In the midst of their penury, he felt a strong sense of alienation as they distanced from each other. Though emaciated and weakened with fever, he went out with his rickshaw. One day he noticed Malathi whispering to the liquor dealer Kasi Biswal beside the vegetable dealer's shop. Appa Rao fumed with rage as he caught her red handed and his suspicions were proved true. He could never imagine her to betray him. He understood that her anklets were not of base materials, but of real silver given by someone whom she frequented. He thought of ending his life

or even murder her in revenge. While thinking of his pitiable lot, an idea struck him. He decided to take her out for a film. Taking her in his rickshaw, she found it strange he was heading towards a different direction in the town. He stopped before a small house and went inside to meet someone. Returning from the house, he dragged her inside saying: "You slut. Don't you dare disobey me. How do you feel when you sleep with the swine Biswal? You think I'm blind, eh!" (69). He was glad he received thirty rupees from the swine. He had enough money for his survival as he had turned left for happiness. Suffering from betrayal trauma, Appa Rao kept exploiting his wife to make money. The story shows how extreme poverty leads to mutual betrayal by spouses.

Relational problems begin to crop up between Appa Rao and Malathi due to her extramarital affairs. The problem may be examined stage by stage: (1) the start, (2) suspicion and negation, (3) explosion and impulsive reactions, (4) making choices and deadlock, (5) working through. ("Sex and infidelity." <http://www.sciencedirect.com>).

Appa Rao notices signs of his wife's drifting from his love. She does not respond to affection just like before. She is indifferent to his illness and his presence. They do not enter into sexual relationship with affection. Being a cheating wife, Malathi appears happier with the new gifts she brings home. She keeps her guarded secrets.

Intimacy in marital relationship depends on the degree of mutual need satisfaction which depends on various factors especially how those needs are expressed by the couples. If they can share their mutual needs to each other properly, then intimacy and respect can be built. When there is no mutual need satisfaction, intimacy crumbles and suspicion and resentment grow in its place. The couples begin to blame each other and justify their stands by mere blame game. Such accusations indirectly refer to what they have missed from each other. In "Ringing Silence" Shankar and Minu are caught up in a web of their own making when they are not able to express themselves to each other and clear rising suspicion and misunderstanding. On the other hand, in "Turn Left For Happiness," it is penury and immaturity that drives Malathi to go after money she received from men who exploited her sexually. From the tender age of thirteen she was a victim of sexual exploitation by Appa Rao, which she continues after their marriage. It was in poverty that she fell to him and the same poverty drives her to be unfaithful.

The four stories dwell on problems of relationship between husbands and wives and the way the husbands tackle the situations. They show their male

domination in the stories trying to give solutions from male point of view ignoring female intuition as has been typically shown by Minu in "Ringing Silence" expressing her love for Shankar which makes him take a 360 degree turn back to her, bringing the crisis to fulfilment in love. □

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### OBSCURE, COMPLEX AND ALLUSIVE: A READING OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S LIFE SIGNS

\* Dr. Roshin George

Indian poetry in English can be considered as an aftermath of colonialism. One of the striking features to be noted in this was the element of imitation of or derivation from British poems and poets. What happened was that most of the poets of that era were English educated and they were exposed to English poetry and English tradition. They tried to create a new literature, inspired by English education and experiences and mixing them with what they considered as Indian. Nationalism also played a great role in the writing of poems along with Indian landscape, rural life, history, folklore and mythology. Being in the romantic tradition, these poets often failed to see the social realities, though there were a handful, who were truly inspired by the freedom struggle and were personally involved in it. "The pre-independence verse displays a keen awareness of the national identity, an intense consciousness of the colonial condition and frequently has an anti-colonial perspective built into it." (The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. P. 18). This body of literature may be taken as the vocalization of the Indian spirit of that time which was kindled by the struggle for independence.

But post-independent poetry made a drastic turn towards the better. It broke itself free from the influence of British literature and began to make its

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appearance as part of Indian literature, "It has been said that it is Indian in sensibility and content and English in language" (Ten Twentieth century Indian Poets P. 3), It was distinctive, authentic and responsive to the contemporary society. So most of the post-independent poets deal with their "relationships to and alienation from the realities of their society". (Modern Indian Poetry in English. P. 2). Urbanisation, industrialization, social changes and the hurry burry life around influence the modern poets and their poetry deal with the expression of man, often himself, in the modern society. Most of the poets are haunted by the question of identity which make them take a very sensitive stance towards the strain stress and challenges of the modern world, "They are mostly concerned with themselves and the surroundings allied to them. Their poetry records the artist's own life history and his struggle against himself". (Contemporary Indian poetry in English P.6).

Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarathy, Shiv. K. Kumar, A. K. Mehrotra, and Jayanta Mahapatra are some of the poets among the many that dealt with these themes and had a great role in making the modern Indian Idiom, giving it world wide renown and establishing Indian Poetry in English as part of world literatures.

Though Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the most widely known, and read of the modern time, he is entirely different in theme and style from the others. "Obscurity, complexity and allusiveness" (The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra p. 1) are the face marks of his poems. He is pre-occupied with the present day societal life and concerns related to that and also the history of his province, its landscape, myths and traditions. Through the poems he questions his own identity and also the relationship between the self and reality. "Rather than moral choices, Mahapatra speaks of being uncertain of his very existence and of groping from poem to poem for the key to human understanding", (Modern Indian Poetry in English p. 85). Often the poet keeps a distance between himself and the poem and takes an estranged and sensitive outlook to express personal and subjective memories, shades of the inner self and the deep mindscape from which the poems flow out in a stream.

Mahapatra is a poet whose feet are firmly rooted in Orissa, its landscape and traditions. But at the same time he feels guilty for his alienation, from the Hindu culture, ritual and spirituality because of his grand father's conversion to Christianity and the English education he had. He observed his surroundings and records reality "as an unknowable flux. It is a poetry of inner space, of psychology, of contradiction and renewed feelings of depression, guilt, desire.

Just and attention". (Modern Indian Poetry in English p. 195). Uncertainty, guilt pessimism and hopelessness seem to loom large In the various poems of Jayanta Mahapatra.. Religious imagery and symbolism is an integral part of his poems. "Life Signs", a collection of his poems was published in 1983. Throughout the collection we can sense an air of sadness, pessimism and hopelessness, with death at the background. Darkness prevails in all poems giving the reader a sense of doom. Through the landscape or personal experience the poet is trying to make the reader taste a little bit of the inner turmoil which is resultant of the conflict with the society around, in a sharp way..

The Indian landscape often served as a spring board for the poet to express his inner psyche. "The Captive Air of Chandipur-on-sea", "Evening Landscape by the River" and "A country", use the landscape to express the negative feelings, helplessness, loss, nostalgia and desolation in the poet's mind which get transferred into the reader through various symbols and imagery. The sea in the poem evokes a sense of nostalgia. loss and helplessness. The poet hears the songs of the sea which remind him of the past centuries and their smells, Fisherwomen bidding farewell to their husbands, lured by the white and hard deltas are synonymous with expectation and hope in their lives. . But in the second part the poem becomes sad and pessimistic. The tides remind him of the ridicule hurled at the dead and he becomes doubtful about existence in general the question of identity haunts him. "This is the existential dilemma of the modern man. This part is in sharp contrast with the first where he wonders:

"Who can tell of the songs of this sea that go on  
to baffle and double the space around our lives ( lines 4-5)

The modern man has become self-centered and he has shrunk to himself. Centuries have lost their significance and the cries of fishermen remind of "What the world has lost." (22). Sense of hopelessness and loss prevails in the poem. Mahapatra is not a romantic to let himself be engulfed in the beauty of the sea. But it tells him about the present sorry status of men where glories are stories of the past. Minds are now filled with sadness and despair and hence hollow.

Fishermen again remind the readers of lost glory and values in "Evening Landscape By the River". Sad overtones and haunting sense of death, are the most prominent features of this poem. The landscape has broken shacks of fishermen and temples frail and still. They remind of the erosion of values and happiness from the lives of people. The six month old child crawling away being unnoticed is a representative of abandoned, and orphaned lives. The poet sees



the abundance of darkness in water but he sees moon light as "an uncertain" and "useless ornament" (13-14). Beauty has no value in contemporary life, which is dominated by self-centredness, penury, sadness and death. Glories belonged to the past and memories of the past evokes a "Sadness which closes the eyes. Here the memory for faces of the dead never appears" (lines 1-2) Fishermen appear in both these poems recalling the past.

But in "A country" the landscape of Puri makes the readers aware of the decay and desolation prevalent there. It also tells very clearly about the disappointment of the poet at the sight of the decaying landscape, which is symbolic of the decay settled in the human minds of the present. He sees a dying countryside "tortured by hunger and the reek of decay in the air after the age-old myths have been told all over again" (lines 34-35)

The myths told of a glorious past which is in sharp contrast with

"the girls who die before their breasts are swollen with milk" (13-14)

or

"that graceful Naxal girl  
who appeared out of nowhere that winter  
holding a knife as old as history" (16-18)

or

"the loss of friends  
and sons who vanished suddenly in seventy-two" (21-22)

The sense of desolation is intensified with symbols related to death like the burnt air or piling up incense and ash on misty whites and the cries of the hyenas from far away. The poem tells about the physical, mental and moral decay of the countryside along with, its people. The poet is very sensitive to these and he feels that

" Wherever I try to live  
In pious penitence at Puri  
or in the fiery violence of the revolutionary  
my reason becomes a prejudiced sorrow like socialism" (25-28)

"Thus, landscape has a great significance in Mahapatra's poetry so far as it enables the poet to search for his own self in order to understand the world in its proper perspective. The landscape also helps the poet to alleviate his suffering (as in "Evening landscape....."). (The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra p. 13). Reality presented through the landscape makes the reader understand the inner reality of the poet and also the gloom and horror in his mind which disturb the reader making him at par with the sensitivity of Mahapatra. With landscape as

the backdrop Mahapatra presents the predicament of modern man in an era which is irreligious, insensitive and cruel, "He sees life in life's terms, and therefore, a calm serenity landscape poems". ( The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra p. 14).

Beneath the serenity and gloomy sensibility Mahapatra suffers from a sense of guilt arising from the struggles of his Christian psyche which is clearly reflected in the poem "Grand father". It is full of pathos and shows the helplessness of human beings at the face of terrible hunger. In the beginning of the poem it is said "starving on the point of death, Chintamani Mahapatra embraced Christianity during the terrible famine that struck Orissa in 1866", Of course, a tinge of guilty feeling might be there which became quite strong in Jayanta Mahapatra. He, who always felt pride in the Hindu culture and tradition, now felt an alien in his own landscape though no fault of his but because of something his grandfather had done even before his birth. On this he had no say and no choice. May be it is this guilt and alienation that he felt, which gave him a sense of gloom and sorrow, lacing his life with pessimism and desolation. Mahapatra describes his grandfather as:

"Hunted, you turned coward and ran  
the real animal in you plunging through your bone  
you left your family behind, the buried things  
the precious clod that praised the quality of a god", (9-12)

With great contempt he asks his grandfather:

"What did faith matter?  
What Hindu world so ancient and true for you to hold?" (14-15)

For the old man, it: was purely a matter of survival. The new faith helped him to survive at the cost of that religion which "wept in the blur of your heart" (18), Desertion of the faith of forefathers, thereby preventing Mahapatra from being a part of the noble and great heredity makes him angry, A volley of questions are directed towards the erring grandfather. But later he regrets and realises that forefathers cannot be blamed for the misfortunes that fall upon us. The poet and his son speak of the famine as "nameless as stone" (19).

The word stone speaks in volumes about the inhuman, insensitive and hard realities of life which cannot be overcome easily. The poet sees his son growing in glory but feels the pangs of conscience, for, he wonders what he had left behind, though indirectly was a loss which is irretrievable, a loss of conscience. He feels that as the greatest glory. But; realizes that grandfather cannot be blamed as he is only a piece on the board who served as a portal for

future generations to know what they were and what they lost. Towards the end the poet expresses his desire to know the grandfather better. He says:

"We wish we knew you more  
We wish we knew what it was to be against dying  
To know the dignity  
That had to be earned dangerously". (39-42)

This wounded Christian Psyche made him wonder about identity. He at one stage of his life believed that he was part of the culture and tradition of Orissa, But the Hindus, especially the Hindu priests refused to accept him, resulting in alienation and doubts about himself. So, often he reacts strongly against the hypocrisy and insincere rites and rituals related to faith and religion.

This gets voiced in "Total Solar Eclipse". The landscape of Puri always attracted the poet, Mahapatra spends the day of total Solar Eclipse in Puri and presents the mindscape of the city as a whole. So far eclipse is always related to a number of superstitions and blind rites preceded by fasting, poojas and all. These are supposed to purify the human mind and soul. But in the present they end up as mere meaningless ritual and the purpose is not served. This may be considered as the poet's reaction to them and his disappointment at the sight of a culture devoid of human values, where civilization acts as a "rabid" one. Sanyasis are compared to hunted dogs and the poet says that their souls "groaned in the harsh voices of ash." Fasting on the days of eclipse is treated with contempt and the poet describes it as "dire superstition". The crocodile "like the fearsome Brahmin priest in the temple" which smile shows the attitude of the poet to religion and ritual. The images used in the poem evoke a sense of fear and revulsion and often they remind of death, destruction and despair. The cobra with the open hood, the despairing wail of the hyena and the vultures remind of death which is related to the "lonely foetus of Puri". Darkness is nothing but a warning by Gods to remind us of the lost values. Values are shown by the images of sanyasis who cover their body with ash and also that of the Brahmin priest who is fearsome and secure behind layers of sleep. They perform all rituals but the lack of conscience make them meaningless. Mahapatra sees into the hollowness of religion without conscience. Actually his hatred is against that system of religion which shuts out its eyes to humanity around and also against labellings in the name of religion.

Death seems to be an obsession with Mahapatra and darkness is an eternal presence in the various poems. "The Wound", "Violence", "Beyond the Himalayan ranges" and "Autumn\*" bear witness to darkness filling the spaces

in the poet's mind. "The Wound" opens with darkness and cold which maybe related to death. The engulfing silence gives expression to the dilemma of existence and raises the questions of identity. The silence says "the world is not ours" (6), Dawn's hours seem to the poet as terrible and awakening is weary because "of the last thrust of blood in the night" (9), and fears which prevent the questions from our soul to come out. Love and death stand in the same way for the poet and they stand to "echo off the hidden wound in the darkness'" (15). The poet realizes that the old, orderly, open romantic world is of no significance, for the modern man's mind is wounded,

"raw by too much sensuousness  
ununderstood absence". (34-35)

The poem is filled with dreary, dark and pessimistic images related to death. The moments of love and death evoke the same feeling as they are filled with the darkness of the soul. Similarly "Violence" also starts with darkness. It is said :

"When I open and shut  
my mouth  
the darkness chokes inside" (1-3)

Here it portends the darkness of the mind and the soul. The children of the modern era are also groping in the dark. A parallelism can be drawn between the bullocks and the children in the classrooms as both are oppressed and tired - The light upon the bullocks..

"goes on mauling the unseen creatures  
with the wide wild pupils" (11-12)

while the children "sit in their classrooms/ shrunk like caged slaves.. " (18-19), Then they open and close their hands "gasping in the darkness'" (24), It tells about utter hopelessnesses and darkness and also the deep despair the children have. They are innocent victims suffering from what others have done to them. Light, which imparts suffering to the bullocks imparts darkness to the children. The poet is fed up with the present which gives more hopelessness than hope. Darkness is also a dead end from where there is no escape.

That may be the reason why "Beyond the Himalayan, .Ranges" abounds in darkness. It portends emptiness, aimlessness and the hollow feeling in one's life. The poet; twists the word in many contexts so that the sum total, is a set of negative emotions gushing forth from the mind. The opening line says "When darkness falls the stones come closer". The stories move towards the human beings to crush them, for it is synonymous with darkness "revealing

nothing else" (6) and its "meaning escapes our children" (11). It is "the leper's mutilated limb" (12) or the sleep of the lost-man, hopeless and sad. When he looks up "Only unseen wings in the air behind him/ keep dragging their shadows like nets in the snow" (18-19), entangled, confusing and hopeless. The various problems in our lives, the question of identity and the meaning of reality, which are not known make life too complex. Darkness stands for all these giving a sense of loss and deprivation from which the poet wants to escape but cannot.

In "Autumn", Mahapatra relates the season to the ringing of temple bells, strong winds that shake the sand in the dry river-bed, festive days of Durga's immersion, rioting and murder. Together these images create an atmosphere of fear, unrest and calamities. The temple is an old sullen one which is closely related to the mood of the poet. The only pleasant image is that of "a newly married couple" who "stands palms stretched towards the priest" (10-11), which symbolises happiness, welfare, prosperity, hope and blessings. But the next image intends death and everything opposite to what the couple in the temple stands as it tells about

"Cobras winding themselves about the ruins  
where darkness still roots the earth-bound stone" (13-14)

Darkness and cobras are related, for the latter is the harbinger of the former.

The death wish and the obsession with darkness is replaced by concrete images of death in "Firefly". The very first line tells about "Ashes cool about in the dying lire\*", which points to a funeral pyre, as when related to the third line: "What cry is it of the dead that refuses to be quiet?"<sup>1</sup> The funeral pyre is cool, but the cries related, to death are riot. Modern man is as good as dead. The poet asks:

"What shadows are these that pass through  
our dreamless eyes to prowl around old artifacts  
in the dark and carve features of Innocence  
along the edges of pain?" (4-7)

Dreamless eyes in the dark, very strangely talk about death. Again the darkness itself is dead and lifeless for it is "bland like/ the wooden rest of the armchair in my room". (10-11). Unable to bear the present sorry status of man who strives after too many goals, the sensitive poet thinks about darkness as the only wise and sensible solution. In the second stanza, the poet is taken out of his reverie and

"light sitting back  
against our own walls, glazed with unease

making us love the lies this body told'' (13-15)

and afraid to make any movement for fear of changing the stagnant equilibrium around. Our lives move in a circle, our hands return to what we are doing and shadows and ashes are still there. Birth-death-rebirth cycle goes on, quite unaware of what is taking place around, To this "whisper of wind comes floating in green with stem and leaf a quiet: carnivore" (23-24). The wind symbolizes life, energy, vitality, but it is a quiet carnivore eating away the equilibrium pulsating around. Here shortness of life span and the rigidity of life are pointed out to the reader along with the passive stance of time.

In quite agreement with the attitude of the poet, the life signs that he sees around speak of drift, estrangement and finally separation. "Life signs" speaks about the relationship between father and son which is a far away unpatchable and distant one. The father's eyes are filled with ridicule "dirty and heavy as rainwater" (4) which is reciprocated by indifference on the part of the son, The uneasy feeling is intensified with a bleary background where :

"the sun has imperceptibly withdrawn  
and nothing stirs there  
except for two discoloured kites"" (6-8).

Kites, which are usually bright coloured and flow with great merriment, are discoloured, as are the lives around.. The poet or the son very much wants to escape from the smothering dogmas of the father and the means is :

"The spectre of belief  
a looming shadow the color of need.  
watery and immense as the Ganga" (11-14).

But it could serve its purpose as it was as unread as a shadow and as lifeless and dull as the mud. The distance between the two is on the increase as

"my father's voice  
echoing wearily from bone to bone  
comes to rest  
on my eye like a speck of mould" (16-20)

For the son. the father and his attitude are useless, harmful, and irritating. It clearly shows the hatred, the son has for the father. So finally what happens is :

I have taken my likeness down from his walls and hidden it  
in the river's roots : a colourless monsoon  
eaten away by what has drifted between us". (21-24)

The colourless monsoon itself signifies the lack of happiness or love and care for each other which was eaten away by the ridicule of the father and their difference of the son. Like "Grandfather", this also could be taken as a family

poem. Though the poet mellow and feels pity for the grandfather, as a result of which he tries to patch up the relationship, no such attempt is made in the relationship between the son and the father. The negative life signs stand for what happened between the father and the son and a drifting apart which went on without being checked. They make the outlook of the poet pessimistic. Often he seems to be brooding about himself and also about what is going on around him and finally relates the two.

In "Summer's End", the fading summer season fills the poet's mind with sadness which makes him look into himself and asks "whose sadness is this?" (1). This question arises from doubts about his own identity. Opening his eyes must normally help him to see the reality, but it is a useless exercise as it will not enable him to see light but gives only night ie; trepidations, unknown fears and self-doubts. The oxymoron "dry tears" expresses clearly, the confession in the poet's mind. The howling of the pariah dog is an ill omen related to death and time is as insincere as a practised whore turning: from one customer to the other. In the depths of night the poet is haunted by the dead or rather by the past, which leaves him out side as a stranger. He speculates about himself and tries to come back to the present which opens with a day drenched in rain "fat and treacherous" (23). These adjectives tell about the nature of circumstances and human beings around him. He falls upon his dead for consolation and support.

"For however poor one is  
one has one's dead to fall back upon" (24-25)

But that hope vanishes when he realizes that

"time is just a pilgrimage  
that the mind makes between our uncertainties" (26-27)

Man is totally helpless as he has absolutely no control over things around him. This makes him say "I can do nothing for you dear friend" (29), as he himself is frightened and aimless and fear and doubts overpower dreams. The poet looks into himself and realizes how impotent he is over the future. Life does not give him the direction to go or where to turn for support when there is a confusion in life. Then he realizes that the summer of life is over and the rest is confusion,  
fr

A storm is about to begin  
Crying from the lonely places of the sea (4.1-42)

Storms are further turbulences waiting for him. He is rather rudderless in the sea of life. The inner turmoil of the man is made clear through out. At life's

crossroads when crisis and calamities overpower the sane mind, we (read average man) look left and right and even towards the forefathers who are and gone. But the solution must come from the inner self. If self doubts haunt the mind, difficulties may be ten folded and they overpower our life, making it grey and dull.

This feeling intensifies in "A Day" which deals with an October day with, "stinging leaf-smoke" (I). The melancholic mind of the poet is transferred to physical objects, giving an aura of grievances and saturation with miserable feelings. The passing of time is related to the bouncing ball of a child, moments carry along with them smoky smell-smoke related to death and destruction. These thoughts creep under the skin and takes away the desire to live, brightness is gone, everything is smoke filled and dull.

The smoky smell of moments move under

The skin and chokes the roots of light" (4-5)

It expresses the poet's desire to escape from the realities of life, where dreams do not have any place. Life submerges the mind in such a way that even dreams are not recognized. The poet tries at least to save his own day but cannot because

..... (it is) like a river

swallowed up by deserts before .

it reaches the sea (12-13)

In the last stanza he says about "our desires build (ing) brilliant grids of light" (14-15). But the futility of this exercise is clear when he blandly tells about the dog scratching itself and lying down again. It symbolizes the maddening fixity of a life which has fallen to a regular groove repeating the mechanical, style all the time. Finally, the smoke of daily routine overpowers the poet. He can think of light i.e.: happiness and innocence only in his dreams and the day is gone, meaningless, mirthless and dragging.

The poet talks about the meaninglessness of light with no change, no challenge and no happiness; contrasting it with childhood innocence which brings along, with it happiness, variations, challenges and pleasure, But when a nameless childhood wakes up in man, his day is over ie; he is past life. So, filled with meaningless struggles, everyday is smoke filled - suffocating and smothering. This aimlessness and mental agony seep into the ability to write poems which was the pinnacle of his creativity. Possessed by pessimism and self doubt he wonders at the usefulness / uselessness of his own actions. Out of an inner urge he writes poems. Once the process is over he asks:

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But what use is a poem once the writing's done

Words looking for what in the dark: of the soul (19- 20)

He considers it as silly and simple as "a match striking, then over " (21). Still he sees it as the last resort and says:

When all else has failed

The poem's words are perhaps justified (22-23)

Looking into the future the poet can see his "still body" reminding of the transience of life in the midst of all hectic scampering which we often call real life. Often Mahapatra appears through his poems as a weak person vulnerable to self doubts and aimlessness. Death, sorrow and pessimism are constant presence in the various poems. He is trying to connect human beings with the world around and is on the look out for an identity which is both loving and loveable. Bruce king says:

Mahapatra has attempted to construct a body of poetry which has the kind of relationship with his Environment and the problem of finding significance in his time of darkness and lost once that is similar to the major poets of our age''

(Modern Indian poetry P.207)

His poetry has a strength which has its origin from the mixing together of the concrete and the abstract. While doing that, often the expected and the unexpected get mixed together which make the poems uniquely sensible. An introspective study of the self gives

Mahapatra a new direction and a kind of authenticity that immediately sets him apart from many other contemporary Indian English poets and brings him to the company of Ezekiel and Parthasarathy

(The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra P. 72). □

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## Region, Memory and Culture in the Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra

\*Dr. Pradip Kumar Patra

Knowing something and absorbing it in one's own self while writing a poem is a great task. Unless one observes the things and gets oneself identified with these, one can not articulate the same properly in creative writings. Jayanta Mahapatra writes more in the forms of hints and traces. The gaps he creates in poems are not just blank; those are rather full of implications. His source of ideas and images is Orissa. Orissa for him is not just a theme . It is that very air that he inhales and exhales. The concept of India as a nation or culture comes later. Mahapatra thus says :

I don't think there is one India. There are many different Indias—Orissa is one India, Bengal is another, Maharashtra, Kerala, Kashmir—all these are different Indias. It is easier to relate yourself to a particular region than to talk about the whole of India as a construct. The culture of Orissa is very different from

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the culture of Bengal or the culture of Bihar. The worship of god Jagannath is not to be found anywhere outside Orissa. The whole Oriya culture, the whole Oriya race is built around this god. The Oriya religion is very different from religion in other parts of India. India comes second, Orissa comes first: I don't mind saying that. ( Many Indias, Many Literatures 26 )

Jayanta Mahapatra is the true representative poet of Orissa. Orissa finds expression in his poems so immaculately. When the entire Oriya culture is about to collapse under the threat of globalization, it is Mahapatra who tries to hold it from such a tremor. All his poems is a kind of attempt to reconstruct the Oriya identity which has lost its health and vigour. His poetry is an exquisite site where a reader gets an opportunity not only to know Orissa from its surface but also to know it holistically right from its roots. It opens a flood-gate of myths, legends, history, culture, various monuments and the land-scape. These are the sites where the soul of Orissa rests peacefully and snores in peace. Such is the intensity of Mahapatra's feeling that he successfully transports it to the readers. One gets the scent of the rain-soaked earth, the cool of breeze, depth of feeling associated with the ocean, the Bay of Bengal, the tingling of the bells and the holy sound of conch from the temples. Even the poverty-stricken Oriyas are portrayed with dignity and compassion by Mahapatra.

Mahapatra is associated both with material as well as spiritual aspect of Orissa. Lord Jagannath is the epicentre of Oriya life. The spirituality associated with Him is not just concerned with the promotion of human soul, but also with the general welfare of human being in day-to-day life. Lord Jagannath in His temple at Puri lives just like a human being with all his senses active. It is the God Jagannath who consciously or unconsciously shapes each and every Oriya. It is this background that Mahapatra has realized and tries to meticulously portray in his poetry.

Much has been talked about Jayanta Mahapatra. Yet, more one speaks, greater is the number of aspects that seem to have been left out. Precision is the hall-mark of his poetry. His readers turn out to be the coauthors. Mahapatra just gives the hints. His poem, 'Main Temple Street, Puri' speaks about the places of religious importance.

Children, brown as earth, continue to laugh away  
at cripples and mating mongrels.  
Nobody ever bothers about them.

The temple points to unending rhythm .  
On the dusty street the colour of shorn scalp  
there are things moving all the time  
and yet nothing seems to go away from sight.  
Injuries drowsy with the heat.  
And the sky there ,  
claimed by inviolable authority,  
hanging on to its crutches of silence . ( Selected Poems 12 )

The Jagannath Temple of Puri is one of the few major temples of India. Through the poem Mahapatra speaks in a broad sense about the Indian way of looking at life in relation to religion, God and infinity. He begins the poem with the word, 'Children'. Children are the source of all innocence and creativity. That's why God lives more in children than grown up . Does Mahapatra want to reinforce the idea of God more through the children than anybody else? Mahapatra begins the poem with the mundane but ends it with the eternal. It seems the poet is obsessed with the idea of childhood . That's the phase of life which has already gone. Good or bad everybody has an attachment towards this phase of life ,if Mahapatra were not, he wouldn't have made the children a water-shed,

Mahapatra's symbols are matured and complex which emerge out of his deep realization of life. A true avant-garde poet , he compresses the myriad hues of life into a single whole. As precision is the hall-mark of his poetry, he charges each and every word with meaning and significance. This is quite obvious in the poem, ' I Hear My Fingers Sadly Touching An Ivory Key' .

Swans sink wordlessly to the carpet  
miles of polished floors  
reach out  
for the glass of voices  
There are gulls crying everywhere  
and glazed green grass  
in the park with the swans  
folding their cold throats ( Twelve Modern 23 )

In the first stanza the poet is very much reminiscent of the hallowed past. That is the past which is silent. It is this past which speaks volumes through its silence. Silence is reinforced through such terms as, 'wordlessly' and 'polished floors' ; then again it is contrasted with the 'glass of voices' indicating the soft and tender voice of the past figures. Swan is the symbol of that silent past. The past of Orissa is not just memorable , glorious or artistically deft, but

also mythical, historical and legendary which forms the part of the common memory of the Oriyas. It is that vast memory which for the poet is the 'miles of the polished floors'. It is like a polished floor because it gives joy and delight only. There is no chance of stumbling and getting hurt by it. The poet's going down the memory lane is so smooth that he, for some time, is lost in it and is not able to distinguish between past and present. It appears the past becomes lively and speaks very softly like that of the soft and delicate 'glass'.

The second stanza is all about the poet's mixed feeling. 'Gulls crying' stands for the senseless ravish of the nature and landscape. As the poet belongs to the coastal area, naturally the sea and the creatures associated with it come up naturally as a symbols for him. It hints at the receding nature cover not only in Orissa but also on the entire earth. Such situation stands in contrast with the parks created by human beings. Mahapatra doesn't say that such creations do not compensate the conscious havoc caused to the nature cover. But, the reader gets the point effortlessly. The poet may be hinting that if there were vast landscape, everybody would have enjoyed 'swans folding their cold throats'. Instead, such natural affair becomes artificial and remains confined to the parks located in the towns and cities.

Mahapatra's impression of nature and landscape in the remote Koraput district of Orissa is noteworthy in this context.

The sky seemed to lower above me. In the distance, an orangish glow lightened up the horizon. It would be Sunabeda, I thought. A thousand doubts gnawed inside me. My mind appeared drained, unable to take in the clear harmony of earth and sky. There were just the dismal shapes of mountains around us, rising even over the clouds, like politicians or bureaucrats - enslavers of a greater land in the darkness of India. ( Door of Papers 117-118 )

Memory in Mahapatra's poems plays a pivotal role. It is for him the interpreter of the present unfavourable situation in Orissa. Life is very much individualistic and fragmented. Since present is feeble and lifeless, it is through the memory of the past that he brings consolation to himself. Memory is enlivened when he comes across the old relics and recollects the myths and legends. The title of the poem evokes the enormous emotion of the poet. By saying 'I Hear ...' he makes it clear that the memorable past is as lively as before. There is no doubt in it. The amount of certitude that he conveys here is quite significant. Besides, it is the high degree of enlightenment which is also expressed through

these two words. '...My Fingers Sadly Touching an Ivory Key' conveys a mixed feeling of sorrow and joy. There is an undertone of sorrow because that golden past is already lost. It doesn't exist in concrete form. It forms a memory only. But the poet, side by side, feels that the memory is as tangible as the present. It is because of the intensity of the feeling of the poet for the past. The paradoxical situation here is noteworthy. '...Touching an Ivory Key' means getting an access to the repertoire of rich and valuable memories.

For Mahapatra memory is also a power. It is a great transformer and also illuminates the darkest part of life as it is very clear in the last stanza of the poem, 'The Uncertainty of Colour'.

Today even the dead backwater  
looks helplessly around for the ocean's hues,  
even the great joy born of the gold of young love  
keeps beating white in the darkness. ( Random Descent 23 )

Even though Mahapatra is detached, his optimism is remarkable. He draws it from memory and lights up the entire present. Here lies his poetic genius. Here is a poet who maintains his status by being different from what we call commonplace. With his eyes on everything common, he transforms those to something uncommon.

In the poem, 'Rice' Mahapatra speaks about poverty and hunger. Instead of making it dull and arid the poet rather stirs the thought and imagination of the reader. The third stanza presents the picture of rice while in the paddy field. Green and refreshing, it stands for life and nourishment. It has an aesthetic of its own in the context of Oriya agrarian life. Mahapatra goes back to the year 1866 when a great famine occurred in which many people died. Mahapatra's grandfather who was sixteen at that time embraced Christianity to save himself. Mahapatra approaches the theme of suffering and starvation from the standpoint of agricultural exuberance in Orissa. Hence, the memory of healthy paddy cultivation becomes a source of yearning.

Here the sleepless nights of summer  
simply come and go.  
The rice has lost its wings;  
it does not tremble in the wind. (Random Descent 19 )

In the poem 'Pain' the poet creates a larger background of memory against which he puts his life's pain.

The dark tree that stands

over the fields of my blood  
has failed to leaf and bud.  
Why must it cut across my blood?  
I must try to understand it well.  
Pursued over and again  
by the sky's heights,  
it holds itself fast to the mist of time,  
giving my mind little rest , small shelter .  
Where are the inessential leaves  
that commanded the heart,  
disturbing those clouds which only are  
the secrets of the sky?  
When will my eyes return,  
that has been swallowed by the sky?  
What ceremony veils its world? ( Selected Poems 28)

The poet has so closely associated his life's pain with his past memory comprising of the places well known to him. Sky, clouds and the trees stand as the interpreters of his agony. Those are the places and the nature which reveal the topography of his pain. His pain assumes the shape of a fine art and emanates from his memory. It is a recurrent feature of Mahapatra's poetry. For him poetry is poetry as long as memory is as lively and sparkling as the running water of the river. □

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A Site of Belonging and Contestation:  
A Reading of Jayanta Mahapatra's  
The Lost Children of America

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Jayanta Mahapatra, the octogenarian Indian English poet from Orissa, has made a mark in Indian poetry for his Indian sensibility as well as for his contemporaneity. Mahapatra's sensibility is shaped and coloured by the Oriyan landscape as well as the history, philosophy and religion of his native place. Remarkably, he owns it on the eve of his accepting the Sahitya Akademi award in 1981 saying: "To Orissa, to this land in which, my root lie and lies my past, and in which lie my beginning and end-I acknowledge my debt and relationship."<sup>1</sup> The extensive usage of the imagery drawn from the local landscape, myth, religion, and culture symbolises his Oriyan ethos and sensibility. Taking cognisance of this, K. A. Panikar remarks: "the sun of the eastern coast of India shines through his poems."<sup>2</sup> Mahapatra is a bilingual poet who writes both in Oriya and English with equal dexterity. He himself has said in an interview once that he is "an Oriya poet who incidentally writes in English."<sup>3</sup> Locating himself in Cuttack, Orissa, he presents his region through his poems in English with such an intensity and exuberance that none could hold the curiosity to know the place of his birth. His poems are modernistic in approach, expression, and treatment.

In this paper, my humble endeavour would be to study his poem "The Lost Children of America"<sup>4</sup> and through it, attempt would be made to revisit Mahapatra's Cuttack, the site of his be/longing and contestation, of his idealised past and sordid present, in order to understand the horror and reality of human living in Cuttack and its familiar characteristics- "hunger", "diseased", "immorality", "corruption". "The Lost Children of America" is included in his collection *Life Signs* (1983) along with other poignant poems, such as "The Captive Air of Chandipur-on-sea," "Evening Landscape by the River," "Autumn," "Life Signs," "Total Solar Eclipse," "A Country," which deal with the social milieu of Cuttack. Every poem in this collection represents a sign of life in Cuttack and records the trial and tribulations of wo/man. Through "The Lost Children of America", Mahapatra gives a pen picture of the contemporary Cuttack /Orissa/ India, a land which was once upon a time inhabited by very prosperous and dignified Oriyas/Indians, but which has now become a place of "darkness". In depicting the squalid present of Orissa/ India in the poem, saying:

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When history does not reverberate any more  
With the pulse of the drum  
Or with the chant of the tide on a sacred Puri shore—  
But with echoes of a bruised presence  
Lying like a stone,

the poet intentionally/indulgently constructs in silence, by contrast, a glorious picture of the ancient Orissa/India and "to the (that) moments//we (he) caught once in the uncertain light of dawns." he wants to "go back".

Mahapatra's "The Lost Children of America" presents the sordid reality of the contemporary "malarial" Cuttack thus:

In the dusty malarial lanes of Cuttack  
Where years have slowly lost their secrets

However, Mahapatra states that his city still attracts the young Americans/Westerners, who flock and "wander//in these lanes//" to seek peace and spiritual solace. The reverberation of the temple bells, the echoes of the chanting of the priests, the murmuring prayers of the pilgrims along with the squeaking/cries of the birds and the flames of the funeral pyres makes his sacred land enchanting and enticing. Even so, the poet is at pain to notice the ugly/ghastly picture of his native land:

along river banks splattered with excreta and dung  
in the crowded market square among rotting tomatoes  
fish scales and the moist warm odour of bananas and piss

Moreover, the poet is shocked by the immorality and corruption pervading/engulfing his society on seeing:

..the big breasted, hard-eyed young whores  
who frequent the empty space behind the local cinema  
..corrupt politicians still  
go on delivering their pre-election speeches

The sorry plight of his city/native land disturbs the poet so much so that he invests the poem with the theme of darkness. The usage of imagery like "rotting tomatoes," "scorched marrow," "town's burning ground," "darkened shrine," "wounded whale," "abandoned cocoon," "stench of blood," "stinging smoke," etc. has made the poem murky, ominous, and cautionary. In the following lines of the poem, it is seen that "in this time of darkness," the poet feels like an "ageing man" whose words are no longer accepted and who does not have a sway over his land and, he, therefore, prefers to "endure the pain":

In this time of darkness the lost ones and I  
..will endure the pain  
when the words of our songs droop like lilies  
in the dark without standing in judgement -  
passing by the abandoned cocoon  
through the stench of blood over the pure dawn wall  
across the stinging smoke of the bum-out doubts:  
perhaps like ageing men

Situating in the contemporary socio-cultural milieu of Cuttack/Orissa/India is the pilgrimage to which there is an advent of pilgrims from various parts of the world. Mahapatra's "The Lost Children of America" specifically reflects the lives of the young pilgrims from the West and particularly the Americans. Here, America is perhaps metonymically used for the West. However, the poet could have used the name of any other European nation but he has perhaps a good reason for using the name of America; the reason could be that in America, a countercultural movement, which began in the 1960s, swayed the younger generation towards an alternative lifestyle and radical beliefs. The American conservative society regarded this younger generation as "lost children," who were spoiled and wasting their lives away. America is regarded as the richest, most liberal, the oldest and most popular democracy of the world and an aspired destination to/of all. So, perhaps in order to subvert this logic and, thereby, to place India in the same league with the most powerful and prosperous nation of the world, he has shown the coming of Americans to India, albeit, for different reasons. On looking at the title of the poem, the questions that immediately come to our minds are: who are these lost children? Why are they coming to Orissa/India? What makes/inspires Jayanta Mahapatra to write about them? Coming to the last question first, Mahapatra himself speaks about the source of the poem in the following words:

The lines came about from those sights which were common in the city of mine in those days. Before me, the high bank of river, where the smoke of the funeral pyres trembles the leaves of the pipal: Before me too, a white couple walking hand in hand, apparently visitors from lands beyond our seas. I observed them: shabbily attired, their hairs unkempt and they move about barefoot as though they exist in dreams of their own. And it made me wonder why is it that these affluent men and women from the west choose to live the poverty ridden air of India, to make me write his poem, and wonder at the truth of life. <sup>5</sup>

In this poem, "the lost children" are described by the poet on the basis of their apparent physical appearances and attires thus:

flaunting their long unkempt hair and bare feet;  
a man naked to the waist, the fringes  
of his torn shorts two weary chapped mouths -  
a woman, her face of old porcelain  
burnt in the harsh sun  
clothed indifferently in a discoloured sack  
her breast weak and sagging  
having lost their glimmer and their power;

Moreover, the poet, using allusions, makes a pictorial presentation of the movements of these lost children in the poem as follows:

like the languid movements of mangled lepers  
around a temple of the goddess Chandi at dawn  
like a wounded whale drifting away  
sadly in unknown seas  
like the dark winds of Asia  
which murmur joylessly in slums but do not answer

A critic of repute, Uma Parameswaran, writes about this pictorial presentation in the following words: "He (the Poet) describes the familiar characteristics of his place, like hunger, disease, poverty, immortality, corruption, at length with Miltonic similes and Ginsberg's long breath. Every line is rich with visual images which cumulatively build up their somnambulant movements to the point of Universal void."<sup>6</sup>

Having read their appearances, attires and other characteristics of the "lost children" in the poem, it becomes an easy work for a reader to comprehend that the poet has been talking about the Hippies. In the 1960s and 1970s, Hippies were people who rejected conventional society and opposed political and social orthodoxy, choosing a gentle and non-doctrinaire ideology that favored a life based on peace, love and personal freedom.<sup>7</sup> Mahapatra writes that the Hippies were people "who rejected their own land and their bejeweled days" and who do not ask the "oft-repeated" questions -

Why is my skin so brown, my birth not final?  
Why do I clean my arse with my hand?  
Why do I seek a virgin woman for my wife?  
Why do I grovel before that grotesque god of bitter wood?

The Hippies inherited the countercultural values of the Beat Generation, created their own communities, listened to psychedelic rock, rejected established institutions, criticized middle class values, embraced aspects of Eastern philosophy, championed sexual liberation, were often vegetarian and eco-friendly and used drugs such as marijuana and LSD to explore alternative states of consciousness and find ecstasy and revelation within. The Hippies sought to free themselves from societal restrictions, choose their own way, and find new meaning in life. As in the beat movement preceding them, Hippie symbols and iconography were purposely borrowed from either "low" or "primitive" cultures, with Hippie fashion reflecting a disorderly, often vagrant style. One expression of Hippie independence from societal norms was found in their standard of dress and grooming, which made Hippies instantly recognizable to one another, and served as a visual symbol of their respect for individual rights. Through their appearance, Hippies declared their willingness to question authority, and distanced themselves from the conformist segments of the society.<sup>8</sup> They lead a simple and illusive/elusive life "living on grass and flowers." Seeing the sordid reality of the world in the form of "hunger", "diseased", "immorality", "corruption" etc, they take recourse to hallucination and illusion. But beneath their hearts lie the "bruised presence," which comes out at a serene moment/ hallucinatory moment in a transformed/transmuted form to please them. The poet tries to describe and analyse their ideas and psyche as:

they are free, the common men  
soft and green of gesture, preoccupied  
with their hidden songs of mankind,  
mind blown by acid and amphetamines  
and we watch them go by  
with vague feelings of exaltation and disquiet.

Their coming to the East/India can be assumed either for finding a different world or in search of spiritual solace. But, the poet ironically states that the Orientals/Indians are not the cherubs the Westerners/Americans come to find. The contemporary India is bedevilled by violence, immorality and corruption. In this poem, the poet gives a harrowing picture of immorality of those people who are in custody of the religious institutions as well as of unnerving corruption of the government ordained protectors of the people thus:

In the Hanuman temple last night  
the priest's pomaded jean-clad son  
raped the squint-eyed fourteen-year fishergirl

on the cracked stone platform behind the shrine  
and this morning  
her father found her at the police station  
assaulted over and over again by four policemen  
dripping of darkness and of scarlet death.

From the poem we can understand that the poet is very much disturbed by the trajectory the Indian democracy is taking. The age-old tradition of peace, love and hospitality has been punctured and nullified, and the materialistic culture imported from the West/America has made inroads into the Indian society. Interestingly, even the Hippies were sold out to the materialist, consumer culture during the 1980s. Thus, the poet, a modern Indian who knows the difference between the sordid present and the idealized past, states:

We gaze at each other in silence, the lost child and I;  
who knows who is playing a joke on whom?  
what can drive me from these mean, sordid alleys  
where I live?

So, the poet also joins the "lost children" in their slow wandering to retrieve and to feel "the virtue that is there in the refracted light" in/of "haunted wood and hunted myth". The poet, having lost his pride over his native land, seemingly approves the Hippies and feels himself to be one of them. □

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## Sense & Sensibility: A Stylistic Interpretation of Jayanta Mahapatra's Dawn at Puri<sup>1</sup>

\*Dr.Asit Kumar Das

"A poet is a poet," declares Jayanta Mahapatra in an interview<sup>2</sup>, 'by virtue of what he 'sees' and 'feels'—basically of the world around him... I have always felt that way - that the poet, above everything else, should be true to what his inner voice tells him and write his poem. You could call it the poet's 'conscience'". One of the best known Indian English poets, Mahapatra has been able to carve a quiet, tranquil poetic voice of his own—distinctly different from those of his contemporaries. Born (1928) and brought up in Cuttack, a thousand year old city where he spent most of his lifetime, Mahapatra often claims that he is basically an Oriya poet who, by accident, writes in English. True to his claim, most of his best known poems such as A Rain of Rites, Bare Face, Grandfather, Hunger, Orissa Landscape, Relationship, Temple and Dawn at Puri ruminates over the poet's lived experience and emotional association with the land and life of people in Orissa. Besides being a respected teacher, Mahapatra is a distinguished editor who, for many years, has been bringing out a literary magazine Chandrabhaga, named after a silky river in Orissa. His enchanting expression of quite meditateness, slightly tinged with sorrow and nostalgia, and the ubiquitous religious and cultural ambience of Orissa bestows a distinctive quality upon his verse for which Panikar observes: "The sun of the eastern coast of India shines through his poems."<sup>3</sup>

A Sahitya Akademi awardee and recipient of numerous international prizes, Mahapatra writes with his heart, sometimes with the heart on the sleeve, on the labyrinthine interplay of life, landscape, and knowledge on intimate Indian themes— the mundane and the metaphysical— where involvement of the 'self' and the 'society' moulds the poet's sensitive 'selfhood'. All the more a rational Christian upbringing and an overwhelming Hindu cultural environment seem to have given a distinct identity to his maturing selfhood. This article takes up Mahapatra's widely read poem Dawn at Puri to show how the poet broods over the involvement of self and setting, local and universal, myth and reality, time and timeless that continually constitutes his feelings and responses. I have made an attempt here to demonstrate how, relating some linguistic elements to meaning, an objective account of initial interpretation of the text is possible. However, as literary stylistics involves the movement away from the microscopic analysis that one does in linguistics to the macroscopic or holistic analysis of the text, I have incorporated both the quantitative and the qualitative approaches for a symptomatic interpretation of the poem.

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Stylistics or stylistic analysis aims at giving objectivity to critical procedures by warding off what is often called subjectivity and impressionism: while stylistic analysis in linguistics refers to the identification of patterns of usage in speech and writing, in literary studies, however, it is usually made for the purpose of commenting on quality and meaning in a text. With stylistics we aim to explain how the words of a text create the feelings and responses that we get when we read them. Stylistic analysis is a normal part of literary studies; it is practised as a part of understanding the possible meanings in a text. However, every text is different as each of us is. Obviously, it is really difficult for a novice to know how and where to begin when attempting a stylistic analysis. Moreover, many people come to stylistics having studied English literature, which demands quite a different set of skills.

Before taking up the actual business, however, it will be really helpful to recount on some basic assumptions stylistics rely on, for what is actually desirable is an original response to the poem. One should begin by reading the text carefully that may include the sense of one's own personal response which should not be vague but must be firmly rooted in close textual examination. So, one can begin analysing the poem by responding to the text; think, brainstorm on the most significant aspects of the text, and decide on the best order for the points. One should not be swayed away by the allurements to include all and sundry; any comment on features that are missing unless there is a significant comment to make should be carefully avoided. Last but not the least, one's comments—supported by concise quotations as evidence—should be well ordered and clear.

Now, let's begin with our initial thoughts and feelings about the poem. Like many of his temple poems, Dawn at Puri is a collaged narrative realistic and intriguing: while the 'crows' cawing for morsels of food, the 'leapers' begging from the devotees, and the 'widows' waiting for a darshan of the presiding deity constitute the sights and sounds peculiar to the environs of the Temple, the violence with which the poet imposes images of a tilting 'skull', the hapless look of the destitutes 'caught in a net', and the smoky blaze of a 'solitary pyre' on the holy sands, in fact, opens up a different set of questions beyond the Temple.

There is not much difficult interpretative work to do and the final message of the poem has made this extremely clear. No doubt an intimate geographical specificity (Puri) has enabled the poet strike an authentic identification with the sociocultural history of Orissa, but his use of lingering images on hunger, suffering and suffocation on the other hand bear eloquent witness to Mahapatra's intense

concern for human existence, giving the poem its timeless appeal. The poem is not particularly difficult in terms of the complexity of its subject matter, but it is interesting to relate the stylistic features that the poet has chosen to use for our general interpretation. One may appreciate this by looking at the most foregrounded features of the poem; that is, the bits of the poem that stand out because they seem peculiar. So, now that we have got an initial interpretation of the poem, we can move on and try a stylistic analysis of it.

The first question that usually comes to our mind here is how far can we identify the speaker in the poem with the poet himself? Since there is no textual evidence to say conclusively that the narrator is male, the possessive adjective 'my' can equally insistently speak of a female speaker. But when we consider the dominant Hindu myth and philosophy of the land (Puri/Orissa), where it is customary for the son to fulfill the 'last wish' of a dying parent and perform religious rituals associated with funeral ('pyre'), it is not very difficult to identify the narrator with a male; hence, the poet. Moreover, there is a usual tendency for readers to assume that the persona in a poem and the poet are one and the same. And because we know that the poet is male, it is likely that we will presume the persona to be male too. But what about the audience? No doubt, any one who has a little bit knowledge of the Hindu ways of life or/and an understanding of the sociocultural life of Orissa could grasp the poem immediately. Even otherwise, the lingering sense of a meditative pathos over such timeless leitmotifs as 'hunger' and 'wish' in the poem guarantee its universal readership: if hunger is a reality, so is faith of the believers, there can be no escape from this reality. Myth and religion, how great they may be, fail to transcend this reality at hand.

Now, looking at the arrangement of the orthographic and grapho-metric units, we find that the whole poem is composed in just one stanza, giving a forced unifying ambience that jostles with observed reality, cultural memory, metaphysical belief, and intellectual concerns. There are altogether five sentences: (1) "Endless crow noises"; (2) "A skull on the holy sands.. towards hunger"; (3) "White-clad widowed women..Great Temple"; (4) "Their austere eyes..strands of faith"— each containing lines in increasing number that gives enough hint at the growing tension as one after another evocative and haunting images keep coming. A closer look reveals a strong element of foregrounding in the first line— "Endless crow noises"— which forms a sentence itself but runs on to succeeding lines with its extended semantic signification. No doubt, there is an obvious violation of conventional rule of syntax, and the abrupt end of the



line is congruous with its sudden beginning. But the reality in the vicinity of the Temple, captured under frail light, is stretched 'endlessly' down the 'shifting sands' where the 'noises' are still haunting in silence. The soundscape – the background scene of the 'crow noises' with its ominous evil associations in Hindu mythology– stretches to embrace the landscape of 'endless' sadness and sufferings of humanity. What is conspicuous is the way Mahapatra paints hunger (line 2 and 3), one his strong points, which speaks volumes on the wretched economic condition of the people of Orissa. But more than just that, hunger is also used as a motif for describing distraction and death– real as well as spiritual. The soundscape of the 'endless noises' extends from the local to meet the universal. The poet speaks about a 'tilt' and the image of the skull on the holy sands shows the lack of balance, blending the metaphysics of hunger with the horrifying skeletal reality of the immediate landscape. Thus the 5<sup>th</sup> sentence ("The frail early light catches..shifting sands"), which is the longest one and gives a distinct twist of sensibility towards the spiritual and the timeless, comes to act as a overwhelming semantic superimposition. Notwithstanding the usual arbitrary relationship between 'signifier' and 'signified' in language, Mahapatra's dexterity in handling the observed realities around the Temple environs (signifiers) has enabled an 'iconic' or non-arbitrary relationship to develop with the poet's feelings and concerns (signifieds). The lingering images of perennial captivity in hunger, religion and myth, for instance, have been built up very systematically through the agglomeration of the signifiers to mature into identifiable patterns on the page.

Our initial interpretation of the poem emerges primarily from looking at the 'lexical words' and their arrangement in the text. Let's first consider these 'open class' words– opposed to 'closed class' or grammatical words– which help carry the majority of meaning in the poem. The grammatical categories as determiners (a, the, that) and prepositions (on, of, in, by) glue the lexical words, linking them together in meaningful arrangements. The following table shows how these words are distributed throughout the poem in respect to their functional

categories as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs:

<u>Nouns</u>	<u>Main Verbs</u>	<u>Adjectives</u>	<u>Adverbs</u>
crow	tilts	endless	towards
noises	waiting	holy	past
skull	enter	its	suddenly

sands	stare	empty	here
county	caught	white-clad	
hunger	hanging	widowed	
women	catches	their	
centres	leaning	Great	
lives	breaks	austere	
Temple	fills	shining	
eyes	cremated	fail	
net	twisting	early	
dawn		ruined	
strands		leprous	
faith		crouched	
shells		smoky	
mass		sullen	
faces		solitary	
names		aging	
hide		her	
blaze		last	
pyre		shifting	
mother			
wish			
uncertainty			
sands			

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12

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04

It may be observed that the poem consists mainly of nouns and their qualifying adjectives. Notwithstanding a surrealistic reference to observed realities- "endless noises", "crouched faces", "shifting sands" and "smoky blaze" where the imagery appears evocative but not crystal clear, nouns in the poem are mostly concrete with thinginess of physical objects. Only four of them are

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abstract nouns ('hunger', 'faith', 'wish', and 'uncertainty'), having some connotative suggestions as well as making some value judgement. The entire range of rationality, reasoning, and reality, it seems, stands negated in such moments of a psychological space. Moreover, these are the vantage points that make Mahapatra's verse appear ruminant, sometimes so introverted that it broods on the edge of sentimentality. But about nineteen factual adjectives in the poem, on the other hand, associate themselves with these nouns to provide us information about the landscape and life around the Temple environs. Further, it is possible to divide these nouns roughly into two semantic fields related to life and landscape:

Nouns related to Landscape (Setting)	Nouns related to Life (Self)
crow, noises, skull, sands, county, Temple, mass, dawn, light, shells, hide, blaze etc.	women, lives, eyes, net, faces, names, pyre, mother etc.

The mixture in the poem of nouns belonging to these two different semantic classes could be said to account for what we perceive as an interconnection between life and landscape. My initial impression of the poem has been that there is some kind of conflict between these two elements and this is explained in part by the above table. The four abstract nouns, 'hunger', 'faith', 'wish', and 'uncertainty' could belong to either category and might be seen to connect the two semantic classes. We can perceive a smooth transition— the transition from local/Oriya to the universal/Indian sensibility— through them. In fact, Mahapatra's poetry very often speaks in crisscross patterns on the strange blend of proximity and distancing just as we get here a movement from an authentic local space to a timeless universal continuum.

An instance of parallelism in the poem could be marked at the phonological level, where we find the repetition of particular sounds. Although the poem does not have a rhyme scheme of any regularity, Mahapatra makes use of internal rhyme at particular points within the poem. There is no strict pattern to its occurrence, yet there is some degree of phonological parallelism. Often we find a repetition of consonant sounds in words in close proximity to each other, as we can see in the examples below:

End <u>l</u> ess crow no <u>is</u> es	□
<u>f</u> lts its empty <u>co</u> un <u>t</u> y towards hunger	□

White-clad <u>widowed women</u>	[4]
hanging by the dawn's shining strands of faith	[9]
a mass <u>crouched faces</u> without names	[12]
into the <u>smoky</u> blaze of a <u>sullen</u> <u>solitary</u> pyre	[14]
on the <u>shifting</u> sands	[18]

But I must acknowledge that I fail to account for such repetitive sound pattern except one, that it captures the idea of a multitude of thoughts, and two, it ensures a dreamy sub-surface music that haunts the ear.

When we look at the verbs used in the poem we find that they impose a sense of immediacy; the finite verbs that are marked for tense are in the present tense. Thus we get present simple verbs such as 'tilts', 'catches', 'breaks' and 'fills'. In order to help establish a sense of immediacy, the progressive present participles ('waiting', 'hanging', 'leaning', and 'twisting') indicate the ongoing 'stretched' actions on the landscape around the Temple- 'crows' endlessly noising, a 'skull' tilting, 'widows' and 'leapers' waiting, a 'pyre' burning, and above all, the aging mother's last wish uncertainly 'hanging'. These actions are immediate as well as timeless, pointing to death and decadence hanging around the landscape and to an increasing tension in the mindscape of the poet as well. No doubt Mahapatra is terribly disturbed by the wretched condition of the weak and the destitute, but he holds himself back in his 'hide' and invites his readers not just to participate in the ongoing actions but to ponder over their ominous continuity. The actions, on the more, are reinforced by four adverbs in the poem pertaining to 'place'- locating the site of suffering ('here' and 'towards'), to 'time'- ruminating over lost ground ('past'), and to 'manner'- conveying a sense of urgency ('suddenly').

The woman is a recurrent image in Mahapatra's poetry. She is often portrayed as an oppressed, imprisoned, quite a discarded thing by patriarchal system and poverty. Here he speaks on "white clad widowed women", whose life has decidedly tilted towards debacle; they are waiting to enter the 'Great Temple', death. The diminutive use of 'widowed women'- clubbed together under one label denying any sense of identity- has ironically stressed the plight of these cultural outcasts. These destitutes, whose life is devoid of all colours because their husbands are dead, have been caught in the miserable web of life

that bears neither meaning nor illusion for them. Thus they are helpless entities like fish 'caught in the net', hanging loosely from the last string of faith in the mythical relieving power of religion. Likewise, the poet has deftly juxtaposed the frame of decayed shells leaning against one another amidst the freakish light on the sea shore, which calls upon our attention to the plight of the weak and the wretched—the widows and the leapers. Their individual identity is negated and erased and their life has been prolonged as vast and meaningless as the sands on the shore), stretching in silence.

'No doubt, the images that Mahapatra carefully takes from Hindu mythology, religion and faith, has enabled him to situate the poem within an authentic landscape flavoured all the more strongly by the dominant presence of Orissa and Puri at the centre. He uses the freakish dawn light to define distorted life and landscape that would have remained under the shrouds of mass oblivion in the temple environment. But these images— white skull and white-clad widows and the 'great Temple'— often reinforce locality and universality, structuring and prioritizing the life of the destitutes. Dream seems to be another motif running through this work. The 'last wish' of the poet's 'aging mother' is a dream-state, for it speaks primarily on the cultural myth of the land that goes deep into making an unconscious and subconscious self. The dawn's light tries to peep into the mind/wish of the mother as well as the cultural make-up of the poet. But when it 'breaks' out of the 'hide' more confusion heaps up and religion, myth or philosophy seem to have lost the power to soothe the plights of age-old realities of the land. Hence, 'uncertainty' twists "like light/on the shifting sands."

This analytical study of Dawn at Puri shows how stylistics can uphold an initial interpretation of a poem, and how it can also highlight elements of a poem that we might otherwise miss. I have tried to show how some linguistic features in the poem are directly related make its sense and sensibility. By using a systematic analytical technique like stylistics we can ensure that our interpretation is as explicit and grounded in fact as it can be. But I must acknowledge that mine is not the only analysis which could be made of this poem. It is more likely that any other stylistic interpretation of the poem would include some of my conclusions and could still go further. □



## Nature and Symbolism in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra

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Jayant Mahapatra is one of the Post-Independence Indian English poets. He can be called the major voice among the second generation of modern poets. He hails from Cuttack, Orissa. In spite of being a professor of Science, he has written excellent type of poetry.

Jayant Mahapatra made his debut as an Indian poet writing in English with the publication of his first anthology published in 1971. He has been honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981 for "Relationship" as an outstanding contribution to Indian English Literature for its awareness of the Indian heritage, evocative description, significant and linking of personal reminiscences with race memory. Love, social criticism, landscape of Orissa, Indian Sensibility and craftsmanship are a few notable qualities of his poetry.

Ample evidence of Indianness is seen in his poems about Orissa where the local and the regional are raised to the level of the universal. In "Dawn at Puri", Mahapatra underscores the importance of Puri and what it means to Hindus. Women wish to die at Puri to attain salvation. Mahapatra says:

her last wish to be cremated here  
twisting uncertainly like light  
on the shifting sands".

The worshipping by the white clad windows and their rites, crow's cawing and the skull indicate how Indians were deeped in myth-making and superstitions.

"The Exile" also depicts an Indian man. The village near the sun burnt hills, dead bodies burning on pyres, the protagonist's ailing parents, the long haired priest, the logic of good and evil depict Oriyan and so Indian life.

Where a country's ghost  
pull my eyes toward birth  
It is an obscure relative  
I've never seen."

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These lines express the poet's hope for renaissance or renewal of past glory in India.

In "Again, One day Walking by the River", the local scene is typically Oriyan. The boat with hay, the repairing of the tar-road, the leper's returning home from begging, and the poet's regret that nobody would mourn for him, are typical Indian emotions.

Mahapatra is an excellent craftsman. One of the traits of Mahapatra as a craftsman is his command over the English language. He is capable of making subtle use of words. His phraseology is quite original. He knows to use words with economy. This effort makes Mahapatra's poem lucid in diction. "Dawn at Puri" is written in as few words as possible and in very simple style. Mahapatra uses scholarly phrases to express his philosophical ideas. That is why Vilas Sarang says that "much of Mahapatra's poetry is difficult, if not impossible to paraphrase". Mahapatra has an excellent capacity of choosing right possible words and juxtapose them in right places in his lines.

Use of figures of speech such as similes and metaphors is another aspect of his craftsmanship. In "Dawn at Puri", an excellent simile is found in the lines:

"Their austere eyes  
Stare like those caught in a net,  
Hanging by the dawn's shining strand of faith".

Another example of simile from the same poem is:

"her last wish to be cremated here  
twisting uncertainly like light  
on the shifting sands".

"Again, One day Walking by the River" contains two fine similes.

"the barge loaded with golden hay  
trapped like a leaf in a basin of water".

In his poem, "The whorehouse in Calcutta Street", he writes:

"Dream children, dark, superfluous:  
You miss them in the house's dark spaces,  
How can't you?  
Even the women don't wear them-  
Like jewels or precious stones at the throat:  
The faint feeling deep at a woman's centre



That brings back the discarded things:  
The little turning of blood  
At the far edge of the rainbow".

Here similes and metaphors are beautifully yoked together. The dream children are shown as a matter of destroying the emotion of human kindness.

The next aspect of Mahapatra's craftsmanship is the use of sound and rhythm. His poetry is non-metrical. Most of his poems are well-knit and compact.

Mahapatra's enchanting expression of meditateness, slightly touched with sorrow and reminiscences, the omnipresent religious and cultural ambience of Orissa confers a distinctive quality upon his verse.

Jayant Mahapatra is a great craftsman and makes fine use of imagery in his poems. Most of the images are realistic and vivid. They are drawn from nature and life. The images form pictures are suggestive and symbolic. One of the noble features of his images is that most of them are integral to the theme expressed in the poem. He uses such images that the readers experience sensible impressions of all sorts like cold, darkness, heat, tensions, sadness etc. His imagery is definite enough to work on the readers' mind. Images in his poetry mention human failures, nature, a process of disillusionment, and the majestic height. In "Mountain", the image of disillusionment denotes the eternity facing the process of growth and decay.

Mahapatra's imagery covers a very wide range. His images are vivid, striking, suggestive, symbolic and gripping. The quality of Mahapatra's image is that they come to him naturally. The images are integrated with his themes which make his poems pleasant and his style superb.

"Dawn at Puri" is an imagist poem and contains a series of varied images which include 'the cawing crows,' 'the skull lying on the holy sands', 'white clad widowed women', 'the great temple' and 'the mother with holy desire'. All these images paint a fine scene in the poem.

"The Exile" contains vivid and realistic images. They are both literal and symbolic. The literal images like 'land's distance', 'the moldy village besides the hills', 'corpses smouldering', 'the wind scattering ashes', 'the old ill parents' and 'the long-haired priest of Kali' paint vivid and realistic pictures. The symbolic images like 'exile between good and evil' and 'Father's house' are suggestive and refer to philosophical ideas. Earth, God, Heaven, Renaissance and Salvation are the spiritual symbols.

"Again, One day Walking by the River" is an imagist poem where, the river image is the central image. All these images are suggestive.

In Mahapatra's poetry, there is an extensive usage of the local landscape as imagery to symbolize his emotions and ideas. A glance of his imagery that forms an integral framework for his poetic musings is enlightening. He is emotionally affected by the rain-drenched small-town and rural life. The best of his imagery is fashioned from the landscape with regional adherence and natural elements of local topography.

The poet identifies the poetic field with a river where he waits for an opportunity to swim across:

Today  
I stand on the bank of the poem,  
even though each word has a price,  
even though this poetry appears as a river,  
a river without water  
we have to swim across...

Mahapatra's imagery is not only based on landscape and nature but also is drawn from componential aspects: seasonal cycle and life cycle. Social and political milieu is inseparable elements of the poetry of Mahapatra. In "Hunger", he criticizes the social evil of prostitution. He makes it clear that this evil is caused by economic disparity and social injustice. He reveals the sorrowful plight of prostitutes.

National tragedies as in "A morning walk in Bhopal", "Bhopal Dawn", "Death of a Nameless Girl in Bhopal" allude to the chemical gas leak in the factory in Bhopal killing several thousands lead to imagery woven out of allusion in Mahapatra's poetry.

One of the important aspects of Mahapatra's theme is that it involves his search for identity. His poetry is the product of various tensions. Mahapatra as the rationalist and the teacher of Physics finds his roots in the tradition of the country, the Christian trying to decipher the meaning of Hindu myths, rites and rituals, an analytical mind reconciling with ancestral beliefs, and above all, an Oriyan writing in English. The imagery of Hindu deities and Hindu mythology, the prominent religious faith in India is alluded to in his poetry. He bridges the gap between his Christian background and Hindu ethos.

Jayant Mahapatra has contributed a great deal to the growth and development of modern English poetry. His contribution is really very substantial.

He beautifully uses images and symbols to express landscape, man's loneliness, his search for roots and identity. He is also called the "original poet". He is a poet of 'land-scape' and even 'man-scape'. □

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JAYANTA MAHAPATRA AND HIS WORTHY PEERS:  
THE INDIAN-ENGLISH POETIC SCENE (1980-2010)

\* Dr. M.A. Nare

In 1980s, Indian-English Poetry established a new record of its achievements as the four poets: Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and Shiv K. Kumar won the prestigious National Sahitya Akademi Award for their contribution to Indian-English Poetry. This spectacular achievement was a terrible blow to the critics who had expressed their fears about the future of this genre in India.

'Editing a collection of Critical Essays on Contemporary Literature is, in several ways risky.....These difficulties are compounded in the case of Indo-English Poetry for it is hardly as yet a genre and acquired a distinct identity only recently'. (1)

In the November-December, 1986 issue of Sahitya Akademi's Journal- Indian Literature, Dr. G.S.Amur reveals the maturity this genre has acquired over the years:

'For the third year in succession, the Sahitya Akademi Award in English has gone to a poet, signalling the degree of maturity that Indian Poetry in English has achieved over the years.....More than a dozen volumes of poetry have appeared during the year under survey'. (2)

This clearly shows the progress of this genre during the first-half of the decade- 1980s. Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das won the Sahitya

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Akademi Awards for their works - 'Relationship', 'Latter-Day Psalms' and 'Collected Poems' respectively. Shiv K. Kumar bagged this award for his collection of poems- 'Trap Falls in the Sky' in 1987. (3)

We must thank the academics like Prof. V.K.Gokak, Prof. Vasant Shahaney, Prof. M K Naik and others who had come forward to recognise the potential in this new genre of Indian Literature in English.

Now, Indian-English Poetry is not only taught at the Post-Graduate Departments in the Indian Universities but also in many reputed foreign Universities in the world. In some foreign Universities like Leeds, it is taught under Commonwealth Literature.

However we must not think that the strength of this genre lies only in a handful of Sahitya-Akademi-Award-Winning-Poets. No doubt, their achievement is a great milestone in the development of Indian English Poetry. But this achievement reveals only the tip of the Huge Iceberg.

R.Parthasarathy's anthology 'The Ten Twentieth Century Poets' (OUP-1976) no doubt included the leading Poets of that time in 1970s. But in the same decade many Indian English Poets were active writing and publishing their poems in the Literary Journals, Magazines and Anthologies in this vast country: The land stretched from the snows of the Himalayas to the dark and deep waters of the seas. We must bear in mind that Indian English Poetry is not written only on the small island Bombay (Mumbai).

Sahitya Akademi's Indian Literature, The Journal of Indian P.E.N., Dr. Balaram Gupta's Journal of Indian Writing in English (JIWE), Dr. I H Rizvi's Canopy, P P Joshi and M A Nare's New Literary Horizons, Baldev Mirza's Skylark, Udayanath Majhi's Rock Pebbles, L N Mahapatra's Poetry Time, Jayanta Mahapatra's Chandrabhaga, Kavita India, Pratikha India, Dr. Krishna Srinivas's Poet, Niranjan Mohanty's Poetry and many esteemed journals did a commendable job in helping the budding and the established poets to publish their poems over the years.

Now, the foundation of this genre that is Indian English Poetry is as firm and as hard as a volcanic rock. Recent growth in the number of volumes of poetry shows the popularity and strength of this genre. Now Indian English Poetry is confident of facing the hidden challenges of the New Millennium.

Dr.Atma Rama, the Director of the U.G.C. Seminar held at Dharmashala, had prepared a list of the poets active in 1987. This list was circulated among the participants and poets like Dr.O.P.Bhatnagar, S.C.Dwivedi, I.K.Sharma, Shiv K. Kumar and many others and it was thoroughly discussed. This list begins

with the leading poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra and ends with Ms. Reema Anand. A critic R.C. Dwivedi (a New York based poet and journalist) in his article, 'Spring Never Starts Outside: Ezekiel's Capable Contemporaries', discusses their contributions to Indian English Poetry in groups. Now, almost all these poets have grown in stature and strength and demand a critical evaluation of their poetry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Concluding his article, R C Dwivedi writes:

'Poetry is the medium par excellence for giving words to reality with an imaginative insight. A host of Indian Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Bhatnagar, Kamala Das, I H Rizvi, P P Joshi, L N Mahapatra, A C Sahaya, D H Kabadi, M A Nare, Syed Ameeruddin, Baldev Mirza, Vimla Rao, S N Tripathy, D C Chambial, we find a tendency to look at reality and see and say as they find persons and situations. The theme of reality runs through their poetry. They find their milieu full of sickness and degradation and they never argue means for reshaping it. These are the times of disorder and through words at least the poets are aiming at order'. (4)

Niranjan Mohanty (Viswa Bharati University, Shantiniketan) published an article in JIWE in which he has emphasized the need of an Anthology which will include all these poets through their representative poems. He writes:

'Is Indian Poetry in English dead with Daruwala's Two Decades or Parthasarthy's Ten Twentieth Century Poets, Arvind Mehrotra's Twelve Indian Poets, Vinay Dharwadkar and A K Ramanujan's The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry (1994), Ranjit Hoskote's Reason's for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets (2002)?

The answer as it appears to me so convincingly is an emphatically no'. Then he gives a list of selected poets starting with O P Bhatnagar, Krishna Srinivas and others which ends with the name of Durga Prasad Panda. He further writes:

'The show is on. The tradition is on. It has not stopped flowing. If the tradition of Indian Poetry in English is to be accepted as valid or if the History of Indian Poetry is to be written say after fifty years, these names that have been mentioned will figure there.' (5)

These are the prophetic words of a poet-critic who had rightly felt the pulse of this vibrant genre in our times. (May his soul rest in peace).

The long felt need of the New Representative Anthology of Indian English Poets, different from those already existing in the above mentioned Anthologies,

envisaged by Niranjan Mohanty, can be easily prepared if all the Major Universities in the Country - like Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Allahabad and Kolkata, Sahitya Akademi, U.G.C and British Council come together to do this challenging task. No doubt the impartial scrutiny of the various anthologies privately published by so many poets over such a long period of time is no small a task. But, it has to be done. Or, how long are we going to teach, 'more or less the same Ten or Fifteen Indian English Poets' to our Literature students in the Universities?

Now let's take a case of Jayanta Mahapatra. For so many years by now, he has remained more or less an obscure figure - a kind of 'Outsider' among the 'Insiders'. The focus of the teaching still remains almost unchanged. Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Shiv K Kumar and A K Ramanujan are at the core. Even Arun Kolatkar and Mehrotra are treated as if they are not in the main stream.

The Special Golden Jubilee Volume (1940-1990) of the All India English Teachers' Association: Indian English Literature since Independence - edited by K. Ayyappa Paniker does not show any article on Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry in spite of the many books he had published including the Sahitya Akademi Prize winning book - Relationship (1981). Out of the seventeen articles in this special volume only three are on Indian English Poetry or Poets of which two are on Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry. The rest are on Novelists, Essayists and Prose writers. However B K Das, the poet-critic in his article 'Post 1960 Indian English Poetry and Making of Indian English Idiom' devotes ten lines to record the publication of Jayanta Mahapatra's three books:

'Jayanta Mahapatra's Relationship (1981) and two recent volumes, Burden of the Waves and Fruit (1988) and Temple (1989) reveal a distinct Indian sensibility that immediately arrests one's attention. History, Myths, Legends, folklore all go together to establish a distinct idiom and identity in these volumes.

The publisher's note to Burden and Waves and Fruit rightly stresses this aspect: 'There are many rivers in these works, much rain and sun, long evenings and a few dawns - occasionally, there are intimate glimpses of friends, lovers and son. India is everywhere and nowhere.' (Publisher's note, Washington DC. This shows the peculiarity of American reviews in general. And this volume was released at the All India English Teacher's Conference.) (6)

This is how the Academics treated Jayanta Mahapatra, the first Sahitya Akademi Award winning poet, the Reader in Physics at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack Orissa (India). While Ezekiel, for whatever reasons has always been

the darling of the teaching community. In my opinion Jayanta Mahapatra's obscurity and his great love for the American readers, editors and journals are responsible for this kind of treatment.

About Nissim Ezekiel's position, Dr. Nibir K Ghosh has rightly observed that Ezekiel still enjoys the status of a 'poet's poet' among his worthy peers.

'How is it then that Ezekiel continues to remain in the forefront, as a major poetic talent, enjoying the privilege of a poet's poet among the foremost writers of Verse in English in India?.....His primary concern is not the India that appeals to the West, but the India to which he can and does truly belong.' (7)

O P Bhatnagar the poet-critic has rightly shown the change in the salient features of the post Independence Indian Poetry in English:

'The prudery which dominated Indian Poetry in English, after Independence is on the wane. The contemporary poet is now closer to the poetic around himself.....this turn has also taken away the distant pose, the use of English gave, to look down upon the Indian life and culture. Concern, intimacy, directness and simplicity are emerging to be the major characteristics of the contemporary Indian Poetry in English'. He further adds - Contemporary Indian English poet tries to avoid 'verbal complexity', wit, structural ambiguity and architectonic flourish.' (Preface to Vision's and Voices 1987).

Ezekiel could easily overcome the problems like alienation and foreign religion of the minority Jews, in a majority Hindu nation. I feel it's not the religion or the missionary school education but the attitude as a poet to his reader that is more important in this case.

Jayanta Mahapatra, quotes Bertold Brecht in one of his articles in The Bombay Review:

'Bertold Brecht once said that many artists tried to create works for masses, not for a narrow elite. But this is a mistake, said Brecht. The real problem is not that we have to work for the masses; we must bring about that change from a narrow elite to a large elite. And with this in mind, without forsaking our cultural past, we should prepare best for the events of the future.' (8)

I think here lies the key to understand Jayanta Mahapatra's case as an artist in the Indian Democratic set up. After Independence we have given up aping the foreign Gods like Eliot, Auden and Dylan Thomas in their attitude to life and literature. There is a thin line between 'a narrow elite and a large elite.'

The very word 'elite' shows the difference between the chosen and the common. William Wordsworth in those days went from London to the Lake District in search of the 'living language of men' and wrote his poetry there

though he was a Cambridge graduate. There is a vast difference between the poetry of T S Eliot and the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel: Though he taught English and American Literature he did not worship the western Gods. Infact both the poets according to C D Narasinhaiah were scraping the surface of the Indian life.

Let's see what a fellow bi-lingual poet, Dilip Chitre says about Mahapatra's position as an Indian English Poet.

'Now compare Jayanta Mahapatra with R Parthasarathy. Mahapatra leans on no identifiable idiom or stylistic tradition and yet he is unmistakably Contemporary, Indian English. Mahapatra's poetry is of ten too ponderous in its movement, his phrase is too awkward in its turn at times, and sometimes his diction is turgid. Yet these seeming flaws work in his favour because the poetry he attempts is different from anything that is being done in English today. Parthasarathy on the other hand - despite his high-pitched Anglophobia, self conscious Indianness and paranoid anti-racism is a poet full of clichés unable to raise a joint-stock craft to the level of individual technique. Nor does he have anything Indian and English about his poetry other than its explicit themes.'

Let's see how Chitre puts Mehrotra's case before us.

'Now take Mehrotra. He is so unique in Indian English Poetry that in his own genre he has no peer. He is the only Contemporary Indian English poet whose theme is the language of poetry itself. He has been wrongly labelled a surrealist. Mehrotra is not venting his unconscious mind anywhere as a surrealist would. He is consciously playing with surface structures of language in order to explore poetic diction. He makes poetic technique itself the content of his poetry, working on language rather than using it. If he has some affinities with any other India English Poet then they are with Arun Kolatkar. Kolatkar too plays with the surface structures of language almost as an end in itself. But this is somewhat disguised and curbed by the fact that Kolatkar uses a narrative descriptive format and his poems therefore have a strong linear progression. Mehrotra creates pure poetic forms out of language using syntactical shifts, lexical displacements and surprise juxtapositions to discover, primarily, freedom with the English language. For an Indian English poet, to want to do so and to be able to do so is indeed a refreshing example of artistic confidence. Oddly enough, though Kolatkar can play with language with the same ease as Mehrotra displays, in both boat ride and Jejuri his thematic ambitions and cultural concerns make his technique irrelevant and counterproductive. It is relevant to remember here that Kolatkar's true achievement as an Indian English poet is in his translations



from medieval Marathi Bhakti poets such as Tukaram, Janabai and Muktibai and not in his more celebrated original long poems or sequences in English. If Kolatkar had Ramarajan's instinct and firm belief that a translator of poetry is as fully creative and original as a primary producer of poetry, we would have had two outstanding Indian English poet-translators rather than the only one we have at present.' (9)

His 'Jejuri', (which had won The Commonwealth Prize in 1976, had given him a position before Jayanta Mahapatra in R Parthasarathy's famous anthology 'Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets'), was written to please the western audience. Devout religious Indian masses do not like his attitude in the poem. I think he had sacrificed something of his own Indianness in order to please the western readers and critics. But he was a product of The J.J.School of Arts, Bombay and had tremendous creative ability as an artist and a poet. And he was a modern Indian thinker. Unfortunately, though he had made a good beginning with his 'Jejuri' for a long time we thought his beginning was his end.

'There was no further publication in English until 2004, the year of his untimely death, with the simultaneous appearance of two books: Sarpa Satra and Kala Ghoda Poems. His Jejuri has gone into several reprints and continues to be bought and read by new generation of readers. A possible reason for its popularity may be Kolatkar's voice: unhurried, lit with whimsy, unpretentious even when making learned literary or mythological allusions. And whatever the poet's eye alights on - particularly the odd, the misshapen and the famished - receives the gift of close attention, which is a kind of love. He died in Bombay'. (May his soul rest in peace). (10)

C D Narasimhaiah in his 'Introduction to Commonwealth Poetry' shows how Nissim Ezekiel, Keki Daruwalla, Dom Moraes and even Jayanta Mahapatra could not make use of their latent potential to rise fully in stature.

'Unlike Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel has shown a remarkable devotion to his craft which has paid him dividends in terms of the success (awarded the belated Sahitya Akademi Prize for his 'Latter Day Psalms') and wide-spread popularity he has won by means of his successive publications, starting from 'A Time to Change'..... It is sad to contemplate that so serious a poet as Ezekiel has failed to leave his mark on the making of the poetic tradition in India. One wonders if the failure is not largely in his refusal to tap the resources of his own Jewish history and its high destiny, let alone his total alienation from the mainstream of the rich Indian Life and Literature which so young a person as

that convert to Christianity, Toru Dutt, still found available to her, a hundred years before him.

For, where rarely the poet taps the organic life, still in evidence among the poorer sections of our people around Bombay, as in his most memorable poem 'The Night of the Scorpion', he does show his remarkable capacity to infuse the life and the language of the people, its syntax, inflexion and rhythms into English Verse.

Ezekiel's predicament is shared by Keki Daruwalla, a gifted poet (also a Sahitya Academy Award Winner) no doubt, but stands outside the mainstream of Indian reality except for its surface happenings which he has succeeded in capturing with striking elegance and charm. One often wishes how infinitely better would have been their poetry had they wallowed in the dust of India and its redeeming glory instead of being content to scrape the surface and achieve sophisticated phrasing, to which they have fallen prey. An evidence of disastrous failure of the critical function at home and overexposure to the fast changing critical scene abroad.

Alas! This is true even of Jayanta Mahapatra (who deservedly won the Sahitya Akademi for his Collection 'Relationship') for here is one who is rich in his inner life, as is evident in his unerring introspection:

'Will a poem of mine be the only answer?

Will its words make me feel something?

I do not want to forget? An impossible wish.

A poignant personal loss and futility of verbal power to body forth that deprivation, each providing an edge to the other in creative tension, should have resulted in marvelous poetry of which the poet gives abundant promise but somehow gets thwarted before it comes to fulfillment. Such is the abortive process in the working of Indian English poetic destiny. For where poets like Mahapatra and Ramanujan fail with everything in their favour - first-class awareness, sensibility, compassion for Indian failings and a shared faith in Indian spirituality they sense even in its superstitious manifestations, and above all more than competent craftsmanship - one despairs if others can register even moderate success.

Before I proceed to Ramanujan I should like to make a few observations on Kamala Das. Kamala Das made her daring innovativeness at once felt in readers of Indian English Literature with her poem 'An Introduction'. She is perhaps the only Indian Poet who owes little to Yeats or Eliot and trusted to her own resources and to her culture - thanks to a poet-mother and her indefatigable Keralite upbringing, it is possible she felt reassured in the quulence lying all

around her to kindle her imagination. How else does one explain her persistent preoccupation, with love and sex both commonplace at one level and precisely for that reason not easy at another, to transmute them into art. She has succeeded to a large extent in exploring those labyrinths which inhibit many a brave poet today. It looks as if Kamala Das has allowed the poetic impulse to flow into poetry before either the rational mind or social conventions arrest the flow. Such is 'Vrindavan':

'Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind  
and the flute, luring her  
From home and her husband  
Who later asks her of the long scratch on the brown  
Aureole of her breast, and she shyly replies,  
hiding flushed cheeks,  
It was so dark outside, I tripped and fell over  
the brambles on the wood.'

But the Radha-Krishna relationship gets diluted in many of her poems. And predictably the poetry is flawed and borders on the merely sensational.

Despite his obvious debt to Yeats and T S Eliot, A K Ramanujan's poetry immediately strikes as his own, which, in the modern Indian context, is saying much for a poet writing in English. There is a determined search for roots in almost every poem of his, accentuated by the circumstances of his expatriation. Roots he has found, but where are the 'leaves and blossoms'? asks a critic. Which obviates the further question: where are the fruits? And why are the 'leaves', Keats speaks of, so late in appearing on the tree? (11)

'In the Times Literary Supplement 'International Books of the Year' for 2004, the well-known novelist Pankaj Mishra claimed that 'India Poetry in English, has a longer and more distinguished tradition than Indian fiction in English, and may finally become better known in the west when Arun Kolatkar's narrative poem *Jejuri* (1976), is published by the New York Review of Books in 2005. Kolatkar published two volumes of poetry, *Kala Ghoda Poems* and *Sarpa Satra* (both by Pras Prakashan) before his untimely death this year. Moving deftly from street life in Bombay to Hindu Myths these last poems confirm his cult reputation as the greatest Indian poet of his generation.' (TLS. 3 December 2004:10)

Kolatkar was that good a poet. Although his work was known only by those who sought it, he was a poet of world class with a very individual way of

looking at the world. In his writing, every cliché is transformed into something new and unexpected, a transformation by imagination, language and tone. If Moraes is a master of older verse idiom, Kolatkar's realm is street talk, the colloquial, the poetry of the ordinary and anonymous.

Take for instance, 'Pi-Dog', a nine-part sequence which begins Kala Ghoda Poems (2004), a volume of thematic connected poetry. Here a mangy street dog rests on a traffic island thinking of its ancestors and circumstances while Bombay sleeps. There is a quite hour, physical realism, colloquial speech, subtle contrast of registers and linguistic invention, and unobtrusive harmonies typical of Kolatkar's verse. It all seems so relaxed, the kind of seeming free verse to which prose aspires, yet behind the first five stanzas is familiarity with a great range of the world's poetry, the kind of distant echoes, allusions, and structures that would make a scholar's paradise. I find myself mumuring Horace, John Dryden, Thomas Gray, T S Eliot, W C Williams, knowing that any source or influence could be right or wrong as this is written by a poet who has absorbed such sources and influences to make them his own. The poem rapidly moves by way of whimsy to the history and mixed culture of the city. The dog claims his body looks like 'a seventeenth-century map of Bombay' with its seven islands, black irregular spots 'on a body the colour of old parchment'. According to 'a strong family tradition he is descendent, matrilineally/ to the only bitch' among 30 hounds which survived the sea voyage from England, imported..... Kolatkar is a master of the incongruous and absurd. He was at least as much immersed in Marathi as English and World Culture. Kolatkar's poetry continued a Marathi modernist tradition best known for B S Mardhekar (1909-56), who had fused surrealism, the Imagists, Eliot and what is called Indian Medieval or Saints' poetry (Saints' poetry directly addresses the divine in a colloquial often erotic language with similar kinds of paradox and wit to those found in European religions and metaphysical poetry. Such poetry in India, was written for many centuries in regional languages by men and women long after and in contrast to the Sanskritic classics). It is a lively regional modernism that has produced several good bi-lingual poets including Kolatkar's friend Dilip Chitre and Ranajit Hoskote. (12)

Now before I close my discussion on Indian English Poetry I must say a word about the man - the Kala-Ghoda-Wala who has unexpectedly risen like a phoenix from his own ashes. The two books Kala Ghoda Poems and Sarpa Satra now being published in America will certainly give him the most important position in the galaxy of Indian English Poets.

Infact a paper of this kind has very little scope for a critical analysis of any poet's book. However, Take liberty here for, the paper is to be published in a special issue on Jayanta Mahapatra where, if I don't touch even a poem of this great poetic genius, it would be a kind of injustice to him.

Random Descent (2005): Of all the poems in this anthology I found his poem 'Madhuri Dixit' as a true Indian English Poem in its content, form, imagery, rhythm and diction. Like M F Husain he tries to elevate Madhuri Dixit to an archetypal image of woman in Indian Mythology and folklore. But the poem has its firm roots deep down in the physical appeal of Madhuri Dixit as young, vibrant actress, a bewitching beauty from Bollywood. Though he calls his poem 'a poem of the soul' an intelligent reader can easily find a pattern of sexual symbols and images and erotic expressions which ultimately lead themselves to Freudian interpretation of the poem.

Madhuri in a New Way: 'Dhak-Dhak actress Madhuri Dixit has described artist Maqbool 'Fida' Husain's obsession with her as a marriage of two arts, Husain, the cinema and the canvas. "It is a spiritual mingling of two different media. One having camera and lights, and the other having brush and strokes."

Khalid Mohammed in his Gaja Gamini: A Critic's Appraisal writes, 'For Madhuri Dixit, the film is a vast canvas on which she changes her identity, garb and feelings with the felicity of a born artiste. She is Shakuntala, she is Mona Lisa, she is Monika, she is the soul of Gaja Gamini. (The genesis of Gaja Gamini by M F Husain, 2000)

However Jayanta Mahapatra has skillfully used the backdrop already painted by the artist M F Husain for Madhuri Dixit, his Gaja Gamini. Jayanta Mahapatra's poem is slightly different in approach for it reveals his own originality in expression and his creative personality as an artist in words who also is bewitched by the presence of Madhuri Dixit like the Knight-at-Arms in John Keats's Poem 'La Belle Dam San's Mercy'. I don't mean it is a romantic poem like Keats's, but through this modern poem Jayanta Mahapatra has finally turned his face to Indian audience, like the disc of the Sun emerging from the shadow of the moon after a solar eclipse. The label of 'obscurity' which he had borne for so many years now will vanish like mist if he writes poems like this for the Indian audience.

I think even Mahapatra had in mind a kind of change as he published this poem in Asian Age India, unlike many other poems in this anthology which were already published in the literary journals in USA and UK.

I wish Jayanta Mahapatra good health and a long, prosperous and creative life. □

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Portrayal of Women in the Poetry of  
Jayanta Mahapatra with Special  
Reference to A Rain of Rites and Temple

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Jayant Mahapatra is a major and representative modern Indian poet writing in English. Even from the point of view of sheer output, Mahapatra's achievement is considerable with thirteen volumes of poetry (to date, including his selected poems), three volumes of poetry translations from Oriya to English, two volumes of stories, one book on Orissa and many articles in various journals, periodicals and newspapers which are as yet uncollected. Jayant Mahapatra came late to poetry. He was almost forty when the first book of his poems Close the Sky, Ten by Ten was published. Moreover Mahapatra unlike most Indian poets writing in English around the time had not had much exposure to the influencing trends in literary movement either abroad or at home.

Mahapatra's poetry very successfully reflects all the conflicts and tensions of an Indian writing in English, of a Christian living in a Hindu society, and an intellectual living in a bewildering social setup undergoing a transformation at a fast phase from a rural and agrarian society to an industrialised and technical one. Also, all through his poetic career Mahapatra has shown an interest in and concern for women in India. This paper briefly attempts to explore and examine Mahapatra's perspective on the plight of women in his two poetry volumes namely A Rain of Rites and Temple.

W O M A N

Even

When she is

Even

When she is not ("Woman", CS, np)

Woman is the substance of Mahapatra's A Rain of Rites, his first book of poems to be published abroad. The Indian womanhood, by and large, has been a synonym for subjugation and suffering at all stages because society is uniformly ungrateful and unkind to her; she has either been deified as Goddess and Mother or debased as Evil Incarnate but never treated as a human being with an individuality of her own. (Hindu Pantheon on Gods abounds in Female Deities- Feminine Principle: the Shakti Cult, etc -while the Hindu practices in reality are quite the opposite, treating women as non-persons). Mahapatra does not take the stand of a social reformer, nor does he assume the role of a social

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worker when he deals with the plight of women. Laxminarayana Bhat P. makes a discerning observation: "Mahapatra does not feel for them (women), but feels with them (women)" <sup>1</sup> which makes all the difference. It is not surprising then that the very first poem in A Rain of Rites, 'Dawn' talks about the passivity of the accursed womanhood.

There is a dawn which travels alone,  
Without the effort of creation, without puzzle,  
It stands simply, framed in the door, white in the air;  
An Indian woman, piled up to her silences,  
Waiting for what the world will only let her do.

This dawn does not break into the sweet chirping of birds heralding a new day in the life of women. It is dull, uninteresting and "limp with dew"-the limpness is suggestive of women's inability to stand on their own. The last two lines aptly summarise how Indian women are treated in a country which boasts of accrediting women with high reverence: (Yatra narayastupujyante, ramante tatra devata <sup>2</sup> - wherever women are respected, Gods inhabit the place). Except for stray incidents in history, and a brief, short-lived period of equal status to women in the Vedic era, Indian women have always been mere shadows of men and locked up in traditions that suffocate them. Manu, the law-giver of Hindu society, says:

Balaya va yuvatya va vrindya vapi yoshita  
Na swatantrayena kartavyam  
Kinchitkaryam griheshwapi <sup>3</sup>

(No woman, whether she is a girl, adult or old shall do any work at home independently without the consent/ permission of the head of the family, i.e. Man)

balye piturvashe tishtethpanigrahasya yowane  
putranam bhatare prethana bhajet stree swatantram <sup>4</sup>  
pita rakshati kowmare bharta rakshati yowane  
rakshanti stavire putra na stree swatantraya marhati <sup>5</sup>

(A woman is protected by her father in childhood, by husband in youth and by son in old age. Women do not need or deserve freedom.)

So women have been permanently condemned to be second-class citizens; they are "The Second Sex" (Simone De Beauvoir) even in the most advanced West. Mahapatra echoes this stark reality in all its nakedness. He avoids the temptations of using this issue to organise protest to protect the rights of women, which is clearly the job of a social reformer. Nor does he justify



the autocratic traditional viewpoint of the school of Manu and his followers. Mahapatra simply portrays a situation as it exists without hinting at solutions. The reader is at liberty to form his own judgements. This neutrality is characteristic of Mahapatra.

'Dawn at Puri' is more direct; it neither affirms nor celebrates, nor does it denounce or ridicule; it seems only to note

Endless crow noises.  
A skull on the holy sands  
tilts its empty country towards hunger.  
white-clad widowed women  
past the centres of their lives  
are waiting to enter the Great Temple.

It is more a sense of uncertainty, of a human condition of uncertain desires and uncertain experiences of fulfilment. The last stanza about his ageing mother is telling.

Her last wish to be cremated here  
Twisting uncertainly like light  
On the shifting sands

'Hunger' and 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' have a somewhat similar theme: poverty, sexuality and human desires. The two poems uncharacteristically look outside and do not delve into the constant search of the self that seems to constitute Mahapatra's poetry. Let us discuss 'Hunger' here. Elsewhere Mahapatra has said:

'the poem is based on a true incident; it could easily have happened to me on the poverty ridden sands of Gopalpur-on-sea. Often have I imagined myself walking on those sands, my solitude and my inherent sexuality working on me, to face the girl inside the dimly-lit palm-frond shack. <sup>6</sup>

The poem unfolds in four dramatic stanzas: there is evidence of a brisk movement of the lines, in harmony with the actual physical movement in the poem. A father sells his daughter in the face of overwhelming poverty.

It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back,  
The fisherman said: will you have her, casually,  
trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words  
sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself  
I saw his white bone thrash his eyes.

The first stanza, laconic and eloquent, sets the scene for the horror of the situation: desperate poverty and hunger speaking to another kind of hunger. The third stanza is powerfully metaphoric:

In the flicking dark his lean to opened like a wound.  
The wind was I, and the days and nights before.  
Palm fronds scratched my skin. Inside the shack  
an oil lamp splayed the hours brunched to those walls.  
Over and over the sticky soot crossed the space of my mind.

The opening 'lean-to' functions as a metaphor for the hunger of the empty stomach as well as an invitation for the customer-speaker. The girl, passive and vacant, is just a yielding rubbery object:

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, the fish slithering, turning inside.

Even if 'Hunger' is based much more in the external world, depending less on the ebb and flow of the poet's own consciousness, it is yet balanced by the inner life/ the perspective of the customer-poet. Indeed there is not much of a distance between the two, which in a sense compounds the sense of doom inherent in the poem.

Mahapatra's Temple published in 1989 is a comment on the horror, the social wrongs perpetrated in contemporary times in India, in half poetic, half dramatic manner. As such the poem is more than a narrative, and less than dramatic, and seems to improvise a form that can bear the brunt of the theme of horror, in the fashion of dance-drama now popular in experimental art. It can fruitfully be examined as a feminist work.

The poem is sandwiched between a prologue and a kind of epilogue: both newspaper reports of acute horror. The prologue is a newspaper story of an octogenarian couple Ramanujan and Chelammal who committed suicide because of poverty and loneliness followed by verse describing the events leading up to the suicide. The report at the end of the poem is about a twelve-year old girl allegedly gangraped and murdered in Khagaria district, which also reported eleven cases of rape and murder of women over two months.

The rest of the poem is divided into three titled sections, each further divided into various parts: One- The Hall of Dancing, Two- The Hall of Offering

and Three- Sanctum Sanctorum: The Shrine. The title seems to indicate Mahapatra's declared theme of Temple: "Woman, Woman who represents Shakti in Hindu Mythology- both creator and destroyer" <sup>7</sup> the connection of this with the newspaper reports at the beginning and end is hard to understand. The verse in the different sections, however, effectively dramatises the young girl's growing up, ghostly voice relating her experiences.

For what time could set her grief free?  
She looks back at her home,  
longing to return and pray  
to the god waiting on her old torn calendar,  
and her life grow smaller  
hour by hour with the small deceit of the good  
and the living:  
for nothing, not even the spirit's sway  
that comes from the first rain after a long draught  
to set her grief loose,  
not even religion's mean voice  
circling like a stubborn fly around her rotting loss.  
For like the fish spawned in rice fields  
wasn't she fated to be caught  
when the terraces were finally drained?

Temple also shows a conscious effort at improving an Indian metaphor and simile: there are more comparisons to things home grown, so to speak, cucumber, fresh rice; more references to typical terms like laxman-rekha and mustard fields. To be just, Mahapatra does use some descriptive narration, but the drama is nullified by a dreamy abstraction. Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, an eminent critic observes : "the work as a poem suffers, in the end, from a kind of woolly wordiness which detracts from the significance of its social context. Pain, horror are best dramatised and presented through a narration of events. Spinning threads to sustain for over thirty pages, a poetry of pain in the abstract, thins the effect." <sup>8</sup> All in all, the two poetic works by Mahapatra reveal a deep understanding and empathy that is intrinsic to his consciousness of the plight of women in Indian society.

Mahapatra is a poet of promise. He began writing in English quite late in life, but within the short period of ten years he has achieved eminence, and is already ranked with the greatest names in the field- Ezekiel, Ramanujan, and Kamala Das. His essentially Indian sensibility, his mastery of English, his

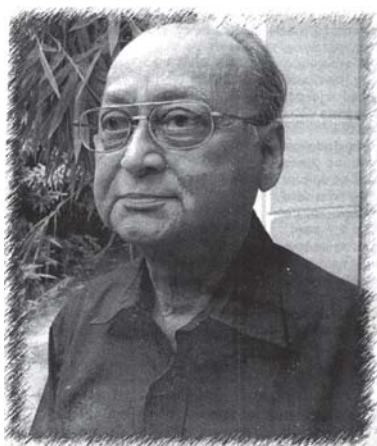
mythopoeic imagination, his economy of phrasing and startling images, are all signs and symbols of a great poet. K.Ayyappa Paniker, quite pertinently remarks: "There is good reason to believe that as time passes Mahapatra's English poetry will be as relevant to our national life as the best that is written in any Indian languages." <sup>9</sup> □

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Jayanta Mahapatra



## Jayanta Mahapatra: Man and Poet

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Winner of the prestigious Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award (1975), Sahitya Akademi Award (1981), Allen Tate Prize (2009), and Padma Shree Award (2009), Jayant Mahapatra was born on October 22, 1928 in Cuttack in a lower middle class family. He had a brilliant academic career. He got his early education in an English medium school named Stewart school, Cuttack. After getting the first class in Masters Degree in Physics, he started his professional career as a teacher in 1949. During his stint as a teacher he served in various Govt. colleges of Orissa. He retired from his job of a teacher in 1986. Throughout his teaching career, he taught Physics in one college after the other.

Jayant Mahapatra started his literary career as a poet at the age of thirty eight. To his credit, Mahapatra has written eighteen books of poems. His first book of poetry was *Svayamvara and Other Poems* (1971). After the publication of this book came collections of poems like *Close the Sky Ten by Ten* (1971), *A Father's Hours* (1976), *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *Life Signs* (1983) and *A Whiteness of Bone* (1992). Among his latest poetry collections include *Shadow Space* (1997), *Bare Face* (2000), *Random Descent* (2005) and *The Lie of Dawns: Poems 1974-2008* (2009). Besides being a poet, he has written a collection of short stories, *The Green Gardener* (1997). He also edited a literary magazine, *Chandrabhaga*. He is one of the most widely known Indian English poets of our time. He ranks among the three stalwarts of Indian English poetry, the other two being A. K. Ramanujan and Nissim Ezekiel. His collections of poems in Oriya include *Bali* (1993), *Kahibi Gotie Katha* (1995), *Baya Raja* (1997), *Tikie Chhayee* (2001), *Chali* (2006) and *Jadiba Gapatiayy* (2009). He has translated works in English from Oriya and Bengali which include *Countermeasures: Poems* (1973), *Wings of the Past: Poems* (1976), *Verticals of Life: Poems* (1996), *Discovery and the Other Poems* (2001), and *A Time of Rising (Poems)* (2003).

It sounds very strange how a science teacher can be a poet of varied moods and feelings. Mahapatra is an exception in the sense that despite being the intellect of a Physics teacher, he keeps the heart of a sensitive poet. His poems reflect the sensibility of a poet who is trying to unearth the mysteries of this inexplicable universe.

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Mahapatra through his "bi-lingual creativity" (Mahapatra: "In Conversation: Brutal Landscape"), in his journey from innocence to experience touches almost every aspect of human life - love, faith, melancholy, agony, silence, cry, childhood, death, continuity of life, patience, arrogance, piety and cruelty, good and evil. Mahapatra's life experiences pave way for his poetry which is replete with imagery and symbolism. As a child he was unhappy. His relationship with his mother was not normal. He always found solace in the company of his father who sent him to study in a missionary school. The feeling of alienation still haunts his imagination. In his poem "Hunger", Mahapatra endeavours to highlight the feeling of alienation which has forced the poet to be in the company of a prostitute. The poem has several implications. It may also be viewed as the naked picture of poverty stricken people who are engaged in the menial jobs like fishing and prostitution to fill their empty bellies. The poem throws ample light on the depressed, underprivileged, poverty stricken sections of society which have been forced into isolation and alienation by the so-called high gentry. The pressure of hunger is so acute that even a father is ready to sell the flesh of his fifteen year old daughter. Life has lost its meaning. Human relationships have lost their sanctity. The moral law of this universe has collapsed. Human beings have become products to be bought and sold in the market:

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 wife.  
(Mahapatra, Hunger: 192)

Mahapatra was quite aware of regional, parochial and chauvinistic tendencies which have crept into the body fabric of India. There is every danger that these tendencies may affect the vision of poet too. Hence, time and again, he warns of the narrow factors and advocates the primacy of a unified vision and does not approve of fragmentary approach on the part of a poet. He exhorts the poets to rise above the fragmentary and regional approach towards art and life. He also does not approve of merely photographic portrayal of the ills of society. He argues that the poet should exhibit courage and capacity to overcome and rise above surface portrayal of society.

Poets are expected to make sense of life. If they find life today in fragments, they must not leave it that way. Perhaps they should have that desire to produce poetry that transcends the ills of modern life rather than poetry that helplessly mirrors them. It is easy for me to say this when I know I am guilty myself of such writing. But I am afraid this is a difficult task to achieve. (Mahapatra: "Of the Lowly Potato: Indian English Poetry Today")

Mahapatra, while discussing the scenario of Indian English Poetry in early nineties, observes a very subtle change taking place in its substance and sensibility of Indian English poetry:

However, it was in the eighties or early nineties, that a change was seen in much of the English poetry written in India. The discerning reader no longer wanted to read merely a well-crafted poem of an Indian poet in English, a poem which could have come as well from the pen of a poet living in Britain or Australia. Neither was the poet interested only in the dry wit and irony most Indian English poems exhibited. The prevailing poetry scene was witnessing a subtle change. Poets, younger poets, from various parts of the country were coming out with their poems; suddenly, English poems were being written differently in Kerala, in the Northeast, and in my own state of Orissa. It was the native culture showing in the poem of the Indian English poet. It was a poem which eased itself from the earth the poet inhabited, nurtured and nourished by the soil and the air of the place. There was a distinct sense of belonging; it couldn't be mistaken. (Mahapatra : "Of the Lowly Potato: Indian English Poetry Today")

Mahapatra admits that the setting, background and sensibility in a poet's work should be rooted in his soil. He does not approve of borrowed sensibility in a poet's work:

And incidentally, I remember Alan Ross, the editor, having written me on a 5 cm by-10 cm rejection slip, when he had returned my poems, that my work was unsuitable for publication because it tended to be philosophic. My own writing has always reflected an Oriya sensibility and I have felt myself to be an Oriya poet who happened to write in English. I suppose our sensibility, the Indian sensibility, is different from the Western one, and this fact stands in the way of the Western reader. (Mahapatra: Of the Lowly Potato: Indian English Poetry Today)

Mahapatra is not a poet living in ivory tower of his dreamland and caring little for the agony of the multitudes. He is very critical of social injustice, economic disparity and political corruption in his state, that is, Orissa. People in Orissa don't have even basic necessities of life - bread and butter, housing, and clothing.

Main source of inspiration: my land, my people, my place, what I see, what social injustice I see, and political injustice. I should like to write about the hunger. I think Orissa is one of the very, very, very, very poor states, very poor. You go inside the villages; you will see they [the villagers] don't have places to

live in. They don't have a roof over their heads. They don't have rice to eat. And only politicians can find out which things are there. During election time they do visit the villages once, and the next five years nothing happens. The same poverty, they sell their children to keep their own stomachs. Mothers sell their daughters; fathers sell their daughters. Even today it's happening, especially in Orissa and the interior of India. (An Interview with Jayant Mahapatra by Vivekanand Jha : Holly Rose Review)

In his early poetry we come across Mahapatra as a poet of love:

. . . my first poems were born of love, of love's selfishness and  
of a huge self pity, like the poems of many whom I admire.  
(Mahapatra, Introduction : Youth Times)

It is the fear of separation which haunts poet's mind:

For how long can we prolong this togetherness  
of being invulnerable together  
in admiration for each other. (Mahapatra, Intimacy : Svayamvara  
and Other Poems)

There is childlike innocence and possessiveness in his love poetry:

And my eyes are wet now  
waiting for the snows to melt  
and I'm almost ready to believe  
that you would be defeated by my tears. (Mahapatra: "Love Poem")

Unlike Kamala Das, Mahapatra's love poetry is free from pornographic taint. His love poetry reminds us of Indian tradition of wedding. It is only after wedding that they will enter into union of body. It also highlights the sanctity and purity attached to the relationship between lover and beloved. There is cultural sensibility of an Indian lover in these lines:

You know  
I will not touch you  
like that  
until our wedding night. (Mahapatra, "The Indian Way": 44)

In his later poetry, the poet expresses his desire to become part and parcel of the living. His desire to take part in the affairs of society provides an authentic poetic experience:

I'm eager to disappear into the living once more away from the forebodings  
of mirror and river from the unhurried poise that seems to protect me from evil,  
the cold glance stone. (Mahapatra, "A Father's Hours":

He decides to accept both good and evil as man's destiny to cope with:



Let me get used to living with myself once again  
with the guilt I was trying to lose touch with,  
which lets them live as they are. (Mahapatra, "A Father's Hours" :

In his later poetry he meditates over the past. It is past which grants meaning and relevance to our life:

There is a past which moves over  
the magic slopes and hamlets of the mind  
whose breath measures the purpose of our lives. (Mahapatra,  
"The False Start":

Quite a number of poems such as "Bhubaneswar", "Dhuligiri", "Temple Road, Puri", "Dawn at Puri", "Relationship" provide a glimpse of cultural roots of Mahapatra's poetry. Puri, Konark, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack provide landscape to his poetry. Jayant Mahapatra is quite conversant with the history, myths and legends associated with these places. Lord Jagannath is the presiding deity of Orissa. He has written quite a number of poems whose focus is Puri and Lord Jagannath. His celebrated poems like "The Orissa Poems", "The Indian Poems", "Evening in an Orissa Village", "The Indian Way" express his Indian sensibility and his association with the tradition of ancient Orissa.

We can safely say that Jayant Mahapatra's sensibility is essentially Indian. No doubt, he has written quite a number of good poems about Orissa, but the beauty of his poetry lies in the fact that the local and regional is elevated to the level of national and universal.

The hypocrisy of the Hindu priests is being mocked at in "Indian Summer". The priests have been compared to "Crocodiles" who "move into deeper waters." (Mahapatra, "Indian Summer": 60) 'Crocodiles' stand for "the underworld of the Indian mind that clings to darkness." (Ramakrishnan: 109) The image of 'Crocodiles' synonymous with Brahmin is presented in "Total Solar Eclipse" too:

And cautiously the crocodile  
pushes its long snout from the deep water  
like the fearsome Brahmin priest in the temple. (Mahapatra,  
"Total Solar Eclipse": 22)

The 'fearsome Brahmin' represents our mythic past, "whose ruins would remain forever / to defy the progress of our race." (Mahapatra, "Relationship": 35) It shows that we cannot get rid of our past. For good or bad our past remains

part and parcel of our present. We are fated to put up with the tension between our past and present.

As regards the depiction of landscape in Mahapatra's poetry E. V. Ramakrishnan makes a very significant observation:

In his essay on landscapes Frederick Engels speaks of the correspondence between the landscape of a region and the religious faith of the people living there. . . . Engels' view presupposes the fact that, for an insider the landscape around him is the given parameter of his life and faith, unalterable as his own body. For a person who belongs to the place, the landscape is an extension of his physical world. Among the Indian English poets writing today, Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the few who speak of Indian landscapes with the assurance of an insider. For him the Indian landscape manifests the destiny of Indians. His poems are seismograms recording the tremors of an ancient land, felt in the body of his private experience. (Ramakrishnan: 102-103)

Mahapatra himself says:

You can't rid yourself of them. In the hot summer months we have whole night open-air operas. Their tunes and melodies get into you, so do our dance and architecture. They have shaped our people's sensibility, my sensibility. (Ramnarayan: "In Conversation: Brutal Landscape")

M. K. Nayak rightly observes:

Mahapatra's poetry is redolent of the Orissan scene and the Jagannath temple at Puri figures quite often in it. (Nayak: 207)

R. Parthasarthy is also of all praise for Mahapatra's rootedness in Orissa, "Orissa is the hub of Jayanta Mahapatra's iconoclastic perambulations." (Parthasarthy: 55)

Mahapatra's poetry is not confined to the limits of class, caste or religion. It is infinite like the unending sky under which everything exists from pompous to menial. Even the most neglected prostitutes find a considerable place in his poetry. Through his poem "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street", he has shown the courage to provide voice to the silent emotions and suppressed feelings of prostitutes:

Are you ashamed to believe you're in this?  
then think of the secret moonlight of the women  
left behind, their false chatter,  
perhaps their reminding themselves

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of looked-after children and of home:

the shooting stars in the eager darkness of return.

(Mahapatra, "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street", Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets :

In "A Missing Person", Mahapatra delineates the image of an ideal Indian wife for whom husband is like almighty God, "waiting as usual/ at the edge of sleep." (Mahapatra, "A Missing Person", Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets: 60) The poem also highlights the missing identity of woman in male dominated Indian society.

It is also important to note that Mahapatra derives symbols from Nature. For example flower stands for purity and faith, river stands for continuity of life and eternal nature of tradition, light stands for spirituality and hope, sea symbolizes eternity, infinity and vastness, rain stands for regeneration and creation, night stands for loneliness, despair, and death, crocodile stands for Brahmin, vultures, hyenas, and sparrows represent degeneration of human values. These symbols recur in his poetry and add richness of purpose and meaning to his poetry. These symbols also help in unveiling the inner experience of the poet.

As regards existential dilemma of choice in life, Robert Frost refers to choice not availed of simply because he could not travel both the roads simultaneously in his celebrated poem "The Road Not Taken":

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood

And sorry I could not travel both (Robert: "Road Not Taken")

Mahapatra also delves deep into the question of choice in life and holds a little bit different view from that of Robert Frost when the question of survival confronts a man:

I don't know what else the fisherman [in his poem "Hunger"] could have done under the circumstances he and his daughter were in. When the question of survival is uppermost, one can't see any other choices. Certainly my sympathy rested with the fisherman. Life's choices are limited. (Mahapatra: "In Conversation with Sudeep Ghosh")

To conclude, Mahapatra's poetry is the poetry of everyman. He portrays the lower depths of Indian society. The tricks of haves and the helplessness of have-nots have found clear and unbiased presentation in his poems. It is true

that he is a down to earth poet whose roots are fixed in Indian culture, but he spares no chance to lash the hypocrisy of religion, class, caste and culture. He writes about present scenario while meditating over the past and refuses to talk about the future because he feels that he belongs to a lost generation:

I belong to a lost generation. I can't look into the future. You see, we were brought up on Gandhi, Dostoevsky and Tagore. Today, any trivial act ends up in violence; there's no more tolerance in people, or in organizations. Gandhism is a word, a metaphor for people. We appear to have lost our ideals. (Mahapatra: "In Conversation with Sudeep Ghosh") □

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SELF IN THE POOL OF WOUNDS:  
A STUDY IN A WHITENESS OF BONES

\* Dr. Minati Pattnaik

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the first Indian English poets to have been honored both at home and abroad. Highly serious and sincere, preserving and prolific, Mahapatra is undoubtedly one of the few gifted Contemporary Indian English poets. Undeviatingly, he has made an original contribution to Indian English Poetry within a fairly short span of time. Among several new voices Mahapatra has come to the fore front of Indian poetry in English, from his poetry it is known that how effectively he has made use of a second language for creative purposes. And how authentic and original is the tone of his voice with regard to his Indian sensibility.

The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra has shown signs of promise and authenticity. His poetry is steeped in an authentic individuality of perception, expression and tone. His is a distinctively unsentimental voice, now conversational, now dramatic, not lyrical, now prosaic, now questioning now searching but always strikingly unpretentious and powerful. Earnestly committed to poetry, Mahapatra pursue his craft with an unusual care, sincerity and dexterity.

As one moves from Mahapatra's early to later poetry, one notices a change in the treatment of themes in adherence to an unassuming style, devoid of any experimentation. He anchors his thoughts in many other modes of living, and studies at large the intricacies of life which make it whole. He identifies himself with his roots and past and upholds the complexities of a sensitive and time bound man: his alienation, his suffering, his growing sense of frustration while

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ageing fast, his perpetual fear of death and the inevitable triumph of time over him. His awareness of the contemporary situations - social, religious and political finds convincing expression in his latter poetry, the poetry that contains 'multitudes'. In stead of floating in the pool of personal love, the poet swims across all the tributaries of living to set up an inviolable link between the self within and the world without. Instead of withdrawal into the microcosmic self, there seems to be a strong willingness to involve himself in the affairs of men. The poet of love turns to be a poet of life. This shift in attitude to life unfailingly sets up a deep sense of continuity between his early and later poetry. The 'there- song of life' is heard distinctly. And the poet convinces us with his acceptance of life as a whole: I'm large/ I contain multitudes. In his later poetry the canvas of his writing gets enlarged. The whole of living matters, not the fraction of it, the whole range of human experiences matters, not the part of it. And hence the love- sick tone of early poetry gives room to a profound homebound and earth- bound vision.

Mahapatra is essentially an inward looking poet, a poet of consciousness. For him the external reality is not some thing out there, but something that yields to the pressures of the consciousness and is sieved through it. The logic operative in his poetry is not that of the objective world but that of the mind. He is doubtless engaged in some quest exploring human relationship for a rationale that would render it whole in later poetry. His search in the absence of a defined ideological or religious point of reference, always bring him back to his sole self.

A Whiteness of Bone is significant in the sense that it is both a continuity of and departure from the earlier volumes. It is a continuity because most of the poems share the same fecund inwardness, the same melancholic tone of voice emanating from the same deprivation and loss, the same clairvoyant willingness 'to polish the light on his heart.'

(A Whiteness of Bone 36). The poem create a bleak atmosphere, burdened with hunger, poverty, loss of innocence, fleeting nature of time, fear of a certain death lurking uncertainly. As if, the poet is determined to discover the whiteness of bones beneath the sheen and gloss of a dream-oriented skin. As if, the poet is equally determined to show us the heritage of growth in his poetry as well as in his own self.

The poet has started not to defend himself for being what he is or where he is - aimed infinite rustle of pain, hunger, poverty grief. He has accepted the destiny of being here and nowhere:

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Love: let me not try to defend myself.

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If this love of mine is light, a grace,  
Let it be unimportant and uninteresting  
To inspire me through the long way  
Into nowhere, to tell them I am here. (20)

The sensitive and conscientious poet, after taking a challenging leap into the pool of existence that has already been darkened by irredeemable shapes of solitude, hunger and infinite affliction and grief, comes to terms with his own self in relation to his own place and country in order to unravel the whiteness of his bones, to grapple with the burden of mortality, and vulnerability at the hands of a time - 'a green mango' (17)- that posits this inescapable whiteness. Mahapatra confronts the essential self with such humility that his poetry becomes painfully and absorbingly human.

The tone of voice in these poems has been melancholic throughout. The poet tries to discover a reason and hence leaves room for critics to identify that reason for the pervading sense of gloom and melancholy:

Do I detect a note of melancholy in my voice?  
No use explaining that my life  
Has involved me in delicate situations  
For which solutions could not be found.

('Silent in the Valleys')

The enormity of loss which Mahapatra experiences and explicates in his poetry stems partly from the past and partly from the present. It stems from the past because, it happened or existed once and it cannot be achieved except in memory. It stems from the present because; the poet realizes that degeneration has crept into his place and country- degeneration in terms of a system of values which govern our existence. Besides, the poet encounters loneliness, betrayal and faithlessness everywhere. In trying to seek redemption from the dis-ease-ridden present, when the poet falls back on his past, he is wounded too. Both in the past and in the present man's suffering is inevitable. His acute pangs emanate from the loss of his childhood of father, or mother and above all of his innocence. In 'Father' Mahapatra depicts the change between his time and father's between himself and his father:

My old father believes, even in his last days;  
That's why he is n't a lover or a poet.  
He cannot drown himself in water. Or in awe. (2)

It is relevant in this context to remember what Mahapatra wrote about his father in an autobiographical and reflective essay:

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My father worked as a sub-inspector of primary schools and his earnings were comparatively meager. Father's work kept him away from home.

It would be right to say, however, that there was a strong and work bond between us, father and son, right from the beginning, and that this lasted right until his death. That was little more than two years ago. Besides, perhaps, as emotional involvements usually are. Something in the / a father reaches for his son's hand, with a vague longing that life should last for ever, I remember the web of force, the silence of which we are recognizable part. These times protected me with courage. ( Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series 138)

He recalls his dead old father when he is in deep anguish. The bondage that once was established never breaks down. Even in death, the father shares the son's suffering and sympathizes:

And through the dull suburbs  
of his death, my old father  
gropes his way back.  
Yes, he seems to whisper  
overwhelmed by the defeat  
in my eyes, hunger and earth  
made the bones of one's breath. ( ' Unreal Country'4)

In trying to escape from the world of pain and suffering from the time trodden movements of the earth, Mahapatra relapses into the memories of his father. The poet is certain that there is no escape either from past of pain or death:

I remember my father, dying  
under the slackening kindness of Librium,  
making pained noises, reaching out  
his life to fill my tongue and mouth  
with the bitter taste of despair.  
The other dead are so quiet.  
And one feels no more  
than a passing shadows of shame  
when one remembers them. (37)

In the galaxy of Mahapatra's familial past, not only father but also grandfather, mother, younger brother, twinkle like stars to comfort him in the darkness of the present. But where is there an escape from the stings of pain? Mahapatra recapitulates the memories of his younger brother and mother.

Tonight

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the shadow of my brother follows me,  
becoming blood on its hooves,  
My loving mother turns pale and cross. (3)

He recollects the pain his mother had to consume. His sympathy with the aged mother makes him a silent part of the life lost beyond recall:

In this room of mine  
last year's calender hangs uselessly on the wall.  
In my mother's eyes pain begins to stir again  
Like a venerable old gentleman  
who has returned from afar. (15)

sitting alone in a gelid December dawn, the poet recollects his mother and compares his own sadness with his mother's:

The old woman  
with gray hair and coarse wrinkled hands  
whom I call mother looks vacantly into her  
tea cup, thinking she has been betrayed.

( 'December 24' )

Remembering the flutter of whiteness and whispers of desolation that surrounded his house and the changed mother, the poet's heart goes dark:

But what I realize is that  
before I reach the door,  
it would have all turned while.  
Mother stands by the door,  
still wearing her clothes of mourning.  
I don't remember what father's death was like. (29)

The poet expresses a futile attempt to do away? With the past. It may be because of the fact that the past is the repository of infinite pains and anguishes. He falls back on the house that sheltered him once:

There is a photograph still hanging  
on the wall in my father's house. It's quite old;  
and against an elaborate backdrop the photographer used  
are my parents, my younger brother and I.  
I want to shut it from my mind  
because it reminds me of a useless monument. (29)

The July rains, the flutter of clouds in the expansive grave sky make the poet lonely. He recollects the old house where he spent his childhood:

the old brick walls of my house

go down into shadow.  
I remember tales prattled  
in the raw hut of my boyhood,  
my grandfather's ghost standing in the rain  
watching the secrets between us burn away  
and smoke past his grey eyes.  
Mother's voice a cricket's scream  
and my remorse, like the brief red glow  
of fifties, gashing the air of the trees. (39)

As a compliment to and proof of his belonging to the past that lies everywhere like water' (10), the sensitive poet remembers his old house that housed him once with joy and loneliness. With the passing of time, the willingness to whirl back to infancy becomes stronger:

This house, my room, yesterday's flowers.  
there are corners my hands never toughed.  
Once I toughed a woman here,  
her breath warm as the loo that blows in summer  
who could think then  
that the lonely body held so much of blood?  
On room's west wall  
the write of photograph's flight  
has dulled slowly into grimy brown.  
A Breath that trembles in a spider-web there  
could bear witness to my faith in love as memory,  
held as I am here by a fear creeping along the skin.  
Light tricks, revealing unknown bones of the air.  
In the house I figure the possibilities  
of life: could I  
hide again as a child, some place here?  
The woman in the silent frame before me  
does not stir. Old murmurs  
wear me out again.  
And I Suppose I must have loved.  
As I look out, I realize sadly  
our sons are with us too. ('House' 22)

An accurate family album, wounded by the fierce talons of time with its muted passing. The sandiness of the poet stems from the recollection of the lost youth rather than from the presence of two sons who remind him of the fast

changing patterns of time. Mahapatra's account of the house in his autobiographical essay intensifies our understanding of his deep sense of allegiance to it:

The house where I grew up in Cuttack  
was located at one end of a cluster of  
house - mostly with clay walls and straw  
thatched roofs - belonging to poorer people,  
who eked out their livings by doing stray,  
odd jobs on daily wages. (138) .

Mahapatra's whirling back to the place of his birth and childhood has become a passion that keeps him away from the fear of being faceless in this crowded universe. In 'December' he makes this passion explicit:

To life one must do those things one loves,  
but always in secret, so to keep going  
back to the place one has come from. (24)

The lost moments come back to the poet in order to revitalize his present with a sense of wonder and awe- wonder because of the intrusion of the past into the present, awe because of the fact that the present would melt into the past. Always these dead things/loom larger with every hour that goes. (53)

The willingness to hurry homeward remains central to Mahapatra's vision of being a home-bound pilgrim. Whether it is memories of home or the inmates of home, Mahapatra falls back on them to revitalize his strength to confront the essential facts of life.

Mahapatra explores the father-son relationship in a number of poems. A significant statement is here:

What's in my father's house  
is not mine. In his eyes  
dirty and thick as rain water  
flowing into earth, is the ridicule  
my indifference quietly left behind. ('An Indian Journal')

Mahapatra's poetry gives indication of two movements: a movement away from the root and movement back towards the roots. The father-son relationship is symbolic of his paradoxical relatedness to and denial of his inherited tradition and ideology a relation at once of bafflement, attraction and feign indifference.

The poverty and hunger of the teeming millions in this sub-continent cannot escape the sensitive poet like Mahapatra. In 'when you need to play-act' Mahapatra depicts the stark poverty of a girl. But here the hunger of the flesh is so violent that poverty of some becomes a scene of enjoyment for others. Mahapatra's quasi-ironic tone gets reflected as he depicts the scene:

And the passerby to throng the diseased girl  
who sits still and unmoving in the market-place  
one full breast peering through  
her ragged blouse, while her kind- hearted parents  
on whom she had turned her back.  
found it easier for them to meet their death? (12)

In 'Bhopal Dawn' Mahapatra ruefully paints the blackest face of gloom and grief. The people of the city were blinded by the gas-leak tragedy. It is desolate now with uncertain fears.

The earth beneath is cold. A lost ray  
starts slipping toward the east,  
weaving sunrise. A work becomes a plot.  
The page of life sprouts scary, unseeing eyes. (44)

The poet was equally wounded on the death of a nameless girl in Bhopal. Starvation, Hunger, disease, gas-leakage are the instruments of affliction in India. Mahapatra ruefully observes:

There has always been starvation here- man  
Yes, we are used to it, This pain was new, one  
of the loose ends. And obviously  
sanity seems necessary. (45)

On August fifteenth every year the poet's wound deepens, On this historic day Indian became free from the British fetters. It was under the selfless leadership of Gandhiji, the father of the Nation, that the country, following a path of non-violence and sacrifice, got her independence. But unfortunately people today have forgotten the sacrifices made by the illustrious sons of this soil. Violence today has placed its grip on people. The human relationship has been corrupted and contaminated by selfishness, pettiness and greed. Gandhiji's dream of bringing back Rama- Rajya is thrown into oblivion. The poet articulates his sympathy, looking at the plight of Gandhiji's photograph:

The photograph of Gandhi in the new airport lounge  
is more than forty years old.  
Every time I look into the old man's eyes,

he calmly hands my promise back to me.  
Land, our land,  
there is so much of land between us.

(The fifteenth of August 50)

People's indifference to the history of this nation wounds the poet. The pain and ordeal our countrymen in the past experiences no longer inspire people today. Hence the agonized poet's lamentation:

We have lost those first days  
that had crowned themselves with thorns,  
the damp tender grass growing to sanctuary  
on faiths we could not manage to understand,  
we have lost all those stories  
about the rustle of the blood  
that caught its breath when the British  
seized out laughter  
tossing timelessly for ages,  
beneath the time of the sun.

('Of Independence Day' 54)

The poet is reminded of the merciless assassination of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Through images of violence and terrorism, the poet shows the rapid degeneration that has crept into the veins of countrymen and the country:

Pale light slashes the streets.  
For a second I see Indira Gandhi  
looking wistfully at her garden  
As I near the edge of flowers,  
I realize she's dead too,  
and that my young friend  
sprawled across the day  
is so full of heroism. ( 'A Sullen Balance ' 57)

The savage rape of a young girl on the 'bed of the Devi River' leaves the poet helpless. He is equally wounded at the sight of cows being dragged toward the slaughter house of the city. Amid such unkind atmosphere and violence the poet becomes skeptical and critical of his relationship with the past of this country:

Today I think I know where I am going,  
I think, I know the way.  
And yet I know too that I have no history,  
no memory of the past, only what is there  
out in the sun, the time when a thing starts

a grief- giving ominous presence, and such time  
when the monstrous hand of fate  
wears its tragic sign of a uncertain misled glory .

( 'Red Rose for Gandhi' 65)

What can poet do except cursing himself, his volition of being a poet.  
The poet's angst- ridden anger- perforated heart moans:

Ch: I am a poet who barks like a dog.

( 'Death in Orissa' 31)

A morning when a poet doesn't know  
what his words mean. A light of treachery  
begins to glisten on the leaves,  
as it changes from instant to instant.  
My pain grows empty like the rainbow  
it dances in the skeleton of the rain limp with light.  
I taste the air.  
I realize more than half my life is over.

(The Hollow Mouth' 59)

A Whiteness of Bone is therefore, the manifestation of Mahapatra's  
tragic vision. The human element and the melancholic tone to voice make this  
volume unique and moving in its own way. □

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## Jayanta Mahapatra's 'Relationship' : A Prolonged- Romantic Agony.

\* Ms. Veena Nare (Thakre)

'Relationship' - a poem that has won The National Sahitya Academi Award for Jayanta Mahapatra in 1981, was first published by The Greenfield Review Press, New York in 1980.

Jayanta Mahapatra, the poet who has retired as Reader in Physics from Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. ( Orissa) his native place was not known to many Indian readers of poetry for more than a decade before the publication of his 'Relationship' .

He is the first Indian English poet to win this prestigious award. Then followed the poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Kamla Das and Shiv K. Kumar .Among the Indian writers, he is a great celebrity today.

Let me at the outset say that in this brief critical paper I would like to examine the poem 'Relationship' and comment on the romantic agony that flows through the twelve sections of this long and difficult poem. When Jayanta Mahapatra started writing poems in his forties ( he was born in 1928) it was difficult for him to find a publisher in India. Many editors rejected his poems.

One editor wrote to him: 'I am sorry, I am unable to use your poems. There is an unmistakable poetic quality in almost all the poems, but something eludes me. I should like to understand what I want my readers to understand. <sup>(1)</sup>

Jayanta Mahapatra in his quest for modernity in Poetry deliberately wrote poems which Indian editors and readers found difficult to understand. So he started sending his poems to America, England and Australia and they were published there regularly. The poet describes the situation in the following words:

'It was apparent to me that I was not writing the kind of poems in which meaning was stated clearly, explicitly and that this poetry did not have a sharp focus what the critic had in mind when he commented on my work. In other words this poetry had no flat statements. What I was perhaps trying to do was to put together images and symbols so that the reader would draw the implicit connections for himself. May be in such poetry context is all important. For here only certain meanings of parts of the poem emerge to the exclusion of others. It could be that his approach to the writing of poetry goes to make the poem mysterious, even obscure and I must admit here that obscurity has been a label applied to much of my work. However one feels that if this type of poem has an appeal, then it does contain the seeds of the poem's own interpretation' . <sup>(2)</sup>

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My purpose in quoting the two passages from the poet's article is to throw some light on the artistry and meaning of his poetry through his own words.

Relationship has its lion's share in obscurity.

Now, I must come to the romantic element in this great poem 'Relationship'. In fact, 'romantic agony' runs through all the twelve sections of this poem. This is Jayanta Mahapatra's 'Song of myself and My Orissa.'

In fact, he did not want to write poems like Keats, Shelley and Coleridge who 'had stuck to his mind'. Partly he did succeed in doing so with his quest for modernity in Poetry.

But the theme of Relationship: 'Theme Song of my life' caught him in the magic web of romantic agony. The restlessness of his Christian psyche is revealed through his search for Identity and a kind of search for his roots in the ancient land of Kalinga, -now Orissa.

To know this crisis we must have a closer look at the two poems Myth and Grandfather published long before the publication of his Relationship.

Since his birth he must have remained satisfied with the illusion that the Glory of Orissa's Cultural Heritage belonged to him, as much as it belonged to any other person in Orissa.

But 'the saffron - robed bearded- Hindoo Priest' gives his psyche a deathblow- when he asked him firmly- Are you a Hindoo? (Myth) And from this moment he began to ask his motherland- Orissa, a pertinent question- 'who am I ?'<sup>9</sup>

In the first section of Relationship after invoking the forbidden Myth-the phallus of enormous stone' and the hidden springs of Mahanadi', he projects his ancestors 'twelve hundred artisans of stones, messengers of the spirit, artless brown flowers in passion to the night in humble brotherhood aerial roots of a centuries- old banyan tree; not taking lives seriously for our lives are only of the seeds of dreams, forgetting the cruelties of ruthless emperors who carved peaceful edicts on blood-red rock, forgetting our groans and cries, the smells of gunsmoke and smoldering flesh, forgetting the tactics and strategy that led to the founding of the infinite distance inside our watery skulls'. (Relationship 10)

Here he identifies himself with these 'artisans of stone' who built the beautiful Sun Temple at Konark. They are noble souls who have forgotten 'the cruelties of the ruthless emperor like Ashoka the Great who killed thousands of Oriya soldiers in the great battle of Kalinga on the bank of the river Daya .



Immediately after this in the same section, he introduces his other ancestors: 'those maritime ancestors /who have vanished in the Black Bay without a trace/ that only live in the sound of waves/ flinging themselves on to the dark fringes/ of the land from Chilika to Chandipur'. (Relationship p. 10)

The creative artist wants to reveal the sufferings and the great sacrifices they have made to make Orissa a land of great Culture, Art, Religion and History. Then the poet is restlessly moving back and forth to find out the mouth of the Mother Earth to hear their story from her: 'as I continue walking back and forth/ not knowing whether the earth would let me find finally its mouth/ only that the stones were my very own/ waiting as mother or goddess or witch/ as though on empty dugs of sorcerous thought'. ( Relationship p.11)

Thus the poet tries to mix his personal grief and agony with the agony of his nameless brown ancestors: the soldiers killed in the war of Kalinga, the twelve hundred artisans in stone and the maritime ancestors guarding the Eastern coast of Orissa who lost their lives in the Black Bay during the reign of the Ganga Dynasty Kings.

Here we find how Jayanta Mahapatra follows the creative experiment of Walt Whitman who says in his " Song of Myself " : 'I do not ask the wounded person how he feels - I myself become the wounded person.'<sup>(4)</sup>

So, in Relationship personal grief , agony and the romantic agony of the imagined ancestors mix and mingle-so do History and Autobiography of the poet. The dramatic setting created for those ancient, nameless warriors, soldiers and sailors gives this poem a dramatic quality. Those characters begin to speak like the Canterbury women in T.S. Eliot's Play - The Murder in the Cathedral.

On the eve of his accepting the National Sahitya Academy award for Relationship the poet uttered those words: "To Orissa, to this land in which, my roots lie and lies my past, and in which lie my beginning and end---- I acknowledge my debt and relationship'.

Jayanta Mahapatra with his 'sharpened sensibility and powerful imagination' creates a dream-like world of his own in which 'his ancestors' begin to reveal their agony before our mind's eye.

Like S.T. Coleridge, he builds 'that dome in air' ( Kubla Khan). The glorious past of Orissa. its land and its people, its culture, history and traditions become alive in his dream world - Relationship.

Mahapatra's sympathies are with those nameless brown ancestors who suffered under the ruthless emperors like Ashoka.

Though Ashoka the Great was filled with remorse and suffered a change of heart after the bloody battle of Kalinga, the poet does not forgive him. He does not show any respect for the great edicts of the Buddhist Emperor Ashoka.

It is hard to tell now  
what opened the skies  
how the age-old proud stones  
lost their strength and fell  
and how the waters of Daya  
stank with the bodies of my ancestors;  
my eyes close now  
because the fear that moves my skin;  
the invaders walk along the only road they know  
that leads to their bloody victories. (Relationship P. 14)

Here the poem which began with the personal agony rises to the level of universal tragedy of Mankind. Then begins the spiritual crisis of Jayanta Mahapatra in this poem.

Burden of your peace father  
Theme- song of my life that burns my tongue  
I want to finish my prayer that began  
like a thin rustling in a mango tree,  
a prayer to draw my body  
out of a thousand years  
and reflect the earth's lost amplitudes. (Relationship pp. 18-19)

In section seven, images of Christ and Buddha appear before us as if surrounded by a dense fog. Then the agony of his soul is revealed through the following lines:

'the wooden soldiers marching , not knowing where,  
in my thick insomnia to beat the drums  
heralding the periodic invasions of the enemy  
into the vanquished city'. ( Relationship p. 25)

The cruelties of the emperors appear to him in his recurring dreams 'like the wooden soldiers marching not knowing where'. The army of wooden soldiers symbolically represents the lot of common men ( the puppets in the hands of their rulers )like his ancestors under the ruthless kings and emperors.

His sympathy for the common men ( proletariat) and his wrath against the emperor Ashoka ( the establishment) reveal Jayanta Mahapatra's Marxist

attitude to history. The Emperor Ashoka represents the ruthless power that crushes, poor, helpless human beings all over the world. They are mere puppets ( the wooden soldiers) in the symbolic dream.

Jayanta Mahapatra ends this great poem with the following lines. We find the poem has given him a kind of relief from the crisis with which the poem began: Fears of my guilt, I bid you farewell.

Is anything beyond me that I can not catch up?  
Tell me your names, dark daughters.  
Hold me to your spaces  
In your dance is my elusive birth, my sleep  
that swallows the green hills of the land  
and the crows that quicken the sunlight in the veins.  
and the stone that watches my sadness fly in and out  
of my deaths, a spiritless soul of memory. ( Relationship P. 38) □

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Jayanta Mahapatra - A profound thinker and reformer:  
An appraisal of his select poems

\* Dr. S. Ambika

Indo - English poets see things with clinical clarity and present their findings with razorblade finish and sharpness. Like the poets who write in the various regional languages, the Indo- English poet too has loved India almost idolatrously , he has thirsted for freedom, and after freedom came, he has also been acutely conscious of the evils in our political, economic and social life. Many an Indo- English poet is agonizingly aware of the human predicament in India, and he swears by men more than by God, and swears at the exploiter, the shirker and the perverter. The humanism of Ezekiel, Moraes , Lal, A.K. Ramanujan and Jayanta Mahapatra has given us eyes and ears, and imported an edge and tone to Indo - English poetry.

Jayanta Mahapatra began writing poems rather late in comparison with his contemporaries. His early poems dealt with love and love's selfishness. They celebrated not only passion, the body's spacious business, but consistently evoke a melancholic atmosphere rent with absence, fears, foreboding and sufferings. But in his later poems we find Mahapatra slowly and steadily releasing himself from the fabric of love and involving himself more with the humanistic aspects of life and death and other succulent chambers of living. As a creator of an intensely meditative, introspective, dialectical hyper - serious poetry, Mahapatra can certainly be called the second generation of modern Indian poets writing in English.

Mahapatra's poetic muse is his individual world and the poet is unrepentant, as he feels that his poems are for himself and then for the reader, As he himself says, "I wanted to make sense of the life which lay in fragments before me, I was urged to seek answers of myself, testing my feelings by striking them against the fabric of the poem I knew I must write" (5). Herein lies Mahapatra's tantalizing appeal in shaping his individualistic thought process. His poems seldom exhaust themselves as verbal icons translating into multiple layers of meaning. Mahapatra presents a constantly changing skyline in his poems and he creates a poetic cosmos that is unmistakably Indian.

Mahapatra is a skilled and conscious craftsman who churns out his images and symbols so thoughtfully that they occupy the center stage of his poetry enhancing him to express even the inexpressible in a lucid way. 'Silence'

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is a prime and poignant symbol that reigns through most of his poems. Silence is symbolic of our alienation from human concerns. Our selfish activities impose silence on us. In consequence we turn into 'traitor and beggar' and disappear from the face of the earth 'nameless, faceless, voiceless atmosphere'.

Mahapatra uses silence as his natural device to convey the actual message as it offers unity of meaning in spite of its unlimited scope. Ayyappa Panicker notes in this connection, "Silence, incidentally, is a word that gets endlessly separated one might say consecrated, in Mahapatra's poems" (103). Mahapatra's poem "Hunger" is the best example of where just one word 'silence' sums up his entire agony:

My mind thumping in the fiesta's sling  
Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in  
Silence gripped my sleeves; his body clawed at the froth  
His old nets dragged up from the seas. (191)

The poverty and human degradation both of which shocked him at first and saddened him and had later silenced him most eloquently. The word 'Hunger' itself symbolizes and exposes myriad meanings to the readers. It stands for the sexual hunger, materialistic hunger and of course, spiritual hunger. As a sling supports a fractured arm the instinctive feelings of the skin helps the poet to fight back the apprehensions of the mind. Redemption from his sins perhaps lay in burning the house that he lived. Panicker avers thus, "The young man does not speak; even the fisherman speaks in a matter of fact tone which has the ominousness of silence" (132). The fisherman's net had froth from the sea. Perhaps it may be symbolic of the fact that wrong doings may leave apparent traces behind. Being a sensitive and keen observer of the society the poet poignantly brings out the societal ills and illusions through this poem, which exposes the atrocities of the illegal avenues of flesh trade centers where morality is compromised by poverty.

Mahapatra uses 'silence' to avoid camouflaging and his moral anguish finds full expression in 'silence' to intensify his meaning. As the poet himself says, "A silence of inevitability which could be more eloquent, more meaningful to the writer of words" (10). His poem "Rain Sense" suggests the value of human inwardness thus, "Through the habitual possessiveness of a pointless silence/ You learnt only to impersonate" (95).

Apart from being a profound thinker, Mahapatra also showcases himself to be a true deep ecologist, who is always concerned about the symbiotic

relationship between man and nature. His "Rain Poems" vividly exposes his belief in this mystic bond. Rain symbolized clarity and wisdom. It is a symbol of an eye opener to the reality of our existence, "Piled up to their silences / It quietly opens the door" (184). Ayyappa Panikar points out the significance of the rain symbol thus, "In Mahapatra's 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" (133). Nature's healing power is revealed in his "Rain Sense" where the poet compares water to, "a long tongue of tireless priests / that will not fail to lick your palms / of guilt and atonement" (88).

Landscape and locale form another important aspect of his poetry that adds local colour to his words. Places like Puri, Konark, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar form as it were a quadrangle in the landscape of his poetry. His poem "Dawn at Puri" is one such poem that focuses on the importance of Puri, the sacred place of Lord Jaganaath, the presiding deity of Orissa. Despite his Christian upbringing one can identify his impartial and objective perception with which he viewed the Hindu myths and rituals that runs beautifully through his descriptions, carrying a deluge of thought for the readers:

Endless Crow noises  
A Skull on the holy sands  
tilts its empty country towards hunger.  
White - Clad widowed women  
past the centers of their lives  
are waiting to enter the great Temple. (190)

Mahapatra's picturesque description and poetic exploration of the places to which he belongs, turn out to be a search for the self. He identifies himself and his poetic craft so close with his place as he says in his "Somewhere, my man":

A man does not mean anything  
But the place  
sitting on the river bank throwing pebbles  
into the muddy current  
a man becomes the place. (176)

A humanist to the core, Mahapatra fails not to portray female figures in their bare reality in his poems. Women come through suggestive forms and different figures like wife, daughter, beloved and whore in his poetry. John Oliver Perry traces the transformations she undergoes in the early volumes:

She appears deeply transformed as a "you" who neither self nor other, neither actual nor merely imaginary – a darkly disappearing, persistently female phantasm who takes symbolic and suggestive forms from passing prostitutes or absent and silent divinities. (60)

Women are often portrayed as silent, distant, tortured, enigmatic and deceptive beings in his poems. And through them the poet leads us to a silence of guilt and burden. His poem "Hunger" pictures the poverty-stricken, under-nourished women being exploited for money by their own kith and kin.

I heard him say: My daughter, She's just fifteen  
Feel her. The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wife  
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.  
She opened her worn legs wide. I felt hunger there. (192)

From prostitution the poet moves on to talk about murder and gang rape effected by heartless men where women become helpless victims. His "Bewildered Wheat fields" makes it explicit, "Now a man knows only two ways / for dealing with a stray woman / he rapes her and he kills her" (38). In another poem "Slum" he poignantly portrays the pathetic condition of women being exploited for the sexual hunger of men, the 'pain and plain despair' of them thus :

And I turn around  
to avoid my fiery eyes in the glass; there stands  
only a lonely girl, beaten in battle, all mine,  
Sadly licking the blood from my crazed smile. (195)

Mahapatra is overwhelmed and he bleeds as he witnesses the curse that has befallen on young women waiting to get married, in the form of dowry. As a result she has been destined to end up her life and being a true reformer of social evils, Mahapatra in one of his poems "Temple" explodes thus:

Between the cynical smile  
and the half-drawn stare,  
she learns to chasten the vision of her death,  
surrounded by the rough noose.  
She simply fuses into a pale, thick smile,  
a faceless shell and a beach. (197)

Mahapatra, thus focuses on the need to sensitise the readers to the frustrating subtleties of life and tries to unravel its mysteries to them. In his article "Piercing the Rocks: Silence to Poetry" he says, "Life teaches us much. Yet a lot of life remains uncovered. The fundamental question of why life began;

why it is going to die, is what we are finally left with" (13). The greatness and ingenuity of Mahapatra's poetry thus rest on his systematized orchestration of authenticated experiences through the exact palpability of images, the sincerity of harping on the 'feel' and 'thought' of the experiences and of course, on the richness and sophistication of his language. □

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#### Important Notice

Our Jan. - June 2012 issue will be a special issue on Manoj Das, the noted story-teller. Papers on the works of Manoj Das (in both hard & soft copy) are invited by October 2011.

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A SPECTRUM OF LANDSCAPES IN THE POETRY OF  
MAHA PATRA AND DARUWALLA

\* Dr. R. P. Lokhande

The 1970s witnessed the arrival of K.N.Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Adil Jussawalla, Jayanta Mahapatra and Arun Kolatkar. These poets presented Indian landscapes, some times in a highly personalised or at the other times focusing on specific regions and communities. The contemporary socio-political realities also figure in the poetry of these poets, with which they construct their own identity. The assertion of Indian identity seems to be the major theme in the poetry of the seventies. This naturally refers to the cultural moorings. The poetry in seventies is urban in character, with the exception of K. N.Daruwalla and Jayanta Mahapatra.

Bruce King (1992: 128) comments on the trend of the poetry in 1970s and 1980s: Indian poetry in the later 1970s and 1980s began to take some more representative, larger ambitions and go beyond the individual self to a greater concern with its environment, with the poet's communal identity and its place within the national culture. There were more poems about specific locales, poems about the community in which one was raised, poems which took matters on cultural heritage or were criticism of the concern with the self and its way of perceiving reality.

In the light of the above comment, it is interesting to study the poetry of Mahapatra and Daruwalla as it deals with specific locales and the poet's communal identity. The present paper makes an attempt to explore the theme of landscape handled by these two poets.

Jayanta Mahapatra is firmly rooted in the Orissan soil. Places like Puri, Konark, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar etc. find mention through several of his poems. Legends, history and myths associated with these places immensely interest Mahapatra and form the nerve centre of his poetry. He wrote a number of poems on Puri (the great place of Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Orissa) one of the four great sacred places of pilgrimage of the Hindus of India.

In these two poems titled, 'Dawn at Puri' and 'Main Temple Street, Puri' Mahapatra underlines the importance of Puri and what it means to Hindus in our country. Widows long for breathing their last at Puri lest they should attain salvation. As the poet puts it:

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her last wish to be cremated here  
twisting uncertainly like light  
on the shifting sands. (1976: 28)

Since the temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri 'points to unending rhythm', dying in this place will take one to Silence, the ultimate desire of a human being which will enable him to attain nirvana. In another poem titled 'The Temple Road, Puri', Mahapatra describes the 'Stream of common men' on the road to the temple and the form of their prayer. Thus the poet says:

Later,  
as the shrine's of light  
slowly close their eyes,  
something reaching into them  
from that place they learn to bear  
the lame lamp post  
to the huge temple door,  
the sacred beads in their hands  
gaping  
at the human ground. (21)

The devotion to the deity makes the devotees humble as they seem to hear his message and begin to understand it. Sense of universal brotherhood overwhelms them and the heart gets purified. Mahapatra's poetic exploration of the places to which he belongs turns out to be a search for the self. A sense of belonging to the places of his land of birth and to the landscape of his state urges upon the poet to relate it to his poetic craft as is shown in the following lines:

A man does not mean anything  
But the place  
Sitting on the river bank throwing pebbles  
into the muddy current,  
a man becomes the place. (1976: 42)

There is as it were, a correspondence between the landscape of a region and the religious faith of the people living there. The landscape of place around the poet is the parameter of his life and faith and perhaps unalterable as his own body. Thus the landscape is in a way an extension of a person's physical self.

Like Puri, Konark, Bhubaneswar and Cuttack are also important places for Mahapatra as they embody the tradition of ancient Orissa and her heroic past. Poems like 'Indian Summer Poem', 'Evening in an Orissa village',

'The Orissa poems', 'The Indian Poems', 'the Indian way' reveal his typical Indian sensibility. Mahapatra has rightly stated his view while receiving the National Akademi of Letters Award in the following words.

To Orissa, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which lies my beginning and my end, where the wind kneels over the grief of the River Daya and where the waves of Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Konark, I acknowledge my debt and my relationship.'

As V.A. Shahane (1984: 144) has observed that "the main focus of his poetic creativity seems to be centered on the 'naked earth' and the mythological, symbolistic or aesthetic structures firmly rooted in that 'naked earth' of which Orissa and India form a significant part." The search for roots is a trend in modern Indian English poetry which Mahapatra shares with A. K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy. Mahapatra's Central Sahitya Akademi Award Winning book, Relationship is in a way a quest for Mahapatra's roots. "This poem is no collection of mere observation, a place here, a character there, an un strenuous meditation or two, inevitable landscapes, but a determined integrated set of selections built into the theme. For the poet the Orissan landscape is the objective setting of his mental evolution, the phases of which get mixed up with the lyrical vocabulary of a humanist creed. The poem being set in Orissa embodies the myth and history of the land. As the conflicting principles of man and nature, history and autobiography and faith and suffering interact against the vast panorama of Orissan landscape, the poem shows a dialectical progression where every synthesis in further analysis turns into a thesis." (1986:40)

The heroic Oriya past is vividly remembered and recalled with a sense of nostalgia. The glory and pride of our ancestors exhibited in the climatic Kalinga War in 261 B.C. which turned Ashok the Great into a deeply religious man is now a long lost trait in our racial character. The river Daya is a witness to our ancestor's heroic effort which has become a sort of myth for us. Once heroic and militant race is no more than mere memory now for its successors proved to be unworthy of keeping the glory of their ancestors afloat and drifted away from their ideals. Thus, Mahapatra notices a sharp contrast in the descending order between the past and the present marking an overwhelming decline in values of life in our time. The following passage makes it amply clear:

It is hard to tell now  
What opened the anxious skies  
how the age old proud stones  
lost their strength and fell

and how the waters of Daya  
stank with the bodies of my ancestors  
my eyes close now  
because of the fear that moves my skies. (1982: 14)

The poet's life is integrated with the heroic tradition of the land of his birth and as he becomes conscious of it, his heart throbs and a kind of unknown fear engulfs him. The landscape of Orissa moves him when he observes the annual migrating birds from far North Siberia to the warm waters of Chilika, a beautiful lake in Orissa. The agony of the poet springs from the fact that while the birds and animals react naturally to the seasons of the year, he is cut off as it were from the heroic traditions of his ancestors. He tells that 'I can never come alive/if I refuse to consecrate at the altar of my Origins' and thus 'a prayer to draw my body out of a thousand years'. There is a sense of nostalgia which pervades the atmosphere of the poem. Cuttack, a city of historical importance, which had the great Barabati Fort, is now a symbol of 'vanquished dynasties'. A sense of belonging overwhelms the poet and in a voice charged with emotion he tells us:

Now I stand among these ruins  
waiting for the cry of a night bird  
from the river's far side  
to drift through my weariness  
listening to the voices of my friends  
who have become the friends of others  
writing poems, object and anxious  
in rooms which reek of old folk,  
of their sloth and arthritis and neglect,  
like state cupboards which are going black  
with the smells of the rancid fat of the past. (1982: 24)

There seems to be a need for pilgrimage to the 'Living Oriya Past' in order to recognize the present and lead a meaningful life by imbibing spirit of the glorious past and tradition of the land. Mahapatra underlines this aspect emphatically in course of an article in *The Literary Criterion*.

In some of Mahapatra's poems Indian landscape, seasons and environment become the starting point giving his imagination a freeplay to reflect on his private moments of desire, despair, guilt and illumination. The poems which belong to this category are 'Dawn', 'Village', 'Oldplaces', 'Summer', 'A Twilight Poem', 'Appearance', 'Silence', 'Indian Summer Poem', 'Evening',

'Evening Landscape by the River', 'The Captive Air of Chandipur-on-Sea', 'A Country', 'An October Morning', 'The Wind', and a few others. The landscape often reminds the poet of our past glory and the dead who had once inhabited the place. Thus the poet writes:

The cries of fishermen come drifting through the spray,  
music of what the world has lost. (1983: 1)

This is the kind of sadness which closed the eyes.

Here the memory for faces of the dead never appears. (2)

In both these poems the past is recalled through fishermen who are lively characters in Mahapatra's poetry. Landscape is vital to the understanding of his poetry, for it enables Mahapatra to portray the inner reality by making allusion to it. Reality when apprehended through the landscape not only becomes gloomy but poignant which moves us. As the poet puts it:

Sometimes at night when all voices die  
My mind sees the earth, my country  
to ~~accept~~ ~~sacrifice~~.....

.....  
wherever I try to live,  
in pious pretence at Puri  
or in the fiery violence of a revolutionary  
my reason becomes a prejudiced sorrow  
like socialism.  
And not understanding myself,  
not understanding you,  
like the still strange shapes of hills in the distance,  
I too, listen to the far away wailing of hyenas  
aware of the dying countryside around them,  
tortured by hunger and the reek of decay in the air  
after the age-old myths have been told all over again. (29)

Thus landscape has a great significance in Mahapatra's poetry so far as it enables the poet to search for his own self in order to understand the world in its proper perspective. The landscape also helps the poet to alleviate his suffering.

I would forget the causes of suffering, mine and others,  
to justify my evening's spirit, searching the landscape  
for the leaf's green, the stone's ochre,  
for what I would not make of myself. (1976: 37)

Sun and moon, dawn and dusk, day and night, heat and dust, mountains and sea, river and hills, sky and earth all are incorporated into the texture of his landscape poetry in his effort to depict the predicament of modern man in an irreligious milieu. He is not a romantic poet to sing songs in praise of the beauty of nature. He is realist who sees life against the backdrop of landscape but does not run away.

Daruwalla shows an equally sharp awareness of the landscape around him. The entire *Crossing of Rivers* (1976) is landscape poetry. It is Varanasi landscape with its socio-religious implications as the concern of the poet and this is brought to notice through the metaphor of Ganga which helps Indians discover their age-old spiritual identity. To Daruwalla, as to Naipaul, Hindu India is a land of darkness and despair with its passivity, fatalism and meaningless rituals; but, nevertheless, it is certainly a real, concrete India which emerges in his poetry and the vision that is projected is of the spiritually strong rational and integrated India.

Daruwalla's poetry stems directly from life around him. His use of landscape gives typically Indian flavour to his poetry. According to the poet's own admission, his poems are rooted in the rural landscape. His landscape is usually related to the vast countryside of North India, with its widespread network of rivers, hills, plains and pastures. Where it is not merely decorative, it asserts its presence on the mind and heart of the reader. The poet (1980: 21) writes: "My poems are rooted in landscape which anchors the poem. The landscape is not merely there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination. It would be the eye of the spiral, I try that poetry relates to the landscape, both on the physical and on the plane of the spirit." In *Crossing of Rivers*, there are a number of poems on landscape such as - "Boat-ride along the Ganga", "Nightscape", "Vignettes I, II and III", "The River-Silt", "Crossing of Rivers" and "Varanasi". The scene is invariably laid in Varanasi, the holy city of the Hindus and the central metaphor is the Ganga, which epitomizes the immemorial religious and emotive feelings associated with the river. The river's rhythm is akin to the cyclic renewals of life and death, of birth and rebirth. It flows swollen with its own momentum and, in consequence, becomes a fertility symbol; its function is not to lighten the human misery but to show it. But in and around it are all the signs of stagnancy, the tonsured heads, the fossilized anchorites, the tattooed harlots and the dead who are brought to it shrouded in the anonymity of white.

It is the poet's coming to terms with the environment and its ancient culture that holds the collection together. The three parts - "The Waterfront",

"Crossing of Rivers" and "In My Father's House" in the collection focus on human misery and murkiness due to religious rituals and customs in Varanasi. The criticism of degenerated religious environ in Varanasi leads one to self-scrutiny and through it self-discovery. The social concern rich with irony and satire has the purpose to present the Ganga of the past and the present. The poet is very much concerned about the spiritual decay due to material onslaught on Varanasi environment.

The first poem in the collection, "Boat-ride along the Ganga" exposes the worn-out Hindu customs and rituals and their so called custodians. The Ghat which is described here is not just a panoramic river-side scene, but a part of the poet's integral 'inscape'.

The opening lines of the poem are evocative :

Filling into a motor-boat at dusk  
We scour along the waters upstream.  
Slowly the ghat-amphitheatre unfolds  
Like a diseased nocturnal flower in a dream  
that opens its petals only at dusk. (11)

The ghat or the bank is compared to an open theatre which gives a commanding view of the perpetual drama enacted in the river. Here, the viewers are in the boat and watch the drama on the ghats. The experience reveals the weird sights and scenes alongside the Ganga. A kind of gloom or emptiness which is caused by a sudden loss of sensation or consciousness develops in the narrator when a Panda attracts his attention for the details of holy place. Pandas are self-styled priests who act as guides to the pilgrims at holy places. But here, the Panda's legend hardly interests him. The narrator writes:

I listen avidly to his legend-talk  
Striving to forget what I chanced to see:  
The sewer-mouth trained like a cannon  
on the river's flank (11)

The speaker's attention is actually focused on the mouth of the giant-sized sewer which spews all the city's sewage into the river. The Panda's legend hardly interests him, but it is temporary escape from the disgusting sight of the pollution flowing into the sacred river whose waters are believed to dissolve all sins and pollutions. His deep sense of hygiene is jolted by the ugly sight.

It is ironic again that when the Pandas keep talking about the merit or 'punya' which one earns, the narrator ruminates over death which is everyone's final fate. The burning ghats keep reminding him of his final stage of the drama

of one's life. Here as everywhere else in the poem, the subjective responses are more dominant than the actual sights described. It clearly indicates his sense of involvement. Everything seems to lead ultimately to self-discovery and self-analysis. The images- the burning pyres, the heat-haze, the objects shimmering, and finally the flesh and substance burning behind a veil of fire-seem to work out the spiritual disillusionment of the speaker.

The ending of the poem is significant. The poet ironises the social reality and thus makes the Hindus aware of the spiritual quality of the place Varanasi. He writes:

Dante would have been confused here  
Where would he place this city  
In paradise or Purgatory, or lower-down  
Where fires smoulder beyond the reach of pity?  
The concept of the goddess baffles you-  
Ganga as mother, daughter, bride.  
What plane of destiny have I arrived at  
Where corpse- fires and cooking fires  
burn side by side? (12)

What we get here is the explicit expression of the vision of despair which is indicated in the beginning of the poem. The place has the characteristics of neither Purgatory, nor even the burning hell. Even Dante would have found it difficult to categorize a place like this. The speaker has little belief in the myth of Ganga being a goddess who has the power to wash away all sins and redeem mankind. The ugly sights which he sees on the banks of the sacred river lead to disillusionment with all the grand images built of the Ganga by the age-old myths and legends. Here, the strange juxtaposition of the fires of cremation and cooking fires baffles the speaker. The Ganga ghat is a place where cooking fires cannot be lit if there are no corpse fires, for the people live on death, earning their livelihood by assisting those who have to cremate their dead. Both in this poem and in the sequence, Danuwalla has pictured Varanasi as an once spiritual city now reduced to a prototype of all corrupt cities. He brings to notice the religious rituals associated with the river and fits present degenerated condition of these rituals. All this leads to self scrutiny, self-discovery of the poet and the Indians in general. Doubtless the journey ends in disillusionment, but leads to discovery of one's country and one's one self.

The city once again comes in for severe criticism in 'Nightscape':

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As the night grows older  
 ... flesh turns to carbon on the ghats  
 ... ..  
 Is this a ridge  
 black with pine  
 rising out of the mists  
 or a city of the dead  
 brooding over a ghostscape? (13)

Stationed in the holy city of the Hindus, Varanasi, and rowing over the river Ganga, the poet keenly observes the night, the dawn and the day and the dusk changing their faces. The impression of decay is progressively evidenced by such pictures as "flesh turning to carbon on ghats", the river being "dark as gangrene", "strained necks of temples rising above mist-scarves", "temple-spires", "cypress-dark rendering the waterfront ethereal". The imagery of light and darkness effectively helps to show how the entire city is turned into a necropolis populated with ghosts. Thus Varanasi, the city of God the creator, is seen also as the city of Death the destroyer.

Further, the three "Vignettes" present striking images of death, disease and destruction, although "the Ganga flows swollen with hymns" (16). These "Vignettes" are conceived as three stages of the voice within. 'Vignette F' is composed of a series of images interspersed with reflections on the city of Varanasi and its holy river. The sad lot of humanity colours the poet's imagination "grey" and he notices a sort of vacuity in human lives :

The river is a voice  
 In this desert of human lives  
 and again:  
 Beggars hoist their deformities  
 As boatmen hoist their sails (16)

At the Ganga's bank assemble beggars and lepers-poverty and disease adding to the misery of our people. The Ganga does not mitigate human miseries or sufferings. It only "shows" them, exhibits them to public gaze. In "Vignette II'", the sights and sounds are no longer pleasant, as they formulate a collage of the tonsured head, spider-thread rituals, the pinddars, kites hanging in the air. The poet laughs at the rituals. The spiritual disillusionment is worked out through the images - 'chanting of gayatri', 'shaved head and the pinddan' and 'sandal paste and mantra'. Even a visit to the 'Panchtirth' does not help one shake out stupor. And the poet ironically says:

Women do not take off their saris  
As they enter the water;  
Men leave their clothes behind  
The dead leave the bodies (18)

That the dead leave their bodies as men leave their clothes behind is an accepted Hindu thought. Man's soul never dies; it simply changes its form. This spiritual philosophy is placed ironically along with a very matter-of-fact detail. The poet's impression of the river is:

Only the river doesn't speak here.  
She is thought itself,  
A soundless interior monologue (17)

Thus the river Ganga is a comment on the present degenerated spiritual stagnancy. The poet rightly points out how the river Ganga is drifted away from its original sanctity and now snared by the mere rituals and mantras. The personal response of the poet develops through the mute river. The poet uses the river as a symbol of human predicament. The poem shows Daruwalla's return to the mainstream of Indian way of thinking and Hindu Philosophy.

In "Vignette II", the poet points out the fact of commercialisation and corruption at places of pilgrimages and Varanasi are part of it. The scene opens as:

In the street of the Lord  
the sepia teeth of pandas.  
In the street of virginity  
the raucous laughter of whores (19)

This is the reminder of the young woman of Khandoba in Arun Kolatkar's Jejuri, a murli whisking off a pilgrim-cum-prospective customer. The same is true of Varanasi. Here pandas, the priests exploit the pilgrims. This spiritual and physical corruption creates anguish in the mind of the poet. Varanasi, is a symbol of all cities in India:

All cities are the same at night  
When you walk barefoot  
Across their blistered backs. (20)

All the cities have "blistered backs". Here, the modern consciousness is directed to reassessment of the Hindu spirituality, the holiness associated with the Ganga. The metaphor of Ganga exposes the worn-out Hindu customs and rituals. All this has a purpose to reconstruct the Hindu identity with its sacred dimensions.

The self-discovery of the narrator is further traced in "The Dip". The protagonist in "Jejuri" and in Daruwalla's "Waterfront" reacts to the religious place with ironic tone but in a widely different way. Daruwalla's protagonist is a practising pilgrim. He is emotionally involved with the environment. Kolatkar's protagonist remains an ironic alien at Jejuri while Daruwalla's pilgrim basks in the rare experience of shaking off the shackles of sin, fear and disgust. There is a reassuring feeling of having been accepted by the Ganga, the mother:

I who came to feel her frozen paws  
find myself in her warm, dark heart (25)

This self-discovery strengthens the Indian identity of the poet.

The poem "Mother" reveals the poet's tender sentiments towards the Mother Ganga. Flowing through the ages she has grown old, brown, unglossy and has developed "a cataract" in her eyes. The poet feels her flow within himself:

Sleeping on your banks  
as you flow by  
I find you flowing within my body (29)

Here, the poet gives expression to every devout Indian's honest religious sentiment which, through such identification with the mother India, endows him with distinct national identity. Mother Ganga, the veritable Lokmata, the mother of the folk, has always been identified with India. R. Parthasarathy presents Vaikai in the similar adoring way.

River for Daruwalla also serves as the preserver of racial memory. In "River-Silt", Daruwalla claims that the 'collective layers of my psyche sleep here' and that the skulls will reveal to the future of the Indians "the racial memory/ of a nation preserved here."

The poet is here referring to the collective unconscious of the Indians which has Mother Ganga as a pervasive archetype. The earth-brown sacred river is linked up with the hoary history of the land. Though at present a sight of ugliness and squalour, it represents the continuity of the Indian racial memory. "Waterfront", despite the critical, ironical tone, awakens the Indians to self-discovery in the rich heritage of Hindu spirituality and the holiness of the Mother river.

"Crossing of Rivers" continues to be a hymn sung to the Ganga in general. The emphasis changes from external description to inwardness and reminiscences. The traditional tone of Bhakti for the river Ganga continues. The river landscape develops as the poet expressed his personal response to the changing course of the river. River seems to form an inseparable part of the

poet's life, continuing to cradle him in her waters from his childhood, through his early youth:

You row to the farther bank  
on a shell-boat  
paddling away with your father's arm.  
And when young blood  
courses along the heart-floor  
you take the plunge (37)

Then follows the symbolic narrative of a man who takes a sudden plunge into the undercurrents below the Ganga's placid waters, and a girl rescuing him followed by, an elaborate ritual performed on the banks of the river:

Why installing a mistress  
is like installing a deity in the house! (40)

On the banks of the Ganga everything is ritualized. The man installs the woman like 'a deity in the house'. After fifteen years of surfeit of senses while living together she begins to live the life of a nun. She whom he had 'deified' and who had "descended from the hills" and mingled with the waters of the Ganga in her onward march disappears from the scene in a most detached manner leaving behind her past and companion. As she has been a vagrant child of Nature, she does not want to be tied down to domestic and social responsibilities. That's how the course of life on earth is completed, but that's also how the eternal life cycle keeps on. This is suggested in the use of 'In every season/ comes a crossing of rivers' (37, 44) at the beginning and the close of this long poem. The "crossing of rivers" symbolically refers to the crossing of lives- the physical and the spiritual, the latter having precedence over the former- which is central to the Hindu way of thinking. The metaphor recalls to us the rich Indian cultural heritage.

Daruwalla's landscape develops on physical, human, and also spiritual planes. R. Parthasarthy (1976:12) rightly observes that there is "an obviously Indian element in Daruwalla's verse, especially in his use of the landscape." His social criticism is obviously directed at the realisation of cultural, spiritual regeneration which today's India needs very badly for reintegration and reconstruction.

Thus the varied landscapes depicted in the poems of these two poets rightly unfold the human condition with its typical regional colour and sensibility. They perceive the inner reality of life against the backdrop of landscape. The landscape themselves are not merely to set the scene, but to lead to an illumination. The superb handling of the aspects of landscape have offered broader dimension to their poetry. □

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Dr. Kusha Chandra Pradhan with Poet Jayanta Mahapatra  
at Chandrabhaga, Cuttack

## Jayanta Mahapatra's Influence on Meena Alexander

\* Deva Kumar Mahanta

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the best known poets in the field of Indian English poetry. He also writes in Oriya. He was born in 1928 in Cuttack, the city in which he spent the most of his life and time. He taught Physics at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack and retired in 1986. Though old, he is still active in his Cuttack home.

Mahapatra has authored eighteen books of poems. His important poetry volumes include *Relationship*, *Bare Face* and *Shadow Space*. He is the first Indian English poet to win the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for Indian English poetry in 1981 for his magnum opus *Relationship* (1980) before stalwarts like Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan and others were honoured with the award by the Akademi. Making a false start as a short story writer, Mahapatra hastily turned over to poetry and since then he has been developing in style, technique, theme, imagery and vision. His best works have been edited by P.P. Raveendran in 1995 as a collection entitled *The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra*. Over a period of more than thirty years from 1971 to 2008, Mahapatra has been writing volumes of verse consistently. His books are *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (Calcutta: Dialogue Publications, 1971), *Swayamvara and other poems* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1971), *A Father's Hours* (Calcutta: United Writers, 1976), *A Rain of Rites* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), *Waiting* (New Delhi: Sankaleen Prakashan, 1979), *The False Start* (Bombay: Clearing House, 1980), *Relationship* (New York: Greenfield Review Press, 1980), *Life Signs* (New Delhi: OUP, 1983), *Dispossessed Nests* (Jaipur: Nirala Publications, 1986), *Selected Poems* (New Delhi: OUP, 1987), *Burden of Waves and Fruit* (Washington DC: Three Constant Press, 1988), *Temple* (Sydney, Dangaroo Press, 1992), *The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra* (Calicut: Bodhi Publishing House, 1995), *Shadow Space* (Kottayam: D.C. Books, 2001), *Random Descent* (Bhubaneswar: J.E. Communications, 2005), etc.

In the first three collections of poetry, Mahapatra's chief concerns are earth, life and language (Mohan 31). The ancestral fear, the awkward despair, and the inadequacy of language to express the emotions have been the chief observation of the poet in these works. The forty nine short lyrics in the first volume of poems, *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (1971) are expressive of loneliness, love, absence, farewells, momentary impressions and generalized moods. Some titles of the poems are also expressive of the themes, e.g., *Death of Boy*, *The*

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Indian Eye, The Sanctuary, The Farewell, The Passing of the Friend's Wife, Sailing Back, and Inertia, etc. Thirty three poems of the second book entitled Swayamvara and other poems unravel many fold human relationships and suffering. The chilly effects of loneliness, the fear of death and many momentary impressions like the contents of the poems entitled "Morning", "Intimacy", "Bones", "Faith" and "Betrayal" dilate on the many fold associations or relationship and their resultant reactions. Mahapatra's early poetry enshrines the themes of the nature of childhood, his relationship with his father, his sexuality, his separateness from Hindu tradition and environment, an increasing social content (King 1986:10) and the place by which he closes the sky by a square of ten by ten (i.e. the deep rooted sense of belonging to his place of birth, which became his constant preoccupation).

The next four volumes of Mahapatra's works entitled A Rain of Rites, Waiting, The False Start and Relationship form the middle phase of his poetic growth, where the inscape of his vision depends into the solidity of his awareness of the race and place consciousness. Thus here he chiefly meditates on the tragic vision which emerges out of his surroundings where the stone made monuments crumble and crack. Many personal and other moments or events drag the persona into moods of despair. Hinting at the themes of the poems in the collection, A Rain of Rites, the blurb of the book contains the comments. "This is a collection of poems out of India by a voice authentic enough to survive from a land where everything endures while everything changes. Many of the poems deal with the deeper inner world of mysterious symbols, of people who settle down peacefully into a deep rooted underground tradition of their ancestors. Others are tradition of their ancestors. Others are about life renewing itself in an endlessly recurring cycle. There are poems about year's first rain that enters people's lives like happy ritual and poems about rivers and villager that are charged with a quite, sacred, content. In the poems of the book runs a graceful sense of motion. Of prospective and of time is revealed. The impact of time against timeless, of the sharply located present against the past, of waking against dream is depicted and behind the poem, a search for wholeness and identity which takes poetry into the realm of vision can be sensed." The poet's attachment to his land of birth is solidly projected in many of the poems of this collection. The poems like "Main Temple Street, Puri", "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street", "Dawn at Puri", "On the Bank of the Ganga, India" and references to places like Dhauligiri, Calangute and Annapurna. Gods and Goddesses like Black ikons (Shiva Linga), Kali, Clay Durga and Temple doors, Fair Brahmin

priest, dead grand father's face, expose some of the obsessions of the poet in this collection of poems where poet's chief motive is to acclimatize the English language to the Indian soil. The next collection of poems reveals his increasing concern with contemporary reality with all its social and political colours (1979, Blurb). A tragic consciousness pervades the poems in the collection. Here the poet is more meditative upon Puri, Konark, Bhubaneswar, and Cuttack- the religious, political, and cultural centres of Orissa.

A deft experiment with the varied images of the land, this volume of poems presents multiple visionary traces of Mahapatra's poetic quest. In the False Start the poet meditates on chiefly the previous themes of place and race consciousness, father's death, rain and door or window (which symbolizes faith, belief, tradition and knowledge). His magnum opus Relationship (1980) built on myth, history, and vision, relates the poet to his land of birth, its past and present. Relationship is a product of dreams, which has made the poet speak of the demands of a pilgrimage - a pilgrimage threatened by the living Oriya past, by nagging hunger and persistent sexuality. Here Mahapatra invokes the myths and the history of the land to find meaning in the present life. The poetic flight of Mahapatra in this book ranges from the time, Lord Buddha, sat in meditation under the peepal tree and Kalinga war to his birth at Cuttack where stands the great Barabati Fort, now a symbol of vanquished dynasties and his life there.

The later period in the poetic career of Jayanta Mahapatra shows development in style, technique, vision, themes and images. From a disillusioned romantic (Dutta 1986: 277) he develops into a career in writing in the post-modernist trend. During this period eight collection of his poems and two volumes of selected poems have been published. Life Signs (1983) exposes deep tragic conscience of the poet. The Dispossessed Nests (1986), centred on the chaotic condition of the Punjab situations and Bhopal Gas Tragedy. The Burden of Waves and Fruit (1988), is a collection of poems about many rivers, much rain and sun, long evenings and a few dawns. Occasional intimate glimpses of friends lovers, and a son, recalling Mahatma Gandhi, the ancestral fear and the inherent obsession with the soil of his birth are the chief concerns of the poet. The next volume of poetry entitled Temple represents a dream narrative on the theme of the plight of the Indian women.

Mahapatra's next collection A Whiteness of Bone contains fifty nine poems. In this collection the themes are not new but the same elegiac mood and his associations with places of his land of birth, contemporary events, rain,



father, the Mahanadi and concerns of many casual moods fill in the fifty nine poems. The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra (1995) edited by P.P. Raveendran is a collection of fifty eight poems selected from the twelve collections published before and a prose autobiographical fragment. In the introduction Raveendran tries to present how Mahapatra's poetry is a consistent act of decolonizing the English sensibility. In Shadow Space (1997) and Bare Face (2001), Mahapatra enters a new phase where the handling of language seems more refined and hieroglyphic. Mahapatra's 17th book Random Descent (2005) concerns with the reminiscence of the variety of themes and images chosen by the poet in his career. In the first section, the poet ruminates on the same old themes as he has been doing so far for over three decades of his career. In his quest for meaning of living, he is still arrested by the indecision, myth and stillness and is hopeful of a healthy air from it.

His mother's soul, palmistry and a girl's desires, Orissa's starvation twilight, stone, silence, Orissan landscape are prominent among his obsessions and concerns in his poetry. After several years Mahapatra speaks in a mystic's tone for finding a single transparent meaning of life:

If I seek an answer to our life  
It is because I see myself everywhere,  
all the time.  
But there is the hard old boatman  
Watching over the utter desert  
of his waters.  
The river flows without from intangible  
And when island on the shore that is not. (2005:75-76)

This is how Mahapatra in his poetry now-a-days turns a mystic against the tradition of Indian mysticism and several trend of mysticism of the land of his birth where flows a river of the conglomeration of various religious mysticisms.

Mahapatra is also a distinguished editor and has been bringing out a literary magazine, Chandrabhaga from Cuttack. The magazine is named after Chandrabhaga, a prominent river in Orissa. Besides being one of the most popular Indian poets of his generation, Mahapatra is also one of the trio of poets who laid the foundation of Indian English poetry. He shared a special bond with A.K. Ramanujan, one of the finest poets in Indian English poetry tradition. He has managed to carve a quiet, tranquil poetic voice of his own distinctly different from those of his contemporaries. His wordy lyricism combined with authentic Indian themes put him in a league of his own. He was conferred the Padma Shri

in 2009 and was awarded an honorary doctorate by Ravenshaw University on May 2, 2009.

Jayanta Mahapatra occupies a pivotal in Indian English poetry by influencing a number of poets of fame like Meena Alexander (1951), Bibhu Padhi (1951), Niranjan Mohanty (1953-2008), Prabhanjan K. Mishra (1952), etc. Mahapatra's influence on them is seen in their use of images. There is similarity in the affinity and visionary mood of Mahapatra and theirs. Meena Alexander (1951) is an internationally acclaimed poet, scholar and writer. She was born in Allahabad of a Syrian Christian family from Kerala, South India.

Alexander has been influenced specially by the Indian poet Jayanta Mahapatra. In a letter Mrs. Alexander writes "He (Jayanta Mahapatra) is a very fine poet, was a great inspiration to me, in my formative years as a poet." Meena's confession of Mahapatra's influence on her in her formative period convinces us that in some ways she was inspired by Mahapatra's art. Even in her *River and Bridge* (1995), Mahapatra's influence is discernible. In 1976, Alexander met Mahapatra at his Cuttack residence. As she writes in her chapter "Language and Shame" in *Fault Lines*, she learnt from Jayanta, a poet's bond with place and also the tragic vision of relating the ruins of the land and the ravages of time (1993:127). In *Fault Lines*, she says, "Through Jayanta, who had lived his whole life in Cuttack, I learnt to understand the poet's bond with place, learnt to understand how the elegiac voice could gather sustenance from the landscape around, learnt, too, how to accept the ravages of time".

To trace Mahapatra's influence on Meena Alexander, her following publication of verse may be concentrated. *The Bird's Bright Ring* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1976), *River and Bridge* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co. 1995). Like the other books of Meena in her first and the recent publication Mahapatra's influence is evident in themes, images, symbols and vision. A tragic vision and surrealist expression pervade Mahapatra's poems. The ruins of Konarka, the river Daya and the Kalinga war, the cruel emperor Ashoka turning into a kind lover of the humanity, father, mother, son, daughter, contemporary events and situations have been the main themes in Mahapatra's poetry. "Stone is central to Mahapatra's cosmogony", says Meena (1986 : 132). River, light, bone, reed, cradle and ruins recur as images and symbols in both Mahapatra and Meena's poetry. Like Mahapatra, Meena writes very precisely and surrealistically. Sometimes her symbols seem to be inexplicable because of her precise expression and swiftly changing moods. (Srivastava 1992 : 178). Meena has lived outside India for a long time, but India throbs in her heart even today. Like

Mahapatra she was perhaps not influenced by the charms or beauty of a particular Indian river but the river image recurs in her poetry. Described as a long poem by the poetess herself, *The Bird's Bright Ring* is dominated by a sad, melancholic strain, and it sings of the devastation of mortality and is carved out of "our breathing lamentation" (ibidem 25). It is Meena's expressionist experiment which is quite successful in capturing the timeless misery of mankind symbolized by the mother image of the poem (Srivastava 179). The following lines show the use of bone image in *The Bird's Bright Ring*:

Bones of light  
make cradle  
with the eyes  
of the pecking bird (10)

A female speaker, who may be identified with the poetess herself, narrates her random reflections on human conditions in the chaotic world of today and the reminiscences of her relationships with the supposed male listener, the 'Cactus man'. The 'Pecking bird' may be a symbol of dominating or exploiting human being. Cradle as a traditional symbol of seat or resort is used many times in the poem. The following stanzas show the use of river and mother images containing flowing lyric grace and idiosyncrasy: "He shows me / a river / of crystal / flowing / out of the throne / of the lamb / - - - - - / my mother / brilliant mother / he knows / I crawled / in the pitch / of the womb / feed me / with the rivers / of crystal / flowing." (13)

Like Mahapatra's poems on women and poetry, Meena addressing the woman of Delhi writes :

Women of Delhi  
You do not see how centuries of  
dream are flowing from  
your land  
and so I sing knowing poetry, to be  
like bread. (19)

These lines show Meena's rootedness to India. She likens poetry to bread. 'Centuries of dream' stands for the Indian treasure of knowledge which has been flowing to other continents of the world. The Indian winter surrounding has been described by her with personal note of intimacy.

Yesterday a winter afternoon  
we sat in the long  
grass wet with light  
under the shadows of the  
old ashoka tree (ibidem).

As Mahapatra writes about the British cemetery at Balasore (1980:70-71), Meena also in section XI of *The Bird's Bright Ring* writes about the British soldiers and the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

It was here the shadow fell  
the shadow of the British soldiers here  
they dragged their guns  
on the slope to the left of the Ridge  
1857 a cold bad winter and they  
broke our backs (19).

Expressions like "Stone mouth", "Red Stones of Kashmere Gate" (21), "Uncounted the stones / of that still city" (22) show use of stone images. The images of sorrows, sufferings of mother or mother-land have been given in the following lines:

With the veins of my hand  
I feel  
the voices the mother  
countless voices / ringing in / the dark (23)

And she sings:

Sing / O Singing Tree /  
into the devastation of mortality /  
For those born of the bruised mother (24)

Indian myths of sorrow of Sita, Kurukshetra war, the emperor Ashoka along with the western myths of Icarus and Ixion also have been enshrined in the section XV and this again reveals Meena's mythopoeic vision similar to that of Mahapatra :

Course course sorrow of Sita  
Salt in the open wound of heaven  
Icarus  
Ixion  
Patliputra  
City of Ashoka  
City without sorrow  
Chariots race to Kurukshetra. (29)

Meena's *River and Bridge* shows her better craftsmanship. Commenting on the poems of this volume, Jayanta Mahapatra writes "In these poems, dream and memory seem to be afloat in the unexceptional drift of things — a drift that effortlessly becomes the major concern expressed in poem

after poem. The poet's compassion for the welfare of her fellow beings is evident in this larger view of the world. She chooses to portray and "a tight control of line and image she exhibits, serves to reveal her deep wish to contribute to literature" (blurb). Even in these recent poems of Meena, Mahapatra's influence is more conspicuous. Lines like "brittle magnolias lift petals from abandoned traffic island" (3), an old stone wall / father's father raised (4), my mother's head in a sack / and ran three days and nights / through a rice field (6) echo Mahapatra's voice. In the poem entitled "Moloyashree" an Indian scene has been described with the images exposing a tragic expression at a paltry loss on a day:

I see stones and sticks  
 a child ships over  
 a woman beats a pan  
 scraping out burnt milk  
 stoops behind a torn curtain  
 crying, Ram, Sriram, Ram  
 Crickets flash in mounds of wheat (20)

Another tragedy takes place in her poetry in an animal world and here she takes the tragedy into her world of stone and her memory of the place of her race, i.e., Coromandel rock.

One Summer's day  
 I saw a heron  
 small and grey  
 blinded by an eagles claw  
 it dashed its head  
 against the Coromandel rock. (63)

Like Mahapatra's poetry of late 80's enshrining contemporary happenings with telling imagery, Meena's poems also give a picture of contemporary Indian turmoil as the following:

Hundreds of hacked to death in Ayodhya  
 in Ram's golden name  
 the fragile domes to Babri Masjid  
 beaten down as massacres begin (95)

Now a days Meena is writing on New York City, North American scenes, etc. As an Indian English poet writing under the influence of Jayanta Mahapatra, Meena has used maximum number of visual images in her poetry. She writes on varieties of themes and is very nostalgic of India as a Diaspora writer. □

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### Indian Ethos in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra

\* Dr. Kamala Prasad Mahapatra

As a major force in Indian English Poetry, Jayanta Mahapatra owes his poetic oeuvre to his native land India more specifically to the State of Orissa, where he is born. Cuttack, Puri, Bhubaneswar and Konark form a quadrangle, as it were, in his poetic landscape. Mahapatra's strength lies in his profound understanding that his creative personae is the byproduct of the socio-cultural heritage of the land of Orissa. The State of Orissa has unique Cultural tradition, that has made substantial contribution to enrich and glorify the Indian Culture.

Two aspects of Orissan Culture seem to stir Mahapatra's poetic sensibility. The eventful and glorious historical past, manifested in chivalry, heroism, art, architecture, sculpture, religion, patriotism and the tribal culture, agrarian economy, poverty and deprivation strike the innermost chord, at the rockbottom level of Mahapatra's heart. In Mahapatra's poetry we encounter the picture of a static and apparently unchanging society, that draws its sustenance from the ageold traditions, myths and legends. Mahapatra says, Orissa is a

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land of repose, of faith and dream, basking in the tropical sun caressed by the wind and the rain, its precious tranquility contained in its songs and its stones and pervading its social and cultural fabric. Each season unfolds the earth to its way of peace and the earth reveals its secrets again and again. Never and nowhere does Orissa make one feel alone. For agriculture is so closely bound to religion that it must needs give the people a purpose of life. So they can face themselves to bring them back to their earth (Orissa P-8).

Mahapatra's Poetry is unique in its dimension and is strikingly different from the poetry of his contemporaries in respect of theme. His contemporaries deal with themes of alienation, rootlessness, shattered beliefs and faiths. But Mahapatra's creative arena stems from his native land and its ethos. The land of Orissa is so passionately depicted in his poetry that it eventually becomes a potent symbol of mat areality in his poetry. Mahapatra is proud of the glorious past and rich legacy of Orissa and often regrets about the dismal State of the Present. He attempts to strike a balance between the past and the present and gratefully acknowledges the debt of the past that renders richness and significance to the present. Mahapatra is excited about the vast treasure of natural landscapes, the flora and fauna, rolling river valleys, seabeach, coastal plains, dense forests, changing cycle of seasons, dark clouds, lightning flashes, deafening thunder, incessant rains during the monsoon, farmers labouring in the Paddy fields the chants of mobile beggar, Brahmins in the summer, the white saree clad widows thronging Puri Jagannath temple in the month of Kartik for salvation, the smoke curling up on the thatched roof of clay walled huts of farmers in rainy season, the aroma of earth after the first rainfall during the monsoon, the multifarious nomadic birds in Chilika lake in the Winter, the countless temples and religious festivals. Orissa known as Kalinga Desa in ancient times had stretched its geographical boundaries from the Ganges to the Godavari and established itself as a force to reckon with, in maritime activities and the sea trade extended to Srilanka, Indonesia and the Phillipines.

A favourable seacoast with prominent ports such as Tamralipti, Paloura and Pithunda helped Kalinga in the establishment of a rich maritime trade. Control of these ports and trade routes could easily have been one of the reasons, why the emperor Ashoka invaded Kalinga....

The year 261 B.C denotes a bloody landmark in the history of Orissa. It is impossible to forget the carnage, the waters of the river Daya turning gory red with the blood of the dead. Ashoka silent about his campaigns and the fate of the royal lineage of Kalinga, has given vivid accounts of the horrors of the war, in

which one lakh and fifty thousand were taken prisoner, one lakh were slain and many times that number killed in the ensuing famine and pestilence. One can not but be moved, when one reads the Rock Edicts of Ashoka- not merely as a historical record but a dreadful tragic epic. (Orissa P- 12-13).

Mahapatra's poetry contains many references to this bloody war and Mahapatra lives that horrible experience, as if he were both the conqueror and the conquered. This instance of history descends into the poetic consciousness of Mahapatra as an intensely lived experience. Besides this, the Sun temple of Konark and the Lord Jagannath temple of Puri, the two monumental creations of superb architectural splendour and artistic marvel, evolving as perennial symbols of man's destiny, in all its rich complexity in the poetry of Mahapatra. The traces of the mysterious ancient tribal culture, especially the 'meria' or human sacrifice, the tantric cult and rituals too become an integral part of Mahapatra's Indian ethos and typical Oriya sensibility. Mahapatra's acute awareness about the socioreligious tradition of India is exhibited, when he makes reference to the prevalence of Beggary. Beggary is undoubtedly a social evil but the religious sanctions behind it, legitimizes it in India. Giving alms to the needy and deserving is considered a pious act, sacred duty. Legend has it that, even Lord Shiva had to go begging in retribution for having plucked one of the five faces of Lord Brahma. Moreover monks and ascetics live on charity and the begging bowl is an inseparable part of their lives. But of late the poet laments beggary is degraded under the cover of a "safe parasitic condition". The beggars, who are dependent on charity are considered as parasites, Even the donors no longer possess the religious feeling or mobility of heart. Ironically charity is practised often to cover up the illegal means employed in amassing wealth. Mahapatra's Poetry shows unmistakable evidence of religious symbolism, which develops into metaphors of man's eternal quest into the mysteries of life and Nature.

Orissan Culture has been influenced to a considerable extent by the aboriginal and it is common knowledge that folk and tribal elements are an integral part of Hindu ritual and living (Orissa P-32).

So the sociocultural heritage of Orissa is the driving force of Mahapatra's Poetry and it helps to unravel the mysteries of his poetic creation. It has been of course a long, untiring but an equally rewarding Journey towards self-revelation. This experience takes Mahapatra not only through the landscape of Orissa but to its very being, where beats the pulse of all that Orissa means and stands for:

My Romance with Orissa should have begun with my birth but I have little recollection of those early days. The period of my long memory begins on



a warm afternoon, when I was five: my father rushing into the house to hoist me into his arms and carry me to safety to the open grounds beside the 'Nanda Deula', the naked temple by the Kathajodi river, as the rumble of the earth slowly subsided. From then on my life has appeared to echo with the river's murmurs and the temple's bitter sweet bell. (Orissa P- 38).

If we seriously look into the background of Jayanta Mahapatra, it appears as if he is twice removed from his immediate surroundings. First he was born into a Christian family in a predominately Hindu society and second he wrote in an acquired medium, English, which was conventionally considered inadequate to encompass the cultural spirit of India. Yet the themes which dominate Mahapatra's poetry are related to such stark realities of India as hunger, poverty, myths, rituals, sexuality, spirituality, the self and eternity. His poetry, whether describing the locale, its environs and landscape or the relationship of his self to his land attempts to reflect an awareness of this milieu, Mahapatra evolves his form and vision of his poetry in the perspective of the locale, in terms of the images drawn from the geographical, social and cultural sources of his native land of Orissa. The place with all its ethos and myths, its lives and beliefs, superstitions and transitions has been the governing factor of Mahapatra's poetic vision and perceptions.

Unlike Mahapatra most of his contemporaries such as Nissim Ezekiel on the other hand, remains an alien throughout, Ezekiel is aware of the fact that his Jewish background makes him a 'natural outsider' in India, though he has come to accept India as his 'home'. Ezekiel's popular poem "Night of the Scorpion" is a pointer to the poet's neutral observation of the incident, although the victim of the scorpion-bite is none other than his own mother :

The peasants came like swarms of flies  
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times  
to paralyse the evil one...

May the sins of your previous birth  
be burned away tonight, they said  
may your suffering decrease  
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said...

My mother trusted through and through  
governing on a mat.  
my father sceptic rationalist  
trying every curse and blessing  
powder mixture herb and hybrid. (Night of the Scorpion)

One wonders whether the poet's nonparticipation and noninvolvement in the psychological makeup of dominant Hindu beliefs, like the theory of Karma, the cycle of birth, death, purgatorial suffering and salvation etc. is due to his roots not being in India both geographically and religiously.

Surya Nath Pandey quotes Ezekiel:

I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider: Circumstances and decisions relate me to India - I cannot identify myself with India's past as a comprehensive heritage to reject it as if it were mine to reject. I can identify myself with modern India. ( Pandey ).

Ezekiel's attitude reflects the typical response of an urbanised elite but lacks the vitality that springs from the fountain head of an ancient civilization, as it happens in case of Mahapatra.

In 'Relationship' Mahapatra attempts to explore the whole spectrum of sociocultural history of his land in order to establish a meaningful bond with it. His own destiny is inseparably linked with the destiny of his land:

My existence lies in the stones  
which carry my footsteps from one day into another  
down to the infinite distances  
I know I can never come alive  
if I refuse to consecrate at the altar of my origins.

( Relationship)

In this context Rabindra K. Swain's observation sounds quite appropriate:

"The element of subjectivity helped him to relate himself to his milieu and landscape in a delicate way never done before in Indian English Poetry. The exploration of the inner self is intricately woven with his childhood experiences, as much as with the Oriya fairy tales, myths, legends and the great Indian epics. Along with these sources close to his locale, he updated himself with a voracious reading of modern classics of the world as well as contemporary writing in scores of established periodicals like 'The Kenyon review', 'The Times Literary Supplement', 'Critical Quarterly', 'Poetry', where he himself has published profusely. If this acquaintance with modern Anglo- American and European literature shaped the form and partially the content of his poetry, it is the Oriya sensibility as well as the lyrical quality of traditional Oriya poetry, which provides charm and grace to his poetry. The tight knit family life, the rites and rituals associated with the cyclic agricultural seasons, the rich tradition of arts and

crafts and an easy quiet pace of life are some of the major Orissan elements that recur in terms of imagery, metaphor and symbol." ( Swain P- 14) .

Mahapatra' s concern with the locale emerged gradually, as he realized the need of an indiom, that would transcend passions and sensuousness into an awareness of the self in search of an identity. For Mahapatra his native land Orissa becomes the meeting place for the past and the present. He bathes in the glory of the past, crystallised in rock-cut temples of Konark, Puri and Bhubaneswar, which stand majestically as finest witnesses to the cultural history of the land, Rabindra K.Swain in his critical essay "Uncovering Lost Possibilities' remarks:

Jayanta Mahapatra gathers colossal ruins of Konark, shapes them into a body and calls it his poetry, For its supporting pillars he has Puri and Bhubaneswar (these two along with Konark make a triangle, geographically and religiously in Orissa) another is Cuttack that stands aloof, head erect, backed by a proud history guarding the poet. ( Swain, P- 265) .

Mahapatra is also simultaneously aware of the merciless massacre of thousands of Oriyas in the bloody Kalinga War . Mahapatra describes:

How the waters of the Daya

Stank with the bodies of my ancestors. (Relationship) .

This bloody Kalinga war was a turning point in the life of emperor Ashok. Ashok' s heart was overwhelmed with pity and he turned from Chandashok to Dharmashok, from the ruthless to spiritual Ashok. Ashok the great left his rockcut edicts of peace "ahimsa' s whimpers" for posterity. The present, for Mahapatra is a "mysterious inheritance" of that splendid past of broken empires and of vanquished dynasties, where the conqueror and the conquered stood on an equal footing, as they both contributed their mite, each in his own way to the birth of a new dawn of peace. Mahapatra hints at one of the finest ironies wrought by history, where bloody wars resulted in long interregnums of peace and tranquility in the backdrop of the Kalinga war. Emperor Ashok was deeply moved by the ravages of the war and turned to the compassionate teachings of the Buddha and made earnest efforts to promote Buddhism in the far East. Society always moves forward by the dynamics of history, which always leaves its indelible marks on the lives of men and matter alike without offering a choice between a willing acceptance and an outright rejection of its consequences. Any healthy or significant change or reformation precedes an unpleasant past or painful history. New awareness, profound wisdom, pragmatic values stem like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes of pain, sorrow and misery of the past.

Mahapatra perhaps had the acute realisation about the relevance of the past. Past is very much relevant to the poetic consciousness of Mahapatra, Past, present and future are like a continuum, a revolving circle. Man takes lessons from the past and monitors his present, so as to get a glorious future. Mahapatra constantly digs up the graves of history and attempts to give voice to history's stifled cries in a series of poetic encounters with the ghosts of history. For him history is not merely a chronicle of the past, but it continually bubbles around us and becomes an integral part of our social existence.

Thus Mahapatra's poetry justifies T.S. Eliot's views "a poem should be able to communicate before it is understood". His poetry may not be simple or sensuous but it is certainly evocative, contemporary social life and indigenous ethos constitute the bedrock of his poetry. Mahapatra attempts to relate himself to his native province Orissa, his country India, its landscape, lifestyle, poverty, spiritualism, religion, superstition, myth, legend, ritual, milieu, custom, tradition and ritual etc. to his poetic consciousness and writes wonderful poems.

Mahapatra observes about his native land:

By the light of wet Fireflies  
your silence my land, grows  
with an old petrified loneliness  
and your bronze youth  
overwhelms with an unheard cry of the infinite  
that once blazed  
the red sandstone walls  
of Konark, Bhubaneswar and Puri  
with the terrifying passions  
of solitary beings ---- ('Orissa' - Waiting P- 19)

Mahapatra laments about the dismal state of progress, and abysmal misery of India in the poem "Song of the River".

There is no song of India  
words of the stone  
lie across the dead valleys in a trance  
a sacred river grows silently in my mind  
The rhythm of dark waters only comes and goes  
( " Songs of the River ", Waiting P-21)

The poem "Konark" harps on the popular myth of Dharama's sacrifice to save the life of twelve hundred artisans after fixing the crest of crowning slab of Konark temple :

Konark, black in sleep  
cold beacon of my silent land  
messenger of death  
Here the little boy in a dream  
waved to the Man once  
and death hung its peace  
an indifferent time of stone  
marks the burnout funeral pyre  
and the sunrise.  
that Journeys again and again  
to call this grief of Man its own.

("Konark"- Waiting P-22)

Legend has it that the crowning slab of this 13th Century Konark temple of Sun god could only be fitted by Dharama, the 12 year son of the chief artisan Bisu Maharana. If the King had known the fact that the herculean task of fixing the crowning slab was done not by the 1200 artisans headed by Bisu Maharana but by 12 year old boy Dharama, he would have awarded them capital punishment. So Dharama in his bid to save the honour and life of 1200 artisans jumped into the sea from the finished peak of the temple and died.

Mahapatra describes about the craze of the pilgrims to have a glimpse of the round-eyed Lord Jagannath (Chaka Akhi), the Lord of the Universe, in the poem " Taste for Tomorrow" :

At Puri, the crows  
The one wide street  
lolls out like a giant tongue  
Five faceless lepers move aside  
as a priest passes by.  
And of the street's end  
the Crowds thronging the temple door  
a huge holy flower  
swaying in the wind of greater reasons.

("Taste for Tomorrow", Waiting -6)

In the poem "Bhubaneswar" Mahapatra expresses his anguish about the ruins of temple and pale and evil smelling water of Bindusagar:

Stone is the theme  
and the endless forbidden temple wall  
goes from lighted shadow into shadowy light

by the west bank of the stale and futile Bindusagar  
tired of ceremony, pale and evil smelling and still  
tying the worn out voages of the bronzen sunset  
Easy on the eye the ruins of temples every where  
defeat the tale of memory and dream  
caught as spiders in the dawn's afflicted light  
this mining of time  
where stones have been lost and won  
to reappear inside our separate births  
perhaps it is a weary World  
that pulls me also to the shore  
we build the stone that has overcome men  
until the fate that shrouds us as a fog.  
Breaks free of its own river, its quiet hope.

( 'Bhubaneswar' - Waiting- 80).

Mahapatra is emotionally rattled by the silence of his native land, Orissa :

Your silence my land grows  
With an old petrified loneliness  
and your bronze youth overwhelms  
with an unheard cry of the infinite. (Waiting P-19)

In the poem : 'Dhuligiri' the poet laments about, the ravages of the fierce Kalinga War:

Afterwards,  
when the wars of Kalinga were over  
the fallow fields of Dhuli  
hid the red-smeared voiceless bodies  
As the earth burrowed into their dead hunger  
with its tortured worms  
guided the foxes to their limp genitals.

('Dhuligiri'- Waiting- 24)

Mahapatra's poem "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" is a sad commentary on prostitution in India:

You fall back against her in the dump light  
trying to learn something more about women  
while she does what she thinks proper to please you  
the sweet, the little things, the imagined  
until the Statue of the man within  
you have believed in throughout the years

comes back to you, a disobeying toy  
and the walls you wanted to pull down  
mirror only of things mortal and passing by:  
like a girl holding on to your wide wilderness,  
as though it were real, as though the renewing voice  
tore the membrane of your half woken mind  
when like a door her words close behind  
"Hurry, will you? Let me go"  
and her lonely breath thrashed against your kind.

( "The Whore house in a Calcutta Street", A Rain of Rites P-17)

God-fearing nature and spiritual austerities of the Indian Hindu widows  
is reflected in the poem "Dawn at Puri" :

white clad widowed women  
past the centres of their lives  
are waiting to enter the great temple.  
their austere eyes  
stare like those caught in a net  
hanging by the dawn's shining strands of faith.

("Dawn at Puri" - A Rain of Rites -28)

Mahapatra depicts about the appalling poverty in India, that drives the  
parents to forget their self- esteem and introduce their daughters into the filthy  
arena of prostitution in the poem "Hunger":

I heard him say; my daughter, she's just turned fifteen...  
Feel her. I will 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, the fish slithering, turning inside.

('Hunger', A Rain of Rites P- 44)

In Mahapatra's poetry, the past evolves as a conscious presence and  
he gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to such a past, which shapes  
one's life :

Between innocence and experience  
A pain flashes in my head as I acknowledge my past  
like an unseen boatman's song floating...  
on the river's face like that dragging shadow  
now shuddering with Spam's of light. ("Way of the River", Waiting 11)

Mahapatra's poetry resonates with silence, the reverberating silence is rendered qualitative, because it guides both the poet and the reader to meditate on the quality of human life. Hence Silence is not a state of speechlessness, but becomes creative and meaningful. Sitakant Mahapatra, the Oriya poet too speaks of the brooding silence that echoes throughout the landscape of Orissa, from the influences of which no sensitive writer can escape:

A visitor to Orissa can go to the Sun Temple at Konark, the Raja-Rani at Bhubaneswar and many other exquisite temples at Bhubaneswar, Puri and elsewhere in the state and listen to the voices of silence speaking from the stones. A glorious tradition of at least fifteen centuries of plastic art speaks through them. ( Sitakant Mahapatra, P- 109)

So silence becomes the landmark of an integrated Oriya sensibility. Jayanta Mahapatra expands the scope of silence by infusing his personal sense of loss, despair and agony, which conveys his estrangement from the cultural matrix of the Orissa, he desperately tries to relate. In this context the observation of Prof. K. Ayappa Paniker sounds appropriate.:

The poet achieves his eloquence through silence. Silence incidentally is a word that gets endlessly repeated, one might say consecrated in Mahapatra's poems. ( Paniker)

In Mahapatra's poetry silence represents what is lost in a culture by the onslaught of modernity and also the mystery of the past. It also reflects, what cannot be retrieved in the flux of time. In his poem "Bells" Mahapatra describes:

Spring freezes on the widow's lips  
These which rang like bells once  
assumed silence.

(Bells -Svayamvara and other poems.P-16)

In another poem "Main Temple Street Puri" Mahapatra writes:

And that sky there  
claimed by inviolable authority  
hanging on to its crutches of silence

( 'Main Temple Street Puri"- A Rain of Rites P- 16)

Spring is the season of flowering and lush greenery, But here it 'freezes' as in winter. The next image is of a 'widow', who can not flower and hence spring has no relevance in her life. But the expression spring, "which rang like bells once" strangely suggested the once vibrant marital life of the woman, full of



hope, excitement, fun and accomplishment, which now stands silent. Hence spring 'freezes' on the "Widow's lips". The memory of a full-blooded, throbbing spring now silenced, only intensifies our sense of what is lost permanently. Seasons are found to change cyclically but here Mahapatra apparently rejects the changing cycle of seasons and hints at the perpetuation of winter. However the lifestyle of rural Orissa with its agrarian background is closely monitored by the changing cycle of seasons. But here Mahapatra has revealed about the simple superstitions and rustic lifestyle of the Orissa people, where in widowhood with an irrevocable finality seals the fate of a woman beyond redemption. A sophisticated urban feminist would oversightly reject this premise that there is no life after widowhood; for some it could even be a beginning of a new life free from social bondage. But the context in which Mahapatra's poem is placed, it does not admit any such possibility. This is a glaring instance, which proves how Mahapatra truly identifies himself with the ethos of his land, Orissa.

In the poem "Main Temple Street Puri" Mahapatra maintains that the temple of Lord Jagannath (Bada Deula) is a living monument of a culture and also the epitome of religious beliefs. It also represents the mysterious and the inexplicable in the history of human civilization. The vast expanse of the sky seems to hold the key to this secret. But man is not allowed to unravel that mystery, because the sky is crippled and is supported by "Crutches of Silence". This maiming of the sky is highly symbolic, as it points to the gradual erosion of vitality in the culture of that bygone era and its weakening power to support and sustain those values enshrined in that culture. But fortunately the sky is not altogether incapacitated. It can still limp, hanging on to its crutches. However this sky over the Puri temple wields an inviolable authority on the life of every Oriya. Commenting on his poem "Orissa" Mahapatra says:

Here is centred to the culture of the Oriyas : in Jagannath lie the simple passions and intimate beliefs of the people. No important event in the life of an Oriya goes by without a consecration to the Round-eyed one..... "Whatever be the will of the Lord" appears to be the solution to any problem that irks the common Oriya.

Mahapatra uses English language in a subtle way and modulates its rhythms, so as to suit to the needs and nuances of Indian experience. Mahapatra tries to come to terms with Hindu mythology and its celebration of the belief that the Universe is boundlessly various, that everything occurs simultaneously, that all possibilities may exist without excluding each other. Frank Allen observes:

"Religious ceremony to the contemporary west, largely synonymous with dubiety and self-denial, evokes a peace that passeth understanding. To use it, the poet must struggle to free this symbolism from cultural prejudice and fantasy. Not so for India. The Hindu ethos has given all diverse human impulses, no matter how anarchic, undignified or bizarre, a valid and accessible place in its beliefs". (Allen- P-335).

Religious ceremony, as it is understood today in the West is fundamentally different from Indian concept, which takes it as an internal symbol of timelessness. Apart from concentrating on beliefs and rituals, Mahapatra also makes use of the current situation in contemporary society to give his poetry a distinct Indian flavour and create a new Indian English idiom. It is in this aspect that Mahapatra is in the company of Nissim Ezekiel, Shiv K. Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, Kamala Das and O.P. Bhatnagar, who underline this typical Indian sensibility in their poetry. K. Ayyappa Paniker's observation sounds quite relevant in this context.:

Indian poetry in English necessarily refers to two parameters: Indian and English, 'Indian' may mean, either written by Indian citizens or written about Indian subjects or even expressing Indian sensibility. This implies that there is a sensibility that is identified with the land and the people of India. National sensibilities are ultimately based on racial and cultural factors, whether they are inherited or acquired is another moot question. (Panikar P- 122).

Most of the poetry collections of Mahapatra such as "Waiting", "A Rain of Rites", "Relationship", "Life signs", "Burden of waves and fruit" and 'Temple' display typical Indian sensibility that immediately arrests one's attention. History, myths, legends, folklore all go together to give a distinct Indian identity in these volumes. The Publisher's Note to "Burden of Waves and Fruit" highlights this aspect:

"There are many rivers in these works, much rain and sun, long evenings and a few dawns- occasionally there are intimate glimpses of friends, lovers and a son. India is every where and nowhere". (Publisher's Note)

The award winning poetry collection "Relationship" is a remarkable poem, that celebrates an Indian sensibility through the creation of an Indian English idiom. The background of this poem is indigenous and Mahapatra has woven the history and myths of his land into the texture of the poem. This poem gives a respectable identity to Indian English poetry by adapting the indigenous tradition and exploring the myth and history of India.

The first section of the poem "Relationship" harps on the mystery of life and evokes the heroic past of Orissa with a sense of pride.

Time  
and the boat  
and the initiation into the mystery of peak  
the sailing ships of those maritime ancestors  
who have vanished in the Black Bay without a trace  
that only live in the sound of the waves  
flinging themselves into the dark fringes  
of this land from Chilika to Chandipur. (Relationship)

The first section of the poem serves as an exposition, as it makes reference to the Mahanadi, the Konark temple and the ancient harbours like Chilika and Chandipur. While recalling with a sense of nostalgia, the glorious heroic past of Orissa, Mahapatra laments that once heroic and militant race is now no more than a mere memory.

Bruce King makes the following observation on Mahapatra's poetry book 'Waiting':

"Consisting of short lyrics with a few longer poems, "Waiting" (1979) at first appears different from Mahapatra's previous books. The poems describe the Physical World and social realities before moving on to the imaginative, the language is plainer, the syntax less ambiguous, there is more punctuation and less fragmentation". (Bruce King, P-12)

In the poetry collection "Waiting" Mahapatra puts emphasis on the self and exhibits his intense pre-occupation with nuances of emotion, although the problems of biculturalism, lack of faith and alienation from tradition have now become the favourite, themes of his poetry. Although a Christian by birth, Mahapatra is unable to ignore Hindu culture and appears to accept its World view. Like the Hindus, Mahapatra endorses the concept of cause and effect, the theory of 'Niskama Karma' (doing the work, without expecting the result in return), the theory of salvation, reincarnation, redemption and purgation. Mahapatra is also found to be troubled by Christian guilt and his divided inheritance. Mahapatra's preoccupation with his relationship to his past and Indian culture and the recurrence of specifically Indian scenes give 'Waiting' a unity of vision. The titles of the poems included in the collection also smack of Indian Origin. The titles of the poems included in the poetry collection 'Waiting' are "A Country Festival", 'Bhubaneswar', 'The Faith', 'Orissa', 'Konark', 'The Temple Road Puri', 'Learning to Flow Free in the Chariot Festival at Puri', 'At the Burning Ground', 'Shrines'. 'The Indian Way', "A Poem to Mahatma Gandhi", .

While going to comment on Mahapatra's poetry GN Devy observes:

"With Mahapatra's emergence as the leading Indian English Poet, the usual critical debates about the relevance, rootedness, significance and status of Indian English Poetry seem dated. In him, we have a poet whose work easily admits and even demands critical standards applicable to great poetry alone. Since he has created a body of poetry, which is outstanding in its consistency as in its quality his poetry compares well with the best of the poetry in Indian languages as well as with World poetry. (Devy- P- 141). □

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### REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S RELATIONSHIP

\*Dr. Santosh Kumar Padhy

Jayanta Mahapatra's Relationship is indeed an intimate relationship with his own land, the nativity, the roots, people, place, myth, mythology, culture, tradition, seasons, climates - that is his motherland - Orissa the soul of India. Orissa remains as the seed-bed of his flourishing art since he began writing poetry in his late thirties. If we discuss this 1981 Central Sahitya Akademi Award winning volume from a particular angle - that is the representation of women, we can easily find the highest of the higher values lie therein and the rarest of the rarer landscapes attach to it. Side by side, what this paper intends to focus is all about Mahapatra's female characters in this volume. By carrying a few women, this volume in twelve sections tries to gather Mahapatra's cooing of love and going into the past. His past experience and latter exploration in representing women not only deliberate his use of sound and forceful images, symbols and metaphors but also authenticate their true meanings higher than their implications. The fleeting moments of time has undoubtedly changed the role and attitude of women but Mahapatra's attempt and representation of them are seemingly rare and unique. In other words, this paper aims at analysing Mahapatra's enlightenment of women among other characters seems to be lovely, lively, therapeutic and hierarchical.

There is a Sanskrit version - Janani Janmavumicha Swargadapi Gariyasi . Both mother and motherland are greater than heaven. Both of them celebrate Mahapatra's poetry and they occupy the central position more valuable than a

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reader understands. The intimacy and closeness that the poet tries to share with his mother are the shares of distant refrains chalked across the white terraces of childhood. It is a memory takes a road vague with the distance of self loneliness for which the clouds shift with the tears of wounded pools of his living. The poet understands his own duty towards the pious lady with many memories but does not know what to do now. One thing seems very clear that the poet while searching for her mother recalls his childhood and tries to bridge the gap between the dead and living, the past and present in the opening lines of section two:

Today I watch through the window  
the grave that is my mothers,  
watch the old impulses in red and yellow  
chalked across the white terraces of childhood (12)

How babies are inclined to their mothers always haunts the poet in his latter years. Then his quest for mother seems endless in section three :

So we would go on  
reading the epics in the lamp light  
sucking our mother's dry and drooping breasts, (15)

Yet in other lines in the very same section, the poet's recollection of his mother is only the repetition of section two in which the poet not only mourns for the past and passing years but also tries to relive in the association with his mother :

the window looking out on to my mother's grave  
defends my dream  
one which I have never understood through the years (15)

A mother remains unforgettable all the time for her children. She is in broader sense, not only the mother of her own children but also a mother for other children. Her love and affection for own children and neighbours children sanction her an inexplicable joy and feeling when she gets the scope of rearing and even feeding breast to neighbour's children. Mahapatra paints pastorals scenes in a real manner that it seems exception to the use of words and the meaning retains its higher value as there is no substitution of mother and her breast feeding :

and which resembles the unexplained feeling of a mother  
when she gives her breast to her dry neighbour's bawling child (30) .

Like mother, daughter is another incarnation of woman. In order to bring all the family members together, Mahapatra sings also of father and daughter in section two. To him, poetry remains incomplete if he does not deal with home,

family, and familial relationship. Here the poet's sense of joy is boundless when he harps on his daughter because she is not only a woman character for his poetry but also one among his blood relationships.

as I forget easily  
my old village's pelt, glistening with rain.  
and the stillness of my gentle daughter's skin,  
forget the desire (13)

An attempt to forget the desire doesn't make the poet desireless. Then he sees more relationship. For Mahapatra, his wife is yet another woman character who is also immaculately, sketched in section eight. The role of a wife is quite different from mother and daughter. The relationship the poet draws with his wife is of blood and near and dear ones. In case of Mahapatra, his wife becomes a theme song of conjugality in which he never fails to decorate her appearance as the female body is a tree :

Where there swills about us  
the spacious body of woman, the fruit and the flower,  
the gentle leaf, the folded belly  
and the sweeping fire,  
like the warm waters around fish,  
like the velvet down about the floating breath  
of fledging (26)

These are perhaps all about Mahapatra's age old experience and relationship with his wife. Other than familial feminine characters, certain utopian female entities also usher in this volume that Mahapatra can be labelled as a leading feminist who brings correlation between natural and supernatural world. In this section, while distinguishing ominous destinations of the real and imagined, the poet limns :

the bronzed gazes of mermaids  
against the infinite blue of the sea, (27)

Neither mermaids nor Gondharvas are restricted to their regions but Mahapatra more interestingly capturing them from a different world cites in the lines of this volume because they correspond to the dark abyss of an absent dimension of the blood. Mahapatra's connection of both in and outside the ethereal bond is meant for personal satisfaction as Yoni and Linga both stand for female and male union represented as personifications to take rebirth with myth and mythology once again in this high-tech age. The last two stanzas of the same section materialise the poet's sulking years of dreams :

For now I touch your secret order,  
embarrassed Yoni;  
before me lie the sulking years of drams,  
the stricken purposes of the muscles,  
the violent splashes of sunsets  
in the fibres of the being.

How would I pull out  
of the centuries of fallen stone?  
How would I hold the linga in the eye  
until the world is made all over again? (28)

Delivered by the myth which exhorts the poet's sleep and standing among the union and reunion, the birth and rebirth with the smells of the rancid fat of the past, Mahapatra looks for mysterious inheritance in which roots stick out and provide accelerate happiness when he mentions the last but not least incarnation of women - the Goddesses in autumn every year. She is Goddess Durga, a symbolical and mythological woman of strength, power, energy and prosperity. Cuttack, the birth place of the poet is famous for worshipping Goddess Durga every autumn. Mahapatra in highlighting sacred shapes of women articulates his birth place, Cuttack in Section Nine :

and the town of Cuttack where I was born,  
its lanes scarred by ruts from whose clay  
the goddesses take their sacred shapes  
in autumn every year, (34)

To conclude Jayanta Mahapatra's Relationship and the female characters in this volume, it is clear that the poet has left nothing. One thing he wants to experience what he yet to be experienced is death which is also delineated as dark daughters. The dark daughters in their various shapes come dancing before the poet, for which he writes: "Tell me your names, dark daughters / Hold me to your spaces" (38). It is Mahapatra's invocation to death that makes the poet as hard as stone and a spiritless soul of memory. In this way, his final desire in this volume is also associated with the female selves. □

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Social Atrophy and Melancholic Representation:  
A Study in Jayanta Mahapatra and Pradip Kumar Patra

\* Jitumani Choudhury

Jayanta Mahapatra (1928) needs no specific introduction today; he is undoubtedly the torch-bearer of modern Indian English poetry. He has provided a quite matured connotation of modern Indian 'life' through his poems and thus made a legacy. Jayanta Mahapatra is a conscious observer of society, of tradition, custom, and of changing human behavior in a fragmented world. He projects the consequences of globalization, consumerism, western science and philosophy on social construct and value system of India. Apart from the western influences, Indian political system and caste as well as class discrimination have laid a crucial impact on the social construct initiating a search for identity. In his poems, there is a prevailing note of irony and melancholy which reminds us of metaphysical deviation from our existential root. Mahapatra portrays the facts related to sacred soil of Orissa, the reality that he perceives around society. But his observation does not confine to or represent only Orissa; his poetry represents the changing perspectives of modern Indian society. His poetry provides a precise concept of the psychology of modern man who emphasizes more on the westernization than on traditional values of their own. He juxtaposes tradition and modernity and thereby demonstrates a contrasting picture of sordid civilization. About Mahapatra, Pradip Kumar Patra says in his article, " 'Random Descent' : 'The still, sad music of humanity ' in the Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra" : So far as his thoughts are concerned, these turn out to be decentred and intellectual more and more. Just like an artist giving shape to his image, he gives a finishing touch to his thought upon which his poems are based. As a poet from Orissa, he is definitely influenced by its artistry visible in the architecture, painting and sculpture of this land of myths and legends. (90)

Pradip Kumar Patra (1966) is another flourishing Indo-English poet from Orissa who has given emphasis on the exploration of 'self'. By exploring the diverse aspects of individual 'self', Patra provides a critical assessment of the unitary self or what we call collective self of modern India. His poems are a rendering of life, reality and truth in which his ontological and philosophical speculations are got illustrated. What Dr. Patra says in this context in the " Preface" of The Rain Speaks is pertinent .

The best introduction of a nation, race or ethnicity one gets from poetry. A nation not just exists physically. It is constituted of shared memory, literature

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and art. Hence, it promotes aesthetics and humility. If the nation is an ocean the poets and artists on it are the vessels moving towards their destination. Some of them tumble forth, some of them drown . It is the artist, in a broader sense, articulates and fills it with meaning. Every body is an artist in his or her own way. He may be a scholar ,politician,intellectual, activist,scientist or a laymen. They may be unacknowledged. But it is their contribution that really counts. (viii)

He has penned seven anthologies of poems viz . Panoramic Shillong (1996), Summer Implications (1996), The Winding Path (1997), Denouement (1998), Dewy Morning (1998), Midnight Divinity (1998) and The Rain Speaks (2009). The poems make a journey from material reality to spiritual reality, from darkness towards light, from vagueness to enlightenment. Like Mahapatra, Dr. Patra also speaks about the predicament of modern man, social atrophy and purports to demolish the artificial constructs appeared to be natural. What makes Mahapatra complex and obscure is his use of matured and ambiguous symbols that imply his adroitness in poetic craftsmanship. Both the poets project the predicament of modern man, disintegration of social set-up, loss of valued cultural heritage of Orissa as well as of India. Both the poets purport that the massive change that comes to social and cultural life is owing to the gradual infiltration of bourgeois culture which has controlled and replaced the mass culture. They show how the whole of mass culture becomes a capitalist bafflement of social and cultural reality. For them what is natural is, in fact, an illusory reality meant to veil the real structure.

There prevails ironic and melancholic overtone in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra. He uncovers the 'assumed reality' with melancholy and thereby denounces the false codes of social structures based on bourgeois culture. Mahapatra projects ethical fall of modern man in the hands of a materialistic and consumer culture. Mahapatra writes in 'Hunger' (Twelve Modern Indian Poets) :

I heard him say: my daughter, she is 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 wompy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,  
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.  
['Hunger']

The stanza explicitly reveals the loss of moral and social values of Orissa as well as of India. It provides a contrasting image of traditional Orissa-

that is highly spiritual, ethical, and rich in cultural heritage . Pradip Kumar Patra, too, speaks about ethical fall of modern man through his poetical works. He depicts the sorrows and sufferings of modern man being fragmented and disillusioned by materialism. He writes in 'Composure and Detachment' ( Dewy Morning ):

My soul goes out to the sky  
out of frustration.  
I'm fed up  
with the congestion of the earth.  
It is not the congestion of nature and air  
but of ambition and desires.  
['Composure and Detachment']

Again he writes in 'Worn-out Identity' ( The Rain Speaks ):

I didn't want to live with  
a worn out identity;  
I wanted to absorb myself  
in the night and be forgotten forever.  
['Worn-out Identity']

Both the poets, though their presentations vary, depict the plight and condition of contemporary India under bourgeois materialistic culture. The rapid growth of industrial and political scenes, powered by the capitalist class, creates tension among the common men facilitating the hankering after West and consequently the erosion of values. While Mahapatra speaks about manipulation and loss of glorious culture leading to rupture in the social system, Pradip Kumar Patra speaks about the disintegrated self of modern man, his agony and suffering who prefers death than life. Death becomes an ecstasy that comes from earthly woes. The entire social set-up undergoes such a rapid change that man has forgotten their existential roots. Both the poets thus deal with the existential question of modern man. Mahapatra writes in this context in 'Winter in the City' ( Random Descent ):

The paraplegic boy stands like a cross,  
shivering in the cold seeping through his fingers.  
Tireless corporate offices  
keep thundering with a sense of wholeness of life.  
Siberian geese are already skimming the lake

between the reeds, not taking more than what they need.

Here in winter I brood for no reason.

I don't have to be good, and fail.

It wouldn't be bad at all to be

a meaningless figure not trying to get somewhere.

['Winter in the City']

Mahapatra symbolically represents the issues of social atrophy and existential problem by tracing three different human worlds: the poor class, the business class, and common people. Here the boy represents the helpless poor class who is at the bottom of hierarchy, has to tolerate all the ills of society. The poet throws light on the problem created by bourgeois capitalist class and its adverse influences on middle class and poor class of society. Here the poet speaks about the clash of these three classes and their ideologies. But he wants to keep himself away from this controversial issue and tries to be a meaningless figure. Mahapatra's soul seems to be resting in the common people both in urban and rural areas. Rural innocence is in sharp contrast with the urban complexity. He in this context says in Door of Papers :

I am reminded of our own rural villages in Orissa that have been ravaged by rain and floods, by droughts and famine. Kamala Markandaya's village could easily be mine, or yours. And in this thought lies the everlasting quality of her book. ( 121)

The poem 'Winter in the City' uncovers the disturbed city life as well as the fractured Indian social structure.

Similarly, Patra also points out the existential problem of modern man acting as a puppet. He projects the tortured life of man who digresses from spiritual and ethical values and thereby makes their life a chaos. He writes in 'A Feeling of being Extinguished' (The Rain Speaks):

I am in the frontier of my urge and  
my sense of restraint, I try to visualize  
my ailing soul that ultimately resembles  
the cyclone victim of Orissa.

['A Feeling of being Extinguished']

The fear of being extinguished is owing to the ignorance of traditional values, culture and ethics. This ignorance leads man to metaphysical emptiness and attachment to worldly pleasure. Both highlight this metaphysical emptiness throughout their poems that change the entire speculation of human beings;

hence Patra says about 'ailing soul'. The social foundation of Orissa is centered round Lord Jagannath and bhakti darshana. But globalization and western materialistic culture decentered the entire social formation initiating emptiness. Mahapatra's satirical presentation of this sick society is well focused in the following lines in 'Grass' (An Anthology of Indian English Poetry):

It is just a mirror  
marching away solemnly with me, luring  
into an ancestral smell of rot, reminding me  
of secretes of my own:  
['Grass']

Dr. Patra's poetry insists on the projection of self realization and a spiritual quest as man comes to know about the deceitful nature of western civilization distancing us from our own roots. He writes in 'Locating the 'I'' (Denouement):

I want to be lost not in the worldly activities  
but in the process of my own spiritual quest.  
When should I find an affinity  
between the two worlds of  
body and spirit?  
['Locating the 'I'' ]

Thus, both the poets explore their commitment towards their society by revealing the erosion of glorious values of Orissa, and creating awareness among the Oriyas of their prestigious past and self purification. In each and every poem of Jayanta Mahapatra and P.K. Patra there is an ironical, satirical and melancholic overtone by which they have focused on the reality of society and individual. Both the poets have a reformist speculation that explicitly dominates their poetry.□

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### Themes and Techniques of Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry

\* Shickna John Wary

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the most prominent Indian poets writing in English. He may be placed in the series of A.K. Ramanujan, P. Parthasarathy, Nissim Ezekiel etc. Although a physic professor by profession, he has found a niche in Indian English literature. Mahapatra's poetry has elevated Indian English poetry to the status of world literature. His talent of building rich and complex imagery and imaginative power makes him stand out as a poet of matured sensibility.

. Pradip Kumar Patra, another Oriya poet writing in English, who in many ways is comparable to Mahapatra, says in this context in his Preface to his own collection of poems, *The Rain Speaks*: "Poetry is as old as the universe. A feeling that poetry as a form of art has no importance in present time is baseless. It is just like saying that we do not breathe regularly because we're too busy. It comes as a friend when one is most alone. It is always there as a subtle feeling whether in joy or sorrow." Poetry is made up of language which is primarily used for communication. The constant use of the language for its primary purpose not only enables man to achieve perfection in its use but also gives clue to the secret of its power and efficacy. This is as natural as the development of a housemaid's skills in cooking or a weaver's expertise in making beautiful fabrics. So poetry is a byproduct of our lived life just as are our culture and tradition. It is a part of our life that gives substance to our existence.

Jayanta Mahapatra is a modern poet. His love of English language has enabled him to compose poetry of high standard. Poetry is basically a language game; although it may sound a bit derogatory, it is a fact. Since poetry is a written art, the poet must have sense to the sound, structure, and subtlety of the language to become a good poet. Jayanta Mahapatra uses monosyllabic picture words to build his images; His passion for the twist and turn of the

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phrases of English language, sometimes, obscures his poem; his important concern seems to be abstract imagery. The imagery of swans sinking wordless into the carpet and the gulls crying everywhere becomes an important example of his attempt to convey his experience through complex imagery.

He is an Oriya poet as he likes to identify himself. He conveys his unique experience as an Oriya; in his state, as elsewhere in India, he has seen cultural collusion: the tension between tradition and modernity, his attempt to reconcile with Christianity and the native tradition largely influenced by the Hindu tradition. As he was brought up in a Christian family surrounded by Oriya culture, he at times feels being alienated. But his empathy with his fellow natives upon their sufferings for illiteracy, ignorance and other similar reasons compensates his mind to become a responsible voice through his art. His becoming a Christian in a predominantly non-Christian culture situates him in a unique situation which gives him an edge to observe his surrounding with dispassionate and sharp perspective. So his feeling of being alienated does not necessarily gives him disappointment, but it enables him to become more focused on the problems of his native people. In an interview with Vivek Jha he says,

"[My] main source of inspiration: my land, my people, my place, what I see, what social injustice I see, and political injustice. I should like to write about the hunger. I think Orissa is the one of the very, very, very, very poor state, very poor. You go inside the villages you will see they don't have the place to live in. They don't have roof over their heads. They don't have one meal a day. They don't have rice also to eat. And only politician can find out which things are there. During election time they do visit the villages once and next five years nothing happens. The same poverty, they sell their children to keep their own stomachs. Mothers sell their daughters, fathers sell their daughters. Even today it's happening, especially in Orissa and interior of India."

His acute awareness about the sordid condition of the society and the plight of the poor people becomes a rich background.. We see elements of sadness and embarrassment hovering around in his poetry.

The second important feature in Jayanta Mahapatra is his feeling of uneasiness with the faith in which he has grown up. In an interview Jayanta tells the history of how his parents embraced Christianity. He calls the fact of his parents embracing Christianity as an accident of time. The uneasiness deepened as he was trained as a science student and later as a Physics teacher. However,

he has never been able to shake off his faith and walk out into the freedom of his fantasy like other western writers such as Shelley, James Joyce etc. Shelley not only rejected his faith but also tried to challenge its relevance to the modern man. Similarly novelist James Joyce, in the process of his disengagement from his faith, tried to prove that his catholic upbringing worked as a bog against the development of his artistic freedom.

The diffidence of Jayanta Mahapatra perhaps arises out of his deeper realization of the mysteries of life and the metaphysics of eschatology, because he knows that human experience can not be categorized as this and that, and any attempt to put it into a neatly labeled box of category is sure enough to throttle it. The following stanza from *The Road* clearly indicates the diffidence and even apprehension of the poet in trying to take the unknown road:

The one I have taken now  
Appears to fill me with purpose and strength.  
But I do not know if it is the happy one.  
Even little children walk through its chaos enchanted,  
Protected by its purposeful air.  
Nobody stops them.  
Here I watch them never lose their way,  
Their flimsy lightness building their delirium.

In *Dawn at Puri* Mahapatra builds an imagery that is the result of his life experience. The imagery of skull-like coconut shells, half sunk in the sand, and the widows being tied to the temple to the degree of enslavement opens up complex thoughts and issues difficult to resolve but worthy to be pondered upon. The title of the poem turns out to be ironic as the vocabulary like crows, skull, net, frail, ruined, leprous shells, etc. build an atmosphere of gloom and sorrow.

The early light of the day does not suggest any ray of hope; rather it catches the ruins of his aging mother's dead body which is being consumed by the funeral pyre. The widows hanging around the temple gate to be cremated at their death seems to suggest that they have been forced to accept their fates as inevitable. The idea of fatalism that is ingrained in Indian philosophy of life overshadows these enfeebled widows whose life experience has been truncated midway at the death of their husbands. Congealed in the frost-bitten life experience they seem to await eagerly the early exit from their mortal frames. The poet



seems to sympathize with these wretched creatures at their predicament, and this becomes evident when he builds the image of his mother being consigned to the flame in the sands of Puri. In this poem the poet is at one with P.K. Patra who writes in one of his poems in *The Rain Speaks*:

I have only had the experience of death  
Through my retribution;  
Life is just a shadow of death,  
As I near the end, the shadow  
Goes on increasing . (15 )

It is significant to note that while Patra comes from literary background, Mahapatra has no such background. He writes with his inborn creative talent. Moreover he began his literary career late. Despite this, Mahapatra has proved himself as an accomplished artist; his keen sense of observation and great sensibility have helped him to rise to a secured position in Indian English literature. His knack for constructing vigorous phrases enables him to make abstract as well as complex imagery, which sometimes frustrates the reader in understanding his poems. Irony, wit and other similar elements lend Mahapatra's poetry delight in construction, but they alone can not be counted as markers of his greatness; he develops them within the context of his personal experience.

Patra, on the other hand, depends on the descriptive mode that is simple and elegant. A poet who takes recourse to the mode of a plain language has a different logic. All the romantic poets tried to simplify their language as much as possible for they gave priority to their thoughts and feelings. Abstract images and far-fetched imagery, as used by the metaphysical poets, were strange to them, because such imagery may distort the spontaneous flow of feelings and thoughts. A language full of abstract images and baroque style may be pleasing to the sensibility of the reader, but it may not be able to communicate the authenticity of experience of the poet. In this connection Jeffrey Wainwright says:

However, every experience with languages teaches us that communication is frequently less transparent than we would wish. Disappointment at the failure of language to be clear, and at its capacity to mislead and sway us into deception, has marked our thinking about language for centuries. Ambiguity, double meanings, equivocation intended and not intended, all manner of 'speak', results from, or exploit,

the potential anarchy of language. Often, it seems, 'words run away with themselves' and takes us with them.

Patra is aware of this limitation of language. So like the romantics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century English literature he depends on the simple and plain language that promises more intimacy of feeling and thoughts. Jayanta Mahapatra and other poets like A.K. Ramanujan prefer phrases full of turns and twists, but this mode has also its limitation and the danger of being trivial if they are employed merely for the reason that they can be done so. It is not always good to stretch language too much. Niranjana Mohanty, another poet from Orissa writing in English also shares the same view when he says:

I'm aware of the fact that language is a limited medium. It doesn't accurately represent the hidden nuances of feeling always. There remains a sustainable gap between what one longs for and what one achieves. Through my poetry I try to minimize the gap between the first hand experience and the expression through the creative medium. The degree of success rests on how my readers/researchers 'read' the lines of my poems, and reach the core.

Jayanta Mahapatra always casts a shadow of gloom or depicts an atmosphere of aridity in his poetry. His approach to the problems and predicaments of the society follows the method of a modernist or postmodernist poet. His poetry expresses a sense of being paralyzed when he tries to articulate something and this consequently leads him to end up in despair; there is a feeling that the cherished values have been drowned in man's pursuit for instant gratification of individual interests.

Disjunction of collocation is another feature of Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry. Many contemporary poets adopt this method to puncture the language for a variety of reasons. The phrases 'polite fiction' and 'beak of tears' in the following lines are some of such numerous disjunctive collocations found in Blue of the Sky and other poems of Mahapatra.

At times even the simple flight  
of a pigeon is polite fiction  
.....  
The sky's blue waiting simply  
To be carried by a bird's beak of tears.

Mahapatra has done it deliberately in order to represent the brokenness of the world in his poetry. Secondly he might be mocking at the language, and by doing so he seems to set his own autonomy of creative framework liberated from the colonial legacy. In fact creation of one's own variety of English is a common feature of many writers of Indian English literature.

Patra and Mahapatra use the real landscape of Orissa to write their poems. Their imagery of landscape is capable of emphasizing the tenor of their feeling in a very powerful way. While Patra depends on the descriptive imagery, Mahapatra uses various types of imagery from concrete to abstract to contrasting one; we see Mahapatra creating imagery of metaphysical types. Mahapatra's imagery sometimes even turns to be elusive, or rather symbolic. Patra's simple imagery belongs to the school of Wordsworth, while Mahapatra's to Eliot or Donne. The collusion of his contrasts sometimes becomes shocking.

Mahapatra's background as physics teacher moulded his sensibility, although his training in physics has little to do with his writing poems. But the fact that he belongs to science background makes Mahapatra more detached and, at times, cold and rational like a scientist who is expected to restrain his emotion. Mahapatra is more concerned with perfection of his craftsmanship, while Patra is transported into the world of his creation. Patra is very much involved in the creation of his poetic imagery. He once said that "to know him is to read his poems." Moreover Patra has strong conviction on the power of imagination. He says "for a poet imagination is authentic. It is as authentic as our own existence. It is never short-lived. It is never away from a poet's own realization."

His faith on the power of imagination reminds us of W.H. Auden's *Look, Stranger!* Auden's intense feeling on the seascape leads him to believe its authentic effect upon the stranger. He insistently request the stranger to pay attention to the "leaping light of delight" that he believes would give the stranger some sort of moral and spiritual exaltation.

Pradip Patra writes confessional or personal poems; his concern is basically trying to understand the self. It seems that he wants to capture the experience of life in fragments of momentary awareness. On the other hand, Mahapatra's poems lament over the stagnancy, ignorance and illusion of the society and its people. He conveys these ideas through images after images constructed out of the raw material of Oriya landscape and its people. India is a land of diversity, but the features of poverty, prejudice, superstition and exploitation

etc. which are common and visible across the length and breath of the country. So what he sees in Orissa is equally relevant to other parts of the country. In this sense he is as much an Indian poet as he is an Oriya. □

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THE MAKING OF MODERN WORLD AND ITS  
ANGUISH REFLECTED IN MAHAPATRA'S POETRY

\* B.J. Geetha

Mahapatra is a keen observer of contemporary life and situation and does not mince words in describing socio-political scene that diminishes humanity. Irony becomes his forte. Like a Nissim Ezekiel here and a Derek W alcott there, Mahapatra tries to come to terms with reality. He reminds us of T.S. Eliot in his The Wasteland days when the latter spoke of 'the horror and boredom of life, devoid of glory'. Mahapatra is a frank and candid in describing the country and the world around him in realistic terms, He 'sees life steadily and sees it whole'. Violence and lawlessness in contemporary society seem to disturb the poet. The disgust of the poet is clearly discernible in a number of poems in his recent works. In a poem titled "Afternoon" Mahapatra expresses his disgust and anguish at the rape of girls and women that is reported frequently in the newspapers of our country. He writes:

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The harsh afternoon skin of the summer sky  
Lies in flakes on the dry river bed.  
There, the raped and dismembered body  
of another thirteen-year old girl, stilled,  
beyond the trembling of the sands.  
Late afternoon I saw a young widow  
strip herself naked by the water.  
Just dark brushes all over her fair body (Afternoon)

Mahapatra though wrote some 'subjunctive' texts, he excels in 'indicative' texts. As a humanistic poet, he wrote about what happens around the world. Poems like 'Defeat', 'The Quest', 'Bazaar Scene', 'Heroism', 'the Unease of Quiet Sleep', 'About My Favorite things' and a few others in his latest book of verse, *Shadow Space* are examples of 'indicative' texts. Hence, these poems can be appreciated and analysed better as cultural studies. In 'About my Favourite Things' Mahapatra writes about the drought-stricken Kalahandi (a place that finds a prominent space in Mahapatra's poetry after Cuttack, Bhubaneswar and Puri) and the sufferings of thousands of people there. He was appalled by the misery that had befallen the people of underdeveloped Kalahandi district of Orissa. The poem is based on the first hand experience of his visit to the place, Thus, he writes:

Last December, around Christmas  
I felt I should go down the drought-stricken  
Kalahandi countryside and watch my eyes fill  
with flight  
.....  
A tiny straw hut in the fallow fields looked sadly  
at me.  
Caught the odor of sweat and coarse straw.  
Did all earth smell like that? (*Shadow Space* 49)

Kalahandi is not an exception. In other parts of the world, 'seven hundred miles away' a family were 'burnt to death, simple because / they had another faith'. The poet is moved by human sufferings at Kalahandi and elsewhere caused by nature or fellow human beings. His heart goes to all the suffering humanity.

It is in this aspect that Mahapatra reminds us of T.S. Eliot and nearer at home, Nissim Ezekiel whose heart goes for the suffering humanity and who wish mankind well in their later poems. As Mahapatra advances in years, he feels more for the suffering humanity. The things which he could not notice during his youth and middle age, now becomes crystal clear to him and his heart bleeds for humanity. In a poem called 'Defeat', Mahapatra speaks of child labour and the plight of a boy who worked in the blacksmith's shop. Thus, he writes:

A boy sat smiling, fanning the flames,  
I did not notice his eyes then, misty with pain  
Or his hands as he worked with the bellows,  
a finger broken, sores on his thin wrists.

And what is worse is that hunger and sufferings go hand in hand. The blacksmith's shop is no more but the suffering of the child labourers has worsened, giving rise to hunger and deprivation. Hence, in a tone full of pathos, the poet records:

The blacksmith's shop is gone now  
and childhood sits in shadow  
like an eye in a face that is dead (Shadow Space 37)

Poverty, starvation and human suffering go hand in hand. In a poem titled; 'Bazaar Scene', the poet speaks of a three-year old girl child who had stolen a rotten mango from the fruit vendor's basket and given it to her 'crippled brother slumped on the road side'. The plight of the undernourished child and the poverty-stricken mother moved the poet. Thus, with a voice marked by agony the poet asks:

If the world weeps, are you moved?  
Will it show you where to go?  
Does the world grow according to its own needs?

Mahapatra is good at cultivating human relationship. One is moved by his concern for fellow poets and love for his contemporaries as is evident in a poem titled "A Day in Marburg on-the-Lahn" (Written on the death of A.K. Ramanujan).

The poem, 'March' in Shadow Space indicates the mood of the poet who is deeply disturbed by the wanton violence that erupts all around us. The failure on the part of human beings to see the danger that threatens our very

existence on earth makes the poet feel sad. As a true humanistic poet, he is disturbed by senseless violence, rape and wanton killings that have become a part of our daily routine life. He writes:

Men here build cities,  
Cities work their way  
Into a maze of stories  
from where man's mind  
fails to see ahead...  
And another murder  
Of a raped girl on the sea beach  
all these are provisional. (Shadow Space 81)

The poet is concerned with the fate of humanity here in our country as well as in the world. And hence, any form of nuclear weaponry is unacceptable to him. The whole atmosphere is threatened by nuclear holocaust. As he put it:

The cloud I saw too, bent on suicide  
And the underground test, pilgrim of a new world  
Carrying easily over the distance between us.  
(Shadow Space 75)

Using 'darkness' as a metaphor for ignorance, which is akin to absence of knowledge, the poet reflects on the colonial past and turbulent present, in a poem called, 'Darkness' (published in Himal August 12/8, 1999, p.49) and asks for a way out.

From a window here and a door there  
Darkness lifted its head and looked  
who would show it the way?  
It slipped past reason and knocked on the  
Minister's heart  
It flouted its shape.

The 'hostile history' refers to the colonial past, which haunts the post-colonial present. The 'colonial' system and laws are still in operation. We have inherited the British Administration and judicial system and thereby, kept the umbilical cord intact. This reminds us of his earlier observation, "It is thus the

odour of a captured country lingers' ('Life Signs'). Mahapatra is making a whole-hearted effort to decolonise Indian English Poetry.

In course of an article, "The Decline of Indian English Poetry", published in *The Journal of Indian Writing in English* (Jan. 2000) Mahapatra outlines the role of a poet in the contemporary society.

Poets are expected to make sense of life. If they find life today in fragments, they must not leave it that way. Perhaps they should have that desire to produce poetry that transcends the ills of modern life rather than poetry that helplessly mirrors them. It is easy for me to say this when I know I am guilty of such writing. But I am afraid this is a difficult task to achieve.

This statement is amply borne out in a poem called, "Possessions". Here, he talks about the poets who merely describe their private and public life, and write about the socio-political scene with a sense of empathy. The public expectation of the poets is very high. The realization of the poets' predicament is brought out in an unambiguous note in the following lines:

In Pin perhaps  
they stand inside, but cannot  
yet slam the door of their voice.

Ministers come and go. Wives pretend illness to attend to their ailing husbands. Husbands and wives know that they are lying and yet they don't 'turn their eyes away'. Politicians assume power and make speeches but thousands of children 'go hungry again'. There are many things in the world that happen around us but we do not comprehend them like a little girl who fails to understand "why the wind keeps crying in the telephone wires / and there, how it makes the stars tremble too!" Poetry fails to come to terms with contemporary reality. Thus, the poet says,

Our poems look to the right and to the left,  
and then turn to torment in meek expectation  
And always the waiting, a hundred years hence  
the poems will still be luxurious  
hiding their impotent hatred  
for the world's unresurrectable life.



Having said this, the poet tries to implore upon the readers that individuals are not very important and what is more, they live not for themselves but for others. The poet asks:

Why is it so hard to realize oneday  
that you are meaningless? That one  
is not even living for one's own sake?

Individual poets too come and go and are 'silenced by the shapelessness of life alive'. The problem baffles us. The poet asks a rhetorical question:

would the problem disappear  
if one puts oneself beyond the judgement of men?

(Shadow Space, 1997:25)

The desire to rebuild the society and reassess life from a new angle underline the message contained in the poem, 'possessions'. Merely telling about life is not enough, one has to face it and live it to the full, the poet seems to say. The optimism expressed in the life, 'There is always a door open somewhere' of this poem, is unmistakable.

Mahapatra's poetry clearly shows that he is one of our best post-colonial poets. The desire to write about an indigenous tradition and culture and establish an identity independent of the colonizer in the recent history, immediately puts him on the forefront of post-colonial poets in our country. To read his poetry is to acquire a kind of empathy with the contemporary life. Mahapatra has successfully decolonized his poetry and made it a vehicle for the expression of Indian scene in the post-colonial era. The concern for humankind and particularly for the poor and suffering people is unmistakable in Mahapatra's poetry. Mahapatra as a poet "sees into the life of things" and makes the reader feel for the suffering humanity. □

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## The Aesthetics of Silence and Sound: Robert Frost and Jayanta Mahapatra.

\* Dr. Bishnu Charan Dash

'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter'

("Ode on a Grecian Urn" - John Keats)

The dialectical clash between 'heard' and 'unheard' music, between 'sound' and 'silence' has been a subject of serious contemplation in comparative aesthetics, and poetry, being the basis of all the five fine arts (the other four being: painting, music, drama and sculpture) is obviously no exception to it. In Indian aesthetics, it is enjoined that a rhythmic movement forms the basis of creation-be it artistic or Natural - and that out of the silence of Eternity, the Sankhya philosophy enjoins, the three primordial principles (Sattva, rajas and tamas) of Nature (Prakriti) took an organized way, and the creation emerged out of 'movement' (sound) when Prakriti, bereft of her equilibrium, came closer to Purusa, the spiritual Principle<sup>1</sup>. While subscribing to the Sankhya viewpoint that movement (spandana) constitutes the beginning of creation, the Saiva philosophy however doesn't distinguish 'Matter' and 'Spirit' as two separate principles, but recognizes them as two sides of the Absolute, who first created 'Power of Creation' (Sakti); and out of her 'desire' and 'movement' for creation, was created, 'sound' (nada) - the primordial sound (Om) The Sarada Tilaka<sup>2</sup> states the secret of the Nada theory in that sound emerged out of the union of Siva as 'solid point' (vindu) and Sakti as his power (vija). The entire universe is a sound which is audible not to the ordinary human ears but to the meditative ears of a man of contemplation, who initially hears cacophonies, and who, in course of his progressive development in contemplation/meditation (dhyana), hears rhythmic sounds of seas, clouds, springs, bells and drums-until the sounds become subtler like humming of the black bees in a state of complete absorption (samadhi) in which the individual consciousness is entirely lost in the Universal, the source of Eternal silence and sound.

The Nada theory can be correlated with the divine theory of origin of poetry, and the Agni Purana<sup>3</sup> eulogizes both poetry and poets in that the poetic world is limitless, and that the poet is as much powerful a creator as the lord of creation (Prajapati) constantly shaping, twisting, dissolving/ dissipating and then producing a peerless work of art by virtue of his creative genius (pratibha/prajna).

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In Indian aesthetics/ poetics, the poet has been accorded a divine status in the sense that he possesses enormous potentialities by virtue of which he can not only create a new world out of nature, but also transform pain into pleasure, silence into sound, and all earthly sound(s) into divine sound(s). Robert Frost, the famous 20<sup>th</sup> Century American poet, and Jayanta Mahapatra, a celebrated name in post independence Indian English poetry, were essentially meditative poets of the 'blessed mood' in which they, like William Wordsworth, heard the 'unheard music', saw 'life into things' in the womb of silence, and realized the 'still sad music of humanity' in hours of 'tranquility' or 'serene-silence' in the lap of Nature. The present paper purports to establish both the poets as seasoned singers of silence and sound which enrich the structure and texture of their poetry.

Robert Frost, often acclaimed as a 'master poet' to be judged by world standards, was, in the words of Robert E. Spiller<sup>4</sup>, a metaphysical poet in the tradition of Emerson and Emily Dickinson for whom poetry is essentially a journey from the common place world of observed reality to the uncommon abode of mystery and mystical significance. In course of his journey, the poet goes in quest of the skull beneath the skin, the 'unseen' behind the 'seen', the sound behind the silence, and the manifold silence behind the cacophonies. Like his creator, the Frost protagonist is a lonely striker, a rider, an apple picker, a swinger placed in the backdrop of isolation in a cold and callous universe. Like the reader(s) of Frost's poetry, he is also caught between the temptation(s) of silence and sound, of action and contemplation, of ideal and real, of life and death, of the simple facts of mundane existence and the 'deep-dark woods' of mystery.

The tension in Frost's poetry often puzzles and betrays the casual reader who fails, at the first sight, to locate the intricate aesthetic design and symbolic pattern built upon a complex cobweb of suggestive meaning. Frost's simplicity is deceptive because there is always in his poetry, a meaning within a meaning and that is precisely the reason why, he himself proclaims: my poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom<sup>5</sup>. And the kernel comes out of the husk like a flash of illumination at the end after the enactment of the drama of silence and sound. In Frost's scheme of things, poetry is conceived of in terms of a journey which is undertaken with the wings of silence and sound, and every time the journey takes a progressive turn, poetry becomes a revelation, and it cozes out endless drops of meaning for the delight as well as knowledge of the reader, just as a big piece of ice on a hot stove melts into drops

Like Frost, Mahapatra is also a meditative poet who subscribes to the tenets of Indian poetics/aesthetics in that poetry is essentially a meditative endeavour rather than a flamboyant propaganda. Ananda Vardhana, Mammata and Abhinava Gupta hold that originality and creative potentiality (Pratikha) are the root cause of poetry, whereas suggestive nuances/meanings constitute its soul ('dhvanir atra kavyasya').<sup>6</sup> A poet without the gift of Pratikha is like a play without the prince. Rabindranath and Sri Aurobindo on the other hand emphasize the meditative and spiritual aspects by recognizing the fact that poetry is incantatory call from within which has nothing to do with high sounding words and ornaments because the jingling ornaments drown the 'whispers' and mar the suggestive meaning and the silent working of the aesthetic structure of a poem.<sup>7</sup> The true poetic sensibility is shaped by simplicity, intensity of feeling, purity of thought and a meditative search for apt metaphors, symbols and images in silence, and Mahapatra, the silent sadhaka of poetry, is a professed follower of this poetic principle. His poetry is an eloquent expression of the eternal silence of the unknown. Mahapatra writes:

".....For me a poem is knit together by an inconceivable silence, which is intangible substance, of which words are but manifestations: words which can build the poem from a silence and to which the poem must eventually return."<sup>8</sup>

The above remark by the poet himself justifies that Mahapatra's poetry, like Frost's, is grounded upon the aesthetics of silence. He comes closer to the Nada theory when he says that this silence has its seat within the heart, and that it waits to burst out from the mysterious silence of the self with a 'child like pang' (signifying simplicity) in order to shape the language of a poem. And here Mahapatra comes closer to Tagore's aesthetics of creation which envisages 'poetry as the cry of a new born child', and 'gift of poetry' as 'an instrument of expression delicately responsive to the breath that comes from the depth of my being'.<sup>9</sup> To Rabindranath, as it is for Frost and Mahapatra, a poet should not survey the world superficially, and the poet as a seer should look into the life of things and should catch the white radiance of eternity behind the dome of many-coloured glass of life. And each and every song of "Gitanjali" provides the reader with an intuitive and revelatory inspiration that ensouls his mind with the sight of the self, the innermost reality of things. Paradoxically, Mahapatra experiences this silence within and it opens out a 'thousand memories' which in turn came into being in his poems. He attempts to express this eloquent silence through apt symbols, metaphors and myths.

In the first poem of his first volume "Close the Sky, Ten by Ten" (1971), under the title of "Loneliness", Mahapatra evinces his keen interest in and commendable capacity for molding the 'language' like 'clay' and makes his imagist experiment so as to present the unusual silence as an aesthetic that forms the 'structure' which overpowers the 'texture'. Bruce King<sup>10</sup> observes that in the first volume, the poet 'experiments with form, language, image' and herein 'sound' prevails over 'sense' (emotion), the 'structure' over 'texture'. The very title of the poem "Loneliness" reveals the strategy of the poet to express isolation through seven different images that enrich the aesthetic of silence. Loneliness is located in the silent activity of the 'wings' moving upward to 'catch the fire of the summer-sun', in the swift movement of 'air', in the 'wheels gripped amid the cogs of other wheels' signifying the queer silence born out of the stop of the sounding 'wheel', in the regular clicking sound indicated by 'ticking time', in the 'ashes upon the veneering table', in 'the breath of reputed ego', in the silent reticence of a winner unexpectedly losing the game, in the silence of graves and wages, of nameless faces and atoms, and finally in the 'flames from the pyre of plundered seconds' perhaps pointing to the frustration of the tormenting past life already plundered away by Time/Eternity. A skilful practitioner of the montage technique as he is, Mahapatra has presented a mosaic of situations/objective correlatives to stage the dominant drama of silence with the help of a cluster of images that are at once haunting, evocative, forceful and functional. The aesthetic of silence is very aptly discovered from the silent and laborious creative suffering of an artist/creator/actor who, in a state of indecision, articulates and struggles silently with words in order to give birth to his baby creation. It is here that poetry becomes a matter of meditation and aesthetic contemplation, and the aesthetic coil of silence, often disturbed by the formidable presence of sound, finally tends to achieve the organic unity/structural finish which Mahapatra's poetry is so famous for. The use of unusual images in the poem under question lends a mysterious glow/ mystical meaning to his creation and in this respect, he comes closer to Robert Frost.

Much before Mahapatra set to writing poems, Frost had already established himself as a powerful poet presenting the paradox of silence and sound. Yet, both of them are considered as modern poets, dealing with the decadence, disintegration of values and human relationship, isolation and alienation of the modern man. From the society/ environment, nature and the cosmic mechanism which is more often than not, presented as cold, callous and indifferent to human suffering, the tension / dichotomy in his poetry between

silence and sound, between ideal and real is nourished by the very fact of his being a poet keeping two feet in two different worlds-one clashing and finally reconciling with another. He began under the cloud of the Romantics and became a realist to the core. He is a Victorian in as much as he shares the 19<sup>th</sup> century religious doubts and distrust of science, and yet he is modern in his mood and manner. Likewise, Mahapatra is a modernist, a 'new poet' of experimentation and vivid presentation of contemporary reality and consciousness, and yet in his magnum opus "Relationship" (1981) which won him the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award, one locates Mahapatra's search for roots, his feeling of loss and deprivation, and his desire to consecrate the cultural past of Orissa- her religion, rituals, traditions and myths. Through the marriage of silence and sound, the poet appropriates his acceptance of the past and the present, of tradition and modernity:

"I know I can never come alive if I refuse to consecrate at the altar of my origins/ where the hollow horn blows every morning and its suburban sound picks it way/ through the tangled moonlight of your lazy sleep." <sup>11</sup> ("Relationship")

The aesthetic alacrity of the stanza rests on the happy marriage of the two contraries-silence and sound- which is indicated by the expressions of 'hollow horn blows' and 'suburban sound picks'. The sacred silence of the morning is both broken and enriched by the blowing of horn in the rural landscape of Orissa, whereas the 'suburban sound' of the evening representing cacophony characteristic of Orissan city life is set against the silent moonlit night and 'lazy sleep'. Viewed from the aesthetic standpoint, the journey in the stanza is from silence (hollow) to sound ('horn blows') and from sound ('suburban sound') to 'lazy sleep' representing silence again. A similar such pattern is followed in the poems "The Lost Children of America" (included in the volume "Life Signs" (1983) and "Silence" (A Rain of Rites, 1974).

In the poem "Silence", the mood is one of deep meditation, and the poet not only watches but reads the mysterious silence of the dawn that 'dances across the land'; action and contemplation, silence and sound are intertwined so as to edify the aesthetic framework of the poem. The poet watches silence passively; through a small lonely window it 'grows' so actively that it 'dances', 'hurts' and finally 'creeps' into bed like a 'furtive child'. Mahapatra herein expresses eloquently the suzerainty of silence, with the help of personification, and the poem progresses from silence to sound (dance) and finally ends in the eternal silence of the unknown:

'I have read the silence

That dances across the land at dawn  
 I have watched it grow  
 From a small lonely window,  
 It hurts  
 The hundred thousand eyes  
 When I try to get over it  
 It creeps into bed like a furtive child.' ("Silence")

Throughout his poetic career, Mahapatra proves himself to be a philosopher of silence. He watches it, reads it, feels/experiences it, enjoys its dance and ceaselessly chases after it even though the latter behaves like a 'furtive child'. Though the poet is critical about religious rites and rituals, he is nevertheless a singer of solitude and a ritualist of silence:

'Sitting together quietly is a ritual looking at stars ..... ("A Ritual")  
 And this ritual of silence is discernible in quite a good number of his poems: 'dead silence' ("Curriculum"), personified solitude 'stretching long hands' ("The Farewell"), silence capturing human mind ("Snakes"), 'silence of our sanity' ("The Moon Landing"), the 'rock-faced silence' of father ("The Bride"), the wet silent night of a crow ("Dawn"), 'silence' as 'distance behind the wheel' ("Konarka"), 'sands' blind solitude' ("Relationship"), 'dry river bed wrapped up in a shroud of moonlight ("Dispossessed Nests"), dawn's bone-white land' ("Burden of Waves and Fruit", 1986 and 1988), 'shadows can never open their mouths' ("Shadows"). The manifold ritual of silence as detailed above is meticulously observed/executed by the poet with the ritualistic ingredients of personification, symbols, metaphors and images - auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory and kinesthetic. In course of his ritualistic worship of silence, he encounters paradoxically both the silence and sound of the 'self', of society, of Nature and of Eternity signified by death and sleep, and in this respect, he seems to be sharing, with Robert Frost, the progressive aesthetic journey from silence to sound, and from sound to sleep epitomizing Eternity. The whole process starts with silence of the visible world and end in the eternal silence of the unknown. Mahapatra observes:

"For, this silence is a sound I will remember always, as it seems to move through my days and I feel it like an amour.... to protect myself from the outside world." <sup>12</sup>

The sound of silence not only reminds him of the cacophony of the world of decay and disintegration, but also prompts him towards intense self-

realization and realization of the Eternal silence, and in this connection, the poet's conversation with Norman Simms is noteworthy:

"Life is painful, the process of writing a poem is painful, and then poetry is going into and finding the centre of yourself..... It sounds quite ambiguous, but you are always aware of the silence which occupies your 'soul' or whatever, and words only go on to make us more aware of this silence which suspends all life, keeps you hanging in space as it were."<sup>13</sup>

In Mahapatra's scheme of things, 'words' are ingeniously used to serve the alma mater of silence, to constantly remind the reader of the border between the understandable and the un-understandable, the visible (sound) and the invisible (silence), between life and death, and it is this metaphysical mystery through the secret working of words/images that brings him closer to Frost.

For Robert Frost, life is a complex and arduous journey, and every human being is a lonely traveler, a solitary soul alienated from man, society, Nature and the callous cosmic mechanism. For both Frost and Mahapatra, isolation is not a peculiar American or Orissan/Indian phenomenon; it is rather an extended metaphor that stands for the precarious condition of the 'modern man' born and reared in a war-prone and poverty-ridden society. And that is perhaps one of the reasons why both Frost and Mahapatra withdrew from the cacophony of the external world to sing the song of the 'self' in silence. Like Mahapatra's poem "Silence" and "Loneliness", Frost's "Mowing" ("A Boy's Will", 1913), "After Apple Picking" ("North of Boston", 1914), "Acquainted with the Night" ("West Running Brook", 1928) and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowing Evening" ("New Hampshire", 1923) are classic poems in which the omnipresence of silence is felt by the reader. The poetic persona in "Mowing" is a lonely mower busy in a field by the woods with a long scythe in his hand. The poem begins in a hushed-up manner in the backdrop of paramount silence and out of the womb of silence emerges a single sound - the whispering sound of the scythe - that unfolds manifold vistas of mystery and meaning - tension between silence and sound, the silence of sound and the sound of silence and the cosmic significance of sound reminiscent of Mahapatra's eternal silence of the unknown. For Frost, as it is for Mahapatra, silence and sound are interchangeable. On the one hand, the long scythe simply whispers to the ground, and on the other hand, the mower, being the owner, doesn't know what does the scythe whispers:



'There was never a sound  
Beside the wood but one,  
And that was my long scythe  
Whispering to the ground  
What was it whispered?  
I knew not well myself' ("Mowing")

The expression 'there was never a sound' signifying the reign of undiluted silence is dialectically countered by the only sound of the scythe that combines both silence (whisper) and sound - human, nature-born and cosmic. It is cosmic in the sense that the mower does not know or fails to know what the scythe whispers! 'Individual silence' here merges with 'environmental silence' and cosmic silence. The clash between silence and sound is clearly indicated, and the cosmic significance of the 'scythe' is evident from the way the poet defines its 'sound' in terms of the 'heat of the sun' and 'lack of solid sound':

"Perhaps it was something about the heat  
Of the sun,  
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound -  
And that was why it whispered and did not speak" ("Mowing")

The scythe is increasingly mystified, and unlike human beings who work for the sake of 'reward', the scythe is an unwearied worker in detachment and hence a singer of eternal silence of the unknown. The mower too has become wise whose pleasure and wisdom consist in his unalloyed devotion to work in silence and in his appreciation of both the beautiful and ugly aspects of the forest signified by 'bright green snake' and pale orchise which reinforce the clash between silence and sound - the snake symbolizing sound and orchises, indicating silence. As in Mahapatra's "Silence" and "Loneliness", silence is held high in Frost's poem under question and it ends in/with a mysterious note justifying the efficacy of the sound of silence.

'My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make'. ("Mowing")

It's not cacophony but 'silent' working and making hay in 'quiet' that matters. It is the sound of silence, the symphony of the woods that dawns upon him the highest wisdom: "the fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows" ("Mowing").

As in "Mowing", the poet withdraws himself from the din and bustle of the external world in search of the silent symphony in the poem "Acquainted with the Night". Terribly sick of the horror and boredom of city life, here is a lonely city dweller who wishes to acquaint himself with the dark and dead silent

atmosphere of a rainy night. As in Mahapatra's poetry, the persona is here in a meditative mood surveying the dead silence of the Night ('the saddest city land'). The aesthetic framework is built upon the coil of silence that interweaves all the stanzas through the silent walk, acquaintance and encounter of the persona with 'night', 'rain', 'city light', 'saddest city lane', 'whistle' of the watchman, the one 'luminary clock against the sky' and one interrupted cry from another street. The mystery and overwhelming supremacy of silence in the poem clashes with the whispering sound of rain, the whistling of the watchman, the sound of the city-walker's feet, the interrupted cry of another street and the luminary clock against the sky. Individual loneliness coupled with environmental silence of the night culminates in cosmic silence paradoxically indicated by the mysterious sound of the 'luminous clock' meaningfully stationed at an unearthly height against the sky. The city walker's wish to merge with the cosmic silence by transcending the terror of night and occasional sound(s) however fails because of the cold indifference of time. The desire to hear the unheard music remains a desire because in Frost's poetry a human being is essentially a lonely figure born to be pushed and pulled between the dichotomy of life and death, ideal and real, silence and sound, 'heard' and 'unheard' music.

If "Acquainted with the Night" is essentially a poem of meditative silence in which the power of sound is made subservient to silence, "Once by the Pacific" ("West Running Brook") is largely dominated by sound which is evident from the 'terrible roar' of the Pacific Ocean. The silent observation of the poet on the beach of the Pacific can be contrasted with the careless onrush of the waves which could eat up the shore itself. The night of dark intent conspires with the ocean in fury how to call for the 'dooms day' that symbolically points to the dying down of all cacophony there by leaving room for eternal silence. The dark intent of Nature to end the World is reiterated in yet another poem ("Fire and Ice") in which the visual imagery of 'fire' and 'ice' work in connivance how to draw a close for the Creation. Though 'fire' and 'ice', 'heat' and 'cold' are as such opposed to each other, they represent the drama of silence. The former burns silently and its flame goes upward, whereas the latter melts into drops secretly. Yet, like the whispering sound of scythe and unlike the roaring waves of the Pacific, both fire and ice represent the 'sound' of 'silence' - one enriching the other - the sound of suffering indicated by 'fire' finally merges into eternal silence signified by the cold clasp of death (ice). Like Mahapatra's "Loneliness" and "Silence", Frost's "Desert Places" combines outer silence with the inner silence of the narrator which is more terrifying than the silence of the landscape or

cosmic silence. An atmosphere of isolation is developed in the opening stanza with terrifying intensity. It is a wintry evening and the poet marks the lonely face of nature which is evident from falling snow, cold night, withdrawal of animals to their lairs, darkening woods and desert places. The aesthetic framework of the poem, reminiscent of Mahapatra's "Silence", is built upon the uncanny and paramount power of silence that runs through all the stanzas, and that progresses from external silence of the deserted landscape to the inner silence of the poet ('the loneliness includes me unawares') and from the terrifying inward loneliness in a state of climax, it tends towards cosmic silence signified by the 'emptiness' of the desolate 'stars':

"The woods around it have it - it is theirs,  
All animals are smothered in their lairs,  
I am too absent-spirited to count;  
The loneliness includes me unawares". ("Desert Places")

The aesthetic contemplation of both Frost and Mahapatra progresses from a tiny graspable world ('a small lonely window' in "Silence", and 'snow falling' in a field in "Desert Places") to the limitless periphery of Eternity. Like the Indian poet meditating on silence through 'watching', 'dancing', 'growing', 'hurting' and finally 'creeping' into bed like a 'furtive child' forcing the poet thereby to go in eternal quest for the 'child' (silence), Frost too follows an elaborate 'ritual of silence' involving 'watching', looking into the 'snow falling' and 'night falling', the darkening woods, the empty face of the wintry landscape blanketed by snow and the desolate stars:

"And lonely as it is, that loneliness  
Will be more lonely ere it will be less  
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow  
With no expression, nothing to express"

("Desert Places")

Frost, like Mahapatra, is here a dedicated devotee of silence for whom the unheard music and the eternal quest of the unknown remain an irresistible metaphysical preoccupation<sup>14</sup>. Both of them have their own 'desert place' - loneliness of mind - where the clash between silence and sound continues forever. The highest message they seem to deliver is that man must try to conquer the cacophony of the world on the one hand, and the desert places/desolate sights of Mind/Nature on the other. Knowing it fairly well that they have

their own desert places, human beings should accept the reality that man is by nature lonely, and that the mystery of silence is as much fathomless as the creeping of a furtive child. □

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## Jayant a Mahapatra: A Humanist par Excellence

\* Nityananda Pattanayak

The artist arrives at the summit of his/her art when dealing with issues and problems confronted by fellow human beings s/he has aroused the love, admiration by the 'faithful representation of life, beauty, pain and virtue'. Jayant a Mahapatra is one such artist who has endeared himself by capturing authentically trials and tribulations, pains and pangs of men, women and children, and highlighting the injustice meted to them. To a question about what are the strong themes of his poetry, Mahapatra replied, "One of the themes would be a theme like the Gujarat problem. I wrote a series of poems on this issue. Many of these poems were published in little magazines. Victimization and injustice are the subjects that occupy me nowadays..Human relationship(s), of course." <sup>1</sup>

Mahapatra's concern for fellow human being is seen nowhere better than his depiction of the poverty of his land. He is pained to see the shameful economic condition of his country even after fifty years India achieved Independence. Pathetic condition of the people stirs his poetic sensibility which erupts to air his voice against economic inequality, exploitation and oppression afflicting the land. The voice is genuine, it is sincere since it wells out from the core of his heart as he himself was a victim of hunger due to faulty economic system in the country. In "Grandfather" he says how his famine-stricken grandfather had to change his faith out of hunger for food during the na-anka famine in 1866. With a sense of agony and disgust he directs a volley of questions to his grandfather, only to reflect in the end on the circumstances of the change. He asks,

What did faith matter?

What Hindu world so ancient and true for you to hold?

He feels that it is not proper on his part to hold his ancestor responsible for the change of religion. He even regrets for fixing responsibility on his grandfather earlier;

We wish we knew you more,

we wish we knew what it was to,

against dying, to know the dignity!" (Grandfather)

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In "Village Evening" Mahapatra depicts the hard economic realities faced by village widows and children, who, devoid of financial security, survive on alms. Ahalya, the widow with her seven year old son earns her living by begging. She

...caresses the rupee  
her seven-year-old son  
has brought home from his day-long labours  
dreaming of day-break

and suffers from a sense of guilty when she feels how miserably she fails to provide her son the promised food:

as Ahalya goes back to bed,  
guilty look on her face,  
her promise to feed her son  
morning milk-curd's another faraway dream.

Mahapatra has heard the whine of hunger-stricken people, seen the slum and squalor where children scour frantically the dumped leftover plates in hotel dustbins for a morsel of food. He has read the reports of starvation deaths or parents selling their babies for money. His discovery of the debased human condition arising out of poverty shocks him. He fumes at the fact that this land even after fifty years of its Independence inherits the suffering and continues to be poor, common people remain the worst sufferers, the victims remain the same while the faces of the perpetrators of oppression have changed. As the poet walks through his town the dichotomy between oppressed and oppressor become more perceptible and he muses that starvation is not new to the Indian people and it is a known history. He writes:

Between the friezes of two bogged rivers (...)  
The past was there when I set out, (...)  
I have walked here so often that I know  
the unending demands the old tales make upon us, (...)  
because I can still feel the catch in my throat, (...)  
the destiny I carry within myself  
conspires with my past to bear witness to my failure (...)  
a country's air of sagging sick cowhide  
grasping the morose trachea of my hopes, (...)  
I move with the delirium of the past,  
applaud with the lean, withered dawns of my hands,  
to set my lips on shy white jasmines

that harden into the stone breasts of Konark dancers.  
And slowly I return(...)  
as though in anticipation  
of the brutality of the oppressor  
unable to escape the trances  
of my place, my endurance  
simply creating gestures of magnificence." (44-46)  
(" Stand By Memory" Burden of Waves and Fruit)

The poet thought of going to drought-hit Kalahandi countryside to see in his own eyes abject poverty, sub-human condition in which people live. He is shocked to see

A tiny straw hut in the fallow fields looked sadly at me.  
It was to keep out the cold, they said;  
the four-by-four frail pyramid of straw  
could easily hold ten men warm  
through the near-zero winter nights.  
I went in, lay down  
caught the odor of sweat and coarse straw.  
("About My Favourite Things" Shadow Space)

He is aghast to see the government apathy, bureaucratic indifference, the violence caused by intolerance. He says

Indefinable, like life, with the government wrong,  
the thinking wrong, the world wrong.  
("About My Favourite Things" Shadow Space)

Mahapatra in his poem "Hunger" shows excesses of hunger that can negate filial love, ignore social castigation, force one to compromise moral considerations. Here he recalls the life of a fisherman who in order to satisfy his hunger for food barter his fifteen year old daughter's virginity by inviting a stranger to have sexual gratification from her. We hear the old man say

... my daughter, she's just turned fifteen...  
Feel her, I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.

The protagonist feels

The sky fell on me and a father's exhausted wile.  
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.  
She opened her womby legs wide. I felt the hunger there,  
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside ("Hunger")

The nation's despair, its deprivation and sorry state of affairs is reflected in the poem "Deaths in Orissa" (A Whiteness of Bone) where the poet brings the picture of a typical village life:

Faces of tree-bark and grief (...)  
Nothing but the paddy's twisted throat  
exposed on the crippled bleak earth,  
nothing but impotence in lowered eyes,  
nothing but the tightening of the muscles  
in Bhyagabati's neck which her outcast mother  
would herself have liked to have throttled to death,  
nothing but the cries of shriveled women  
cracked against the bloodied altar of Man.

It is in India that people reel under the twin yokes of hunger and oppression. It is  
..., like the decapitated old temple by the river,  
its mouth open and staring,  
all its bewildering hunger born into sorrow.  
("A Dark Wind" A Whiteness of Bone)

Mahapatra's mapping of the contours of his land with hunger, oppression and suffering continues in "A Walk of Wild Feet" (Random Descent) where he says how starving multitudes live on "powdered dry mango seeds" and "wild roots plucked in the forest" and finds it difficult to believe that the world has either "color, light or hope". His anguish deepens further and he questions the meaning of Freedom. He says:

At times, as I watch,  
it seems as though my country's body  
floats down somewhere on the river (...)  
Not to meet the woman and her child  
in that remote village in the hills  
who never had even a little rice  
for their one daily meal these fifty years  
("Freedom" Bare Face)

Mahapatra extends this scene to his poem "Bazar Scene" where he subtly depicts the pathetic condition of half-starved children, the contrasting scenes-  
on one side jubilation and on the other struggle to live.



"Where did you get the mango?" the mother  
asked the excited three-year old, taking  
the soft fruit into her palm,  
knowing exactly where it came from  
the rotting pulp already staining her fingers.  
It was a time of jubilation for the chariot festival.  
Indifferently I watched the little pig-tailed girl  
running down the road with a solitary mango  
she had stolen from the fruit vendor's basket  
and given to her crippled brother slumped  
on the roadside. The child looked so undemourished  
his large eyes seemed ready to weep.

This abject poverty not only drives girls to prostitution or children to go for begging,  
it also drives youths to join extremist groups. He is bewildered to know why a  
number of young men and women suddenly disappear from their villages and go  
to join the Naxalite movement:

However much I provoked and curse  
I am unable to force an answer out of you  
(“A Country” Life Signs)

Everyone knows about this dichotomy between rich and poor, prosperity and  
poverty yet people have become insensitive to this inhuman condition. He feels  
sorry for his nation and people and in the same poem he says:

a land of fluctuating shadow and sunlight  
trapped in the roots of that very mango tree,  
A voice that is silent, fighting the poverty of fate.

From remorse he turns angry and pities the haves for their insensitiveness.

Pity is only felt for one  
whose eyes are blind to the ways of another  
with those eyes  
I cannot walk barefoot here. (Bazar Scene)

From local he goes international when he hints at the future of the raven-eyed  
hungry Somalian children who depend on other's help for survival.

the world's future in World Bank's loans  
and in the enormous eyes of Somalia's children,  
1992, Shadow Space)

Again,

It's the world again  
that must not take one unawares,  
a world where hundreds die  
of hunger in Somalia and elsewhere-  
(The Stories in Poetry Shadow Space)

The poet is not complacent only in depicting the pathetic economic condition of his land and its people, he also describes its consequences upon them. Impoverishment and deprivation reduces human beings to an empty stomach, causes loss of selfhood and dignity, takes out the sparkle from their eyes. In a rueful mood he says:

Always, someone somewhere  
is denying someone else his dignity.  
Someone's porcelain face is always laughing.  
Someone makes the dead walk in the night.  
(Denials, Shadow Space)

Contemporary happenings-Khalistan movement, Nellie massacre or Bhopal gas tragedy- that tell tales of senseless bloodshed, brute murder, gory incidents have not escaped the sensitive mind of the poet. He is deeply moved by the sudden turn of events in the first half of 1980s when Independent India began to bleed and was beset with loss of human values. He expressed his self's unhappiness over the events when he says India is his native land:

where a man easily kills his neighbour  
in the poem of God  
while he moves  
with a false face and song.  
(Waiting for the Summer of 1994 Shadow Space)

As the poet sees the raging violence, growing religious intolerance, narrow parochialism and government indifference in tackling the malaise, he displays a universal concern for humanity rising above mere political and social consciousness. He writes:

when the memory appears again over a land  
with that air of a mother which makes us simply  
clutch our hearts in grief, (...)  
which will only inherit  
our mother's spirit of sacrifice bringing freedom in death  
(Dispossessed Nests)

Depicting horrors of Khalistan movement when some misguided youths hijacked the Flight 405 to Lahore, the poet says:

shakuni skies  
under a merciless sun (where) angry masks barter faith  
with the golden litany of the Punjab (Dispossessed Nests)

Mahapatra's anguish continues seeing the violent protests in Golden city of Amritsar in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar and he writes:

Darkness stalks the streets somewhere (...)  
Only shadows  
pick up the reigns of reality in Amritsar  
shadows  
of long and supreme lives. (Dispossessed Nests)

He re-enacts the scene when he says:

A black bile of mad unrest (...)  
They wave their moist hands of red blood  
For this is the hour when the evening once more  
demonstrates its passionless mediocrity. (Dispossessed Nests)

To describe another macabre scene he writes:

Around  
a slender waist  
a petticoat stirs  
in the wind,  
looking absurd  
the torso  
looking about  
for its missing head. (Dispossessed Nests)

The poet is not only concerned about the present but also about the future fearing that how and to what extent the present events would be exploited by mythmakers to shape the future relation between communities. Describing the background of Indira Gandhi's assassination by her two bodyguards belonging to Sikh community he writes:

A man stands there afraid of what She is,  
the blossoms of revenge ablaze on his face.  
Bringing up the past is part of the game,  
his ominous dark patina of poetic justice. (...)  
who knows what kind of myth this is going to  
make in a hundred years? (Dispossessed Nests)

Mahapatra is horrified to see inhuman set-up in the Punjab violence, personifies it in the procession of the emancipated cows led toward public slaughter house "with their feet sleeping, / their eyes following the vague light into silence."  
(A Monsoon Day Fable Life Signs)

Mahapatra's sensibility is disturbed by the narrow regionalism and religious intolerance that put human lives at stake. In the heyday of six years Assam movement a brute massacre was committed at Nellie which claimed more than seven hundred human lives and caused thousands homeless. Describing this he writes in "Winds of Spring 1983" (Burden of Waves and Fruit)

death in the trampled paddies (...)  
the pleasure of slicing through  
the tender flesh of those graceful victims.

He continues the enactment of this savagery in "Summer 1983"  
an insane mother cradles her child's head  
that lies without its body,  
and tries faking death-only to die. (Burden of Waves and Fruit)

This incident so bewildered the poet that he like a pendulum tried "his utmost to replace the senseless refrain of hate by the amazement to be alive"  
(Dispossessed Nests)

Mahapatra expresses his bitterness at the growing religious intolerance in India where in the name of religion "others" are maimed, decapitated and killed. In "For Days Together" the poet has expressed his shock at the killing of an Australian missionary with his two sons by some fanatics in a remote village in Orissa. The poet outbursts:

This poem becomes a girl growing up  
while keeping her legs pressed chastely together,  
looks around shyly  
as another set of January deaths  
when a father and his two children were burnt alive  
(just because they had another faith).

At the same time the poet expresses his helplessness, helplessness of his poetic art in checking this madness and violence. In "Progress" (Bare Face) he writes:

It was there, friend, this poem  
its hands folded, eyes shut,  
looking down at those three charred corpses  
of a father and his two young sons  
in the middle of a long journey to nowhere  
what it saw turned to secret dust.

Mahapatra is deeply moved by the plight of women and children who fall easy victim to chauvinistic patriarchal concepts and discriminations, who have "a bruised presence" in the society. The woman falls always into male gaze and seldom rises above the primordial concept. Lucy Irigaray believes that a woman becomes thingified since her role in the society is viewed as that "represents a sense of "place" for man. " She finds herself defined as a thing".<sup>2</sup> Many of Mahapatra's poems while expressing sympathy and concern for the women and children strive to create a space and find recognition for them. In "Dawn" (A Rain of Rites) he says that in India a woman is "piled up to her silences, waiting for what the world will only let her do" and questions:

Where are things called homes  
sticky with toil; need after need  
tempts the fate to touch them,  
trap the homely, embarrassed hurt.  
Year after year  
like onions and herbs hung out to dry  
their hearth heavy  
the quiet too long  
what do they live for (...)  
They seed, though. They close their eyes  
everywhere  
to that end  
arising the poise of a flower.

For Mahapatra there is no mitigation to the suffering of women in India and their condition has remained unchanged from time beyond history. This age-old suffering of the women is beautifully presented in "In a Time of Winter Rain" (Bare Face) when he writes:

In the writing on ancient rock, young women  
bound and gagged, etch the grey walls  
with their dead brown bellies, their joyless eyes.  
On the pages of palm leaves they dance,

lonelier than ever,  
stone-bodied courtesans swaying to the dark water.  
This suffering continues even to-day when young and beautiful brides are burnt  
alive by dowry seekers, and the poet hears:

The silent sob from the dying girl  
set on fire simply for the color television  
she did not bring as part of her dowry  
(“The Uncertainty of Color” Random Descent)

and the memory of these unfortunate girls haunts him always:

our mouths cannot change the noises of our memory  
of the night before  
where a woman felt that her death by fire  
was definitely easier  
than death through constant beatings and torture.

(“The Uncertainty of Color” Random Descent)

The women are very often seen as objects of pleasure. When denied this, males  
show their bestiality by forcibly falling upon them in the name of patriarchal  
authority. This senseless violence perpetrated upon women has robbed man of  
his conscience and the poet quite poignantly recreates such a ghastly incident  
in the poem “The Lost Children of America”.

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  
and this morning her father found her at the police station  
assaulted over and over again by four policemen.

Further he exposes man’s insensitiveness toward women ironically.

Now a man knows only two ways  
for dealing with a stray woman:  
he rapes her  
and he kills her (“Dispossessed Nests”)

The authoritarian patriarchal mind does not show any sympathetic attitude to  
the traumatic experience of a raped woman. Rather she is looked down upon  
and jeered at publicly with a mixture of voyeuristic pleasure and abhorrence:

The odour of a raped woman through the wetness  
sacked and consigned to the poison in her blood,

And the irrelevance  
of people waking past in silence.. (June Rain)

A male-dominated world restricts the movement of a woman and she is compelled to be left alone confined to the four walls, forcing emotional loneliness on her. Mahapatra writes:

On most nights there's a woman  
who just lies in her bed, open (...)  
The walls keep their close watch  
over her loneliness; and not even that  
can go wrong here.."

Again,

And the woman of sleepless nights hears  
the footsteps of her loneliness slip out of her back door  
through the trees to a garden she has never been.

(On Most Nights)

Even a girl child never escapes the male gaze, she is looked lustily. Mahapatra in his poem "Awe" captures this vividly

" . . . there goes Lakshmi down the road,  
swinging her tight little hips in unison. . ."

The poet is deeply saddened to see such atrocities committed against woman. He is at a loss to understand why such acts are ever committed. In the poem "Her Hand" he writes:

This little girl has just her raped body  
for me to reach her  
The weight of my guilt is unable  
to overcome my resistance to hug her.

While writing about the violence committed against women Mahapatra uses appropriate and effective images. In "A Whiteness of Bone" he evokes the image of a rape victim by the word "slaughter".

Last year her murder and dismemberment  
made us understand some what  
the trembling in the eyes of cows we see  
being led meekly to the town's slaughter house.

The "slaughter house" evokes a sense of fear and helplessness and the brutality to which these rape victims are subject to. They are so terrorized that they fail to identify and expose the perpetrators of crime. The analogies between the "trembling in the eyes of the cows" and the rape victim, "slaughter house" and

the patriarchy dominated world are appropriate. In this context Laxminarayan P. Bhat says " The fear, the anguish, the helplessness, the shame, the agony and the pain of the rape victim are powerfully communicated in the analogy:"<sup>3</sup> The miserable condition of Hindu widows in Indian society touches the poet most. He is moved by their predicament and in " Dawn at Puri" he terms them as prisoners of social customs and tradition. They are devoid of all colours in life. Having lost all dreams in life they await for death since their life after the death of their husband is only an extension of lifelessness. In "Window" (Shadow Space) the poet pictures the inhuman suffering of a widow. Mahapatra says:

Silent white walls of forbearance sit up  
and begin to climb the stairs  
of her long inauspicious loneliness.

Not that only the male world turns the life of a widow miserable it is also her own sex who subject widows to various humiliations and vilification. In the same poem he says:

Like jackals, malicious women around her,  
sniffing the smell of leftover death  
feed on her scandalous intestines.

Child abuse prevalent widely in contemporary India has not escaped the attention of Mahapatra. Like William Blake he expresses his abominated hatred toward the practices like child labour, child beating, and keeping them hungry. In "Defeat" (Shadow Space) he says:

As a child in my way to school  
I watched the fire crackle in the blacksmith's shop  
A boy sat, smiling, fanning the flames.  
I didn't notice his eyes then, misty with pain,  
or his hands as he worked with the bellows,  
a finger broken, sores on his thin wrists.

Jesus when asked who are the greatest in the kingdom of Heavens, He said:

Truly I say to you, unless you  
Turn around and become as young  
Children you will by no means enter  
Into the kingdom of the heavens. (Mathew,18:3)

Mahapatra hates from the core of his heart child exploitation and child abuse. In "Dispossessed Nest s" the poet writes how a fourteen year girl Yashoda learnt to expect, "lies and tears and fights a little rice and vegetables" in exchange of "the



bites of human beings". She is joined by another, a thirteen year old girl named Lakshmi who is forced to abort nine times to embrace death finally on the "messy verandah of Intensive Care". Seeing all these abuses and atrocities committed against children the poet questions the justification of India celebrating its Independence. For this messy situation he holds the government responsible:

" Beneath the bloodied walls of history  
nothing can happen more dreadful  
than stones turned to gods through prayers  
stones, whose eyes have had no expression in them  
stones, like governments, who have no honor at all  
stones, whose long arms easily batter and kill  
a young woman accused of adultery.

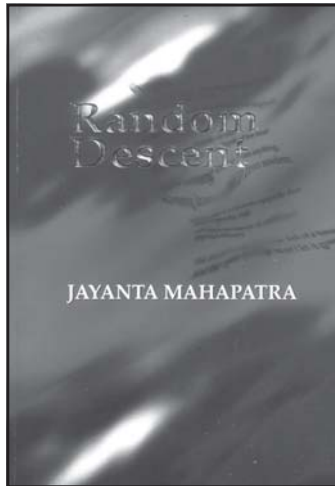
("The Stones" Random Descent)

Mahapatra never creates a utopian world in his creative works. He is a poet of the common men, of the marginalized section of the society. It is because of his close observation of men and things and his deep concern for the suffering lot, who are oppressed and suppressed by the dominant powers of the state and society. His constant fight against hierarchical structure presents him as a great humanitarian. As K. Satchidanandan says "Jayanta sings not with the murderer but with the murdered and shares the bread of his poverty not with the cunning master but with the silent slave, the hapless orphan, the half-starved tiller, the half-awake rural craftsman, the tenacious survivor of a thousand calamities. Mahapatra's whole oeuvre reveals his extreme sensitivity to the larger issues that concern mankind in general and our society in particular".<sup>4</sup> □

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## Irony in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra

\* Sanjeeb Kumar Sarma

The term 'irony' owes its origin to the Greek 'eiron'. In Greek drama, the 'eiron' was a character who, inspite of weaker than his opponent, the braggart alazon, nevertheless defeated him by misrepresenting himself in some way<sup>1</sup>. Irony is a literary or rhetorical device, in which there is an incongruity discordance between what one says or does and what one means or what is generally understood. It is a statement that, when taken in context, may actually mean the opposite of what is written literally. According to W.R. Goodman, irony holds in suspense two levels of meaning - one is explicitly stated and the other is the underlying meaning of which the reader is aware. Irony as a technique is implied by several modern Indo Anglian poets, of whom A.K. Ramanujan, K.N. Daruwala, Arun Kolatkar, Syed Amanuddin, Shiv K Kumar, Kamala Das, Nassim Ezekiel and Jayanta Mahapatra deserve attention for discussion in this paper in which special emphasis is given on Jayanta Mahapatra's poem Total Solar Eclipse, Again. One day walking by the River, Dawn at Puri etc. Born into a typical Christian Family (could be called a 'rice Christian' because in the time of famine and starvation his grandfather sought refuge from a Christian Mission and in the process adopted a new faith for himself and his family) Mahapatra accepts Indian reality and his poetry portrays the social aspect of Indian scene with a humanistic strain.

Jayanta Mahapatra lends a special charm to the periphery of Indian English Poetry. Irony is all pervading in Mahapatra's poetry and the poem 'Total Solar Eclipse' describes with ironic overtones a special day in Puri - the day of total solar eclipse i.e. on the 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1980 as meek and submissive as a frightened child. The poem also reveals the superstition of hanging a banner of human skin on the top of the Jagannath temple in order to warn people of possible dangers that might overtake them. The opening stanza of the poem reads like this.

''It was the drown-out cry of day  
that left behind no echo,  
day that became meek as a frightened child.  
A banner of pale human skin  
fluttered on top of the temple of Jagannath''

Continuation of irony can be noted when the poet says that people living in the localities near the Jagannath temple were groaning in distress since

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they were feeling panicky on account of what had happened to the sun. Looking at the completely darkened sun with unstable minds, these people felt miserable like hunted dogs:

"From the maze of alleys  
that lead down to the giant temple street  
the souls of simple men  
groaned in the harsh voices of ash,  
afraid to reveal their bodies,  
peering here and there like hunted dogs."

(Total Solar Eclipse)

Besides, irony is embedded in the fearsome Brahmin priest's belief that the darkness caused by the total solar eclipse is an omen of the displeasure of the gods ('using darkness to be a portent of the gods')

"Again, One day, Walking by the River" written by Mahapatra is an Imagist poem wherein we can witness irony here and there. An ironic instance lies in the poet's statement that at two o'clock in the afternoon, it is the heat of yesterday that still sticks to the old walls of the buildings around. The heat clings to the walls in the same way as salt may cling to a person's skin, causing him some imitation:

"It is two in the afternoon, and  
the heat of yesterday still clings to the old walls  
like harsh salt on the skin."

There is an irony evident in people's fantasies about the deformed lepers who walk helplessly in a clumsy way towards their homes. The poet says,

"..... . S o o n  
the mangled lepers will shuffle along, going home,  
their helpless looks  
drawing fantasies on the town square."

(Again, One day, Walking by the River)

It is difficult to deny that the lepers deserve people's immediate helping attitude or, at least, their sympathy towards them. Irony is again very pungent when the poet says,

"I can't remember hearing anyone  
saying he will mourn for me when I am gone."

(Again, One day, Walking by the River)

In Mahapatra's philosophical poem entitled "The Exile", that is partly imagistic and surrealist, the protagonist regards himself as an exile, who is broken,

physically, mentally and morally, and so he gives utterance to his feelings of distress and frustration. This grave poem appears to bear a single instance of irony pertaining to a long-haired priest. This priest, who looks after the shrine of the goddess Kali, steals jasmynes from other people's gardens in order to offer them to goddess Kali early in the morning. To put the poet's potent lines:

"The long-haired priest of Kali  
who still packs stolen jasmynes  
into a goddess's morning eye;"

Mahapatra's "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" is a realistic poem in which there is a glaring example of irony. The customer thinks that he would learn something more about women by going to a whorehouse and by meeting a prostitute he can have some intimate talk with. But the customer feels shocked when, in the course of the sexual act, the prostitute says, somewhat harshly and mechanically: 'Hurry, will you? Let me go. " These words of the prostitute seem to 'thrash' the customer because he was expecting some kind of emotional response from her while she, being professional, wants to get away from him as quickly as possible and wait for the next customer and the next payment.

To conclude, the Indo-Anglian poet discussed in this chapter have resorted to the technique of irony for the sake of driving home their viewpoints, observations or perceptions in an efficacious manner. For these poets, irony, irony is a positive mode as it mediates between the serious and the ludicrous, between the tragic and the comic. They comprehend reality in a larger perspective and attempt to present things as they are. They uphold the gap between the apparent and the real, between the ideal and the trivial. The ironist is a realist or a metarealist at the core. Wayne C. Booth writes :

"Before the eighteenth century, irony was one rhetorical device among many, the least important of the rhetorical tropes. By the end of the Romantic period, it had become a grand Hegelian concept....."

Mahapatra's poem evoke melancholy notes while childhood memories occupy a considerable space in his poetry. His commitment to and identification with Orissa because a reiterated repeat theme in most of his poem included in the aforesaid discussion and one of his most celebrated poem "Dawn at Puri." 'Irony' as a matter of fact, responsible for the refinement of Mahapatra's poetic idiom and vision beyond his exhaustive use of image and symbols. It gives him the freedom to accept the good and the evil with equal temper and attitude. Sensibility moulded by Oriyan landscape and irony distinguish him from other Indian English poets. Irony is present from the very beginning, though it becomes

more profound in the aforementioned poems. No other Indian English poet has shown the remarkable ability to organize his pan Indian experience into words as competently as Mahapatra has done and he has also displayed matchless ability to give his poems a certain finality of form. In conclusion, it may be opined that irony fortifies Mahapatra's thought process and his vision of life posing questions beyond the thoughts without providing answers. In other words, it strengthens the delicate ties between life and creative imagination, and finally allows the poet to shape a vision that comprehends reality in all its unknowable immensity. □

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## Imagery as a poetic device in Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry

\* Dr. S. S. Biradar

Jayanta Mahapatra is a bilingual poet writing in both English and Oriya, his mother-tongue. He is one of the leading Indian English poets. His poems are widely read and seriously studied all over the world. A great deal of critical writings on his poems is being published regularly in one or the other part of the globe. Thus, his poetry has been sufficiently and universally recognized.

Some of Mahapatra's poems can be described as Imagist poems. An Imagist poem is short, and contains a series of images which are precise and sharply etched. An Imagist poem just offers a number of images or pictures without even establishing any connection between the various images.

A close study of Mahapatra's poems indicates that he has used symbols and images quite affluently to express his ideas, thoughts, actions, emotions and meanings. His imagery covers a wide range. This imagery is gripping too. It "grips us by the sleeves", to adopt a phrase which occurs in one of Mahapatra's poems. Imagery seems to come to Mahapatra naturally. He does not strain himself to provide the apt imagery; his imagery seems to flow into his pen from the very theme and from his treatment of the theme.

We find the varied and realistic imagery in Mahapatra's poetry. The poem entitled Events may be mentioned in this connection. Each stanza in the poem contains vivid imagery. We have, in the first stanza, pictures of the town's dusty streets, the moonlight falling upon the roofs of houses, and a distant whistled sound imparting sadness to the night. Here, in fact, we have an example of audio-visual imagery by virtue of the reference to a "distant whistled tune." In the last stanza we have somewhat surprising image: "A rape penetrates the periphery of the jungle". Here a rape has taken place outside, or close to, a jungle. In our country rapes are taking place in daylight in big cities, in cottages, in houses, in lanes and by-lanes.

Symbolic imagery, a kind of imagery, is an integral part of some of the poems of Mahapatra. We have a mixture of the literal and symbolic kinds of imagery in the poems entitled the Exile and the Moon Moments. In Mahapatra's poetry we come across a highly suggestive and startling imagery. The poem called The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of a Republic has the following suggestive

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images: the jungles have become gentle; the women have become restless; and history reposes between the college girl's breasts. Mahapatra in his poem, 'Sanctuary', suggests the images of sky, shape, home and absence. Read for example:

Now I close the sky  
With a square ten by ten  
The roof essential  
Hides the apocalyptic ideal  
The space sings  
Where I live at home  
To hyperbole to sky-tasted love  
For the blessings of absence  
Is its essence.

The image of "Nature" occurs recurrently in Mahapatra's poetry, but it stands as distinct from the universal ethos. He uses fresh images of mountain, sun, city and factory in his verse. He writes in his poem 'The Mountain', thus:

In the darkness of evening  
Silence and pressure only  
Multiplying, adding, subtracting  
In the abyssal heart.

In Mahapatra's poetry the city occupies a principal place. The image of city, like the image of darkness, is always lumped with urbanization, industrialization, capitalism and corruption in modern human life. The city image is very predominant in a poem like 'Snow in Iowa City'. See, the following lines from the poem:

Here the anguish of the old is hidden  
Under the gentle slopes of bearded corn fields.  
But you can hear it in the footsteps.

The woman is yet another image in Mahapatra's verse. As a symbol, she is closely associated with the "unwanted things." She is often projected as a sexually oppressed by the male dominated society and utter poverty. The image of the woman has been vividly exhibited here in his poem "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street." Witness, for example:

Dream children, dark, superfluous;  
You miss them in the houses dark  
Spaces, how can't you?  
Even the woman don't wear them-



Like jewels or precious stones at the throat;  
The faint feeling deep at woman's centre  
That brings back the discarded things:  
The little turning of blood  
At the far edge of the rainbow.

Hunger is yet another very powerful poem where we come across imagery of both sexuality and poverty. Here, in this poem, sexuality is closely interlinked with poverty. The hunger is evidently two-fold, there is hunger between the legs, and there is hunger in the belly above.

Noteworthy also is animal imagery in Mahapatra's poetry. An outstanding example is to be met with in the poem entitled Total Solar Eclipse. The behavior of animals during the solar eclipse has realistically and vividly been pictured in this poem. The cobra slides along the hill; the hyena sniffs at the sudden cool air; the vultures turn away from the still-warm belly of the sky; sparrows assemble over the shaking gulmohar; and the crocodile moves more cautiously in the waters.

Many of Mahapatra's images assume the shape of symbols in his poetry of such recurring images; mention may be made of human failures, nature, a process of disillusionment and majestic height. While discussing the poem 'Mountain', we have seen the application of the images of disillusionment, which usually denotes the eternity, facing the process of growth and decay.

Images and symbols come to Mahapatra as naturally as leaves to a tree. He, therefore, uses images and symbols quite often in his poems to express man's loneliness, his search for identity and roots. 'The Pregnancy of Silence', 'Shattered Faith', 'Movements of Sexual Desire', 'Dreams and Imaginations', are articulated with images and symbols.

Ample instances of Indianness are seen at their best in Mahapatra's poems, where the thinking of the local and the regional is raised to the level of universal (global). His poems such as Orissa landscape, Evening in an Orissa Village, Dawn at Puri and the Orissa poems are Oriya first, and therefore, Indian too.

The images that Mahapatra uses in his verse acquire the symbolic overtones. They are slightly tinged with sorrow and nostalgia. The religious and cultural ambience of Orissa bestows a special quality upon his poems.

Here in Mahapatra's poems, simile and metaphors are beautifully articulated together. He depicts the dream children as a matter of withering the emotion human kindness. The same kind of images has been traced in Ezekiel's

poetry, too. The tension and pain of being out of melody is apparent in the poems like "Lost" and "The Mountain". The temple town of Puri, in "Dawn at Puri", is wonderfully depicted with images and symbols. He writes, thus:

At Puri, the crows  
The one wide street  
Lolls out like a giant tongue  
Five faceless lepers move aside  
As a priest passed by.

To sum up, Mahapatra is a skilled and conscious craftsman who uses imagery as a poetic device and churns out his images and symbols thoughtfully. Thus his verse is pretty rich with beautiful images and sparkling symbols that are carefully selected and artistically employed to denote a distinct meaning to the readers. □

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## Surrealism and Jayanta Mahapatra's "Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street"

\* Aratruna Panigrahi

Surrealism is an approach to artistic and literary creation that emerged has identifiable movement coincided with the publication of Andre Breton's Manifest du Surrealism in 1942. Influenced by the unconsciousness of Freudian valorization, is the surrealism, which immediately precedes it, argues for complete artistic freedom, and the abandonment of all restrictions might be imposed on the creator of art. The artist then relinquishes all the consciousness controlled and responded to the irrational urges of the deep mind or unconsciousness at its premises. Hence the bizarre, dreamlike and nightmarish quality of surrealist writing combines seemingly incompatible elements and violate all traditional artistic, philosophical, and moral norms and canons. As a movement, surrealism flourished in France, Spain and Latin America, comprising such artists as Salvador, Dali, Joan Miro and Max Ernst. After the Second World War, it also influenced American writers like as Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, John Ashebery and Bob Dylan. Surrealism also greatly influences the contemporary Indian writing in English. Poets which often changes mode and theme of the poets. Jayanta Mahapatra is one among them who has an aptness to deal with various themes in his poetic progress and consciousness. His occasional shift leaves a dilly-dallying thought and impression in the mind of his reader that it is rather difficult to judge Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry. This paper intends to look into his poem "A Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" in reference to surrealist approach and its application. because particularly and more in interestingly this poem bears essence and the testimony of such an approach. "A Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" is such a poem that Prof. Ram Narayan Panda while editing gives a remark: "A typical Mahapatra poem is plotted around a thing or moment in life, but what gives the poem its power is the abrupt shift into a world that is surreal".

The poem begins with an introduction to the visitor of whorehouse so that he can reach there easily at whorehouse in Calcutta Street. A whorehouse is a house where sex workers wait for visitors all the time. Their intention is to provide them sexual pleasure instead of money. Perhaps Calcutta is such an

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attractive place and it still remains ambiguous for the readers where the narrator is a visitor or not. Because if one reads poems of Mahapatra, one can not guess how he is charmed to write such a poem either incident or experimental. The beginning of the poem gains much confidence about the narrator:

Walk right in. it is yours.  
Where the house smiles wryly into the lighted street.  
Think of the women  
You wished to know and haven't. (207)

Mahapatra's persuasion of the readers to think of women is a general tendency and attitude: it can also be a kind of appeal to look into this serious concern who are involved in flesh trading. Another view can not be denied that holy land like India always worship women, however a section seems to be neglected and to be down trodden in this largest democratic country. Mahapatra while comparing similar there looks down upon other categories of women like role models, female characters of small and large screens known as stars and actresses now- a- days. They too attract audience large in number. For them all, he writes:

The faces in the posters, the public hoardings.  
And who are all there together,  
those who put the house there  
for the startled eye to fall upon,  
where pasts join, and where they part  
The sacred hollow courtyard  
that harbours the promise of a great conspiracy.  
Yet nothing you do  
makes a heresy of that house. (207)

Mahapatra has hold a strong that each house is scared. But if we compare the whorehouse to other houses, we can find the courtyard is hollow. Because it lacks the decorum of a family and patriarchy. Again Mahapatra presents the whorehouse as `` that harbours promise of a great conspiracy'' (207). Perhaps the conspiracy of that house is heertic. The heresy of that house is undoubtedly of luring the visitors. However, a great conspiracy is chiefly attempted what Mahapatra guesses related to make the visitor a permanent customer.

The third stanza begins with the visitor's experience, which Mahapatra prefers to remind the readers of ``the secret moonlight of the women'' (207). Perhaps it refers to the naked physique of the women. Mahapatra intends to

speaking not about an individual but the 'women' in plural form indicates the visitor's experience with a lot of sex workers. Another impression of the women that is 'their false chatter' to the visitor to mould them to become a part of the whorehouse and to look after children and home. The lines sustain similar there:

Are you ashamed to believe you're in this?  
Then thing of the secret moonlight of the moonlight  
left behind, their false chatter  
perhaps their reminding themselves  
of looked-after children and of home:  
the shooting stars in the eager darkness of return. (207)

How a visitor returns from the whorehouse with a lot of aspirations in the dark cobweb of his mind is delineated and what Mahapatra wants to speak about children of that house is never superfluous. It seems Mahapatra to accept the children as 'dream children, dark superfluous. His intention is very much clear that the children are the most neglected and down trodden neither looked after by their mothers nor any body else. They have no identity of own which makes their life subtle to live on. Later Mahapatra doesn't hesitate to detail the visitor's sex experience at a woman's centre. Mahapatra elaborates:

Dream children, dark , superfluous;  
you miss them in the house's dark spaces, how can't you ?  
Even the women don't wear them-  
like jewels or precious stones at the throat;  
the faint feeling deep at a women's centre  
that brings back the discarded things:  
the little turning of blood  
at the far edge of the rainbow.

The very beginning lines of the last stanza is a depiction more about sex and about women, which Mahapatra likes to focus about the sex education for the readers those who don't have this kind of experience, particularly, the students of higher education. Here Mahapatra's role both as a poet and a teacher is highly appreciative. To conclude this poem Mahapatra writes:

You fall back against herein the dumb light,  
trying to learn something more about women-  
while she does what she thinks proper to please you,  
the sweet, the little things, the imagined;  
until the statue of the man within  
you've believed in throughout the years

comes back to you, a disobeying toy-  
and the walls you wanted to pull down,  
mirror only of things mortal, and passing by:  
like a girl holding on to your wide wilderness,  
as it though it were real, as though the renewing voice  
tore the membrane of your half-woken mind  
when, like a door, her words close behind:  
'Hurry, will you? Let me go',  
and her lonely breath thrashed against your kind.

A mortal is never away from sex. It is a desire in human mind and equally a passion that stimulates both man and woman. Having such an experience is different but not having similar experience as shown by the poet is educative who reads this kind of poem. Having experience of sex leaves a new kind of experience in the mind, makes him the imagined ever for a long time and the experience is also a flash back in the memory to make one wakefulness in his half-woken mind. What Mahapatra wants to highlight in the last lines, are about the detail experience and conversation between the visitor and the whore during and after sex experience. Thus the poem sanctions a kind of approach in reference to surrealism. The techniques used by Mahapatra is both the consciousness and un-consciousness mind providing images of dream vision- all are designed to subvert aestheticism and precipitate a fundamental to change in our understanding in reality that a surrealist is delighted in paradoxical images which mocks at the process of rational thought and perception. The aim of surrealism is to change the world, partly through social revolution but more centrally through a revolution in a consciousness, Mahapatra as a poet, is exception to these entire characteristic in this poem. □

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## Discovering Orissa: Reading Into the Pure Poetry in The Lie Of Dawns

\*Dr. Kalikinkar Pattanayak

The Lie Of Dawns (Poems 1974-2008) by Jayanta Mahapatra is brought out by the Authors Press (2008) which contains pieces of pure poetry that reflect Orissa, the motherland of the poet. The epithet 'pure' is added to the poetry, here, because Mahapatra, unlike many modern poets, doesn't manufacture poetry with the help of words; he pours out his feelings, genuine and powerful, in the poems. Born and brought up in Orissa Mahapatra develops special attachment for this state which glows in between the lines of poetry. While receiving the Central Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981 for his masterpiece Relationship he uttered these soul-stirring words:

To Orissa, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past, and in which lies my beginning and my end, where the wind keens over the great grief of the River Daya and where the waves of the Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Konark, I acknowledge my relationship. (Mahanti 1986:ii)

The intimate relationship between the poet and his motherland has been spelt out. When the relationship between man and his place is very close language that the man speaks gets surcharged with over-flowing emotions. The reference to the grief of the River Daya and the waves of the Bay of Bengal and the twilight soul of Konark makes the point clear that Mahapatra's love for Odisha is profound; he not only knew the rivers, the sea and other natural phenomena intimately but also admired the art, architecture and sculpture of ancient Orissa in the core of his heart. Hence to read into the master poems of Mahapatra is to discover Orissa, its ancient glory and the gradual deterioration of art, architecture and sculpture as well as human values. But Mahapatra's choice of English as the medium to give vent to his feelings is not without justification. He acquired competence in such a language because since his school days he has been a voracious reader of English texts. In an interview with Jaydeep Sarangi he reveals his feelings :

J.S.: Do you take pains to transmute your thoughts into an alien language?

J.M.: No.

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J.S.: Do you believe in the concept, poetry is the criticism of life?

J.M.: You cannot ignore the world you live in. I have been living here in Orissa, so the problems of my people are mine. One writes because one feels, and one sees. I live with my eyes and ears open. So, I respond to things that happen around me. It's not criticism, but my own response to the world I live in. (Sarangi & Jha: 190)

In this interview Mahapatra makes it clear that he doesn't lack inwardness with an alien language like English in order to express his deepest emotions. He states it categorically that the poet and the world can't be separated. Basically he is an Orissan. He falls in love with Orissan climate-  
tis air, water, people and none the less the language. But he chose to write in English in the beginning of his poetic career because of his culture. Here is a passage on Cuttack, the cultural city of Orissa where the poet was born and brought up:

Here  
in the dusty malarial lanes  
of Cuttack where years have slowly lost their secrets  
they wander  
in these lanes nicked by intrigue and rain  
and the unseen hands of gods  
in front of a garish temple of the simian Hanuman  
along river banks splattered with excreta and dung  
in the crowded market square among rotting tomatoes  
fish-scales and the moist warm odour of bananas and piss  
passing by the big-breasted, hard-eyed young whores  
who frequent the empty space behind the local cinema  
by the Town Hall where corrupt politicians still  
go on delivering their pre-election speeches  
and on the high road above the town's burning-ground  
from which gluttonous tan smoke floats up  
in the breeze, smacking of scorched marrow and doubt.

(Mahapatra:30)

This is the opening passage of a brilliant poem *The Lost Children Of America* published in *Wordloom*; it pictures Cuttack, the old capital of Orissa in a language which testifies Mahapatra's inwardness with English, his observant eye, retentive memory the capacity to expound. In the above passage he not only gives the picturesque description of the city, its malarial lanes, crowded



market square, the garish temple, the local cinema hall, the Town Hall, the river bank and the burning ground but also sketches the characters like prostitutes and politicians. He creates the atmosphere of unhealthy living which is the stark reality. The stanza also sheds light upon the religious faith of the city dwellers, the corruptible nature of the politicians. The foul smell of the market place and the river bank is real because the poet gives the justification for it. The rhythm of the passage is appealing, the description appalling. It seems Mahapatra has mastered style unconsciously which Eliot uses in The Waste Land. Mahapatra emerges as the sensitive citizen of Orissa and the conscious-point of his own times.

Mahapatra also delves deep into the past. In the poem Dhauli he not only pictures the bloody battle between the warriors of Kalinga and those of Ashok but also depicts the transformation in the heart of Ashoka. The opening stanza of Dhauli reads as follows:

Afterwards,  
when the wars of Kalinga were over,  
the fallow fields of Dhauli  
hid the red-smeared voiceless bodies. (18)

In the above passage the poet paints 'the horrors of the war' in suggestive and alliterative words like a 'fallow fields' and 'red-smeared voiceless bodies'. The concluding stanza is thought-provoking:

the measure of Ashoka's suffering  
does not appear enough,  
The place of his pain peers lamentably  
from among the pains of the dead.. (18)

The word 'pain' is meaningful. The pain of Ashoka is due to repentance but the pain of the dead warriors is due to patriotism. In such poetry Ashoka as well as the warriors emerges as the heroes. Ashoka turns hero in the true sense for the transformation of his heart (from Chandasoka to Dharmasoka); the warriors leave imprint on the minds of the Oriya readers because of their sacrifice of their lives in order to protect Kalinga, the ancient name of Orissa.

About the river Daya which was a witness to the bloody battle the poet writes in Shapes by the Daya:

Time rests its terrible quiet on the river.  
And the wind blows everywhere, and words dance  
like the ghastly remains of long-dead men  
by the light of a cold moon,  
in these skies  
as though they were a fearful place to be naked in. (P.28)

The word 'shapes' that figures in the title of the poem acquires meanings in the progress of the poem. Daya has provoked many sensitive souls to compose poem(hence 'words dance'). But truth about Daya is terrible; hence, the last words of the last line('a fearful place to be naked in') are quite suggestive. In this context the poet's statement is worth-quoting: "A poem makes me see..in all directions like a sieve, and I am almost relieved at that all important thought." (Parthasarathy 59)

Chittaranjan Mishra in his article, Return Of Native: Oriya Poetry Of Jayanta Mahapatra makes some fruitful observation about the bilingual poet: "He thinks of the subaltern, the marginalized, the working class people whose stories are never foregrounded in our mainstream narratives." (Sarangi: 185). Here is a stanza from The Lost Children Of America:

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  
and this morning  
her father found her at the police station  
assaulted over and over again by four policemen  
dripping of darkness and of scarlet death. (P.33)

The rape of a fisher girl by the son of a priest and the beating of the rapist by the policeman leading to death have been pictured through suggestive visual images like 'jean-clad', 'squint-eyed' and 'scarlet death'. The atrocities of the policeman the lust of the priest's son, and the helplessness of the fisher girl highlight the degeneration of human values in contemporary Odisha.

Mahapatra not only dwells on the present and past but also he thinks over the future optimistically. In a short poem Taste For Tomorrow the poet visualizes an age of reason and enlightenment:

..the crowds thronging the temple door:  
a huge holy flower  
swaying in the wind of greater reasons. (P.35)

The poet is hopeful that by the grace of Lord Jagannath the attitudes of the Orissans are likely to change; they will act in accordance with the dictation of higher self, which Mahapatra calls 'greater reasons'.

In the poem A Monsoon Day Fable the poet discusses the futility of blank rhetoric and plagiarism of our poets:

I pick up the morning newspaper and see  
how a nation goes on insulting itself  
with its own web of rhetoric. And remember how  
some of us poets had participated at the Silver jubilee  
Celebrations of the Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi,  
and with plagiarised smiles and abstract talk  
convinced ourselves that in harmony there was  
no deception. It seems so strange looking at one another  
and finding ourselves go into the distances of our eyes;  
even my wife does not look as if she belonged to me, (P.42)

Mahapatra, a bilingual poet, is critical about the poetry that is composed inside and outside our state. He doubts the sincerity of emotion, authenticity of statement, appropriate use of rhetorics and above all the cordiality of relation among the poets to be unacknowledged legislators of the society. The poets have a tendency to manufacture poetry with a view to striking the headlines of the newspaper. In such a situation he ironically says that his wife doesn't look as if she belongs to him.

Hunger is a powerful poem by Mahapatra where he dwells upon the poverty: economic, aesthetic and emotional. The biological urges of this speaker (lust for sex and the fisherman's longing for bare necessities of life and his permission to the daughter to sell her body have been delineated with superb skill). 'I' in this poem represents a sex starved Orissan young man who needs non-vegetarian diet like fish and the flesh of a young girl for enjoyment. The poem is composed in a dialogic situation; the dialogue takes place between the fisherman and the lustful narrator. The final stanza of the poem reads as follows:

I heard him say; my daughter, she's just turned fifteen...  
Feel her. I'll 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 wompy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,  
The other one, the fish slithering, turning inside. (P.46)

These lines remind of Gandhi's remark on his first visit to Orissa: "If you want to know what poverty is, then come to Odisha". (Guru:11)

The Sprouting Grass is a fine poem on a poor Oriya woman and it depicts how a poor woman lives. The poet makes a penetrating observation into her way of life and living:

Ramachandrapur could be the village's name.  
And in there, a daughter-in-law  
of one family, among many.  
...Those days of hers  
like hard knots in her belly.  
Those beatings from her drunk husband  
from time to time.  
And in the leftover days of her ageing in-laws,  
She keeps on bobbing spiritlessly.  
But then,  
when the children sit around her  
for their last meal of the day  
in the oil lamp's frail glow, they feel  
as if grass, green and tender,  
begins to sprout from her tired, dirty limbs.

(Mahapatra:181-182)

Ramachandrapur is a place in Orissa. It is situated in one of the dark corners of Orissa. The poet visits the village and notices her life style. The woman starves very often. She gets beaten from her drunken husband. The children are the source of pleasure and solace to her; hence she lives. The poet uses a symbol 'grass' which stands for freshness and strength. Woman grows stronger when she sits in the midst of her children. This is the real plight of working-class poor woman.

In this paper an attempt has been made to show the life style of Oriya people living in a city like Cuttack as well as in a remote village like Ramachandrapur. The sensitive poet in Mahapatra observes, 'big-breasted hard-eyed young whores' and 'corrupt politicians' (Mahapatra:30) in Cuttack; he also observes the movement of lepers around the temple of the 'goddess Chandi' (P.30). The same poet in Mahapatra notices the sad plight of a working woman in the village Ramachandrapur-her drunken husband and apathetic in-laws. In this context one gets reminded of Seamus Heaney who discovers the relation between the geography of the place and the feelings it evokes in the sensitive souls like the poets. Heaney writes in Preoccupations:

It is this feeling, assenting, equable marriage between the geographical country and the country of the mind, whether that country of the mind takes its tone unconsciously from a shared oral inherited culture, or from a consciously savoured literary culture, or from both, it is this marriage that constitutes the sense of place in its richest possible manifestation. (1980:132)

In this article the focus has been given on a neglected village like Ramachandrapur, a thickly peopled city like Cuttack, the religious place like Puri, the historical place like Dhuli, the tourist place like Konark: the culture of each place is different and unique. Mahapatra, the poet is able to capture the spirit of culture if by culture we mean the art of living. The poet has the ability to identify himself with the place he visits.

The Indian Way embodies exquisite poetry on the relationship between the lover and the beloved; even if the title of the poem indicates that the poet is dealing with the Indian way, in fact he is shedding light on the Orissan way. Orissa is the land of Lord Jagannath; here the beloved or the wife, at first, is conceived of the spiritual partner of man. The poet unconsciously feels it. The poet takes recourse to the images from nature in order to depict the premarital relation between the lover and the beloved.

In the opening stanza the poet delineates the soul's craving for union- the spirit of the hills longs for the touch of the rain. The relationship occurs at spiritual level. The poet prefers the image of lotus to be used as the gift for the beloved- a sacred gift indeed! The following lines focus on the arguments between the lover and the beloved which is suggested through movement but arguments don't lead to bitter relationship. The final stanza is Mona Lisa's smile. Here the lover says :

You know  
I will not touch you,  
like that,  
Until our wedding night. (P.29)

Thus the harmonious relationship between man and woman is possible only when they open themselves; at first they will bare their hearts, then the mind and lastly the body- this is the essence of conservatism.

Relationship which won Central Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981 has been set, the poet views, in the 'state of Orissa' (Mahapatra:78). Twelve pieces of fine poetry that this volume embodies deal with the Orissa's glorious past. Here are some words which speak eloquently of those maritime ancestors:

Time  
and the boat,  
and the initiation into the mystery of peace;  
the sailing ships of those maritime ancestors  
..of this land from Chilika to Chandipur. (Mahapatra:60)

The above passage sheds light upon the adventures life of ancient mariner of Orissa. They could endanger life for the sake of prosperity.

The poet pictures the deadly disease of Orissan women and children :  
...like virulent boils of pox on dead women and children. (P.60)

The poet is a lover of nature: human as well as external. The concluding passage of the poem No.2 Relationship reads as follows :

as I forget easily  
my old village's pelt, glistening with rain,  
and the stillness of my gentle daughter's skin,  
forget the desire  
cozing out of the hewn stones of Konarka,  
and the voices of frogs  
bending the white-wet moonlight into embraces,  
through the strange fires that carried him down  
from the tranquil hills in the rain. (Mahapatra:62)

In the above passage there is orchestration of sounds: the sounds of rain and the croaking of frogs correspond to the sounds of the words in the passage. There is a symphony of movement. It is a fine piece of brilliant poetry because it pictures the fundamental desires of man carved on the hewn stones of Konarka which correspond to the rainy weather that arouses the basic instinct in man for the union with gentle woman. The desire for the union with the member of the opposite sex is so powerful and mysterious in humans that the poet uses the expression of the 'dark daughter' instead of 'gentle daughter' in the concluding poem, Relationship:

Is anything beyond me that I cannot catch up?  
Tell me your names, dark daughters  
Hold me to your spaces  
In your dance is my elusive birth, my sleep  
that swallows the green hills of the land  
and the crows that quicken the sunlight in the veins,  
and the stone that watches my sadness fly in and out  
of my deaths, a spiritless soul of memory. (Mahapatra:77)

The words that lend beauty to this passage and stir imagination are 'beyond', 'dark daughters'; 'elusive birth', the 'sunlight in the veins', 'spiritless soul of memory'. The way the daughters of Kalinga-the fair girls of ancient Orissa could stir imagination and arouse passion is mysterious. The word 'dark' is suggestive of mystery of the woman's heart... The elusive birth is suggestive of difficult birth-the birth at a time when the fine arts (dance, architecture and sculpture) reach the zenith of glory. Once upon a time Utkal, one of the

ancient names of Orissa, was famous for fine arts-the activities in which the Orissans could create the things of beauty (painting, poetry, sculpture and so on) which was the source of joy for ever. Sunlight in the veins is suggestive of alertness; when man awakes he achieves excellence in every field; he also enjoys the beauty of nature. The poet feels that his ancestors were highly spirited souls capable of making and enjoying things of beauty but their descendants are weak and 'hollow man'; hence this poem ends with a phrase of 'spiritless memory'. The expression 'my death' in the concluding lines of the passage is quite suggestive. In the poem Making No Secret Of Death the poet writes:

This death is a darkness in which children keep playing and  
Shouting  
..when my childhood no longer exists (Mahapatra: 163)

In the above stanza it is clear that death to Mahapatra is ignorance and loss of innocence. Life to Mahapatra is creativity; hence he says in the poem The Plot:

How can I live with the birds who can't sing (P: 162)

Thus death happens to Mahapatra when creativity becomes a casualty. In the quotations from the master poems of Mahapatra, as analysed above, point to the fact that he dreams of Odisha which will reach the zenith of glory in arts, architecture, sculpture and so on. The Oriyas should exercise their creative faculty rather than develop a die-hard materialistic attitude. Mahapatra makes a reference to the sacred deity of Lord Jagannath at Puri cryptically in the phrase of 'grotesque dawn of wilderness wood'. (P.60). The deity is made of the wood of a neem tree chosen from the dense jungle in every twelve years. Lord Jagannath is the symbol of fatherhood of man and therefore the cult of Lord Jagannath spreads the message of the brotherhood of men, sisterhood of women and neighbourhood of pain. At Puri there is Swargadwara (the gate of heaven). The Oriyas believe if someone is cremated at Swargadwara he gets liberated. The cremation of dead bodies at Swargadwara echo in the years of the poet-'the deep roar of funeral pyres'. (A Summer Poem:39). In the lyric Dawn at Puri he pictures the last wish of his mother to be cremated at Swargadwara:

... smoky blaze of a sullen solitary pyre  
that fills my ageing mother:  
her last wish to be cremated here  
twisting uncertainly like light  
on the shifting sands. (p:21)

Death like the course of life is unpredictable. The expression 'twisting uncertainly' is quite suggestive. Death clutches a man without any notice.

Deaths in Orissa is a heart-touching poem. In this poem the poet laments over the untimely deaths of women at the hands of their in-laws. The poet pictures it in cryptic language:

nothing but the tightening of the muscles  
in Bhagyabati's neck which her outcaste mother  
would herself have liked to throttle to death,  
nothing but the cries of shrivelled women  
cracking against the bloodied altar of Man,  
nothing but the moment of fear  
when they need a God who can do them some good. (P.138)

Suicide or murder of women is not a tough task now-a-days. If a woman loses the sense of belongingness she hangs herself; if she is aggressive she gets murdered by her husband, the possessive lover or in-laws. Mahapatra shares the sympathy for the dead or the murdered. He 'barks like a dog' at the murderer (138).

To conclude, Mahapatra is basically a Oriya poet. Agreeing with K. Satchidanandan it can be said that 'he sings not with the murderer but with the murdered' and shares the bread of his poverty not with the cunning master but with the silent slave, the hapless orphan, the half-starved tiller...(1999: 226-227). Infact Mahapatra touches the human issues in general and issues of Orissa in particular. In the title of the article two phrases are important : 'discovering Orissa' and 'purest poetry'. 'Discovering Orissa' means knowing and experiencing intimately what is special about natural phenomena, art, architecture, sculpture and above all, culture of Odisha. 'Pure poetry' implies the sincerity of emotion as well as expression of the poet that is experienced by the readers while reading or analysing a poem. Poetry is a thing of beauty and purity in poetry is nothing but the perception of beauty of things and beings that the poet observes and pairs with words. A perceptive reader who longs to know the speciality about a state called O'disha whose ancient name is Kalinga should read into the poems in the volume of The Lie Of Dawns because in this volume the poet explores the greatest truth which lies in where the lie lies. In a word, here, the poet discovers 'the skull beneath the skin' and translates Yeats's words into reality-there is 'more enterprise in walking naked'. □



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### A CRITICAL STUDY OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POEM HUNGER

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Poverty is drawback of our country. Unfortunately  $\frac{1}{4}$  part of Indians are living in poverty, suffered a lot by starvation and the same leads to the issue of hunger. 'Hunger' is the inseparable part of human life. Always, humans have different types of hunger. For instance: hunger for food, hunger for feelings, emotion, the hunger for physical pleasure, hunger for happiness, hunger for money, etc. In short, basically, human is a hungry social animal.

Jayanta Mahapatra, a winner of Sahitya Akademi Award, the translator of Oriya poems into English and the writer of verse collection of poems, needs no introduction, who very circumspectly handled and delineates the theme of hunger in his poetry 'Hunger', dragged out from his collection of poems called *A Rain Of Rites*. It sets down the callous picture of life. Being a father, the fisherman in this poem fights back with the utter poverty by offering his own daughter to the speaker. That shows his vulnerability towards life as well as towards hunger, who has to serve to the whole family.

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The poem focuses on the helplessness of the fisherman, who is the representative of Indian poor community, who are not able to connect two poles of the life, for that sometimes they are ready to do things which are morally and socially implausible. One of them is hunger. Without any feeling of grief, on his face, without any vacillation, he offers the speaker his daughter as if the daughter is a kind of means to get food for his family. In the words of T.S. Eliot: he is "Shape without form, shade without colour, /paralyzed force, gesture without motion;" (11-12)

The speaker, who just has a good amount of flesh and blood in his body, is looking for sexual gratification, represents the hunger of sex. He is not able to identify the expression on the face of the fisherman, as he needs physical intercourse. Or we can say that being a youngster, he avoids the helplessness of the father. He turns too hollow to understand. In the beginning because of sexual hunger, he turns his back to the father's miserable situation. He does not feel ashamed of his purpose. It also signifies modernism, the naked truth of upper class.

"It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back" <sup>(1)</sup>. "I saw his white bone thrash his eyes" <sup>(2)</sup>. These two lines in the first stanza of the poem give clear picture of the father and the speaker who has different surroundings socially, physically and even economically. The physical appearance of the fisherman, whose pale eyes gives idea of his severely beaten life, which cannot budge the speaker from his purpose. When the father offers his daughter to the speaker, he is too careless as if he is doing the holy thing. But behind that there is a father, who ignores to see the real fact and tries to escape from the situation in order to feed his family. This particular thing suggests that how hunger is higher than the relationship. Even in Mahabharata, there is a reference, towards the end, when all the Kauravas died, though being a mother, sad and anguish, Gandhari felt hungry at that time and didn't find any source to fulfill hunger. She gathered the dead bodies of her own sons like a heap and climbed on that to reach that tree and finally she satisfied her hunger. The incomplete line in the fourth stanza: "I heard him say: my daughter, she's just turned fifteen....." <sup>(16)</sup> has an immense echo of his pain as well as helplessness.

The description of his hut throws light on houses of poor inhabitants, who survive for the whole life. The oil lamp, the wind; that just quakes the roof of that hut is the reality of life of poor people. Even the watch, which is already stopped, suggests the deadness of their life. Their life is also motionless. Nothing new happens in their life as if the time is stopped. He is not able to break the

cocoon of the social terms, conditions and conventions because of his poverty. And because of that there is no improvement and progress in his life. He is compelled to live in such situation, where there is no space for two people to live together; there ten people use to live. Even rich people consider them as curse of the God.

The poem signifies that money turn as the God for humans. For which the father is ready to sell his own daughter. But at the end of the poem, the speaker felt ashamed of his own thinking. When he perceived a girl, who just turned fifteen, but her age dose not make her look like a young girl but made her a kind of thing made by rubber. Who is just sitting in the corner of the hut and waiting for the hunger, hunger of food. ' 'In the flickering dark his lean -to opened like a wound. / The wind was I, and the days and night before" (11-12).

The lines suggest that the one glance at that girl made the speaker to feel day and night together in front of him. As day is out side the hut, the night is inside the hut as well as in the heart of the speaker. When she opened and widened her legs for inviting the speaker to fulfill his purpose. At that time; not the speaker but his good inner self said, "The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wile" <sup>(18)</sup>. And he was taken aback and feels blameworthy. He feels that this is the hunger for food that led the father as well as the daughter to sell her body. This pathetic scene made him to forget his carnal desire. Plain face of that father and daughter made him think as if the speaker is too despicable in his intention. As T. S Eliot's 'The Hollow Men' says:

We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw .Alas!  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass (1-8)

T. S. Eliot's this poem signifies that how we, modern people are hungry for money, power and our selfish desires. The world totally turns materialistic. Being a human, we do not have any feelings for each other as the above lines are implying. We are really hollow, in the sense of love, brotherhood, mercy etc., means we are absolutely empty.

Even when the father said, "Your bus leaves at nine" <sup>(17)</sup>. These words of the father shows utilitarianism, and also proposes that he knows the nerves of

the speaker but life is too hard for the fisherman, who could not stumble on any other direction for survival . As life made a kind of circle and trapped him and his daughter to find out one corner to escape. But at the end of the poem, good inner self of the speaker finds a way to leave his desire and that place, but still the hunger is there in the circle of life of the fisherman and his family who have to struggle at the cruel reality of life and that is Hunger . □

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### Jayanta Mahapatra' s Random Descent : An Ecocritical Study

\* Dr. Chittaranjan Misra

An ecocritical reading of literary texts takes into consideration the relationship between culture and nature. It challenges the cultural constructedness of reality and highlights the general physical presence of nature as a fact and not a concept. Eco-criticism that began in USA in late 1980' s and in the U.K. in the early 90' s draws its inspiration from the ecoconsciousness of American transcendentalism and British Romanticism. Nature-worship and cosmic-literary imagination is the basis of Indian sensibility that continues till date despite threats from colonial forces and technologization of society. Jayanta Mahapatra' s poetry written during the last forty years has consistently reflected an ecocriticism. An eco-critical study of his poems enrich our understanding of his poetry. Since his poems invoke the natural as opposed to built environment they need to be studied eco-critically.

Mahapatra' s poetry not only glorifies nature through a mystic mode but mediates between human and non-human worlds pitched against an ethical measure. Nature for him becomes a medium for settling a balance between mystery and contemporaneity the immanent grace perceived through nature and the lack of transcendental meanings of the global cultural condition today. This forging of a balance through subtle movement of images between the social and the natural hints at an ethical concern that ecocriticism is groping for at the

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moment. The paper attempts at exploring his vision and aesthetic sense ecocritically with reference to Random Descent because this is the fifteenth poetry collection of Mahapatra that marks a mature phase in the evolution of his poetry. The dedication page of this book contains:

The wait's begun again  
The long wait for the angel  
For the rare, random descent

The descent points at the waiting of the earth for some angelic arrival, a transformation. The title of the collection suggests this descent as a random one. It relates the idea of random descent, the theory of evolution of Darwin. Instead of being anthropomorphic the title is implicated in the idea of "the natural world" which "far from passive and compliant to human intervention, is indeed intractable and responsive in unpredictable ways." (Abraham 2007: 181)

Randomness of events in the human and the non-human domains is natural and eludes rational explanation. The poet believes that the complexity of behaviour seen around us, such as mechanical device, an electrical circuit, a wild life migration, a rioting crowd, an atmospheric storm, or national economy - it seems only plausible that these are governed by a multitude of independent factors or subject to random influences. Physicists look for complex results. And the only way they could see a solution was to assert that chaos was an integral part in nature. (Mahapatra 2007: 187)

Mahapatra's poems in Random Descent are implicated in this truth of chaos, unpredictability and mystery of nature. They do not subscribe to the view that non-human world exists for human welfare. The ecologically degraded earth by technological intervention is not a triumph of man over nature but a warning of chaos and apocalypse where all human delusion of victory is defeated and demolished. Mahapatra seeks answers to all his questions and realizes that the answers are hidden in natural phenomena. In Things That Happen he writes:

But those things that happen  
have always beginnings that cannot be seen.  
It is the body I think I've carried all along,  
forcing me to wander from secret  
to secret, mirage to mirage,  
pumping up halfttruths into a reality I never lived.

(Random Descent 73)

The key to understanding of the world lies in nature. For Mahapatra the dichotomy of human and non-human dissipates. The power and working of nature is all pervasive. He laments :

No more do men go out onto the earth  
to be close enough to the mountain's quiet  
and wait for an answer.

(Ibid 42)

Not only the silence and vastness of the mountains and seas but natural objects become metaphors for human situations in most of his poems. They are used as a touchstone to interpret the social human world. The image of stone in many poems of Random Descent gives us a clue to Mahapatra's vision.

In A Mask he writes:

The faces of rice are stony  
its fists seem clenched all the time

(Ibid 41)

This stony quality is real for the people who live with hunger. The stone wall bearing the letters of the Asokan Edicts of 261 BC becomes a reminder of the lust for power and violence in man who go on repeating the brutal killing of a hundred thousand people like that of the Kalinga war :

These things can happen all the time.  
Memory has drained us,  
and an ancient stone wall  
inscribed with rules  
is not what it appears  
Someone's rotten blood has gone into the stone.

(Ibid 51)

Like stone, the objects of non-human nature get heavy with weight of meanings inscribed on them. The imposed meanings change the face of nature. The reality of objects is "caged in new interpretation". (Ibid 51)  
The poem The stones reveals this more concretely:

The house I have lived in all these years  
has forgotten the stone it was made of

(Ibid 47)

What ails the poet more is the cultural construction of stones in religion, politics and sex:

Beneath the bloodied walls of history  
nothing can happen more dreadful  
than stones turned to gods through prayers  
Stones, whose eyes have had no expression in them  
Stones, like governments who have no honour at all  
Stones, whose long arms easily batter and kill  
a young woman accused of adultery. (Ibid 47)

What does the poet want the stone to be for men? He seems to be restoring the 'stoneness' to the stones - to look at stones as stones and not gods. Nature undergoes complex distortions through cultural production of meanings. When the distortion leads to boost the unethical, the poet is not at ease. In this poem Mahapatra highlights how humans are made to feel that 'hate and power is real' afraid of being face to face with the truth of their own nature.

The poet tries to bare the thingness of things and so his poems contain the contradiction between ecology and textuality. But the paradox is that he has to express the 'extra - linguistic' reality through language, through words of poetry. T.J. Abraham observes: "Ecocriticism came up, one recalls as a reaction against the debilitating excessive textualized view that only "The word grants being to a thing" (2007 : 180). Mahapatra' poetry shows the reader a world beyond textuality.

What his poetry aspires for is an identification of being with the thing, the observer with the observed. It is like Whitman's "I" containing multitudes in a reverse way. He says :

If I seek an answer to life.  
It's because I see myself everywhere.

(The Shore 75)

The collection is full of such utterances echoing this line of thought. "Desire and earth move in out/of me, climbing the old loneliness" (Random Descent 53) in the poem Light .In One Evening , he writes.

One Evening  
I was a mango tree with a clutch of troubled, reluctant leaves  
and the stormy wind suffered my tremors and tears,  
(Ibid 38)

He does not bother about preconceived notions but assumes the position of a silent witness: "I accept what I see through the open windows." (Of storytelling 54)

In a lyrical essay entitled Freedom as Poetry: The Door Mahapatra makes his stand clear:

"... a poet's business is to see - which he should do, listening to the voice of his inner self. Let the poet not bother about the conscience of the world - simply be the water that flows, finding its own level, even if it is soaked by the earth, with no trace left behind." (Mahapatra 2007: 6) In the same essay he says: "... surrounded by my own words which crowd me down, I try to escape, thinking of another kind of freedom. He asks: who will whisper the whisper of the summer breeze? The politician or the poet?"

(Ibid 5)

The aspiration to find oneness with nature is to enter into an unintelligible

domain of communication of birds, beasts, air and water inaccessible to human language. Mahapatra is neither a deep ecologist nor a 'light green' but his poems incorporate an eccentric concern in a holistic way.

It can be presumed that in Mahapatra's poems nature is not reduced to a concept but accepted as a real existence. There is a conscious struggle at repudiating the constructedness of nature in cultural practices and that is the reason why he celebrates nature : in resonance with that unity of being / nature only knows how to brace. (Dance of Fire Files 57) . The poem The Uncertainty of Color in Random Descent offers clue to understand Mahapatra's green vision in the context of nature culture controversy. The stubborn life-force of nature that precedes culture and history is continuity. The continuity environs the predatory impulse of man as a species through different phases of time:

The grass whispers in its rooted being  
That its stubborn green has come  
From world to world where nothing matters there  
but men marching on ahead (23)

Mahapatra does not shy away from socio cultural reality of present times. He is much grieved by issues of poverty, violence, social injustice, and victimization of woman no matter wherever they occur. Random Descent abounds in these issues diffuse in a metaphoric frame of images of nature. The poor paraplegic boy in Winter in City is described against the biting cold, fluttering leaves, migratory birds of the season. The boy is on the road with every possibility of dying, but even though he "cannot carry his broken body, hasn't stopped loving himself." (14) . The zeal to live is as natural as the inevitability of death or a season": If he'd die, it would only be a natural death." (14) . The poet refers to hunger in many poems in this collection. Hunger, he understands as "the new narrative of our civilization." (37) . He relates hunger and brutality metaphorically:

Hunger lends each one a mask  
and it smells of trapped beasts. (41)

The 'mask' of culture and 'beasts' of nature build up the images of human state, of starvation and struggle for survival.

When he refers to a raped sixteen year old girl and gropes for justice he brings in the images of darkness: "a large owl burrows deep into its steamy air" (The Portrait 61) . Again helplessness at the site of the raped body of a little girl in the poem Romance of Her Hand he seeks something to hold on to release his vain empathy: "blood opens that terrible door between us" (63) Myths, rituals, temples, priests, corporate offices, city despite their proclaiming of varied metaphors for life and truth cannot prevent suffering, injustice, death and ageing. The boat is fated to sink into the "lethal calm of the sea" (62) . Looking beyond



misery is like looking "at a jasmine's sad, sweet smile." (21). "The strange grief of the blue of in the sky peers down at me" (25), he writes at the end of the poem Sign. The weight of grief is the weight of the unknown, the weight of the impenetrable nature and that buries him. One is reminded of Wordsworth's line "the still, sad music of humanity" while going through such lines of Mahapatra. John Bamie has aptly observed: "... The differences between the two poets (Wordsworth and Mahapatra) are profound, yet in one sense at least the comparison is just, for few poets in our century have evoked "the still sad music of humanity" so movingly as Mahapatra." (Bamie John 1984) .

Mahapatra privileges external nature against all intellectual and conceptualized views of nature. He knows that the silence shrouding all objects, the silence of the process of birth, death and decay is a different language of nature. To feel that silence is a path to freedom. He writes:

I only want to renew myself  
like this old river's quiet  
that has emerged victorious  
over a hundred layers of religions  
in the airlessness of the dead

(The Land That is Not 70)

With Mahapatra one comes to believe in the claim of eco-criticism that nature is not "reducible to a concept which we conceive as part of our cultural practice" (Barry Peter 2008: 252). Nature is not what we make out of it even though literary theory believes in everything including nature as socially and linguistically constructed. □

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AN INTERVIEW WITH PADMASHREE JAYANTA  
MAHA PATRA, THE INDIAN ENGLISH POET  
ON 31<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2011 AT CHANDRABHAGA, TINIKONIA BAGICHA,  
CUTTACK (ODISHA), INDIA

\* Dr. Kusha Chandra Pradhan

\*\* Dr. Krushna Chandra Mishra

(Questions asked in an informal setting in the ambience of the poet's drawing room when he came out from his newspaper reading session with a broad smile welcoming the inter viewers. The poet was 82 at the time of interview)

KCP & KCM : Why and how did you come to choose to write and publish poetry in English?

JM : There are two things here : About my choosing to write. Look, I never intended to be a poet in the first place. When I was twenty-two, I'd begun writing a novel, which still lies in those three exercise books somewhere. Then there were some stories I did, but when I sent them out to publishers and editors, these came back with rejection slips. I knew then that writing was not for me. As to why I chose to write, I have no answer, Who knows why one does these things? Or why one does anything, for instance? I can't say .Anxiety, inadequacies, unhappiness, these could lead one to writing. Perhaps I am talking to myself when I write... .Then there is this subject of English, and the answer is simple: I wrote in English because it was the most natural thing for me to do. My studies in a missionary school where English was mandatory; we had to speak English in school, no other language; and the urging of my Principal, who liked me much, and instilled in me a love for the English language – these were factors which led me to use English for my poetry... .As you are perhaps aware, I started writing poetry when I was approaching forty, at an age when most poets would have finished with their strongest work. But some things happen in life and reasons are not always easy to find. I sent my new, fumbling creations to periodicals and found they were accepted – which gave me the much-needed incentive to write.

KCP & KCM : Did your training as a Scientist and profession as a researcher and teacher interfere in any way in your development as a poet? If it has helped you, please elaborate on the kind of contribution your training and your profession have made to your growth as a poet?

JM: I don't think there has been any sort of 'interference' that you talk of between

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a scientist and a poet. There is no disparity I feel. You can't do away with the element of struggle in the making of a poem or in the process of scientific research; for without that we wouldn't be able to arrive at any conclusions after all. However, I feel my scientific training taught me a kind of discipline which I could use effectively in the making of a poem. Poetry is a kind of science, a science of the heart's affections. On the other hand, science is also poetry, but a poetry of the mind. I could put it like this: I use my intellect for science, but when I write poetry, my heart runs ahead of my intellect.

KCP & KCM : What has been the course of your poetic journey when your vision as a poet has all along been with you in your appreciation and critical outlook of the world around you? What has specifically been your inspiration in commenting on your surroundings in the ways the comments crowd and crown your pages of poetry?

JM: It is hard for me to talk about my work. Let me be clear on this: I never wanted to be a 'poet', because I didn't read any poetry. Fiction was what I was interested in. The limits of my stupidity lie in the plain fact that I had not, ever, thought of reading Tagore or Eliot or Neruda; they did not matter to me at all! And here, at forty, I was into poems, I was looking around the world, and into myself. Maybe when I started out writing poetry, I thought I was the center of the universe, which was absolutely wrong. My early poems were exercises in a way, written mainly to please myself. These poems were more fused in themselves, and they tended to be abstract. My mind was more to me than my heart, which is not right when it comes to poetry. I am sure you will agree. Critics were disappointed when my first two books of poems were published. And it hurt me. But I wanted to go on writing, so I began reading contemporary poetry, mainly the European and Latin American poets whom I consider to be the greats...I thought I should write simple understandable poems, to silence my critics in India. And which I did, although it was very difficult. The only thing in my favor rested in the language, the English, I had learnt, and the words I could use in various ways through my own reading over forty years. This was a great help in writing poetry in English.

KCP & KCM : Do you recognize any change in your vision as it has moved from work to work produced over so many years of your active enrichment of poetry in general and Indian literature in particular? What would be the proper and perfect symbol for your vision at work - the vision that has resisted change even while accepting changes in its semblance?

JM: When academics and interviewers talk about 'vision' in one's work, I generally slip away from them. I don't understand much about vision. Frankly, I started out from being a sort of physicist and went into poetry; people always insist they are

two opposite poles of the earth. I don't know. And I don't agree. My beginning poems spoke about myself and the people around me, they were seemingly personal, because I was not aware of a larger world that existed around me; it was my pain, my love, my relationship which mattered. It took time to see things, feel them, it took time to bring out in my poetry the myths that have shaped me, from the chaos of history and tradition that has always energized my land, Orissa. I had been aware of all this very much, but to have them become a power in my poetry wasn't easy. One of the reasons might be that I hadn't read much poetry and did not know how to write. And there was nobody to help me. Writing all by yourself in this remote town was a great disadvantage. But I persisted. I wrote and wrote. Good poems perhaps, mostly bad poems. I did not give way. I'd like to quote from the writings of the distinguished French playwright and poet, Jean Cocteau: "My work devours me, begins to live, and it is I who die". A perfectly genuine statement totally unforgettable. Well, that's how it is... stacks and stacks of poems on my shelves which I haven't revised or rewritten or sent for publication. And all these poems are rooted in this land where I live, and choose to live. It's strange that I can write here when I am in Orissa, nowhere else. Most of my colleagues, poets like A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Meena Alexander stayed behind in the USA; even Dilip Chitre was there for several years, but I did not let myself be hypnotised by the affluence of the West. I am happy when I touch the shoulder of my rickshaw puller or my dentist-friend; those things matter to me. If you ask me what I want, I would answer: I want to be believed, the honesty of my poems to be believed. I don't wish to sit in a glass house and talk about the plight of our people in Kandhamal, I want to be there and see, and touch them. I was doing this a few years ago, my visits to remote villages in Thumalrampur in Kalahandi and Barakamura in Mayurbhanj showed me the opulence in which I live, and it tortures my waking hours. But this is how my poetry has changed through the years: and I would like my poem to be a kind of worship, from the experiences I have... If I was well and mobile, I'd move from place to place and see things for myself. I can, truly, only write out of myself and my Orissa, and this is what I have always done, the last 45 years. And today, there is a sense of despair in what I see around me. My conscience hurts me. And if what I write is not true to my conscience, what use is there in writing? I am not referring to social or political commitment; I am talking of my own sleepless night when I can sleep on a full stomach and my neighbor, even though he lives in a remote village in Koraput, is hungry and naked and lives without a roof over his head... I think this answers your question somewhat, I cannot say.

KCP & KCM : How do you find the times that have brought you the turbulent urge to express yourself changing with the recent restrictions that age has imposed

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on you and your movements and mobility in social circles?

J M: The urge to express my thoughts is there, it hasn't changed. I still have the need to write...But the new violence bothers me. I feel safe within the confines of my home. I was never a social person, I prefer always to sit thirteen rows behind when I am at a meeting, and can only answer to questions which others might put to me. And my age, and an immune setback has made things a little worse. But I try to participate in poetry readings; I was in Delhi on the 8th May reading my poems on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore...Frankly, I try to avoid social gatherings, they make me feel uneasy.

KCP & KCM : How does the poet keep the world informed and advised to face the great disaster – explained in terms of natural laws and immoral social practices and irresponsible political decisions worldwide? Do you think this forms part of your personal responsibility when your writing is a prized heritage of the humanity and you have transcended the limitations of birth and place?

J M: I suppose you try to speak to the world through your poems – in my case that happens – and these poems are fixed, almost always, in Orissa and its special landscape. I write about what I see and hear and feel; maybe what I don't wish to see, those immoral social practices and political aberrations around me, turn into traumas which become the stuff of my poems. But this is not deliberate; it's the anguish of people I cannot face. So I will write about: such things, like for example, the Kalinganagar tragedy where twelve tribals were killed in police firing and their palms cut off; how could I just sit back and forget the whole issue? So this anguish goes into a poem. The same sort of thing happens when you read about a farmer's suicide, or a terrorist killing. No, this is not a personal responsibility, and you shouldn't expect all poets to write about such atrocities. I would simply say: I am responsible, yes, but responsible to my conscience. If my conscience says a wrong is being done, I should write about it. Maybe a good poem does not come out of it, still.., the moral responsibility shouldn't be put aside.

KCP & KCM : How have the awards and honours coming your way left you delighted and disturbed in the course of your poetic progress? Please elaborate with examples and anecdotes?

J M: Well, the first ever award I got for poetry was way back in 1970, when I won the second prize for an international poetry contest held by International Who's Who in Poetry in London, UK. The award was for a poem titled "The Report Card" and I had sent it for this contest from Balasore in 1969. The news of my winning the prize, naturally filled me with joy. Here, I had just begun to write poems 3 years back, and I'd won a prize! It was unbelievable; I was literally

sitting on top of the world. And I realised there was no going back then, I had to write more, I had to write better. I started to read contemporary poetry and write with more earnestness. Perhaps the years 1970 till 1976 were the ones I struggled hard with my poems and sent them out to very prestigious journals in USA, UK, Canada and Australia. Awards and honors kept coming in; a manuscript of poetry I had submitted to the University of Georgia Press; USA, was the winning manuscript among many submitted that year. It was published in 1976 under the title A Rain of Rites, and all the poems dealt with my land, Orissa. I wouldn't wish to speak of honors and awards that came later. My resume should tell you all this... But twice in my writing career, once in the USA, when I was reading my poems to an international gathering, a girl simply wept and left the hall hurriedly (she was a Brazilian)! Then again, at the international ACLALS Conference in Hyderabad seven years ago, the same thing happened, when a Canadian poet rushed out of the reading hall with tears in her eyes as I was reading my poems. These two separate incidents made me feel myself in a way I've never experienced before. There was both delight and despair, and I consider those two moments to hold more weight than any awards I have got for poetry. The poignancy hits me still; it came out of the words I used in my poems, and that was more than enough... But today awards don't mean much to me; as a matter of face, they don't bother me at all. Not even the Padmashree, which was recommended by the Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, and not by the Government of Orissa. Today I feel satisfied that whatever I have done in the field of poetry, I have done myself, without taking anyone's help. If I owe anyone, it's to my wife, Jyotsna, who was my great support, who was ready to die for my life.

KCP & KCM : How do you look at your recent chosen change over to prose and Oriya Language writings while still being increasingly read and appreciated as a poet writing in English?

JM: I have not been able to forget that I am the inheritor of a rich tradition, a culture and a language that make me proud of my being an Oriya. If my schooling and early childhood years would not have been in the medium of English, and if my British headmaster would not have made me love the English language, perhaps I would not have used English. It was not a deliberate choice, I wrote in English because I could not write in Oriya. Today perhaps I love the language English more than I Love Oriya, but my roots have dragged me into the earth which gave me birth. Years of writing passed by, and even Odia fellow poets thought of me as an outsider. Things hurt. And it is hard to forget the insults one has been subjected to. Life is reminiscence, and memories become the shadow you cannot throw off.. So I turned to writing in Oriya even when I had established myself in English. In Odia I feel I can be more intimate with my readers; when I

read out a poem in Odia, I can see the light of understanding flash in the eyes of the audience. This doesn't happen in English, here in India. But abroad, it is in English, that I communicate easily... The added factor in Odia, for me, is that I use simple words, and a commonly used colloquial idiom, both for prose and poetry. Today I enjoy writing in Odia and wish I could have used Odia in my writing earlier.

KCP & KCM : How do you react to our understanding of your poetry as basically related to human relationships of all hues and those including nature?

JM: Well, you are probably right when you say that relationships, mostly human, or with nature make up much of my poetry. Maybe if I were a doctor, I would be more into human relationships, the experience in that area seems unending. You write about your mother, your father, and in my case, I am always floating in the sorrowful past of my grandfather. But, I have also written about people who have hovered around my life, and perhaps used nature which helped me to see more than I see with my eyes. I am talking of a poem like "Dance of the Fireflies" which came out of a two-day visit in the jungles of Similipal, in Mayurbhanj.

KCP & KCM : Do you agree that your poetry despite its surface simplicity leads to philosophical depths and contemplations on life and its struggles in adverse situations? Does your poetry aim at comforting and inspiring the struggling humanity to hopefully keep the spirit of living high?

JM: I don't think I can give an answer to both your questions. I feel kind of satisfied when my poems appear simple on the surface, I'd like to begin a poem with straight forward images. In a poem "Again, one Day, Walking by the River" I start with the line :

The same river, the same Sun, the same town.

But what the poem achieves as you proceed to the conclusion of the poem is something else lying behind to apparent simplicity. If the poem represents a movement through life, it will make some sense of life; and this movement implies a meditation or a thinking on life. There are other poems too which look quite simple on first reading, but the process of the poem goes beyond what you see or measure. I suppose you can't measure anything by its face value, and that is very very true in the case of a poem. .... I don't know how to answer your second question, I can only write about what I see and hear and feel, but whether it can comfort others I cannot say. I don't think I have solutions for the ills that plague our people, and that is not a poet's job. A poet is an observer, basically. He or she should leave such things to others, to a politician perhaps.

KCP & KCM : What is your view on the answerability of poet to the humanity? What would be your guiding advice to the poets writing in English now - in terms

of subject matter, poetic style and ideology?

J M: Let me speak of myself first. When I began writing poetry, I presumed I was writing just for myself. So whatever I thought I put it down, without thinking if anyone understood it or not. I was totally wrong, stupid. Poetry should communicate, should relate to the reader, to another human being. And we have a second important point - about the answerability of the poet. Why should a reader read about the personal life of the poet all the time? Or, about the myths that are a part of our living scene? If the poet is answerable, which he should be, he should be solely answerable to his conscience. His conscience is his responsibility, to try to show in his poem the unjust things, the violence, the cruelty, as different from what should be the real goals of our society. It's not easy to write such poetry, but in a way we are responsible for what we say in our poems.

I have no advice to give my fellow poets writing in English in India. I don't know for myself what I should do. I'd say : Place your hand on your heart and let your heartbeats guide you. And read the great poets, beginning from Shakespeare. I am sorry, I have no knowledge of literature to give any kind of advice.

KCP & KCM :Though you may not like to comment on individual poets writing in English from India, please put in your personal observation on the trends of Indian Poetry in English and your assessment of the future of Indian Poetry?

J M : You are right. There are no absolutes in poetry. A poem which appears relevant to me might not be appreciated by another poet or by an editor. So many kinds of poetry are being written today, and the trends are for critics to talk about.... I would love and to write poetry which touches. That's important, isn't it? you might be interested to know that I have just edited an anthology of Indian-English poets, and many of the poets included there are new names. The anthology contains poems of ten poets and is titled simply Ten. I enjoyed editing this anthology of new poets and hope readers will have an idea of what is happening in the field of English poetry in India. The book, Ten, should be out by the end of 2011.

Your second question : Poetry is going to be written in English in our country whether people like it or not. English is being used more and more in Indian homes, more and more among the younger generations, so the emphasis on English speaking and writing cannot be overlooked. Let us not talk of poetry readership. Readers of poetry are a small number, they have always remained small, limited.



KCP & KCM :Alongside your personal favourite " HUNGER " poem, what other poems from your favourite oft-read pieces? Please include only a few of your most loved poems that you have liked to present at poetry work-shops and poetry festivals.

JM: "Hunger" is a short, narrative poem which comes out of a true incident. I read it out because I like it, but not at all gatherings of poetry. Reading a particular poem would also depend upon the type of audience it is read to. To your question, some poems I would like to read out could be :

Grandfather  
The lost children of America  
Relationship  
A Missing Person  
Possessions  
Rice  
Deaths in Orissa

Generally, I read newly-written poems at festivals/ conferences.

KCP & KCM: How do you feel at your being awarded the Allen Tate Poetry Prize 2009 for the finest poetry published in the Sewanee Review, the prestigious American Journal? Does this bear any hope for the Nobel Prize for the poet and does this award put the Indian poetry in English at an enviable height now?

JM:The Allen Tate Poetry Prize did bring me a sort of fulfilment. Forty years of writing poetry, and I could not help myself thinking that my poems were as good as some of the best poets writing in the world. But it also brought a feeling of aloneness to my mind; what would I do next? Poetry writing is not easy at all. I keep thinking : How will I write my next poem?

The second question is redundant. Please excuse me for saying so.

KCP & KCM : Does your choice to write your autobiography in your mother tongue Oriya aim at inspiring the creative talents in Odisha to boldly step in to publishing in English and urging upon the critics in Odia literature to take note of your internationally acclaimed contribution in the field of poetry writing? Do you not think this 2011 publication of the autobiography Part-I (BHOR MOTIRA KANAPHULA) keeps your international readers and admirers deprived of the opportunity to have a view of your life and times?

JM: The choice to write my autobiography in Odia could be mine; still, I feel it

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was somehow not mine. To attempt to write a considerable body of prose in Odia was never something I could have dreamed of a few years ago. Poems were different things. But, when I began writing in my own colloquial manner, I felt I could write about happenings in a more intimate way. No wonder it's called your mother tongue. And the Odia culture came out in unimaginable lines. I can't explain this, I can only reiterate that it's exciting to write in this new-found medium for me. I do not know about the consequences of my writing in Odia. Rationally, when I think about this, I should have written in English for my established readers. And I am asked the same question : Why in Odia? How are we ever going to know what you wrote about your life? But then, I have no answers to give them.

About critics in Odia literature, I can't say. Do I have critics who comment on my book? I say this because not a single review or notice has been published on my book, Bhor Motira Kanaphula as yet. I have friends, young readers, who like my book, and that is enough for me. Perhaps a translation of the book into English can help English knowing readers to know a bit of my life. I haven't thought about that. I believe in things taking their own course, and I have never been ambitious.

I hope these answer your questions to some extent. Thank you!

KCP & KCM :Thank You Sir !

MAY GOD SHOWER HIS CHOSEN BLESSINGS ON THE POET TO KEEP ON CONTRIBUTING TO THE WORLD OF POETRY FOR LONG WHILE RECEIVING ALL THE GREAT RECOGNITIONS THAT ARE DUE TO HIS MIGHTY TALENT AND HUMANITY.□

Jayanta Mahapatra in his Library



## THE POETRY OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: AN APPROACH THROUGH INDIAN POETICS.

\* Ms. Ranjita Barik

Jayantā Mahapatra who was honoured with central Sahitya Academy Award first time for poetry in 1981 is a sensitive Indian poet even if he took recourse to English as a medium of expression. If his poetry is analysed in the light of Indian poetics it affords greater aesthetic delight than an analysis of his poetry through common sense or western stylistics. Basically Mahapatra deals with Indian themes in Indian English. In his poetry one discovers the beauty and bounty of Indian rivers and landscape; the customs, practices and rituals of Indian religions, the attitude of the Indians towards issues like love, marriage, social and economic problems, poverty and so on. Reading Mahapatra is to discover India : to read him with the tools from ancient Indian aestheticians is to enrich our intellectual horizon and deepen our aesthetic pleasure.

Poetics refers generally to the theory of literary discourse, especially the theory of poetry. Indian poetics refers to the Sanskrit poetics – the criticism that developed in India on the theory of poetry in ancient times. Some of the outstanding schools of poetics are namely: The Rasa (aesthetics of pleasure) theory of Bharat, the Alamkaras (the figures of speech) theory of Bhamā, the Dhvani (suggestiveness) theory of Jagannath & Anandavardhana, Vakrokti (artful expression) of Kuntaka, the Auchiya (propriety) theory of Kshemendra and above all, the Riti (style) theory of Vamana. In this paper a modest attempt is made to analyse the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra in the light of these theories and place him before the Indian readers as an outstanding Indian English Poet.

Let me quote a few lines from the last section of Relationship :

Tell me your names, dark daughters

Hold me to your spaces.

In your dance is my elusive birth, my sleep  
that swallows the green hills of the land  
and the crows that quicken the sunlight in the veins,  
and the stone that watches my sadness fly in and out  
of my deaths, a spiritless soul of memory.

(Section: 12 / 38)

In the above passage a perceptive reader feels the symphony of sounds as well as the symphony of ideas. The lines are quite suggestive; words radiate meanings. The alliteration is found in the expression of 'dark daughters' (repetition of initial sound / d/), 'sleep that swallows' (repetition of / s/ sound), 'crows that

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quicken' (repetition of /k/ sound). 'Dark daughters' invokes the spirit of the black stone Devdāsies of ancient Orissa. The devdāsies knew how to dance and entertain the onlookers. They represent the glory of art of an ancient Orissa. 'The sleep that swallows' has metaphorical force; it refers to indolent nature of the speaker to enjoy the beauty of nature. The crows, here, are the messengers of the new day which gets reflected in the line 'the crows that quicken the sunlight in the veins' - the harmonious relation between nature and creature is brought to light; 'stone' refers to the glory in architecture and sculpture in ancient Orissa. The 'death' has also metaphorical force; it doesn't refer to physical death but cultural and spiritual death; hence the concluding phrase of the poem is 'a spiritless soul of memory' is highly suggestive. In the passage there is an implicit contrast between the glory of art, architecture and sculpture in the past and degeneration of life and decadence of culture in the present times:

a brilliant passage to be studied in the light of dhvani and alamkara theories.

Radhakrishna Myth has been used to depict ideal romance. Here is a brilliant passage on the relation between Radha and Krishna which can be analysed in the light of auchitya theory (propriety):

Radha, still standing  
On the right of warm mists,  
abandoned, and yet boundless  
With pain and desire;  
Krishna, far away,  
Like the silence on the river,  
Secretly always victor.

(Orissa: waiting 18)

The relation between Radha and Krishna is platonic. Here there is no physical passion. Krishna is far away from Radha 'like the silence of the river'; but he has secretly won heart of Radha in such a manner that Radha experiences the agony of separation. The simile, the comparison of silent lover like Krishna with silent river is striking. The river flows; the desire to be united with Krishna is very much strong in Radha; hence her pain is boundless. The poem set in the lap of nature in Orissa is appropriate for evoking right emotion at right place.

Mahapatra's picture of love is striking. In the poem Love he uses poetry as a metaphor:

'LOVE'  
like poetry  
leave thought alone  
to find the meaning

(Love: Close the sky, Ten by Ten)

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Poetry means 'something of great beauty, emotion of imagination'. (Macmillan.1087). Love is very deep; it is a profound and sublime emotion. The lover like the poet gets absorbed in the objects or the ideas that embody beauty and stir imagination. These lines can be befittingly studied in the light of *alamkara* and *dhvani* theory.

Living in Orissa is a beautiful poem in which language has been surcharged with emotion:

Something here, perhaps fatal spirit.  
Something that recalls the centuries of defeat.  
To live here,  
antlered in sickness and disease,  
in the past of uncomprehended totems;  
and the spilt blood of ancestors  
one would wear like an amulet.  
... ..  
Someone goes on dancing  
at the doors of indifferent temples.  
Carrying pain in an eyeless face.

(shadow space. 11)

The passage evokes '*karuna rasa*' - the sense of pathos. The Orissans have been ruled by the foreigners over the centuries because they are not aggressive in designs but religious by nature. They believe that the deities worshipped inside the temples would protect their freedom: political and social but ironically temples become indifferent. If this passage is studied in the light of the theories of *alamkaras* (figures of speech) and *dhvani* new meanings well emerge from time to time. The expression 'fatal spirit', 'antlered in sickness and disease', 'eyeless face', 'indifferent temples', 'uncomprehended totems', 'spilt blood of ancestors' lend beauty and mystery to poetry. The stark reality gets presented in an ironical vein.

The tantalizing nature of physical passion has been beautifully depicted by the poet at the onset of rains:

Somewhere, a woman's body knows.  
Rain is her mother,  
a fitful time of sweat and fears.  
Quietly she dies of ghosts of love  
She found among the water and grass.

(Bare face, 28)

The relation between water and grass is vital. Grass grows if it is watered. Similarly a woman develops physical love which grows through 'sweat' and 'fears'.  
If the end of poetry is to stir imagination and emotion, the passage does it to a

great extent. The expression 'ghosts of love' is artistic and suggestive. The Proponents of the schools of dhvani and vakrokti will consider the passage as a brilliant one.

Mahapatra sheds light on the fossilized life style of man in a language that is apt, colloquial and suggestive:

We would return again and again  
to the movement  
that is neither forward nor backward  
making us  
stop moving, without regret.

(Waiting, 44)

Man is born to this world; he grows old in a natural process and falls victim to disease, decay and death. He doesn't aspire to create something new; hence he lives a stagnant life. Mahapatra focuses on the natural laws of the universe. His lines are more cryptic and suggestive than those of T.S. Eliot:

Birth, Copulation and death  
that is all, that is all, that is all.....

Several expressions in Mahapatra's poetry are aphoristic. For example on "Time" he has made several remarks:

"Time has no mouth".

(Relationship, 10)

The absence of mouth refers to the quiet passage of Time.

"Time is just a pilgrimage". (Life Signs 32)

'Pilgrimage' is suggestive of sacredness associated with Time.

"Time is a green mango". (A Whiteness of Bone 17)

'Green mango' is a substitute expression for rosy dreams.

"Time, our strongest possession bleeds". (Shadow Space 25)

'Bleeds' is associated with suffering. Time causes suffering.

Thus Time has appeared to poet as a powerful and mysterious entity. Hence he has used various alamkaras (figures of speech) to picture it.

Mahapatra has used various figures of speech (Alamkara) for 'poem' and poetry:

Poem, my mother, how  
Pain has made you cross  
The divide between past and future.

(Bare Face 44)

Poem is the product of creative pain; it can bridge the gulf between the past and future. It is as respectable as mother.

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Again the poet uses a series of figures of speech just to define a poem:

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The poem is like a lost child wailing  
near a lamp post, uncomforted by the coin  
thrust into its fist by a passer-by.

(Ibidem 39)

Poem embodies fears as well as hopes. It is difficult to write and criticize poetry which is a thing of mystery.

About his relationship with poetry he says:

My life is small,  
And poetry might deceive me later.

(Ibidem)

Poetic truth is different from practical truth; the poet apprehends that poetry might deceive him.

The poet feels that poetry is sometimes perceived to be an out-dated thing:

The poem's fate hangs like an old calendar  
On a nail on my conscience's wall.

(Ibidem 38)

Poetry puzzles the poet as well as the reader.

The poet sounds paradoxical about the nature, structure and function of poetry.

To sum up, Jayanta Mahapatra's Indian English Poetry is unique in many respects; its uniqueness can be brought to light through the application of Indian Poetics. Kalikinkar Pattanayak in his article, "Critical Interpretation Through Indian Poetics" says:

The objective of the study of Indian Poetics is to sharpen the reader's perceptions in the art of interpretation and appreciation of literature. The distinguished aestheticians of India: Kauntaka, Vamana, Anandavardhan, Bharat, Dandi and so on emphasise on the fact that literature should be studied in such a manner that there will be revelation of meaning and illumination of idea in a flash. In other words a piece of literature is not to be dissected in order to arrive at the meaning but the meaning is revealed through right perception. (Souvenir: 15)

F.A. Inamdar holds that Mahapatra attempts to express the inexpressible through symbols (1986:259). In Mahapatra's poetry symbols change, flash and glitter. Hence to perceive Mahapatra better a reader should rely on principles propounded by the aestheticians of ancient India. The brilliant passages that have been quoted and analysed in this paper reveal that Mahapatra's poetic language is artistic, emotive and suggestive; the meaning of his poetry is not fixed; it is revealed through different perceptions by different readers - here lies the justification for the study of his poetry through Indian poetics. □

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## THE VOICE OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA AND THE POETICS OF SILENCE

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Every Creative art presents the symphony approach to the socio-cultural milieu of the time in which the artist lives. A true artist presents the human condition through symbolic representation. The psychic condition of the people around him is perfectly displayed with the map and geography of their mind. With the artistic flavour a true artist brings forth the irony of situation and deals with the irony of fate. In the course of presentation the follies of the moments are explored with a better possible vision of healthy living.

In creative expression English has become a vital language in India for the writers who started writing in English as well as in their mother tongue. In the matrix of their thought a new taste of art originated being coined as Indian English writing. In such writings there is a better synchronization of native thought in foreign medium of expression. It created an aroma, a globalized literary phenomena, the cult that springs from the accepted norms of life which may not challenge the original English tradition. It has its own space to move in.

As a genre, Indian English poetry has come through a long way of experiment and evaluation. Much before Jayanta Mahapatra (1928), poetry has bloomed with its delicate flavour sustaining the booming spirit of Indian English literature. Mahapatra has become one of the exponents in contemporary Indian English poetry along with the constellation of poets like A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Nissim Ezekiel, Shiv K. Kumar, Pritish Nandi, K. Darwalla, D. Chitre, Arun Kolatkar and Kamala Das etc. As the most celebrated poet of India Jayanta Mohapatra has received the much coveted central Sahitya Akademi Award for his book Relationship in 1981. In 2009 he has also received Padmashree award for his outstanding contribution to literature. He has published 18 volumes of poetry, 8 books of translation, a book of essays and memoirs, a book of stories and a book on Orissa, the picture gallery of his native land. Like all other Indian English poets, Mahapatra presents the true accounts of Indian scenario and the Indian mind-set through his own poetry. More truly he broods over his native land Orissa, searching his own identity, where lies his roots. The medium English has helped him to transcend his thoughts in to the excellent art of writing

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and to offer the international audience in expressing his roots in particular and Indianness in general, K.R.S. Iyengar observes:

Indians have written – and are writing – in English for communicating with one another and with the outside world for achieving self-expression too, artistically using English if necessary in Indian way. (4)

Language of the colonizer has not distanced the Indian writers to set an authentic local space in their expression, however it has brought unity in diversity to establish the picture of the most articulate root that lies in the mythological, social, cultural and aesthetic traditions. It is no doubt that the poetic organizations of Jayanta Mahapatra spring from Oriya sensibility and he rightly prefers English as the medium of expression to reach a larger audience. In his article "Of the Lowly potato: Indian English poetry Today" he writes:

My own writing has always reflected an Oriya sensibility and I have felt myself to be an Oriya poet who happened to write in English. I suppose our sensibility, the Indian sensibility, is different from the western one and this fact stands in the way of the western reader. (4)

In his creative quarter Mahapatra sustains the transition of two spaces that originates from Oriya sensibility and merges in Indian sensibility. He establishes his relationship with historical past for the emergence of his creative necessity.

Being a converted Christian living in a Hindu dominated society he goes deep into the roots, his insignificant past and searches his identity. Once upon a time this identity was secured and was in euphoric celebration. The fragmented time during the terrible famine of 1866 made a potent strain on this identity and ultimately the identity was changed. In this Poem "Grandfather", Mahapatra recalls the vernacular whispering notes from the old yellow pages of his grandfather Chintamani Mahapatra's diary.

In a retrospective measure he stumbles to hear the cramped cry in the situation. But after a wide generation gap, when he speaks with his son about that famine, it appears prominent but "nameless as stone". In the stir of conscience he observes:

A conscience of years is between us. He's young.

The whirls of glory are breaking down for him before me.

Does he think of the past as a loss we have lived, our own?

Out of silence we look back now at what we do not know. (29 – 32)

Present has become the point of oscillation between the meaningful and meaningless history. He analyses his own place, people, his own self with the compulsion of the inner need to establish the identity in the disoriented real life situation. He concludes:

We wish we knew what it was to be, against dying  
to know the dignity  
that had to be earned dangerously,  
your last chance that was blindly terrifying, so unfair  
we wish we had to wake up with our smiles  
in the middle of some social order. (39 - 44)

'Grandfather' connotes the ancestral status of some past unforgettable moments and at the same time it has become the metaphor for an unwanted distortion of origin for a necessary change. Mahapatra does not compromise with the change rather he prefers that it would have better if such a situation had not come in to being.

A lingering shadow of defeat with the horrifying past creates a panic space in his heart. With a retrospective measure he looks back from a long distance of time and situation, thinks about the lost culture and religion which appears to him as forbidden and as a closed door. Despite the shadow space in his heart he describes the significance of his place and people around him. He is greatly indebted to the place where he is born. In an ecstatic and jubilant tone he expresses his relationship with his own place at the time of receiving the prestigious Akademi Award. Niranjana Mahanti collects

To Orissa, this land in which my roots lie and lies my past, and in which lies my beginning and end, where the wind keens over the great grief of the River Daya and where the waves of the Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Konark. I acknowledge my relationship. (ii)

Even with the burden of history and ultimate dejection, the poet develops a great sense of intimacy with his region. A better spirit of art remains with the lulling sanity in his creative corner for his place, surrounding and landscape for a significant expression. He is indebted to his own circle for his craftsmanship. The places like Cuttak, Puri, Bhubaneswar, Konark, Balasore, Chandipore etc take the vital positions in his poem. Mahapatra is greatly attracted to Puri for its spiritual significance. He has dissected so many events exploring the unique moments concerning Puri, the hub of Hindu religious life in Orissa. The poems like "Main Temple street, Puri" "Dawn at Puri" etc express his inclination towards the importance of this place. To sustain a sordid portrait of certain events he never lags behind his effort. His approach becomes powerful only because of his honest exploration. The first poem, "Main Temple street, Puri" provides a valuable photograph of the place with certain posture of activities. Here the children are wayward, "continue to laugh away at cripples and mating mongrels". Nobody bothers but "The temple points to unending rhythm". The 'rhythm' may be the rhythm of spirituality that has the unending flow from the shrine. Despite the non-bothering attitude of some people the significance of the place and the benevolent

eternal flow remain intact. The poem gets its height when Mahapatra writes:

And that sky there,  
claimed by inviolable authority,  
hanging on to its crutches of silence (9-11)

Mahapatra takes a philosophical turn in his depiction of the unmatched respectable authority that lies in the silence of the sky over the temple. In 'Dawn at Puri' he establishes an authentic local space, the important oriya sensibility for the larger Indian, English space with an attempt of universalization. Puri is the holly place, a seat of oriya culture with the temple of Lord Jagannath as the point of focus. Mahapatra is very much sincere poet living in Orissa of using such truth as image, symbol and motif in his poetry. In this poem he handles the unusual sound and picture of a deserted geographical situation:

Endless crow noises.  
A skull on the holy sands  
tilts its empty country towards hunger (1-3)

The strange noise of the endless crow has the evil association with the Hindu mythology and the skull which has become the symbol of decay and decadence. Mahapatra projects 'hunger' as the outcome of frail economy of Orissa where death and decadence come as the sequel. He is obsessed with the poverty and hunger, the recurrent vision of the fatal event of history that haunts him again and again for which his base or origin has already been changed.

In another observation Mahapatra portrays a significant view of the middle aged white-clad widowed women those are waiting to enter the great Temple. They have lost everything in utter hopelessness. They are widows having the living dead bodies without having the lustre and color of life, hence they are white-clad bereft of all dreams. Lord Jagannath has become the nucleus of faith, the centre of solace, who can provide salvation to these destitutes. Mahapatra has borrowed this idea from Hindu philosophy and metaphysics and rightly projects the truth for a better poetic structure. The last six lines of the poem express the subjective observation as he says it "suddenly breaks out of my hide" for a lonely funeral pyre. Genetically deep rooted Hindu psyche makes a point that a person gets salvation, the beyond state of death as he or she is cremated here. The last wish of poet's mother seems to originate from the social space of Hindu psyche. Mahapatra's poetry can be assessed as a silence bound pilgrimage. There is a pervading force of silence in the inner meaning of his poems despite the repeated use of the word, silence. In this regard Paniker observes:

Silence, incidentally, is a word that gets endlessly repeated one might say consecrated, in Mahapatra's poems (103)

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Mahapatra develops a saintly observation of silence, either by repeating

the word or by creating an atmosphere in the poetry, which appears as the poetic device for the unity and strength of meaning. The poem "Silence" provides a better explanation of the truth that he handles for the canon of his thought and poetic idiom. The whole poem is shadowed with sombre atmosphere with the presence of rain:

Rain all night  
capacious, like the body of a woman.  
And the heart, intolerable.  
A cow lows once. (1-4)

The poet consciously brings out the uninterrupted solitary situation where the water runs from the feet towards the nameless place and the mountain rests on the earth's body with its entire weight. At that time the poet gives the chance of silence:

The saints are all silent inside their own truths.  
Mass broods silently in the cracks of the stone.  
Four year old patric is silent inside his screams. (10-12)

There is the garden spider, it is silently spinning its web. The sigh is also curls up here and lies asleep on a mat in the darkened room. Such is the condition of silence here. In most of his poems this condition plays a vital role to make a new dimension to his thought and expression. The poems like "Rain Sense", "Hunger", "Evening landscape By The River", "An old country" etc. are rightly situated with the state. In "Rain Sense", silence suggests the human inwardness but in "Hunger" it has become the clue to sum up his inner self depravity. The poverty and human degradation both are reflected in the medium of silence of that situation. Silence, virtually means, a state of oblivion. Mahapatra deals with this state systematically and in a balanced manner. It strengthens his poetic device, as he explains:

So, for me a poem is knit together by an inconceivable silence. Silence which is intangible substance, of which words are but manifestations, words which can build the poem from a silence and to which the poem must eventually return (44).

Silence springs from this contemplative nature and further it heightens the philosophical growth of his poetry. His grief, sense of loss, appreciating nature, deprecating history and social stigma are well balanced through the application of this significant poetic tool. In his rain poems, like "A Rain", "A Day of Rain" or even in his "A Rain of Rites" he develops a kind of thought that is very much fit for the situations. The sense of silence is glorified rightly with the elements of nature and nature is appreciated with esoteric feeling in silence. Mahapatra accepts it as his poetic process, the catharsis for his new poetic mode. Rain has become a generative force in his early poetry but later on it

becomes a symbol of burden or spiritless dream.

Mahapatra's poetic exploration to the soil, he belongs, insists the search for his self. The influence of his place of birth has shaped his sensibility by creating a fine layer in his works. The indebtedness lies with a sense of belonging to the place of his birth and to the landscape of his state urges upon the poet to relate it to his poetic craft" (Das, 18) moreover Bruce King observes:

Mahapatra's poem often records a distance between himself and the customs of his surroundings. There is the sound of the temple bells, the prayer of priests, the funeral pyres, the uncomplaining acceptance of the past representing a possible reality or a mentality of which he is not a part (201)

Such renewal is very much familiar in Mahapatra's poetic journey. He supports Bruce King's observation in his poetic tone:

A man does not mean anything.  
But the place.  
Sitting on the river bank throwing pebbles  
into the muddy current.

A man becomes the place (Somewhere my man, 1-5)

Landscape has become a smoother canvas for his art craft like the romantics. But unlike the romantics he involves himself with nature recollecting the memory and expressing the present agony. In his poetry he has given importance to the places like Puri, Konark, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Balasore etc. with their vibrant landscapes, like the river bank, the hill side, evening landscape by the river, seashore. In each poetic shot he establishes the irony of human standard. Though nostalgic return enhances the spirit to search the roots remaining amidst the place and event, Mahapatra handles it as the mystery of human existence. He consciously celebrates his private moments of desire, despair, guilt and illumination in many of his poems of Indian Landscape, seasons and environment. The poems like, 'Evening landscape By The River', "The captive air of Chandipur on Sea", "Village" "Dawn" "A Summer Afternoon", "Twilight" "old places", "Summer", "Indian Summer" "Country", "A Day of Rain", "October Morning" etc. recount a kind of visionary trait. He derives the creative thought from the native culture, place and history. Most of the time his present is gloomy and unsatisfactory. He has the sympathy for the dead who had inhabited the place.

Here the memory of the faces  
of the dead never appears  
(Evening Landscape by the River)

Or

The crises of fishermen come drifting through the spray  
music of what the world has lost.

(The Captive Air of Chandipur on Sea)

Landscape has become an allusion for Mahapatra to explore his own self. Various symbols like Sun, Moon, Dawn, Evening, Circle, Sea, River, Sky and Rain play vital role to enrich his poetry. Moreover he has great devotion to love, time and death for the interpretation of his poetic vein. In most of his rain poems he develops the desire for sexual union. He also accepts it as the hope for better tomorrow. Simultaneously rain has become a metaphor and symbol for wisdom. It evokes memory and symbolizes the innocence of man.

The after effect of rain creates self - realization. Again the passion for love elongates with a yeatsian zest for life and longing for love. Love remains unfulfilled and brings disappointment when it is remembered. In "Love Fragment" the poet brings forth the pale and worn out state of hunger and darkness where love and dream remain unmaterialized.

There is the circular motion of time in Mahapatra's poetry having three prominent points to realize, past, present and future. Mahapatra seems to have been influenced by T.S. Eliot for the theme of time. It is how the linear development that possesses straight in the direction of past, present and future. As Eliot, Mahapatra also relies on the paradox, that time can be conquered only through time. In most of his poems Mahapatra celebrates the lost glory, the lost ecstasy of the culture of his land. In "Bhubaneswar" and "Main Temple Street, Puri" he sustains the images of ruin and silence. Poems like "Dhaulagiri", "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore" etc. recollect the glorified past. Through the ruins the poet recollects the beauty and charm of the past. But the status of modern man is fixed in alienation that results in a sort of anguish. V.A. Sahane rightly observes in this regard:

Jayanta Mahapatra's constant preoccupation with the naked earth, the favorite places such as Jagannath Puri, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar in Orissa and part of Indian soil dominates one permanent layer of his work. He has a poetic exploration of earth which he belongs as much as it equally becomes a search for self. (145)

Myth plays a vital role in Mahapatra's poetry. Mainly he broods over Hindu mythology. His myths are linked with the world of history and sculpture. Also he has handled different legends to deal with the Shakti Cult, the representation of women for divine force also fall in this category. Mahapatra's finest volume of poems, Temple is built on several myths. In the note to this volume he clarifies about the myth in Shakti Cult:

Hindu mythology states the ultimate consciousness and divine force are one and the same [...]. The Shakti Cult has been prevalent in India from ancient time. Chandi and Kali are manifestation of Durga. The fierce and all destroying aspect of the goddess makes her a total woman, Shakti the divine force which emerges in times of need (56)

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Myth is trapped by the truths and remains in the closed door as an old

man locks himself in due to the condition of unwanted prevalence. Mahapatra explores it as the solace at the time of defeat. In his 'Burden of waves and Fruit', he writes:

Would we go on gnawing at our old Myths;  
arguing with the vital organs of body and mind,  
to approach only the rear entrance to the page  
surrounded by the expensive air of defeat? (38-41)

Mahapatra tries to recollect the native tradition and myth of the land with its recurrent symbols in his poetry in order to reproduce the past in modern terms. The hub of religious activities in Puri and the spontaneous sympathy for the temple ruins in Orissa draw him towards the path of regressions, the point where his root lies. But regarding the temple and the image inside it he says "I can't explain". It may be a question that what is that thing in Mahapatra which is felt in his skin after experiencing the touch of a huge hand? What is that thing he is unable to explain? Obviously it is the attachment of Hinduism that flows from generation to generation, from his grand father and before. It is his root which is reverberated again and again in his memory. In his poem "Myth" Mahapatra puts such a question to answer these questions.

Vague grieving years pit against the distant peaks  
Like a dying butterfly  
As a bearded, saffron - robbed man asks me, firmly:  
Are you a Hindu? (21 - 25)

With regard to history Konark also has a very significant place in his poetry. The ruins of Konark remind us in the lane of own memory about the past glory of our "maritime Ancestors". Such racial memory haunts the poet urging a common root. He declares such conception in his most discussed poem "Relationship".

It is my own life that has cornered me beneath the stones  
Of this temple ruins in a blaze of sun.  
Sun - lion, standing against the steps  
Whose return to life are you waiting for (Eight - 1 - 5)

It happens as the sequel, the poet declares:

Only that stones were my very own,  
Waiting as mother or goddess or witch,  
As my birth feeds on them  
As through on the empty dugs of sorcerous thought.  
(one, 65 - 68)

In the process of search here he finds his own self and own identity. The present physical world provides a different kind of images those are subsequently modulated in this psychic state for a better poetic out let. His thoughts are related to the



situation and event as the objective co-relative. His later volume "Random Descent" explores a significant artistic concentration with the blend of more intellectual modulation of the variety of decent themes in random selection with the recurrent themes and images. Here he speaks of genesis, palmistry, blue of the sky, rain, shadow, freedom etc. in the heading of 'Old violins of legends', 'Another Ruined Country 2002' and 'Shores of Darkness and Light'. Mahapatra is also very much fanatic in poetic articulation of portrait. His poems like 'Mother Teresa' and 'Madhuri Dixit' in this volume present a kind of metaphor for peace and dream respectively. With a profound sense of expression he touches the spirit of humanity and joy. The magnitude of character sustains an esoteric but dominating reality in profound philosophy. In 'Mother Teresa' Mahapatra speaks:

This bride  
Of a haunted land  
Whose veil of white  
Merely disburdens her flesh and bone (9 - 12)

She has become the epitome of freedom, stigma less personality an angel of truth in the great human history. Like that his another portrait poem "Madhuri Dixit" also contains the metaphor of dream, love, fearlessness, and feminine zest. At the out set of the poem he depicts the persona in hyperbole with the spirit of praise and learning.

You are a country  
A man can breath deeply  
The clean air of earth and stone after rain (1-3)

He talks at love, dream in miraculous heart, and compares with the mythic characters like Radha and Menaka. Again there is a sharp contrast of the ecstasy in beauty and decay or destruction that comes through the hidden cruelties of ageing womanhood. In the concluding lines of this poem Mahapatra ironically projects the ephemeral human condition that can not be compromised with the ever lasting lust, love and ecstasy. Everything is subject to decay, he writes:

Then how will you love, Madhuri?  
For we do not have light in our bodies,  
We men have only fire in our flaming nests  
And we will forget the faith that moved us  
We will forget (64-68)

Such a passionate feeling gets its closure with the inevitable condition of man.

Thought and language in Mahapatra's poetry are very much reciprocal those come from a long way of examined truths. Language may be spontaneously colourful that comes from the most conscious state of mind. Mind is the workshop of feeling for life. The fountain of feeling comes from history and society. Mahapatra sustains such powerful feelings with the fitting language for his poetic diction.

In his Door of paper: Essays and Memoirs he affirms:

To get to the fundamentals, poetry does not make things happen. That is what language does. Poetry is about making language happen. It is we who push our language to do things in all spheres of our lives. (199)

Jayanta Mahapatra is certainly a prominent voice, a promising craftsman and a profound poet in post modern Indian English literature. His journey of poetry comes through the silence bound creative pilgrimage. His vision gets its strength from the camouflage of creative silence. His identity is revealed not only as a blessed son of Orissa but also as a prominent voice in Indian English literature. □

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## POETRY

Jayanta Mahapatra

\* H.K. Mahanta, IWA

Like Walt Whitman in America  
William Wordsworth In England  
or W.B.Yeats in Ireland  
Jayanta Mohapatra captures  
the ancient Odissan landscape  
culture and history  
in the Indian subcontinent  
depicting Kalinga War  
Samrat Ashoka  
and his change of heart  
from cruelty violence and war  
towards peace and kindness  
unto Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha  
three essence of Buddhism.  
through Relationship  
his masterpiece  
and his vision  
of ancient Kalinga, its religion  
and spirituality  
has been very lucidly  
illustrated and the readers  
can savor the old  
anaectodes of  
Konark, Chandrabhaga  
and monuments that  
India boasts of within Odisha.  
Although a man of science  
his mind brilliantly  
captures the legacy  
of Cuttack the ancient  
capital of Odisha  
where he was nourished  
and brought up.

A poet known and adored  
all over the world  
is also known for his simplicity  
serenity and sublimity.  
In the land of Lord Jagannath  
where Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs  
Muslims and Hindus  
all mingle together harvesting  
universal brotherhood and peace  
has very nicely been  
manifested in his writings.  
a pan Indian identity indeed.  
An architect of letters  
very rricetly translating the dreams  
and essence of  
of Bishu Maharana  
who once built the Konark  
Asia's Black Pagoda  
and world's one of the most  
beautiful monument  
in his depiction of characters,  
symbols and metaphors.  
No doubt Jayanta Mohapatra  
will be remembered  
in the history of Indo-Anglian  
poetry for many times to come  
like the Pyramid of Egypt  
or Eif el Tower of Paris

---

\* Mr Mahanta edits a bi-annual literary  
Journal - The Eternity.



Jayanta Mahapatra

Some Poems of  
Jayanta Mahapatra:

Madhuri Dixit

You are a country  
a man can breathe deeply  
the clean air of earth and stone  
after rain

You are a free city  
a child can walk around  
without fear

unlike a goddess's one-faced  
domain,  
from sight-seeing into pilgrimage

These are surely dreams we will die in  
Dreams full of dancing and crowds  
laughing and stamping  
Dreams that watch you with your  
ankle-bells  
and voiceless poets  
Dreams that stand by the side of  
the road  
and stare at the heart in despair

Dreams that wade through fallen  
leaves and damp dark grass  
until they grow still and become the  
earth  
Dreams of the sound of you sinking  
your teeth into an apple  
until they walk through the white  
canvas and black paper  
of a beautiful surrender

This physical poem I move through  
is a poem of the soul,  
a poem striving toward the light  
sparked from the heart of Krishna  
this is a poem worshipping the sun  
in the ancient temple walls of your  
eyes,  
a poem drinking the moon  
mirrored in the moist ravines  
of your lips  
It is a stranger's words  
exuding from memory's mirrors and  
human destinies  
where brightly coloured snakes  
devise in endless motion  
a poem made to the size of my  
dream -

How could I know I am a cry of  
apprehension  
that falls apart at the touch  
of a raindrop?  
How could I know that your face  
and feet,  
shoulders and hips, are wind-blown  
grass and earth?  
How would I know you are river and  
waterfall,  
a story of the tide playing with  
abandon  
in the five estuaries of the Indian  
dream?  
It is a pity you cannot see what we  
see;  
that in you is the eternal, and over  
you  
the world keeps on moving,  
as it has before-  
perhaps Radha, perhaps Menaka,  
determining

the limits of India's prodigal  
imagination;  
your womb in happiness,  
shame and pain  
is a truth we will not understand.

It's your body we see, March's  
fickle weather,  
behind which your untold pasts and  
futures lie abandoned  
like a pit, a nut or stone. Not much  
else.  
You are a hunger  
among bronze peacocks,  
your uncertain nights torn  
by strange flutes from stranger  
pasts.

Miraculous is this heart:  
how do you love, Madhuri?  
How take in the fine state  
of euphoria,  
the shift of sky on your little finger?  
How do you play without playing  
yourself?  
I waste paper, savouring  
poetic trauma,  
push through the growth  
that words had made poems,  
and close my eyes in daydream  
to pick out  
the way you laugh at stars and  
memories  
left for the rain to cry on. Soon this  
poem too,  
will be worn out by life,  
as you already are.

With our hidden cruelties, we will  
wait, Madhuri

until your pain assumes  
a brazen shape we can see,  
until the day before yesterday  
is the day after tomorrow -  
until your ageing womanhood  
becomes pregnant with youth,  
leaving behind a body that had lost  
its horse  
and riders, breasts humbled,  
in total silence.

Then how will you love, Madhuri?  
For we do not have light  
in our bodies,  
we men have only fire in our flaming  
nests  
And we will forget the faith  
that moved us.

We will forget. □

### Winter in the City

The paraplegic boy stands  
like a cross,  
shivering in the cold seeping  
through his fingers.

Tireless corporate offices  
keep thundering with a sense of  
wholeness of life.

Siberian geese are already  
skimming the lake  
between the reeds, not taking more  
than what they need.

Here in winter I brood for no reason.  
I don't have to be good, and fail.

It wouldn't be bad at all to be  
a meaningless figure not trying to  
get somewhere.

The boy who cannot carry  
his broken body  
hasn't stopped loving himself;

he would not hurt God ever.  
If he'd die  
it would be only a natural death,

when he imagines the world  
outside of himself.  
From afar I see the smoke  
of small wood fires

where the poor are warming  
themselves;  
the shape of a cat is tucked in  
by the boy's side.

The cold rolls around my feet,  
and bites,  
tiny leaves flutter on the trees  
like shadows:

if this is just a plan for another  
approaching spring,  
I wouldn't notice the boy,  
or drag my ancestors around.

Perhaps the leaf, the cross,  
the death  
that lures me out, the fire and  
smoke,

and the notes swirling in a swathe  
of sunlight

are all stiffening in the garden,

misting the answers we are afraid  
to ask,  
still healing those flaws of life itself  
we do not know. □

### A Brief Orissa Winter

A puddle of fire by the roadside.  
Warming hands of passers-by.  
Elsewhere, a schoolgirl gets ready  
for class,  
flapping her wings like a bird  
about to take flight.  
Both people who live one or  
a hundred lives  
rinse their bodies with  
the cool winter air.

No more do men go out  
onto the earth  
to be close enough  
to the mountain's quiet  
and wait for an answer.  
No more does any one who  
tries to talk of love  
defeat death with his certainties.

Already the ash has leapt out  
of the fire  
that lit the darkness of a savage  
winter night,  
and the ground beneath it  
is ready once again  
with its mysteries.

The schoolgirl doesn't want  
an answer;  
she just wants someone  
to agree with her.

The sun is now low in the sky.  
So much science, so much prayer,  
and in this darkness that has  
invaded our lives  
a bird whistles by,  
down the mountain  
to where the clouds floated along,  
floating past the way  
they always had. □

### One Day, Standing in a Corner

One day, standing in a corner  
of a strange city,  
I felt I was blind to the real meaning  
of whatever I had done all along  
to my life.  
I remembered the wide world  
I kept tempting  
to innocence, the past and  
the future  
that lusted for my death,  
and the magic  
of the day that gave a dry little sob  
and sighed.  
There was this poison my blood  
would carry  
to my heart, those dreams  
and desires  
as they kept being fulfilled  
in the world,

carrying enormous human costs  
with them.  
This poem of mine, which was  
never an answer,  
shook the surrounding darkness  
like a bell  
and quietened, shocked at finding  
itself  
lying about my life. All the poem  
could do  
was to close its eyes  
and feel the breeze  
and the sun in its face.  
It disregarded  
the hour between night and dawn,  
when  
most of us die, and my  
sleeplessness lay there,  
waiting for the fear of the wholeness  
of life.

That day, standing in the corner  
of a strange city,  
the world spoke to me  
in an unintelligible language.  
The silence of history rang with  
noiseless trumpets  
and echoless drums; my history  
became  
my own skeleton that intruded  
like an alien  
inside my flesh. Was there a voice  
at all?  
People were all around me,  
and we were  
all alive at the same time.  
Our realities  
were different and our heroisms  
were lies.

My blood had gone naked so long  
that my veins decayed  
into saltiness,  
and reality was a soft,  
perfumed bridal bed  
with a scarlet sheet that was a  
potential market  
for a country used to live on  
without memories.

It wasn't clear if the fate of the  
people was mine,  
whether the key to my life had been  
handed to me by a blind man who  
was not  
blind at all at the end of this  
marathon;  
and that revenge, loosened  
of its moral code,  
was to be revelled in  
as an assuring feat -  
the past of the land was on parade  
and the faces of tradition  
were defying masks.  
I was suddenly aware nothing could  
ever  
repair things, napalm could flower  
on the breasts  
of a young girl to give democracy  
its wings,  
my mind a dead leaf caught by a  
lazy autumn breeze.  
Like a dying man confined  
to his bed, paralyzed  
but aware, was poetry itself,  
watching the ones he loved pilfer  
his familiar goods. □

## The Sounds of Freedom

Somewhere someone  
is climbing the wall of lost time.

In my room I awake  
in darkness to the silence  
of earthworms.

Once, I thought I had learnt  
the myths of the secret  
underground river:

how naked and obvious  
our freedom looked,  
the distances between us drifting  
to the river bottom.

Today this evening is old,  
smelling of ashes.  
And a wind of irrepressible grief  
settles everywhere.

I find myself lying about my life:  
I cannot call my freedom tangible  
and intense.

Only my sanity sits at the doorway  
like a blind man watching the world  
go by.

It hears those watery noises  
freedom makes,  
like shadows that move without  
flesh. □