INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY: UNVEILING AUTHENTICITY AND SOCIAL REALITIES THROUGH JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S EVOCATIVE IMAGERY

Dr. Manu*

Open Researcher, Department of English, Haryana, India

***Email ID**: imanupoonia1@gmail.com*

Accepted: 07.05.2023 **Published**: 01.06.2023

Keywords: Lonely, Social Reality, Hunger, Misery and Poverty.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that, despite its relative youth, Indian English poetry has already established a reputation for authenticity and sincerity in its expression and communication. A particular emphasis will be placed on Jayanta Mahapatra's skill in exposing Indian sensibility and social realities and picturing the contemporary scene through suggestive and startling imagery. The primary focus of this paper will be on the misery, hunger, loneliness, and isolation that are prevalent in India today.

Paper Identification

**Corresponding Author*

Introduction

Since authors like Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Sarojini Naidu began penning works in this 'foreign' language, Indian poetry produced in English has been referred to by a number of different labels, including Indo-Anglian, Indo-Anglo, Anglo-Indian, and Indo-English poetry. These are the genres of poetry published in English between 1825 and 1945. But since then, the field of Indian poetry produced in English has developed, rendering those

classifications obsolete. Poets such as Browning, Yeats, Pound, Auden, Williams, Stevens, and Ginsberg, as well as Kapilar, Paranar, Allama Prabhu, Kabir, Tukaram, Nirala, Faiz, and the contemporary socioeconomic reality, have all had an impact on subsequent generations of English-language poets. Modernised word choice and imagery (known as "chutinification" or "biryanization") serve to more closely align with Indian culture and ethos. There is now contemporary Indian poetry available in English.

Despite its relative youth, the Indian context plays an essential role in the authenticity and sincerity of the communication in modern Indian poetry written in English. While the language itself is foreign, the sensibility and spirit that shape it to meet its needs are intrinsically Indian. Although the wearer's skin and blood may be foreign, the garment itself is Indian. Protest marks a significant departure in the new forms of Indian poetry written in English, which "involves both the choice of language and the flow of the rhythm—that is, being adjusted and attuned to the temper of the new age." Our poets have learned the value of taking their craft seriously from the likes of Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas, and maybe even Allen Tate and Wallace Stevens. They have come to the conclusion that poetry cannot be created by simple prose. Words cannot "live" or "sing" on their own through merely imitative or wanton angularity, frenetic incoherence, or contrived obscurity. Writing poetry as a career requires dedication, dedication, and more dedication. It says something about the 'new poets' that they are committed to their craft without treating it as a hobby. Iyengar, B., 649. Even though English is a second language for most Indian poets, they have the guts to compose in it. Although Mahapatra claims in his poem "Even if No one takes my poems seriously":

> “Yes, there’s a poem growing
> with a foreign language which keeps my head up;
> I don’t try to explain
> Whether it is the right thing to do or wrong.”

Mahapatra's view of poetry differs from that of Ezekial, Parthasarathy, and Daruwalla in that it is nothing more than the chronicle of a mind in flux, complete with its anguish, remorse, frustration, contradiction, and failed attempts. He relies heavily on personal recollection. However, he shares common ground with other Indian English poets on some key ideas, including poetry's form and the search for one's heritage. He sees poetry as a way to share his inner thoughts and concerns about his place in the universe. To paraphrase what he says about great poetry, "A great poem lets us embark on a sort of journey or voyage through symbols and allusions to encompass the human condition" (Literary Criteria 9).

Poems by Indian poets written in English are almost always autobiographical or contemporary in nature, such as "***Background Casually***" by Ezekiel, "***Broken Columns***" by Shiv K. Kumar, "***Rough Passage***" by Parthasarathy, "***Self-Portrait***" by Ramanujan, and "***An Introduction***" by Kamala Das. An integral part of Indian poetry written in English is the endeavour to adapt native practises to the language of the coloniser. Ramanujan adapts the language and culture of South India to the English-speaking world. Parthasarathy discusses ancient Tamil history. In a similar vein, Jayanta Mahapatra's "***Relationship***" explores the poet's connection to the history, heritage, and customs of his homeland. Born into a Christian household on October 22, 1928, in Cuttack (Odisha), Jayanta Mahapatra has become one of the most well-known Indian poets writing in English. He attended Stewart European School, Ravenshaw College, Science College, and Patna, all in India. He retired as a Reader in Physics from Ravenshaw College in Cuttack, where he had previously taught.

When compared to other people, Mahapatra's encounter with inspiration was late in life. In his forties, he began to write poetry seriously. The "***Critical Quarterly", "the Kenyon Review"***, and the "***Sewanee Review"*** were among the earliest American literary magazines to print his works. "***Close the Sky, Ten by Ten"*** (1971), "***A Rain of Rites"*** (1976), "***Relationship"*** (1980), "***Life Signs"*** (1983), "***A Whiteness of Bone"*** (1992), and "***Shadow Space"*** (1997) are among his more than a dozen collections. Mahapatra translated much from Oriya literature and wrote in that language as well. He is credited with editing the poetry sections of The "***Telegraph"*** and "***Chandrabhaga"*** (A Literary Journal) as well as translating the works of prominent Oriya poets such as Gangadhar Meher, Sachi Routray, Soubhagya “Mishra, and Sitakanta Mahapatra into English for "***Counter Measures"*** (1973). Many literary honours were bestowed on him in recognition of his work. The Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981, the PadmaShri Award in 2009, and the SAARC Literary Award in 2010 are just a few of the many accolades he has received.

Mahapatra has a very Indian way of thinking. The key to his success has been to ignore his Indian heritage and avoid succumbing to what has been called an alienation complex. The poems he wrote about Orissa epitomise his Indian identity since they elevate the particular to the universal. It's important to note that the Oriya authors of Orissa Landscapes, Evening in an Orissa Village, The Orissa Poems, and Dawn at Puri are also Indian authors. There's no denying that poverty, hunger, and malnutrition are major factors in the daily lives of the vast majority of Indians. They are also an important part of Mahapatra's poetry. The stories "Hunger," "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street," and "Man of His Night" all examine the issue from different vantage points and shed light on its nuanced and heartbreaking truths. There are three distinct

analyses of male sexuality and the exploitation of women in these poems. Mahapatra's poetry has a tragic-pessimistic tone because of his awareness of the poverty and suffering of the Indian masses and of women as victims of masculine lust in a male-dominated society." Human interaction,' especially as it pertains to sexual love, is another important issue in Mahapatra's poetry, as shown in such works as 'Lost' in the Logic and 'The Wholehouse in a Calcutta Street. One may sum up Mahapatra's poetry by saying it is rooted in intensely private memories.

The vast majority of Indian English poetry has its roots in India. Each poet comes from a unique experience that informs their work. A lot of English poets have looked to Orissa for inspiration, and Mahapatra is no exception. Self-aware of his debt to the earth, he says:

> "To Orissa, to his land in which my roots lie and his past and in which lies my beginning and my end, where the wind keens over the grief of the River Daya and the waves of the Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the firelight soul of Knonarka, I acknowledge my debt and my relationship" (Mohanty 65).

He writes poetry using the 'Naked earth' as his inspiration. The 'Naked Earth' mythological, metaphorical, and aesthetic foundations of which Orissa and India are important parts. Mahapatra defied expectations by choosing to write in English despite having been born and raised in Orissa, where the official language is Oriya. In his words,

"I am in love with English. And then, my schooling was in English and

> I learnt my language from British school masters – mainly from English Novels …. Further I feel I can express myself better in English than in Oriya" (Mahapatra 59).

His writing is in English, a language he learned after being born into a Christian household in a Hindu-dominated culture. "His poetry is dominated by topics like malnutrition, mythology, rituals, sexuality, poverty, human connection, spirituality, the self, and eternity, all of which are rooted in the harsh reality of life in India. Mahapatra's poetry benefits greatly from his deep familiarity with his environment. The setting, with all its lore and legends, its loves and beliefs, its superstitions, and its changes, has been the primary inspiration for his verse. Parthasarathy says that "Orissa is the hub of Jayanta Mahapatra's iconoclastic perambulations" (P. 207).

Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry is a great representation of his universal concerns, such as hunger, philosophy, human suffering, sex, the sensual sordid realities of life in Orissa and Puri, business, a nuanced and complex personality, Indian sensibility, human frustration, and disappointment. The dramatic monologue of "Hunger," written in four mocking stanzas, tells the story of a poor

fisherman whose daughter is driven to prostitution by financial necessity. In "Dhauli," a sensitive account of the Kalinga War (261 BC) that wiped out thousands of lives to satiate, a single individual's hunger for power, hunger for food, and hunger for sex merge. In "Grandfather," the narrator describes the harrowing experiences of his grandfather, Chintamani Mahapatra, who was forced to convert to Christianity because of hunger and sex. Poverty breeds violence, and "voices" speaking out against the status quo are brutally cowed. "A Country" is an implicit critique of the current social scenario, which is a comment on the plight of impoverished Asian nations from Turkey to Cambodia. "A Country" is also about hunger that engenders bloody revolutions leading to bloodshed and violence, as has happened in the past, while "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta" and "The Exile" both depict the condition of an alienated individual in the modern world and discuss the miserable state of the modern man's mind being broken mentally and morally, giving vent to feelings of distress and frustration, respectively.

Mahapatra is, first and foremost, an Oriya poet, and the Oriya landscape is the central focus of his work." His poetry takes on a local flavour from his observations of the Oriya countryside, the Orissan people, their social customs, and their religious practises. Relationships, societal issues in India, love, sex marriage, ethics, the mind at work, and the natural world are all topics he explores in these works. As M.K.Naik astutely points out:

> "Mahapatra's poetry is redolent of the Orissan Scene and the Jagannath temple at Puri figures quite often in it".

Dawn at Puri, Taste for Tomorrow, Slum, Evening Landscape by the River, and Events are only a few of the poems in which he attempts to recapture the lost splendour and pleasure of Oriya culture. His outlook is deeply rooted in Indian culture. His poems about Orissa best display his Indian heritage. K.A. Panilker puts it perfectly:

> "An examination of the recurring images in Mahapatra's poems reveals that he is Oriya to the Core" (118).

Numerous poems by him feature Puri as a real person, including "***Indian Summer", "Poem", "This Stranger", and "My Daughter"***. Several reality-based symbols are used to paint a picture of Puri in the poem "***Taste for Tomorrow"***:

> "At Puri, the crows The
> one wide street lolls out
> like a giant tongue
> . . . . . .

And at the Street's end the crowds

thronging temple's door."

Poems like these often use nature as a metaphor for all of India. What the poet sees happening in Puri is reflective of life across India. As S.Viswanathan so astutely observes, "the poet's sensibility is both Indian and modern, and his response to the Indian scene is authentic and credible" (P.5). The poet of "Village" succeeds in painting a word picture that is both familiar and moving:

Carefully I cross

The palm trunk bridge over the Irrigation canal.

Even in the heat of "***summer"***, you may conjure up a landscape more typical of the countryside:

"A ten-year-old girl

Combs her mother's hair

Where crows of rivalries

are quietly resting"

The home will never be hers

His surroundings in everyday life provide the true setting for his poetry. He is a Christian, but he enjoys listening to the old Radha and Krishna songs. He introduces fundamental Hindu beliefs. His poetry frequently reflects an alienation from his community's norms. He is not familiar with the funeral pyres, temple bells, or priestly prayers. When discussing his own local roots, he writes:

"I don't know much about it.

I know I love old lyrics of Radha and

Krishna written by Banamali and others" (Normans 32)

The abstract and the concrete, the expected and the unexpected, all find common ground in poetry, and this common ground is the outcome of what T. S. Eliot called a united sensibility. By giving them what Wordsworth calls "a certain colouring of imagination" to them, Mahapatra, who is plainly seated on a gorgeous throne, transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Sex, sexuality, love, and societal concerns are as central to Mahapatra's poems as the Orissa environment. Some of Mahapatra's imagery 'grips us by the sleeves', to use a line from one of his poems. Imagist characteristics shared by all of his poems include: i) a focus on concrete, firm, and definite images; ii) an avoidance of clichés; "iii) the creation of new rhythms for the expression of a new mood; iv) the allowance of complete freedom in the selection of subject

matter; v) the presentation of concrete, firm, and definite images; vi) an ongoing pursuit of concentration; and vii) the provision of hints rather than full explanations. Images of the interminable crow-noises, a skull on the hallowed sands of the seashore, and old widows in white waiting to enter the temple of Lord Jaganath with austere eyes staring like fish trapped in a net may all be found in "***Dawn at Puri"***. A huge holy flower sways in the wind, not swaying in the natural breeze but swaying in "the wind of greater reasons," and the book begins with the words "At Puri, the crows," followed by an image of a single wide street lolling like a giant tongue, five lepers stepping aside to make way for a priest, crowds thronging the temple door, and so on. A temple stands far and still, as if lost in thought, while a baby of six months crawls across a floor washed with manure. This is the "***Evening landscape by the river"***. The sun has set, and there comes the faint sound of laughter. The moon is falling over "the abundant darkness of water" and settling there like a familiar but useless adornment. The "dungwashed floor" and "like a familiar but useless ornament" are two such realistic details that help to create the picture and the atmosphere the author intends.

Even though the episodes and events in the poem "***Events"*** have no apparent connection to one another, the poem's imagery, such as the town's dusty streets, the moonlight falling on a rooftop, and a distant whistled song giving grief to the night, is striking.” Then there's the scene of a conceited Rotarian lecturing a group of uninterested listeners on the secrets of American business enterprise in the Y's second-floor conference room, where smoke can be seen lingering in the distance from the riverbank and a single funeral pyre burns among the pipal trees. Other excellent works of imagist poetry are ***"Indian Summer Poem" and "A Missing Person."*** First, in "***Indian Summer Poem"***, there is the sound of a mournful wind moaning and the sound of priests singing sacred passages so loudly that it sounds like all of India is yelling. The next thing I see are crocodiles swimming away into deeper water, and then I see trash piles burning and smouldering in the heat. Last but not least, there's the mental picture of a dutiful woman sleeping soundly in her husband's bed all afternoon long, weary enough to dream about the deep roar of funeral pyres. Mahapatra claims that these are the defining characteristics of a traditional Indian summer. A woman stands in front of a mirror with an oil lamp in her hand, but she can't seem to find her reflection in the poem "***A Missing Person"***. Her basic being or inner personality is hidden from the world, and only the "drunken yellow flame" of the oillamp can see it. The jungles have turned mild; the ladies have become restless—these are only two examples of the shocking and intriguing imagery in the poem "***The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of a Republic".***

Then, several of his poems vividly depict women in the role of helpless victims of malevolent forces. In the poem "***Afternoon"***, female characters are portrayed as mere sexual objects.
"The two big-arsed Srikakulam women". In the poem Idyll, the shopkeeper's lust is aroused by the women who wander into his shop to purchase four kilogrammes of rice. He gazes at them with "wide hunger in his eyes" and "Fans himself in the lethargy of his dream."
"Something in a woman's eyes tempts confessions for her husband as they stretch out to sleep." He uses her every night to bury his 'pain' inside of her. This guy doesn't give a damn about how she feels. She exists solely to satisfy his sexual desires.

By depicting a victim girl who is raped twice, first in a tempt and once at a police station, Mahapatra exposes the social reality and emphasises the total helplessness:

> "In the Hanuman Temple the priest's pomaded
> jean-clad son raped the squint-eyes fourteen-
> year fisher girl her father found her at a police
> station assaulted again and over again by four
> policemen" (The Lost Children of American).

The lyrics in the poem "***Man of his nights"*** create a beautiful picture of a whore:

> "The plump whore has just left'
> has brazenly gone to work on a
> new customer."

The whore metaphor in the first line of "***The Lost Children of America"*** is telling because he compares the "whole" to "the politicians," both of whom ply their trade in the same establishment. The Indian female population has a deep connection to the natural order and patiently awaits the world's limited opportunities. Again, the film "***These Women"*** depicts the unwavering faith of Hindu women in India.

By asking humorous questions regarding women's attitudes, the poet reveals their frailty:

> "what do they live for beyond the veils
> of innocent prayer the climb up and
> down the holy stairs?"

Not only does Mahapatra expose women's unquestioning devotion to religious dogma, but she also highlights women's inherent passivity. In a few of his poems, he makes an effort to investigate the feelings of alienation and loneliness that women experience. Absence, solitude, loneliness, estrangement, and emptiness are the concerns that dominate the minds of Indian

ladies. Again, the image of a solitary woman who pines for experiences she has had in the past and her sentimental outlook are both beautifully portrayed in the poem. "***Old Earth"***:

> "And in her eyes the dim flower
> of her days glows from the old
> earth at its roots".

The woman is portrayed in "***The Whorehouse on a Calcutta Street"*** as little more than a passive instrument. The shame does not seem to be shared actively by her. After that, the sexual act takes place. She approaches it fairly mechanically due to her fatigue and boredom. Her brash retort betrays her helplessness and complete apathy for her predicament. Poem attesting to social realities and Indian sensitivity by drawing attention to the hunger and anguish of India's underprivileged.

To sum up, Mahapatra's poetry is full of intriguing and shocking imagery, all of which serves to further his exploration of societal realities and the projection of an Indian sensibility.

References

1. Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishing House, 1964.
2. Mahapatra, Jayanta. 'Talks to N.Raghavan' "Interview", *Tenor* No.1, June 1978.
3. Mahapatra, Jayanta. *Literary Criticism*. Vol.XV, No.1, 1980.
4. Mohanty, Niranjan. "The Theme of Life: Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra", *Contemporary Indo-English Poetry*. Bareilly: PBD, 1986.
5. Naik, M.K. "Two Worlds: The Imagery of Jayanta Mahapatra", *Studies in Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987, p.207.
6. Paniker, K.Ayyappa. "The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra", *Indian Literature in English*. Madras: Anu Chithra Publications, 1989, p.118. \
7. Parthasarathy, R. *Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976.