

MACROCOSMIC CONDITION OF WOMEN IN INDIA AS REFLECTED IN THE POEMS OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

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Abstract

Poetry has the charm to enlighten the readers. It also has the power to be used as an effective tool to reform the society in a subtle way. For ages poetry has been a tool in the hands of the poets who have an urge to reciprocate their feelings in their verses. The poetic lines hold the mirror which reflects the sordid reality of women in society. Poetry is criticism of life. Jayanta Mahapatra has utilised his poems as a tool to portray the pathetic plight of women. Hence the select poems of Mahapatra has been taken for study. The psychological aspects of Mahapatra's poems naturally kindle the interest of the readers. The verses of Mahapatra depict the confrontation of women as they have been exposed to social traumas. Mahapatra, a renowned poet from Orissa, is aware of his immediate environment. Mahapatra vividly portrays the Oriyan landscape which represents the Indian consciousness. As the poet belongs to twenty first century, his select poems reveal the contemporary situation prevailing in India. The decline of socio cultural values and exploitation of women and the threat of insecurity find a place in his poems. The agony, the quest for identity of the poet is evident in his poems. The pathetic, deplorable state economic condition of the women has been brought in through his portraits, The microcosmic view of family in turn gives us a wider view of the macrocosmic condition of women in India.

Poetry has the beauty to enlighten the readers. It also has the power to be used as an effective tool to reform the society in a subtle way. For ages poetry has been a tool in the hands of the poets who have an urge to reciprocate their feelings in their verses. The poetic lines hold the mirror which reflects the sordid reality of women in society. As Matthew Arnold has rightly said 'poetry is the criticism of life' (William J Long 563). It is true in the case of Jayanta Mahapatra, a renowned poet from Orissa. He has utilised the tool of poetry to portray the pathetic plight of women through their portrayal. Hence the select poems of Jayanta Mahapatra have been taken for study. As Welleck and Warren have rightly said in their theory of literature that in poetry there is the charm, beauty and power allied to philosophy. The philosophical and psychological aspects of the poems have kindled the interest of many readers. The verses depict the confrontation of women as they have been exposed to social traumas.

Jayanta Mahapatra, the poet from Orissa is aware of his immediate environment. Mahapatra vividly portrays the Oriyan landscape which represents the Indian consciousness. This study tries to unravel the confrontation of women with society by analysing the select poems of Mahapatra as they express their attitude towards deprivation of the rights of women and exploitation through the depiction of culture of the society to which he belongs.

In India, women are found suppressed and subjugated in the patriarchal society. They are victims to all sorts of domestic violence. They suffer not only inside their homes but also they are afraid of the outside world as there is a threat of acid attacks, rape, eve teasing and even murder. They perceive women from their points of view. They are perturbed by the existing plight of women. So they want to focus on some of the existing drastic evils like dowry death, rape and exploitation of women. The poems of Jayanta Mahapatra depicts the condition of women as they confront the society in all walks of life. Mahapatra's empathy for the suffering women kindles sympathy in his readers. The Indian poet taken for study is Mahapatra, the poet from Orissa. He belongs to twenty first century and he is innately endowed with a sympathetic view for the pitiable marital status of women of today. Their deplorable state depends mainly on the economic condition of their families. The microcosmic view of family in turn gives us a wider view of the macrocosmic condition of women in India.

The poems of Jayanta Mahapatra deal with different aspects of the alienated women. He feels dejected when the cultural values are getting subdued and destroyed. The decline of human values haunts him so much that he points out the drastic reality through his images. His world of poetry is full of subtle images. He brings in every sector of the human society in exhibiting the socio cultural reality of the existing evils in India.

The tradition of India was once to be aped by cross-cultural society, but today it needs a reformation. Women of India are helpless and there is an urgent need to ensure their freedom. Their total dependence on men folk leads to vulnerable atrocities.

He brings in the images of darkness as to reveal the reality of the present India. He brings forth his agony by asking

What is wrong with my country?
The jungles have become gentle, the women restless
and history reposes between the college girls breasts.

(The Twenty fifth Anniversary of a Republic 1975 1-3)

Mahapatra's quest for reformation and his silent appeal to the readers by bringing forth his inner urge through these lines. He presents a picture of the Indian panorama picturing women as victims of poverty. The poverty stricken woman dries herself after bath with only one sari, her only possession. Here are the lines:

drying herself with only wet sari
after her bath, and the nameless solitude
that has nothing to hide behind.

(The Lost Children of America 104-106)

The lines not only picture a single woman but women in general. Hence she is representative of the poverty stricken mass. He also portrays another woman standing in a queue for getting her allowance. She is almost 'voiceless' as her voice is being drowned by the full-throated voice of the minister.

The voice of the lonely woman
standing in the queue for her sustenance allowance
a voice which the roar
of the minister's jet cuts short.

(Dispossessed Nests)

It depicts the sufferings of a Indian widow begging before the government for the allowance due to the loss of her husband's life. The atrocities of the men-folk towards a helpless woman as they live in remote corners are vividly brought out in these lines.

Now a man knows only two ways
for dealing with stray woman
he rapes her
and he kills her

(Dispossessed Nests)

Therefore she has to ever remain panicky and cautious. It is the most sensational issue prevailing nowadays.

He portrays mostly passive Indian womenfolk who undergo subjugation silently.

In the neighbouring house, a woman hides
her hatred for her impotent husband.

(Post card from home)

The male dominated society fail to understand the sad plight of women. The responsibilities have to be shouldered by women in the name of tradition and culture. They have been conditioned to accept their roles and responsibilities at home. They have been conditioned in such a way that they should be adaptive by nature. Though women accept everything and adopt themselves to the rising situation, there lurks a threat to their insecurity and cruelty.

Women cannot escape from the eyes of men who perceive them as sexual objects. This atrocity has always been confronted by women not only in Orissa, but everywhere in India. The evil minded chauvinistic men look down upon her as an object for sexual gratification and thus women get entangled between security and insecurity. Mahapatra rightly pictures

There goes Lakshmi down the road
swinging her tight little hips in unison

(Awe)

Such a portrayal reveals how women are denied the right to move freely as Indian Constitution has given them.

Jayanta Mahapatra never omits to portray any section of women. A mother at home is longing to be in the company of his counterpart which is vividly pictured in these lines.

My mother looked at him and took her pills
and pretended illness; it was only the
justification of her own life.

(Possessions)

A dependant Indian woman thinks at the time of her marriage that her husband will look after all that she needs.

The good wife
lies in my bed
through the long afternoon
dreaming still, unexhausted

(Indian Summer 7-10)

As she cannot earn the love of her husband, she indulges in self pity missing her self - identity. Jayanta Mahapatra symbolically brings in the image of mirror, portraying the non-identity of women in society.

In the darkened room
a woman
cannot find her reflection in the mirror
waiting as usual
at the edge of sleep

(A missing person 1-5)

He brings in the image of an innocent woman entering the village pond to have her bath. He recalls the glorious moments of the past and he feels dejected as the social and cultural values are being deteriorated today.

The air drops quietly back into the past,
a part of the present seems to break away.
The destiny of India heaves in darkness
in the memory of ancient waters.

(Bare Face)

Mahapatra uses the image of an innocent victim being exploited by her greedy parents in-laws. Mahapatra depicts dowry death (colour television) sarcastically in the poem entitled "The Uncertainty of Colour". Innocent women have been set on fire as they have not given them what they demanded. He brings the irony of the vow which has been taken at the time of marriage to ensure the faithfulness of the couple in question. There is a Tagorean quest for unravelling the mysteries of Indian life.

The silent sob from the dying girl
set on fire simply for the colour television
she did not bring as part of her dowry
goes around the vow of faithfulness
a vow played
by our game of reward and punishment.

(Random Descent)

He paints a picture of the innocent brides who are burnt to ashes by the greedy parents' in-laws. He brings in the cruel atrocity in his own poetic style. Mahapatra talks about the prevailing scenario:

not to meet the woman and her child
in that remote village in the hills
who never had even a little rice
for there are daily meal these fifty years
after the country's independence.

(Freedom 19-22)

Mahapatra portrays the filthy acts of women. Their hunger for food leads them to indulge in the hunger for sex as the money that they thus earned can satisfy her hungry children. He depicts the darker side of the Indian society. Even a fifteen year old girl has been exploited by her father for survival. He frankly discusses sex and poverty in his poem 'Hunger'. Hunger is one of the predominant themes which Jayanta Mahapatra deals subtly in his poems. He brings in the picture of a girl child in the poem "For the days together" as

This poem becomes a girl, growing up,
while keeping her legs pressed chastely together,
looks around shyly

(For the days together)

Mahapatra speaks about his poetry as “Great poetry has always chosen and preserved experience, and this is not something easy to achieve. As a poet one tries to do this, to give life to what has touched him most in myth or legend or even, fact, and bringing these into timeless proportions. But as I said, this is difficult. Perhaps in this way helps to protect our civilization; this urge to preserve the past and look into the future becomes a true requisite for good poetry everywhere. Poetry’s concern is with the art of life, to provide us with the means to live fully and truthfully. So, as a poet, how could I not be conscious of my past and of the history which has shaped me ,both personal and racial”(Bijay kumar Das 128) .

Mahapatra’s poems deal with the endless struggle of married women. The poet portrays the plight of women as victims of male lust, an exploitation of women of a commercialised society. Mahapatra picturises women as passive tools for satisfying sensual men. Though his portrayal of woman as passive recipients, it throws light upon the contemporary situation where there is a urgent need for revival. The poet brings forth his quest for the revival of social and cultural values which are being deteriorated. He brings in the picture of the loss of cultural values and the decline of the past glory India, he subtly portrays them as it reveals the search for cultural identity.

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