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## Representation of Social Realities in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra

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### Abstract:

This paper attempts to show how Jayanta Mohapatra delves into sensibilities and social realities through contextual imageries in his poetry. Poetry is the product of exquisite sensibility which is equivalent to the poet's ability that mirrors the reality. Indian English poetry gives prominence to Jayanta Mohapatra exposing Indian sensibility, social realities and picturizing present-day scene through indicative and startling imagery with a focus on the desolation, starvation, seclusion, and loneliness of the Indian poor with a feeling of being Indian. His dominant concerns are the vision of grief, loss, dejection and rejection through the redolent imageries from Odisha and Jagannath culture. The landscape, cultural history, social life, rites, and rituals of people from India constitute the significant body of writings. His poetic world such as 'Hunger,' 'Summer', 'Her Hand', 'Dwan at Puri' etc. reflect his attachment with native sense. Indianness is a vital element in his thoughts, feeling and imagery. It has become one of the major vocations which he treats as an intensely personal exploration. His poetry is noticeable for the depiction of typical Indian atmosphere. He has committed himself to Indian values, culture, people, and language, and Indianness have always been in his blood and writings. Mahapatra's poetry is remarkable for depth of feelings and true poetic imagination which embraces a wide variety of such themes. Mahapatra's poetry evokes intense emotional benefits out of things around him. His poetic imagination transforms the events into verse. He makes observations about how people behave in social situations and about problems. In fact, he does not relinquish creative quality while addressing socio-cultural and political issues.

Key Words: Sensibility, Indianness, Imagery, Reality

Literature helps to expose societal realities to have better understanding of the society. It aims to draw attention to the real socio-political and socio-cultural aspects of its members. It ranges across all art forms from film to literature giving a social commentary and depict life as naturally as possible. Jayanta Mahapatra starts from his ability to weave new meanings and making new connections that elicits emotional resonance of his heart.

Dr. S.Chellia remarks on the poetic brilliance of Mahapatra and observes:

“The language and diction are more contemporary, as is the imagery, leading to the “chutinification” or “biryanization” of the language to identify with the Indian culture and ethos. Modern Indian poetry in English has, indeed, come into its own.” (P-33)

In the field of contemporary Indo-Anglican poetry, Jayanta Mahapatra, a contemporary of A.K. Ramanujam, Nizzim Ezekeil, and R. Parthasarathy, stands out clearly as a great Indian poet. Mahapatra's poetry expresses what he observes around him. He is more focused on ensuring the continued existence of man than on building a perfect society. His characters include a cobbler, starving street kids, slum residents, prostitutes, and a hurting woman. He simultaneously depicts the people of Orissa and their practise of Hinduism, complete with all its ceremonies and ancestral beliefs.

The more than a dozen anthologies he has published include ‘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). Mahapatra regularly translated from Oriya literature and wrote in Oriya. He is credited with translating important Oriya poets' works into English, including Gangadhar Meher, Sachi Routray and Sitakanta Mahapatra. He also edited Chandrabhaga (A Literary Journal), Kavya Bharati, and The Telegraph's poetry department. In recognition of his literary achievement, many awards were heaped on him. Among the numerous awards and honours, he has been the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981, the Padma Shri Award in 2009, and the SAARC Literary Award in 2010.

Mahapatra is primarily an Oriya poet, and his poetry's most significant and vital theme is the Oriyan landscape. His poetry has a regional perspective because of the Oriya environment, Orissan cultural history and background, Orissa social life, and Orissa rites and rituals. He discusses morality, the inner workings of the human mind, love, sex marriage, morality, human relationships, and nature through these. M.K. Naik correctly remarks:

“Mahapatra’s poetry is redolent of the Orissan Scene and the Jagannath temple at Puri figures quite often in it” (p-207).

Mahapatra uses his poetry to depict actual events and stories from his surroundings. With the aid of his creative genius, the happenings are transformed into rhyming beautiful lines. His poetry primarily focuses on societal topics including injustice, poverty, and prejudice towards women. One of the most well-known poems by Mahapatra is "Hunger." The poem is the most extensively studied work of his that is anthologized in most significant collections of contemporary Indian poetry. The poem is distinctive in its strong presentation of sexuality, unlike a normal poetry by him, and examines the covert child sex trade hiding in the social fabric.

When this poem was included in the B.A. Final English Literature syllabus, it ignited a debate among students and professors. The media took advantage of the situation and publicised the opinions of intellectuals, educators, and students. Headlines like “Teachers feel ashamed in teaching ‘Hunger’ before the boys and girls” appeared and the environment was created against the teaching of this poem. Students along with some professors complained to the authorities of M. J. P. Rohilkhand University for omitting this poem from the syllabus. How to present the case of a father who searches for the customer for his daughter for money became a challenge for the professors in the class. The meaningful poem suffered much more from the misinterpretations by the so-called teachers and the writers of helping books than the genuine teachers who attempted to create the proper environment to make the students understand the poem from the right perspectives. It depends on teachers how seriously they teach and introduce the social reality prevalent in the Indian society to the students.

In fact, the poem is a part of Mahapatra's collection *A Rain of Rites*. According to the poet, the poem is directly based on a personal event. Yet, it is unclear if the poet, who serves as the story's protagonist, visited the fisherman's daughter. Mahapatra had a troubled childhood, which led to the poet's loneliness in his adolescence, which is expressed in the poem. The poem stands out for its candour in addressing the forbidden subject of sex between a father and his daughter. In the second line, the fisherman asks casually "will you have her?". However, the exact intention of the father is couched in subtle and ambivalent imagery: - "trailing his nets and nerves" and "his white bone thrashing his eyes". To bring out the fleshly trappings of the mind, a variety of poetic methods are used. The poem's vivid beach imagery illustrates the conditions that lead a woman to sell her body for prostitution. Commentators have called attention to the poem's crude portrayal of sexuality.

Jayanta Mahapatra, an internationally renowned Indian English poet, is well known for his poem *Hunger*. The poem is the most extensively studied work of his that is anthologized in most of significant collections of contemporary Indian poetry. The poem investigates the covert child sex commerce that permeates society. Yet, in this case, poverty pushed the impoverished man to consent to his daughter having a bodily trip for pleasure and sexual fulfilment. The poem is about sexual appetite, sexual fulfilment, moral decay, and perverted thinking.

The protagonist (poet speaker) of the poem "Hunger" describes a specific interaction with a fisherman's daughter. Due to his tight financial circumstances, the fisherman was forced to exploit his teenage daughter as a prostitute in order to make some money and support both himself and his daughter. The main character got in touch with this fisherman in order to have sex with his 15-year-old daughter. The main character was taken to the fisherman's cottage near the shore where they had intercourse. Her legs were spread. Due to her father's lack of resources, the poor fisherman's daughter driven by poverty, is offered for the sexual gratification of the Prufrock-type visitor. The woman's desire for food cannot be met in normal circumstances. She belongs to a poor father who is in no position to provide for her food.

There is a lot of psychological intrigue in this poem. The guest, who appears to be a guy tormented by passion and guilt at the same time, needs her to relieve his tension but is unable to get past the normal conscience prickle. When the protagonist claims that the soot from the oil light continuously penetrated the spaces of his mind, it emphasises his sense of guilt.

Men who are dissatisfied with their marriages, are single, or are divorced frequently frequent brothels and tip for their personal enjoyment. Particularly in India, it has now evolved into a business. India is an impoverished nation, and that is an understatement. India today is morally and financially impoverished. We have lost sight of the fundamental human moral that women are the ones who give birth to new generations. Shamefully, we have lost sight of the truth that women are not objects to be used for the sexual delight or contentment of males. The entire human race was created by them.

The poem aims to debunk myths about living in so-called "red-light districts" (most such zones have little or no light at all). The sex urges of prostitutes and other women who work in the sex industry are sometimes distorted and exaggerated. Gopalpur-on-sea, a little village hidden along Orissa's southern coast, attracts tourists because of its bright beaches, calm waters, and tranquil evenings. Women from fishing communities, who typically sell fish in the neighbourhood market, occasionally also work as prostitutes for tourists.

The poem "Hunger" by Jayanta Mahapatra explores the concept of hunger, which at first refers to sex and sexual desire but ultimately changes to stomach hunger that motivates people to take action. The poet starts off with the phrase It was difficult to comprehend that my back carried so much flesh. When we first read the poem, we could assume that the author is carrying a large amount of luggage. Yet, the expression "impossible to believe" denotes something substantial and profoundly deep. The poet in this passage claims that he found it hard to accept that at the time, he was pursuing powerful sexual impulses. We learn that he is aboard a boat with a fisherman in the following sentence, who asks him, "Would you have her?"

'Her' in this context alludes to the fisherman's daughter, whom he offers to the poet for sexual relations. Given that no father ever provides his daughter to a stranger to satiate their sexual appetite, it is both weird and impossible. The fisherman appears to be carelessly trailing his nets as he inquires. But he was not at all negligent. He was anxious for the poet to say yes because he and his daughter do not have anything to eat and are frantically looking for food. His nerves were frayed and white bone was writhing in his eyes. For the poet to satisfy his sexual desire and the first two to satisfy their bodily need, he provides the poet his daughter. He observes that his daughter's approval secondary in this regard.

The poet then proceeded to pursue him through the wide-open beaches. His skin was attempting to support his throbbing mind like a sling or bandage used to support a broken arm while the poet's mind was beating in the flesh's sling. The poet believed that by setting fire to his home, his fault would be atoned for. The passage reveals that the poet was feeling extremely terrible about what he was about to do out of longing for something sexual. The poet's quiet then began to engulf him, as if it had his sleeves in its grasp. Perhaps what was tense were his nerves.

As they arrived at the fishermen's hut, it was very dark and gaped open like a wound. Because of their poverty, this phrase captures the worst state of their hut. Here, the wind represents the storm that the poet was contemplating. Days and Nights indicates that it was occurring continuously.

He was being rubbed on his skin by the palm tree leaves as he entered the hut. They were preventing the poet from committing the sin in a figurative sense. The oil lantern had constrained and nailed the hours to the wall within the shoddily constructed cabin. It most likely indicates that the hut has stopped the passage of time. There is only night; there is no day. The darkness of the fisherman's and his daughter's sadness creates a night that is both literal and metaphorical in nature. His mind was filled with the lamp's smoke, and he experienced one of two feelings: helplessness or a dreamlike state.

When the fisherman says, "My daughter, she just turned fifteen," the poet overhears it. It indicates that the poet can now do whatever he wants with his daughter. The fisherman pimps his own daughter in exchange for cash or food due to his acute poverty and hunger. The way fisherman persuades the poet to have sex with his own daughter makes the poet feel as if the sky has fallen on him. The poet finds the girl who is young but malnourished due to poverty. Seeing the poet, she opens her worm-like legs (as she is very weak and young) for the poet to make her his sex slave. It is well known that Jayanta Mahapatra is a keen observer of social and religious reality. Through the poem "Dawn at Puri," he has painted for us a very depressing image of the circumstances around the Great Jagannath Temple in the sacred city of Puri, with an undercurrent of criticism of Indian society. The poem is brief, but it contains a variety of pictures, each of which exposes the flaws in some of the social and religious realities that are common in India.

The author begins the poem by describing a typical early-morning scene in and around the sacred temple. The sounds of crows can be heard nonstop throughout the morning. Crow noises are typically not regarded as something that should be embraced in Hinduism. In fact, it is regarded as foreboding. Crows are considered scavenger birds and typically like to live in unclean areas. The abundance of crows practically serves as a sign of how dirty the area around the sacred shrine is.

In the sprawling sea beach of Puri, he has observed a skull lying on the sands. The presence of a human skull lying in this manner practically gives a picture of ill-fed, hunger-stricken people who live amidst extreme poverty. It shows that there are many under privileged people whose condition is not better than a stray dog. Many such people throng in the holy cities like Puri seeking sustenance and salvation, but very often they die a neglected death.

Next, we get an image of white dressed Hindu widows standing in a row to enter the holy temple. These women have been leading an austere life and have put all their faith in religion. They are the women caught in their self-imposed religious net. Their mind is governed by the strand of faith that only lord Jagannath can offer salvation to them. They are also the victims of equally orthodox social system which put all the blames of the death of their husbands on their shoulder.

With the frail early light catches the holy place, several people suffering from leprosy are seen outside the temple. These are the people caught by the deadly disease and discarded by the society. Their condition is very pathetic. They have neither social security nor individual identity and they must depend on the blessings of the devotees for food and clothes.

The poet also gives the image of an imaginary pyre with flames covered with smoke. He tells about his aged mother's last wish to be cremated in the sea beach of Puri. This reference to the poet's mother's wish indicates the last wishes of many Indian women to be cremated in this holy place. Though the poet is Christian in religion, he is also an Indian and so he is aware of the Hindu customs and belief systems. The picture drawn by the poet is realistic in nature with a touch of irony and satire.

In a good number of poems like Dawn at Puri, Taste for Tomorrow, Slum, Evening Landscape by the River and Events, he tries to evoke an atmosphere of lost glory, lost ecstasy of the culture of Orissa. His sensibility is essentially Indian. His Indianness is seen at its best in his poems about Orissa. K.A. Panilker aptly says:

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

Mahapatra's poetry is notable for its depth of feeling and true poetic imagination, which embraces a wide range of themes, including rootlessness and emptiness in modern existence, love and sex and relationships, and excellent poetic craftsmanship. The Orissa landscape represents India's cultural and religious past running into the present.

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