

Symbolism and Imagery in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra

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Abstract

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the scintillating stars of the Indo-Anglian poetry. He is the first Indian poet to win the Sahitya Academic Award for *Relationship* in 1981. His poems such as 'Indian Summer', 'Hunger' and 'Relationship' are regarded as classics in modern English literature. He is awarded Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian honour in India in 2009. He returned his Padma Shri to protest against the rising intolerance in India.

Jayanta Mahapatra is an Indian leading English poet, whose poetry comes from his experience and from his deep memories. He said "To Orissa to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which my beginning and my end."

Key words – Scintillating, Intolerance, Awareness, Indianness, Symbolism

Jayanta Mahapatra is called the major voice among the second generation of modern poets. His poem 'Relationship' is an outstanding contribution to Indian English literature for its awareness of the Indian heritage and evocative description. His poem is a mixture of modern and Indian traditional thought. He uses English idioms for Indian context. Jayanta Mahapatra, in his poems, describes Indianness, social scenario, time, family relations, memory, lover and nature.

Jayanta Mahapatra's symbolism heightened the significance of the meaning of his poems. The ancient symbol of fertility stands as one of the most favourite metaphors for Mahapatra. The metaphor of rain can be considered as the mirror of the poet's psychological condition. 'A Rain of Rites' by Mahapatra is a poem of symbolism. The poet in the first stanza uses

metaphor 'rain' for his unfulfilled happiness, joy and

contentment. The poet says the rain that he wishes to fall, never falls, while coming down.

Mahapatra's sensibility is essentially Indian which can be seen not only into his presentation of man-woman relationship but also in his poem about Orissa. So, we can say that Mahapatra is a poet of human relationship and raises his situations from the regional to universal. He employed imagery and symbols in his poems very elegantly and delicately.

The poem 'Hunger' by Jayanta Mahapatra, a well-known poet from Orissa, depicts two kinds of hunger one is the hunger of food and another is the hunger, for sexual gratification.

It appears that men who are not satisfied with their married life or are not married or

are divorced, go to brothels and give money for their own pleasure. My opinion is that India now is not just poor by money, but poor by morals. The basic moral of a human being is to realize that women are responsible for the creation of a new generation.

Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry not only explores the influence of local realities in creating the depth of one's feeling and sensitivity but also stretches the possibilities of language to represent them.

"It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back.

The fisherman said:

Will you have her, carelessly, 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 few lines of the poem tell us about a man and a fisherman. The fisherman is volunteering the man to his place for a deal. The man feels the flesh on his back is too heavy. It seems like, he is holding a huge burden of something inexplicable and it's better to drop off the load. As if the girl is some toy to play with. He is hungry and he needs money to buy food. His eyes reflect his misery.

"I followed him across the sprawling sands,

My mind thumping in the flesh'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 had only dragged up from the seas.'

The man is continuously faced with a weight upon him symbolizing the weight of guilt and regret. Though he follows the fisherman across the shore, he feels a thumping tension to refuse the offer and turn back. He could escape the trap and guilt, he is caught in. But he remained silent. The fisherman's description seemed to increase.

'Dhauri' is a historical poem by Mahapatra which challenges masculinity and sexual power of the soldiers when he says, "buried into dead hunger with its merciless worms guided the foxes to their limp genitals." The image of the foxes gnawing at the limp genitals of the soldiers is a powerful evocation of the limitations of male sexual power.

'Grandfather' is a poem by Mahapatra which reflects nostalgia. The poet is bursting with questions as to why his grandfather embraced Christianity and to seek answers, he turns to his long dead grandfather and his diary. In this poem, he reveals the struggle of his wounded psyche to come out of its cocoon. The speaker is haunted by the invisible spirit of his grandfather he calls his grandfather a board that has helped him and his children to grow and move ahead.

'A country' is a political poem in which he suggests that suffering is universal, no matter what the social or political order may be. The poet says that if the countries are separated by foundries, the economic and socio-political conditions can be similar.

Conclusion:

Thus, we concluded that Jayanta Mahapatra's poems show women are helpless and objectifying light. A major example of power of male and sexuality is seen in his poem 'Grandfather' and 'Dhauri' both talk about the historical Orissa. Therefore, we can say that Mahapatra's poetry continuously engages with the past and its loss through sensitive recounting of events and episodes from the history of Orissa and through the local myths, legends, rituals and social significance. He uses images and symbols drawn from nature and

numerous temples. Mahapatra's poetry is suggestive rather than national; to his Oriya historian identity is most important and reflects in his poetry. Mahapatra's poems are an outstanding contribution to Indian English literature for its awareness of the Indian heritage with evocative description.

He is regarded as a postmodern experimental poet. In his poems, they are an ironic reflection of life's bitter sweet memories. Indeed, he is a kind of attentive awareness of the darker realm of being.

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