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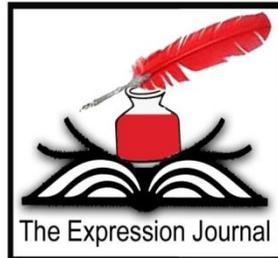
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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE IMAGINATIVE WORLD IN JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POETRY

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Abstract

Mahapatra's poems are addressed to that team of readers who are inclined to take pains to encounter the experiences, which might be cocooned inside the framework of the poem. The imbibed experiences of the poet prompted the avid readers to unravel the mysteries enshrouding his poetic outputs. Mahapatra generously stirred the reader's empathy with his poetic creations. Mahapatra's poems don't have any message to broadcast in chiselled tropes. The compelling force of Mahapatra's poetry lies embedded within the poem itself, making the readers self introspective queries about assail its import, uncertainty and so on and so forth ushering him into the voyage of self discovery. This paper tries to x-ray the character and unveil the stern social reality of human existence. The paper captioned "A Critical Study of the Imaginative World in Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry" attempts to interrogate the poet's self, society and the truth of humans with reference to select poems.

Keywords

Mortality, Debilitating Issues, Landscape, Entrenched, Pimping.

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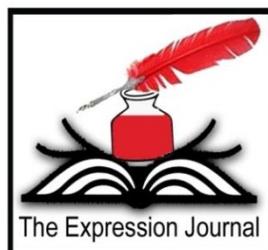
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Poetry communicates human experiences, not abstract concepts and abstract ideas and the incomprehensible thoughts are experiential. So that even Tom, Dick or Harry, may have the feel of experiential ideas or abstruse thoughts. An unlettered woman rushed to Lord Buddha to inject life into her dead son as Buddha was believed to be imbued with the divine halo. Lord Buddha thought that the illiterate woman would not comprehend the mortality of life. Naively, he says go and fetch a handful of mustard seeds where there is no death, your son will be alive in a fraction of moment. The woman jumped for joy and visited all the doors to have mustard seeds where there was no death. But to her utter dismay she did not find any door without any cases of death. Then the woman got to know the mortality of life and her son was no exception. The woman fell to the feet of Buddha and sought his forgiveness. The philosophy embodies ideas and thoughts but poetry unfurls experiential thoughts and ideas. Similar is the poetic vision of Mahapatra in which he unfurls experiential ideas and thoughts by erecting imposing edifice of evocative symbolism in which layers and layers of meaning may be unearthed. Poetry is not sheer paraphrasing as Louis Macleish asserts in *Ars Poetica*.

Mahapatra's writing is a prized heritage of the posterity. He has transbanded the barriers of time and place and the process of harmony beyond. The Social reality in the select Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra is undertaken in an effort to analyse and verify whether or not the twin aspects of poetry, the inner and the outer forces have impacted tremendously the writer within the making of his poetic composition. Being an Indian, Jayanta Mahapatra wants to idolise the import of Indian poetry in English. Mahapatra made studd contribution to Indian English poetry with his experimental topics and native poetic idiom. Such as poverty, prostitution, patriarchy, crime, and the folk's pleasure and discomfort of Indian portrayed and tune his poems to his emotional and spiritual self. He limns out human predicament mostly and India in particular underscoring the communally debilitating issues such as corruption, social discrimination, communal disharmony, ecological imbalance etc.

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The person who is born into a precise socio cultural milieu inherits effortlessly and unconsciously through the accrued knowledge of earlier generations in the forms of traditions, legends and myths. Myths are the robust embodiments of man's goals and aspirations which provide him with beliefs and help him set his pursuits in a hostile world continuously threatening man's existence. They play a vital role as the old socio-cultural and heritage of Orissa. Human psyche acquires its form out of the effects of the past experiences. The internal self of Jayanta Mahapatra has been woven with his childhood and his poems are their outcome. His poems unfurl the poet's strong inclination of a lot of childhood experiences in the Oriya fairy testimonies, myths, legends and the high-quality Indian epics. The poet recollects the flash of feelings of the whispers of loneliness surrounding him. His heart turns into heaviness at the sight of his mother now, appearing in apparition. The poet feels the affliction of his father's loss of life in another method similarly his contemporary poet, R. Parthasarathy, in his poem "Obituary" presents an identical quandary in his family and the transformed look of his mother after his father's death.

Jayanta Mahapatra 'Dawn at Puri' is a poem consisting of a number of vivid, sharply etched, but not necessarily interrelated images). The Panorama of Puri (in Orissa- a land of 'forbidding myth), artistically portrayed with a cluster of vivifying images and symbols which are evocative. Puri is the name of a famous town in Orissa, which is considered sacred thanks to the temple dedicated to Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Orissa. It is particularly famous for the chariot festival of Jagannath; an annual ritual conducted for the glory of this deity and is attended by a large number of pilgrims. From the poems of Mahapatra we find that the poet is very firmly entrenched in the soil of Orissa. There is a quadrangle landscape formed by means of Puri, Konark, Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. We study an exceptional deal about the legends, history and fable associated with these places. Mahapatra's poetry, according to Bhat, "makes the reader look inwards, question himself about life, its significance uncertainty and so on leading him to process of personal discovery" (Bhat 274). Puri is considered to be a sacred place for the Hindus. They fervently worship Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Puri. "Dawn at Puri" underlines the value of Puri and what it means to the Hindus.

Widows desires to spend their last days at Puri founded on the religion that, it will fetch them their salvation. The poet expresses this sentiment that the last desire of a widow is to be cremated here. 'Endless crow noises'; a reference to the endless cawing of the crows, a visual as well as an auditory image. 'A skull on the holy sands': This is a startling imagery created with the juxtaposition of the abstract with the concrete, where the abstract 'holy' and the concrete 'skull' are grouped together. It is believed that the deity of Puri was carved out of a tree trunk that was washed ashore and this fact is alluded to in his poem 'Losses'. Hoping for some kind of redemption for this wayward world, the speaker in the poem muses: "Perhaps the piece of driftwood/ washed up on the beach/ heals the sand and the water". Puri is regarded as a sacred site and it is the wish of every pious Hindu to be cremated there to enable them to attain salvation. It's empty country towards hunger': a reference to the poverty to the people of Orissa including the sight of the skull lying on the sea-beach symbolizes the utter destitution of the people. 'White-clad widowed women': reference to widows wearing white saris and the phrase that points to their predicament as well as the rigidity of Hindu customs and rituals. 'Past the centers of their lives': having spent

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the middle years of their lives and passing their prime. 'Their austere eyes stare like those caught in a net': the misery resulting in utter hopelessness is clearly visible on their faces for there is an expression of solemnity in the eyes of the widows in which no worldly desire is perceptible and are full of desire like the eyes of creatures trapped in a net. 'Dawn's shining strands of faith': A person having a firm belief in religion never loses hope, so in spite of their circumstances, the only thing that sustains the widows is their religious faith and the hope born of it. The reference to dawn is to be noted. It refers to a new beginning in nature and thereby, to a new start in mankind and civilization. The tone of quiet acceptance, with a latent awareness of suffering, perhaps indicates a very Indian sensibility. 'The frail early light': the dim light of the dawn is a reference to the title of the poem which must be noted. 'Leprous': from leprosy, an infectious disease affecting the skin and nerves and causing deformities. 'A mass of crouched faces': a large number of timid persons standing in a group, having no confidence in themselves, preferably referring to the lepers and widows who are not allowed to move freely in the town. 'And suddenly breaks out of my hide': suddenly emerges from beneath my skin. 'A sullen solitary pyre': A pile of wood is used for burning a dead body as part of a funeral rite. The sight of this reminds the poet of his mother's last wish to be cremated here as it is the gateway to Heaven or the 'Swargadwara' which is the name of that part of the long sea-beach where the funeral pyres go on burning. Since the temple of Lord Jaganath 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. "Twisting uncertainly like light on the shifting sands': This is an apt image of the smoke rising from the funeral pyre where the wind from the sea causes the smoke to twist uncertainly. This is an example of Mahapatra's 'transcendental mode' and an example of his attempt to trap elusive meanings. The poetic exploration of this place turns out to be a search for the self. The view thrills the poet and he becomes an integral part of it, observing a morning scene on the sandy sea-beach in the town of Puri. By means of a series of vivid pictures, the atmosphere of dawn has been created. Mahapatra also underlines the importance of the temple town of Puri and what it means to the Hindus in India.

Jayanta Mahapatra's poem "Hunger" Jayanta Mahapatra, along with Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Dom Moraes, is a major voice of the first wave of modern Indian English poetry. In my opinion the works of poets like Kolatkar, Agha Shahid Ali stole the luster from the works of these other poets, Mahapatra held his own. If he is not as pervasively known name as someone like Ezekiel, it is due to non-poetic reasons. Mahapatra is one of the most haunting of the Indian English poets with a highly demanding poetic style. He edited a magazine called Chandrabhaga for some time. He started writing late in life: he taught Physics in a College in Cuttack and began writing after he was 40. But soon he had a substantial body of writing. His *Crossing of the Rivers* is a remarkable long poem. An abiding motif in his poems is the tangle between tradition and modernity. The picture that emerges in works like A Rain of rites is that Mahapatra tends to position himself on the side of modernity and then rather than challenging or undermining or ironically doubting tradition. He examines modernity itself by evoking the tradition to throw posers at his modern location. The modernity of the speaker in many of Mahapatra's poems is a burden to bear. But, yet

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his poems do not cast tradition as the preferred resource. It is the difficulty that this opposition raises that gets foregrounded. One of his poems that earned a lot of fame is 'Hunger'. This poem impressed Bernard Young, the American poet, so much that he 'quoted' the whole poem in The Hudson Review. The poem presents two kinds of hunger – one (physical) leading to the fulfillment of other (sexual). The theme is quite obvious, so let me focus on what I like about this poem. The poem primarily has two structures of images: flesh related and poverty related; hunger emanating from the flesh and that from poverty. What makes the poem impressive is the way these images entangle one another, some abstract, all building the irony of the two urges. The vividness of the images build a word portrait of the place, graphically relating the manners of the three characters. The fisherman, the father who pimping his daughter, is careless in his offer of the girl: "as though his words sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself". I think the poet craftily pushes the reader to question the very ideas of sanctity here. The utter hopelessness in the life of the fisherman and his daughter is such that it words like sanctity would be meaningless there. The values have no 'purchase' in so utterly degraded a human plight. The image of wound is prepared to by such images as 'the bone thrashing in his eyes', 'mind thumping in the flesh's sling', 'burning the house' 'body clawing'. The actions indicated in these portray the human effort that is rather desperate, fruitless and hurting. The wound images gather them all together in a place where the combined force of all these previous images together hits the reader hard and jump his out of complacency. It must be borne in mind that the tourist searching for sexual gratification implicitly holds the place of the audience as the reader is a voyeur like the tourist. The soot image, a customary suggestion of sin, alerts us to how the blackness of the predicament of the father pimping his daughter is a condemnation not of the father but of the society where such a tragedy comes to pass. The soot covers the shack of the fisherman, but it is the tourist's mind on which the poem sees the soot.

Thus, like Blake who said the presence of a whore in society is a curse of the marriage system, this poem questions the justness in society from which sanctity has disappeared. I have always felt that it is the reader who has to bear the force of irony of this poem. Notice how the reader in this poem is not allowed to be outside of it. Like the tourist in the poem, the reader is an outsider and a sort of voyeur. So the shame of the plight of the pimping father falls on the reader – not on the individual reader.

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