

## Picturization of Social Realities of Contemporary India by Jayanta Mahapatra through his Poetic Imageries

<sup>1</sup>Srikanth Ganduri, <sup>2</sup>Dr. P. V. Ravi Kumar

<sup>1</sup>Asst. Professor of English and Communication Skills, School of Allied Health Sciences, Malla Reddy University, Kompally, Hyderabad

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor of English K.L.E.F. Deemed to be University, Vaddeswaram, Guntur Dist.

### Abstract:

*Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the greatest poets in India who demarcated poetry as the expression of real-life experiences and his contributions to Modern Indian Literature are innumerable. His poetry has a therapeutic touch that cures the emotional wounds of people who go through the magical lines of dazzling imageries. Mahapatra has written most of his poems based on the geographical landscape of his homeland Odisha. Odisha is not only a place for Mahapatra's childhood memories but the land that brings out all the emotions and feelings of his inner soul. His poems are the depictions of contemporary social realities which pass various moods to the readers by maintaining a balance between society and life. He handles the issues of cultural elements in the contemporary India, particularly the culture of Odisha and its traditions. This paper explores the artistic works of imageries in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra that depict the socio-cultural sensibilities and ethos of contemporary India and its mythical landscape. It also sheds light to the lyrical approaches that the poet has used to deal with the realistic social issues such as poverty, barbarian rituals and mythical concepts and also the issues related to complex human affairs. He represents himself as an ordinary man of Odisha who wants to express various emotions and his throbbing childhood memories. This article tries to bring out the human sensation that has been delineated in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra using his pleasing poetic artistry.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Humanity, Imageries, Landscape, Social Realities

### 1. Introduction

India is a land of rich heritage and its history includes throbbing memories and terrifying past events. India is a place of great diversity that has various languages, different religions, mythological concepts and culture. Even though the country has diversity in everything, it is consecrated with secular philosophies and mutual understanding among the people in the society. Though it has a past of petrifying memories, after these stretching periods of era, people of India now feel proud and elated due to its unity in diversity. Among the states

in the independent India, Odisha has a great significance due to its traditional culture and great historical measures. The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra speaks about its conventional ethos and customs that are still followed in the holistic state of Odisha. The poems written by Mahapatra shed light to the social realities of the present age in the poet's homeland. India has never failed in upholding its cultural unity and interreligious respect even in its diversified beliefs.

Modern Indian poetry has developed an open and genuine conveyance method for representing social realities of contemporary India and it plays a vital role in the post independent era of Indian Literature. It proves that the poetry can be the most powerful tool to bring out the fullest emotions of a human being and to represent all the social imbalances in the society. Iyengar opines about the power of poetry in his own language that,

“Writing poetry is the symbol of exact discipline ... It is to the credit of the new poets that they are prepared to take their vacation seriously” (Iyengar 649).

Mahapatra himself says about writing poems by Indian poets in a foreign language is not that easy yet they showed the boldness to express their views through their poetic creations. He believes that writing poetry is the activity of expressing feelings with consciousness, with all the feelings of distress, sadness, frustration and inconsistencies. He emphasizes on the childhood memories to compare the past and present. He believes in the concept that poetry is the best platform to express the inner feelings and real-life issues about human relationships. Mahapatra opines that,

“A powerful poem allows us to embark a kind of various journeys of life through its poetic expressions and imageries to encompass human state” (Literary Criteria 9).

## 2. Significance of Imageries in the Poetry of Mahapatra

Jayanta Mahapatra who was born and brought up in the land of Odisha entered into his career of poetry writing not in the earlier stage but in his forties. His collection of poetry compilations includes the popular poems such as *Close the Sky*, *Ten by Ten*, *Rain of Rites*, *Relationship* and *Shadow Space*. His poems are the representation of Indian sensibility and the astonishing landscape of his homeland. He also picturizes the sensational feelings of people in the Indian society of the present age. He contributes his Indianness at the optimal level in all of his poetic collections by delineating the beauty of the city, its landscape, evening walks on the heritage streets of villages and its traditional customs and festivals. Among the feelings of

happiness and joy, there are a few sensational emotions of predicaments such as poverty, alienation, starvation and distress which lead to a crucial circumstance in the society. These types of emotions and feelings have a crucial place in Mahapatra's poetry and they form the major thematic expression in it. The plight of starvation and hunger are analysed in various angles of view and the realities of this social crisis have been brought into light through his intellectual poetic imageries in the poem *Hunger*. It is written based on a true incident and it brings out the social reality of the society by dealing with various themes that have been revealed through the thoughts of his mind. The poet is really concerned about the problem of starvation and poverty of the people around him.

*She opened her wormy legs wide*

.....

*the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.*

*(Hunger, Mahapatra).*

The dark side of a major issue in current society is brought into the light through his other poems entitled *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street* and *Man of His Night* which explore the painful subject of male prostitution and also the exploitation of women. Mahapatra used his poetry as a tool for revealing the poignant truth of starvation because of which the majority of people in the society are still suffering. The realization of struggles of women who suffer in the male dominated society and the picturization of these undesirable things in the society impart a negative cynical tenor to the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra. The women in his poems are portrayed as goddesses whereas the same characters are revealed with a different face who work as sex workers in order to satisfy their feeling of hunger. The theme that is handled in this poem represents such a significant realization of women's sufferings though they have a pessimistic approach. This theme was really found missing in the Indian literature for a long time and it is picturized with the imagery technique in the poems of Mahapatra especially in *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*. The images of sea weed that arises after huge tidal waves crossing their vociferous limits are used to ridicule the male morality in the poem *The Whorehouses in a Calcutta Street*. The verses of Mahapatra present these images as,

The sweet, the little things, the imagined,

... comes back to you, ..

*(The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street, Mahapatra).*

The amalgamation of intellectual imagery technique and poetic craftsmanship of the poet symbolizes the major social issues in the contemporary Indian society. *Today* is a poem which comes in the collection of *False Start* in which Mahapatra uses multifaceted symbols of time. The image of flag represents time that is flickering in the imagination of the poet and it is the symbol of some dark symptoms towards the life. Time haunts his childhood memories as he compares his past in the next poem entitled *The Day*. In his other poem *Ash*, death is symbolized by the imagery of bird that flies over the sky spreading its wings and moving its jerks.

The birds flutter towards rest around tree,

.....

floating away like ash (*Ash*, Mahapatra).

A deep sense of personal experience is revealed through the poetic verses of Mahapatra as he expresses his own life predicaments and griefs in most of his poetic collections. Most of the poets who contributed their works to Indian English Literature have used their own personal experiences to bring out the social realities of the contemporary society. In this list of poets, Mahapatra too considers his own childhood memories and Orissan landscape as the seeds to plant the Indian sensations in his poems. He has a deep attachment to the soil of the land of Odisha. According to Mohanty,

“To his land of roots, Orissa, my past lies in this land, where my beginning and my end, where the wind keens over the grief of the river Daya ... I acknowledge my debt and my relationships in this wonderful land” (Mohanty 65).

The superstitious thoughts of people of Puri and their ignorance of reality about solar eclipse and the fear associated with that are depicted in the poem *Total Solar Eclipse*. In the second half of this poem Mahapatra uses the imagery of animals such as Cobra, Hyena, Vultures and the sparrows in order to mention the comments on the journey of moon in a scientific manner. The superstition among the people of Puri about the solar eclipse is associated with the priest in the temple and it is portrayed using the imagery of crocodile.

Secure by shadowy layers of sleep,

So out of date, in the alleviative belief

... by a rabid civilization. (*Life Signs*, Mahapatra)

Mahapatra connects his relation to the homeland in the past and in the present in an intentional way in his renowned poem entitled *Relationship*. The heroic past of the land of

Odisha and its magnificence are passing through his mind when he remembers his childhood. His nostalgic feelings are revealed in the poem through various imageries. These lines of Mahapatra's poem *Relationship* reveal his pain regarding the pain of King Ashoka's failure in Kalinga war,

What opened the anxious skies ... My eyes close now

Because of the fear that moves my skin. (*Relationship*, Mahapatra)

Mahapatra's other poem *A Country* tries to picturizes the major social issue of poverty and hunger not only in India but also in other Asian countries such as Colombia and Turkey. This poem reveals the socio-economic and socio-political undercurrents that make discrimination between rich and poor, standard and non-standard and ordinary and extra ordinary in the society. The latter groups are crushed under the power of the former and they become unvoiced in the voiced civilization. The poem *A Country* is also the best example for revealing the social realities of the present generation nevertheless it stimulates bloody revolutions in the current society. The poet deals with the social issues in the current age through this poem which gave him the title as a socialistic poet. In the poem *A Country*, he tries to bring out the reality of Marxism and Naxalism, in which he uses the image of an elegant naxal girl.

... graceful Naxal girl  
who appeared nowhere that winter,  
holding a knife as old as history.

(*A Country*, Mahapatra).

The major themes of Mahapatra's poetry that are dealt with by the help of imageries are issues of human relationships, societal issues of contemporary India, love, sex, marriage, adultery and so on. According to the opinion of M.K Naik,

"Mahapatra's poetry is evocative of the Orissan Scene and the temple of Puri and Jaganath figures out in most of his poems" (M.K Naik, 207).

The living imageries used to bring out the real picture of the Puri city prove the intellectual poetic craftsmanship of Jayanta Mahapatra. In his poem entitled *Taste for Tomorrow*, the Puri city is portrayed with numerous imageries.

"The crows on the wide street  
Lolls out like a giant tongue

..... the crowds thronging the temple's door.

(*Taste for Tomorrow*, Mahapatra)

The symbolic representation of a particular city as Puri is not only the image of a small village. It represents the whole Indian society and its typical natural landscape. The real context of most of his poetry is the milieu of the present society which he encounters in his real life.

*Indian Summer Poem* and *A missing Person* are other most apposite examples for his imagist art work. In the poem *Indian Summer Poem*, the brilliant use of images of a sober wind moaning and of the priests chanting loud mantras can be seen which represent the whole country has opened its mouth. Another poem *A Missing Person*, the image of a woman who stands before a mirror and holding a lamp represents the darkness of the polluted society. The woman is not able to find her own image whereas the drunken yellow flame of the lamp knows where the woman's body hides, as it is her inner personality, not outer flesh.

The image of woman who is a victim in this male dominating society is one of the major elements in Mahapatra's poetry. The reality is that no man cares about the feelings of woman, she is just a sexual object to fulfil the physical need of man. He writes in the poem *Idyll*,

Women's eyes tempt confessions for her husband

... As they stretch out to sleep

(*Idyll*, Mahapatra)

### 3. Conclusion

Jayanta Mahapatra exposes the social reality and speaks about the helplessness of the people in the current society through the imageries in his poems. The poetic style of Mahapatra is laudable as he uses such images in all the poems for presenting the positive and negative faces of the society. He brings out the pathetic situations of the present society such as blind beliefs of religious faith, isolation, political issues, solitude and voidness. Hence, it is found that he has splendidly used strong imageries in order to picturize the social realities of contemporary India.

### References

- Das, B.K. *The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1998. Print
- Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishing House, 1964.
- Mahapatra, Jayanta. *Selected Poems*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989. Print.

Mahapatra, Jayanta. *About "Hunger" and "Myself". Door of Paper: Essays and Memoirs.* Delhi: Authors Press, 2007.

Mohanty, Niranjana. *The Theme of Life: Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra, Contemporary Indo-English Poetry*, Bareilly: PBD, 1986.

Naik, M.K. *Two Worlds: The Imagery of Jayanta Mahapatra*, Studies in Indian English Literature, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987.