

## Representation of Human Predicaments in the Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra: An Analysis

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### Abstract:

*Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the greatest poets in India who tries to express his own personal experiences through his poetic artistry. He expresses a sort of distraught and catastrophe that has been experienced by the entire Indian society of his generation. The human predicament and inertia affected the psychic state of people who witnessed many unpleasant events at that age in the country. Mahapatra's poems are the platforms for expressing human predicaments and adversities that have been passed through by the people of the contemporary society. He illustrated the social and political issues in India through his poems in which the contemporary social crises and cynicism are the major themes. The poems of Mahapatra reflect the life that he experienced in this age of social inequalities. He is desperately concerned about the Indian society, particularly in the state of Odisha, and the predicaments of Indian people in such a period of time. His poems are the reflection of the agony and distressed feelings of many people who were the victims of monotonous, hopeless, and desolated life. This article tries to explore the poetic artistry of Jayanta Mahapatra that is used for expressing current social issues and predicaments of the human beings whom he witnessed in and around his homeland.*

**Keywords:** Human predicaments, social crises, desolation, cynicism, psychic issues

### 1. Introduction

Indian English Literature obtained a significant change in the post-colonial period as it marked a vital place in the arena of world literature. The beginning stage of Indian literature was under the control of writers who focused only on the readers of English community. It was defined as Anglo-Indian Literature and most of the writers were mainly from the community of English or Anglo-Indians. Later on, after the independence, this scenario made a huge change in the literature field wherein new Indian origin writers have emerged from the

country. The Anglo-Indian writers contributed many works to the Anglo-Indian literature from India however most of them settled back to their hometown after their retirement.

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the popular poets emerged from India in the post-independence era who accustomed to a conventional culture and contributed a new English poetic style in the field of Literature. He influenced numerous readers in India and other contemporary poets through his natural and simple poetic craftsmanship. Mahapatra is the winner of Sahitya Akademy award in the year 1981 for his poetry entitled *Relationships*. He is the first ever writer in English language from India to win this prestigious award. It is important and interesting to study about his poetic style and themes. Most of the Indian poets in the post-colonial era dealt with the subjects such as cultural and social issues in India, religious and communal situations and the attitude of society towards women and girl children. Jayanta Mahapatra deals with all these themes related to the human predicaments and also describes the conventional traditions and landscape of his own hometown which is a small village in the state of Odisha. His poetry is the representation of continuous exercising of several communal activities and its positive alternatives. He dramatizes the numerous dilemmas and adversities in the life of both men and women in the land of Odisha. As there is a large passion on the range of various themes such as tradition, temple, nature, whorehouse, love and human relationships, it reveals the psychic attachment of the poet towards his motherland.

Mahapatra derives his imageries from his life experiences and memories in which he might intended on philosophical and psychological elements that can probe into the personal relationship in the contemporary situation. He also dramatizes the mythical past of Orissan people stating the plight of his ancestors who were slaughtered by the king's army in the bank of river Daya. He draws attention to the toil of labours and artisans who worked hard in the building process of sun temple of Konark and comparatively delineates the present-day situation of the same place. Mahapatra's poems are the real representation of human predicaments and their feelings and hence he is placed in the list of poets who emerges as social critics. The themes such as loneliness, solitude, alienation, cultural inequality and mental frustration are dealt in these poems through intellectual imagery technique in a view of revealing the human predicaments. The world of Mahapatra's poetry is filled with the emotions and feelings of ordinary people in the state of Odisha. He expresses personal agony,

regret, hunger, dissatisfaction and the beautiful landscape of the Hindu temples and antique monuments as well.

## **2. Review of Literature**

The study of women who suffer in the male dominating society of India was done by I.M Sheeba Aloysius in 2014 which comprises the statement that women always have the place of weaker sex, house wife, pleasure maker for men and they have never been given the deserved position in the family. Women gets avoided in the society and in the family as well. This study shows that the history is full of events where woman meets injustice, struggling even for her personal needs and who lives a life of dissatisfaction. In Mahapatra's poems, he delineates the discriminated women community struggles for their own identity in the society who survives for leading their miserable life. This study brings out the poetic expression of predicaments of deprived women in the poems of Mahapatra.

According to Vijay D in his study (2016), the poetry of Mahapatra is the real expression of certain crises that were faced by the contemporary generation. Mahapatra is deeply preoccupied by the human predicaments of the generation of his age and hence he makes his poems as the platform to express these predicaments and frustrations. They are marked by the terrifying societal crisis and disenchantment which are conquered by the respective social vista. The researcher states that Mahapatra sees the life through a dark glass in which the view is unclear and grey in colour. Life observed through this dark glass has so many negative impacts on the society such as monotony, isolation, voidness, and hopeless future. The poems analyse the agony of the present society in various situations that suffers from numerous psychic issues.

Another study on the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra was done by Jayaramaiah. N in the year 2016 explores the theme bad fate of young women who become whores in order to fill the stomach of their family members. The poem of Mahapatra entitled *Hunger* tells the tale of a fisherman and his daughter who is tempted to become a whore to keep the hunger away from his family. The research study explores how Mahapatra describes the cynical state of human life in his poems. He tries to bring into light how people are attracted towards the illegal sex works and commercialize the activity. It also portrays the dual existence of the morals and the miserable state of women in the male dominated society. In this research paper, the researcher

states that it is based on a true story happened in those days in Gopalapur, a place in the state of Odisha. Mahapatra's poem proves his passion on the landscape of the village of Gopalapur.

In the study of Dr. Mirza Sibtain Beg in the year 2017, he examines Jayanta Mahapatra's innovative technique of dramatizing the social issues of our country such as hunger, anger, frustration, sexual exploiting, socio-cultural inequality. The study includes post-colonial superstitions and spiritual invariability. Post-colonialism denotes to the philosophies of political goals and modes of activism that break the constraints of structural inequalities and to establish social justice. The poetic description in the poems of Mahapatra unravels many negative aspects of the post-colonial society by going to the past and seeking the identity of every citizen. He expresses his feelings of Indianness persistently through all of his poems by crafting the wonderful technique of imagery.

### 3. Influence of Psychic Attacks in the Contemporary Generation

Most of the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra are influenced by the psychic attacks towards the present generation society. The cynicism and the resonating social panorama are amalgamated into a single form by the poet while picturizing the human predicaments. His poems are the combination of numerous feelings such as weariness, gloom, trauma and adversities witnessed in the contemporary period of Mahapatra. He is preoccupied with the frustration and weariness of the real society.

Mahapatra's poem namely *Hungers* sheds light to the biggest social crisis of poverty and the theme is projected in his poem in the simplest way at three levels. According to Ayyappa Panicker,

“The simple writing style used in the poems of Mahapatra made him one of the greatest poets in English language” (1997).

*Hunger* is a poem in which the real-life story of a fisherman and his daughter is portrayed in a realistic manner. Starvation of the family forces the father to send her young daughter to prostitution. The protagonist is offered the daughter by her father. The fisherman catches customers as he catches fish, for his daughter. The poet describes the nervousness of the fisherman while he tempts his daughter in the following lines,

“Trailing his net and his nervousness .....

..... with which he faced himself' (*Hunger*, Mahapatra)

The poor girl and her father were undernourished as the poet describes this as the fisherman's bones were white and the daughter's legs were long and lean. The imagery of silence has a major role in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. He repeats the word 'silence' in many situations as it gives a concrete meaning to the poetic lines of his poems.

The other poem written by Mahapatra entitled *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street* describes the power of mind over the body. When the mind aspires for sexual needs, the body acts like a machine that obeys the desires of mind. The protagonist of this poem is also following the path of the fisherman in the poem *Hunger*. Silence gripped him when others tempt the protagonist to follow his path. Mahapatra writes,

“Silence gripped .... His old nets had dragged up from the seas” (*The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*, Mahapatra)

Mahapatra's poetry is full of prevalent and intellectual use of imageries. An oil lamp symbolizes the bad circumstances of the fisherman and his daughter who were at the extreme starvation. He writes,

“An oil lamp splayed the hours ....  
... over and over the sticky soot .... Mind”  
(*Hunger*, Mahapatra)

Mahapatra tries to express the tension and pain that are experienced in the real world in which he uses many brilliant poetic imageries. He creates images from the world around him and uses them in the right way to make his poetry alive and active. The special feature of the poem *Hunger* is the apposition and the interaction of two hungers who represent the two ends of the universe. This poem is the symbolization of victims of the biggest societal crisis such as hunger and poverty and the protagonist's consciousness about the heavy flesh on his back.

“It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back

.....

My daughter, she's just turned fifteen”  
(*Hunger*, Mahapatra).

The above lines describe the weariness of the father while he collapses the purity of his daughter's character. The protagonist of the story who has a heavy flesh on his body searches

sources to satisfy his sexual needs. He is not able to realize the fisherman's feelings as he becomes blind with his sexual desires. The father is helpless because he and his daughter are starving and he is not able to work. The only way he has found is to push the girl into the dirty world of prostitution. The man who approaches the fisherman father feels embarrassed at the end and realizes the situation of the girl. He felt that the girl is just like a doll in front of him as she doesn't know the intensity of either pleasure or guilt. The lines express the pathetic scenario of poverty at the highest,

“She opened her wormy legs wide ...

.....

The fish slithering, turning aside”

(*Hunger*, Mahapatra).

The desire of sexual pleasure leads to a slanted mindset in the entire young generation people and they become the victims of various mental disorders. The victim shows a huge sexual abnormality when they seek sexual pleasure from any of the outer sources. Hence, they misbehave to their partner and sometimes involve in sexual violence. The poem written by Mahapatra entitled *Lost* is the best example of this attitude of the young generation. This poem reflects the peculiar nature of the lover when he seeks sexual pleasure from his partner. The poetic lines are,

What pain and pleasure your mind can wear

.....

Through the intrigues at my fingertips”

(*Lost*, Mahapatra)

#### 4. Conclusion

An acute and powerful spectator of the realistic instances that happen in and around, Jayanta Mahapatra has never vacillated in portraying the truth behind the social issues in the contemporary generation. A revelation of frustration and tension in the minds of demoralized young people in our society is the major theme that is dealt with in all the poems of Mahapatra. His world of poetry is filled with painful emotions such as gloom, guilt, disloyalty, and deep frustration. He observes his surroundings very keenly and tries to impart the social and political issues of the real-life scenario into his poetry. He is a great poet whose attempt is to project how the psychic attacks influence the young life of his landscape

particularly in Odisha. His poetic style is simple and hence it pierces the hearts of the readers and becomes the eye-opener of many youths.

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