

The Unique Characteristics of Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry

Dr. Rituraj Trivedi

Assistant Professor

Department of English & Foreign Languages,

Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, M.P., India

Abstract

In terms of his poetry, Jayanta Mahapatra's predominant view is one of loss, despair, rejection, and pain. No other Indian poet writing in English seems to employ tragic consciousness in quite the same unsettling ways that Jayanta Mahapatra does. Mahapatra is a gifted poet who frequently writes love poems that capture both the ephemerality and stasis of interpersonal connections. One of Mahapatra's greatest love poems is "Lost." "The Logic" is also a huge hit. Mahapatra consistently paints a compelling picture of a man and woman's interaction. Mahapatra steers clear of the typical romantic babble by portraying love as a moral force in a world plagued by sexual temptation. Mahapatra tackles subjects like poverty, misery, and the trafficking of flesh, and he succeeds in doing so with dexterity and delicacy. He refrains from using these subjects and situations as a playful lyrical prop. Mahapatra's poetry often features portrayals of ladies, which directly allude to this feature. Mahapatra is a poet of extraordinary mental calibre, as evidenced by his numerous psychological, contemplative, and philosophical poems, which also demonstrate that he has a deep intellect. Among this group, the most noticeable and striking are The Logic, Grass, The Exile, The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore, Total Solar Eclipse, and The Moon Moments. The imagery of Mahapatra's poetry, especially the animal imagery involving cobras, hyenas, vultures, sparrows, and crocodiles, is just as important as the poems' profound concepts.

Keywords: Consciousness, Sexual temptation, Trafficking, Dexterity, Contemplative.

Introduction

One of the best poets writing in English today is without a doubt Jayanta Mahapatra. In a comparatively short period, he has unquestionably made an innovative contribution to Indian English poetry. Pain and sorrow, remembrance and loss, hope and the potential of redemption are the defining characteristics of the cultural metaphors and symbols that shape Mahapatra's utopian world. His vision transcends all natural limitations to acquire universal importance, even though the vocabulary of his poetry is guided by a keen understanding of the cultural and socio-political ethos of his home. The poetry of Mahapatra is rife with genuine originality in tone, language, and observation. His topics cover a wide range, including nature and sex, religion and superstition, metaphysics and mythology, and the individual and the impersonal. Regardless of his subjects, the reader is captivated by a deep, contemplative quality akin to that of a saint.

Primarily, his pure intuition always stays true to what makes him truly Indian. His poetry has a strong sociocultural Indian tradition at its core.

Mahapatra's profound understanding of India's legacy—particularly that of Orissa, which has endured for hundreds of years—provides him with inspiration for his poetry. Jayant Mahapatra's poetry has heavily referenced the state of Orissa, both as a distinct socio-cultural entity and as a representative region of India. Mahapatra's two experiences in Orissa seem to have influenced his poetic sensibility the most. The turbulent past of history and the ubiquitous presence of religion, which is linked to ancient civilization, coexist side by side. Then the harsh truth sets in, revealing the ostensibly unaltered way of life of Orissa's predominantly agricultural populace. This is why Mahapatra's poetry often meets and finds inspiration in the enduring and timeless nature of old customs, myths, and stories. This study paper looks at how Mahapatra depicted the human condition in the Orissan people and how that reflects both Indianness and humanity worldwide:

“White-clad widowed women
Past the centres of their lives
Are waiting to enter the great temple.”

(Dawn at Puri: poemhunter.com, p. 11)

The portrayals of the self's loneliness, isolation, and estrangement from the world's peripheral facts seem to be connected in Jayant Mahapatra's poetry, yet this relationship doesn't seem to last. It is comprehensible as the philosophical conundrum that is addressed in a large portion of modern literature. Jayant Mahapatra's poetry conveys a great deal of emotional pain, regret, despair, hunger, ambition, and moments of rediscovery. It also describes his experiences and interactions with symbols of belief embodied by the people of Orissa, like temples, Hindu festivals, and old shrines, as well as symbols of belief embodied by Mahapatra's characters.

The poems of Jayanta Mahapatra end without offering any resolutions to the issues they bring up. By keeping his poetry from becoming unduly simple as a result of operational simplification, Mahapatra avoids the perils of a political tactic. This appears to be Mahapatra's most important quality overall. Mahapatra is a unique poet whose poetry incorporates sarcasm and irony, two highly important elements of Indian English literature.

Aspects of Mahapatra's poetry's technique and style

Mahapatra is a master poet not only in terms of the subjects he explores but also in terms of how he approaches them. Stated differently, he is a master craftsman. The word "craftsmanship" refers to a poet's word choice and the dexterity with which he arranges those words into phrases, clauses, and sentences; it also encompasses his figure of speech, rhyme, sound, and rhythm; it also includes the poem's structure and imagery.

When it comes to all these facets of poetry, Mahapatra is a master poet. Mahapatra's knowledge of the English language is remarkable. His use of language in his poetry and word choice demonstrates that he is aware of the subtleties and various shades of meaning that accompany each word in addition to its precise meaning. His phrase-making exhibits

extraordinary creativity, and he can employ words extremely subtly. His use of language in his poetry demonstrates both his knowledge of the aesthetic value of words and his ability to convey his ideas with the right words. Naturally, a large number of his poems are composed in the most basic of terms. Poems produced in the most basic of styles are Dawn at Puri, Indian Summer Poem, and Taste for Tomorrow. However, he employs academic terminology frequently in his poems. Among them is Total Solar Eclipse. We can use the subsequent sentences and lines from this poem as an illustration of how to employ new vocabulary:

“The wind, the obsession, the nightmare,
To affirm what only these men would let come
Through precious paschal fast, dire superstition”
(Total Solar Eclipse: Indo- Anglian Poetry, p.69)

Mahapatra uses metaphors and similes, which are significant poetic elements that enhance the felicities of words and phrases in his poetry. Non-metrical poetry has been composed by Mahapatra. Consequently, we shouldn't anticipate any remarkable metrical feats from him, nor should we anticipate music that relies on meter and rhyme. Because he writes in free verse, the Indo-Anglian poet of today depends entirely on rhythm. It doesn't matter that Mahapatra doesn't have meter or rhyme because poetry has other attributes. Whatever the case, the rhythm he offers is rather pleasing, and the tone of the phrases he chooses just heightens the pleasure of the beat. When it comes to rhythm and melody, Dawn at Puri and Hunger are two of Mahapatra's best poetry. Examining these two poems from this angle is undoubtedly enjoyable, and the poems' topics only serve to heighten our enjoyment. Mahapatra's other poems, including Lost, Slum, Evening Landscape by the River, The Exile, and Again, One Day, and Walking by the River, all have a pleasant sound and rhythm. For the sake of illustration, one short quotation would be sufficient:

“It is evening, there is light laughter,
And the abundant darkness of water
Over which an uncertain light of the moon
lies like a familiar but useless ornament.

(Evening Landscape by The River: Indo-Anglian Poetry, p.70)

His poetry holds significance since it appears to indicate the path that Indo-Anglian poetry is anticipated to follow in the future. His poetry is incredibly regional, but it also has a global feel to it. His poetry makes a significant reference to the Orissan landscape, which is dominated by Puri and Konarak. However, the deeper aspects of Indianness are more important than the external environment. A profoundly Indian sensibility is suggested by the tone of serene acceptance that conceals knowledge of generations of pain. Nonetheless, his poetry, which demonstrates the operation of an incredibly sensitive and adaptable imagination, falls within the symbolist-surrealistic tradition. In addition to being extremely global and local, is also a very unique poet, and no other Indo-Anglian poet comes close to the breadth, depth, and nuance of his imagination:

“White-clad widowed Women
 Past the centers of their lives
 Are waiting to enter the Great Temple
 Their austere eyes
 Stare like those caught in a net
 Hanging by the dawn’s shining strands of faith”.

(Dawn at Puri: poemhunter.com, p. 11)

Poverty, Sexuality and Sex: The Key Themes of Mahapatra’s Poetry

When it comes to the topics of Mahapatra, sex, sexuality, and poverty rank lower. Hunger and The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street are two of the most notable and intriguing poems in this regard. Hunger portrays poverty and sexuality. As a matter of fact, here, sexuality and poverty are tightly related. Customers are drawn to the fisherman's shack by their sexual cravings, but it's the starving fisherman and his hungry daughter who have turned to prostitution. The fisherman is even forced to lie and claim that his considerably older daughter has just turned fifteen. The client is then invited to feel his daughter and to conclude the transaction, as his customer's bus is scheduled to depart at nine o'clock. The customer senses the girl's hunger as soon as the fisherman leaves, opening her "Wormy legs" wide. Two types of hunger exist: one is in the abdomen above, and the other is between the legs. Though there is undoubtedly much more in the poem, its themes are undoubtedly poverty and sexuality:

“I heard him say: My daughter, she’s just turned fifteen...
 Feel her. I’ll be back soon; your bus leaves at nine.
 The sky fell on me, and a father’s exhausted wile.
 Long and lean, her eyes were cold as rubber.
 She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
 The other one, the fish slithering, turning inside”.

(Hunger: poemhunter.com, p. 20)

The poem "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" is more complex. The customer can indulge his fancies to a great extent here. Entering a whorehouse appears to have the promise of seeing numerous attractive sex workers, whose countenances would mimic the attractive people featured on posters and billboards that he frequently sees and which have consistently aroused his desire for sex. The client is happy about the chance, but he also feels guilty and ashamed about entering a place where people with bad reputations reside. In addition to satisfying his sexual craving, he believes he would get additional knowledge about women. Regarding the prostitute, she goes to great lengths to win his approval; this is, of course, her job as a professional. Additionally, she violates her profession when she tells the client:

“Like a girl holding on to your wide wilderness,
 as though it were real, as though the renewing voice,

tore the membrane of your half-woken mind,
 When, like a door, her words close behind:
 "Hurry will you? Let me go"
 and her lonely breath thrashed against your kind."

(The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street", A Rain of Rites, p.17)

This poem, then, portrays the relationship between a prostitute and her client in a realistic yet distanced way. The poem blends the natural fascination in such a matter with a psychological component. Although the concept is well-known, Mahapatra's interpretation of it is incredibly intriguing. Nonetheless, there are social ramifications to this poetry. Prostitution would go on and maybe even get cleaner, which would make it safer for people's health. The world's oldest profession could evolve into a more sophisticated and modern one.

Philosophical, Psychological, and Reflective poetic style in Mahapatara's poems

Mahapatra is by no means a poet of inferior intellect. He is, on the other hand, a genuinely philosophical and introspective poet. The poems "The Logic," "Grass," "The Exile," "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore," "Total Solar Eclipse," and "The Moon Moments" are among the most notable and striking in this genre. A psychological poem filled with contemplation on the deceased is The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore. Young people's deaths are the most tragic and heartbreaking. These deaths elicit deep reflections. In addition, a simple anchor that is partially submerged in mud in a cemetery can someday become a god that future generations will revere:

"Rusting in the vanquished country, the blood's unease,
 The useless rain upon my unfamiliar window;
 The tried triumphant smile left behind by the dead,
 On a discarded anchor half-sunk in mud beside the graves."

(The Abandoned British cemetery at Balasore: Contemporary Indian Writing in English, p.16)

Although it also has a realistic element, The Exile includes philosophical content. Everyone can recognize and relate to the following: the far-off land; the musty village; the sun-burned hills; the corpses burning on funeral pyres; the elderly, sick parents; the filthy town; and the long-haired priest of Kali. However, the following lines bring philosophy into the poem:

"It is an exile
 Between good and evil
 Where I need the sting of death."

(The Exile: Indo- Anglian Poetry, p.52)

A philosophical, even mystical quality can also be found in the poem The Exile. A sting of death is what the exiled poet needs as he vacillates between good and evil. Mahapatra is a staunch realist, but on account of phrases like these, one could consider him a transcendental poet. When taken together, these two facets of his poetry are rather good and give his writing a unique touch.

The Solar Eclipse illustrates both the scientific and superstitious methods of understanding this natural occurrence.

Mahapatra's Poems: A Portrait of Orissa's Landscape, History, and Culture

Poems Dawn at Puri, Taste for Tomorrow, Slum, Evening Scenery along the River, and Events are mostly about the scenery of Orissa. With its never-ending crow cries, a skull resting on the sacred sands, widowed women dressed in white waiting to enter the massive temple, and other details, Dawn at Puri is the most noticeable, realistic, and possibly most fascinating of all. A scene from Puri, complete with crows, a very broad roadway, lepers, and hordes of devout people gathered at the temple door, is depicted in Taste for Tomorrow. Mahapatra's poetry has several references to Puri. Partially destroyed Puri and Konarak temples have a significant and striking influence on his work:

“Endless crow noises
A skull in the holy stands
Tilts its empty country towards hunger”.

(Dawn at Puri: poemhunter.com, p. 11)

The Orissa Poems, Orissa Landscapes, and Evening in an Orissa Village are among the other poems that refer to the culture and prehistoric past of Orissa while showcasing the region's beauty. Upon reading these twelve poems, a man who has never been to Orissa may start to believe that he has visited the region and spent some time there, taking in the many settings, people, and events. Because Mahapatra has painted such vivid images of Orissa and its people for us to imagine, we are transported to that part of our country through his portrayal of this issue, which further establishes Mahapatra's status as a great poet:

“Faces of tree-bark a grief
Hang against God's hand in the world
That cannot lift itself up to help.
In the corners of women's eyes

The rainbow breaks against the sunrise” (Deaths in Orissa: poemhunter.com, p. 12)

Conclusion

Mahapatra has demonstrated the touch of a master in addressing the numerous unique traits of concern found in his poetry. The subject's dignity and significance are matched by the mastery with which he handles his unique abilities. When describing the topics, a reader encounters when reading Mahapatra's poetry, terms like petty, unworthy, or even commonplace would not come to mind. In this relation, the reader would only think of terms like substantial, dignified, profound, exciting, shocking, and elevating. The major themes in his poetry are the Orissan scenery, the Orissan cultural background and history, the Orissan social life, and the Orissan rites and rituals.

Naturally, this demonstrates Mahapatra's primarily unique perspective. While regionalism is undoubtedly the most notable aspect of his poetry, its themes are neither

constrained nor limiting in any way. Mahapatra addresses morality, marriage, sex, love, human nature, and societal issues in India. Thus, although Mahapatra's poetry cannot be defined as all-encompassing, its variety of distinctive qualities is sufficiently broad.

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