

Book Review

LOSS OF “LAND” IN MAHAPATRA’S LAND

Book analysed - Mahapatra, Jayanta. Land. Delhi: Authorspress, 2013.

Dr. Golaka Behari Acharya  
Lecturer in English  
K.A.Mahavidyalaya, Rekutia  
Keonjhar; Odisha

In a book; besides the cover design; the blurb and the excerpts from different sources- all subscribe to the feeling encrypted invisibly in the writings inside. Thus the line “The artistic life is a long, lovely suicide”-Oscar Wilde’s- much imply the moral and meaning of Mahapatra’s poems in Land. However; a retrospection authenticates his earlier creations as poems of introversions whereas the later ones as the poems of passionate extroversions. This collection is a proportionate mixture of the two.

Jayanta Mahapatra, as all know; an outstanding Indo-Anglian poet has by now traversed half a century of his poetic career that started with Close the Sky, Ten by Ten and come up to the latest collection; Land in 2013. Having thirty two poems in its ambit a broad picture of the wide world around the poet is presented here.

“Under the Drift of the Mild Moons” one can see “this brooding valley/ lying under the drift of mild moons (13).” Here “sadness” in solitude is troublesome to every eye. Hunger holds him tightly as it has been since the beginning of his poeticism. It is given paramount importance in “Death in Orissa (14).” The impressionistic photographs slam kidney punches on the conscious readers; listen to it if you want to see:

Little bits of land here  
hold their breath by the railway level crossing  
one expects nothing more,  
just the cold stillness of yesterday  
that flies past like a tree sparrow(14).

“Hunger” has been Mahapatra’s predominant subject exhausting maximum place in his poems- silhouette being echoed with the slogan to get it eradicated. So “Death in Orissa” portrays how “Laughter is no more green like the grain/down the slopes of the Niyamgiri Hills.”

Like a hung out tongue, amidst sullen mist the door to an exhausted village hut opens in a still winter evening. Grief, death, and widowhood glow more to choke us at the middle of our breath. We read the “village mythology” where an intolerable act is enacted repeatedly on the

stage of God. So he sings with a sigh “The Sea might sweep up on the shore again/ in a sudden aggressive embrace.” We listen to the utter hopelessness of this social critic- he fails to tolerate any pain of man. Again he says, who does not see “The Birthplace of Grief” but who reacts against it. Mahapatra looks into his heart as he remembers his dead Grandfather’s diary who was sixteen and dying of starvation in the terrible famine of 1866 changed his faith. He utters:  
There are things/ that at times light the darkness in us/ but I cannot feel the presence/ or the warmth of bodies they might possess.” “Darkness”–as in many other poems- shows the “motionless” world around. He is pushed to solitude that pushes us to the pathetic helplessness. There are pungent satires amidst the portrayal of the society around- a contrast like the political drama and the ground reality. Look at it: “In the airless heat, wounds of trees/ and the lonely river brushing itself with the warm wind. / I curl up on the mat, and don’t know if it is enough. / The morning paper unleashes on us the mud/ that is washed off the Prime Minister’s feet. /the familiar news of a crime settles on my eyes (23).”In a poem “Earth” the poet reproaches: “Can’t understand why sometimes/I go blind for this earth/ For this squalid red earth (24).”Actually the subtle heart of the poet throbs with the sadness of the starving millions whose smiles have disappeared long before. These people are not the only ones who bewitch the poet but also the widow at the ghats of the Ganga, Varanasi. Often a resolution comes into the lonely mind of the introvert poet and he thinks “the simple answer is never love” (32).Funny ideas creep into the poet’s parlour “this evening God shall stand by someone’s bed/and assure him once again that he should suffer” (37). In silent nights:

I wait alone in this quiet house  
The cry of the caged parakeet silent  
On the raw, rising wind.  
Maybe it counts on my goodness  
To help it escape, beyond the need  
To lean on the night alone. (45)

Actually into the room “comes the cry of the parakeet” very well makes it clear who the parakeets are and for what the sensitive poet is emotional. So the speaker feels like an exile wherever he lives.

Each poem of the Land is a typical Mahapatra’s one where pain of the society makes the poet bleed. His tear drops roll on the cheeks like the philanthropic pearls of life. The words are so nicely chosen they echo the sound of communism from their back. These are novel attempts authenticating the poetic movement that has been a current for half a century till this day.

However; Land must leave an imprint on the artistic pavement of Indo-Anglian literature. It is not only nostalgic but also retrospective- it is too full of reproach. It seems as if the poet is crying for the loss of his “land” in Land.