



HOMESICKNESS IN JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POETRY

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Abstract

This paper discusses the homesickness, love and plight of an Indo-Anglian poet, Jayanta Mahapatra, for his motherland, Orissa. He is a physicist but his poems have a lot of metaphysical elements. He began writing quite late in his career but that didn't stop him from bagging Sahitya Akademi Award (first Indian to win this award for English poetry). In this way he surpassed many Indo-Anglian poets who have been writing bulk of poetry through the years. His true and deep love for Orissa makes his poem to stick to the heart of the reader. It will surely remind you of the childhood place you grew up in.

Keywords- Indo-Anglian, Homesickness, Poetry, Homeland, Orissa.

INTRODUCTION

Jayanta Mahapatra is a leading Indo-Anglian poet. Indo-Anglian poetry refers to the original literary creation in English language by Indians. Other such eminent poets are Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujam, kamala das etc. The bulk of writing these poets have produced has given birth to a separate body of literature which is called Indian-English literature.

We all are fond of poetry that talks about emotions rather than rationality. Our emotions are universal and panoramic. We are more fond of poetry which gives some visual stimulation. We also feel a strong bond and love for the land which holds all the good and bad memories of our lives. No matter where we live we all are homesick for some place or the other. One such poet whose poetry is replete with such kind of emotions is Jayanta Mahapatra. His poetry shows extreme longing and undying love for his homeland, Orissa. Since this eminent author has lived in Orissa all his life, he has

a lot to talk about it. The landscape and ambience of Orissa have strong presence in his poetry.

It is unbelievable and odd that Jayanta Mahapatra is a Professor of Physics but his poetry certainly has some metaphysical elements. His love for Orissa transcends the physical barriers and beauty of this land. He personifies the state in many of his poems. He loves Orissa as if it is his beloved; beautiful and magnificent. His poems are rather short and depict beautifully the landscape, historical background and social life of Orissa. Poems like 'Dawn at Puri', 'Taste for Tomorrow', 'Slum', 'Evening Landscape by the River', and 'Events', chiefly deal with intricacies of Oriya culture and lifestyle. While reading this poem we can see the immense love Mahapatra has for Orissa and how deeply he has studied Orissa. From the colour of the sky to the sounds of certain birds he describes Orissa in a way which is interesting, conspicuous and realistic. He talks about the temples of Puri and Konark which is known by almost all the Indians, yet Mahapatra introduces

them in a more effective manner. If someone has never been to Orissa, he/she can get a satisfactory view of the land by going through Mahapatra's poetry.

Mahapatra's poetry is imagist. The exact visual images give the poetry a charm and seriousness. While reading 'Dawn At Puri' we come across some picturesque lines which shows how deeply Mahapatra has got Orissa engraved in his soul and mind. The poem talks about the time of dawn in the scared town of Puri which has the famous Jagannath temple. Since, it is a scared place the people of India want to be cremated there to attain salvation or 'Moksha'. Here the poet gives a description of the beach of Puri which is also a cremation ground.

"Endless crow noises
A skull in the holy sands
Tilts its empty country towards hunger"

This excerpt from the poem shows Mahapatra's view and agony for his land which has a cremation ground. The skull symbolizes of helplessness and beliefs of Oriya people for their holy land. Here, Mahapatra's pain can be seen for his motherland. Though, he has achieved a lot in his life, the poet is engulfed with the plight of his home landers. We cannot say here that the poetry only talks about Oriya lifestyle, culture and problems. It talks about the omnipresent tradition of cremation (preferably in a holy place) and poverty of India as a whole. He is there, yet he is homesick, loving the land as it is, describing it as beautifully and aptly as possible. He wants to leave no stones unturned while describing the beauty of this somber land.

"and suddenly breaks out of my hide
into the smoky blaze of a sullen solitary pyre
that fills my ageing mother:
her last wish to be cremated here
twisting uncertainly like light
on the shifting sands."

This extract is full of pain and longing. It seems Mahapatra is talking about his mother's wish but in reality he is talking about his hidden desire to

die and get mixed in the Oriya soil. through the reference of his mother's wish, Mahapatra talks about his own feelings which are very strong and undaunted for his holy motherland. We can see Mahapatra's longing to be with Orissa and love Orissa till his last breath.

Of all the poems, 'Taste for Tomorrow' is extremely picturesque. It is rather a very short poem but anyone can literally paint the streets of Orissa by just reading the lines of this poem. The poet has described the beauty of typical locations which otherwise goes unnoticed and unappreciated.

"And at the streets end
The crowds the temple door:
A huge holy flower
Swaying in the winds of greater reasons"

People standing in long queues to get a glimpse of their Gods or Swamis in temples is a common site in India. Temples are always a busy place in India. The poet here is describing beautifully the deep devotion of Hindu people to their Gods. Orissa is no less than a lady with beauty and mysterious sadness to Jayanta Mahapatra. He looks directly in her eyes and paints a picture with his words describing the concealed and unnoticeable features this lady (Orissa) possesses. He is so much in love with this lady that he cannot stop talking about her. His extreme longing for the well-being of Orissa can be seen in his poems.

The poet in all the poems shows India through Orissa. His detached view of a person of the Orissa and all of India gives us a more realistic and satisfactory view. But in all his poetry we notice an omnipresent somberness and melancholy when he talks about his motherland as if he will get sick and die if Orissa is taken away from him. Here we can see the love of a steadfast lover for his beautiful but dark beloved. Mahapatra doesn't feel shy to show his and his countries' vulnerability which rather paints a gloomy picture of India. Mahapatra talks much about women, who are the oppressed part of the whole humanity. His poem 'A Missing Person', says

In the darkened room

A woman
Cannot find her reflection in the mirror
Waiting as usual
At the edge of sleep
In her hands she holds
The oil lamp
Whose drunken yellow flames
Know where her lonely body lies.

This poem is highly pessimistic and shows Indian woman in the hackneyed light of negligence by the society. "The missing person" is the soul and heart of a woman which she cannot find. She is lonely and desperate.

This urge to show Orissa and its people in the true light made Mahapatra's poetry very cheerless and depressing. His love for Orissa changes in the form of agony in his heart when he sees the plight of his motherland. He surely loves Orissa but he is also truly sympathetic and sad about the poverty, indifference and especially the condition of women in his motherland.

As S. Vishwanathan says, "the poets sensibility is both Indian and modern and his response to the Indian scene is authentic and credible. The rendering of Indian vignettes, whether it is that of a village landscape as in "Village" or that of a city or town street scene as in "Main temple street, Puri", 'dawn At Puri', or "Sunburst", invariably an authentic evocation of the object and the individual response of the poetic self to it alike. Themes such as those living-not-living, suffering Indian women, the cycle of birth and change with an underlying pattern of fixity and permanence, and of certain kinds of hypocrisy and prudery characteristic of the Indian, though recurrent, are by no means strained out of the finely rendered landscapes but well communicated through them and the poet's apprehension of them."

Jayanta Mahapatra uses humanizing adjectives for inanimate objects thereby, rendering them life and creating 'Verbal Drama'. Expressions like "furious wrinkled wall" bring non-living objects to life. Mahapatra, despite of being a late bloomer,

in a very short period, achieved what many couldn't achieve in their lifetime. He is one of the foremost Indo-Anglian poet whose main focus is Orissa (and India). His mastery of words create a magic that no one could escape or ignore. His poems reflect a deep sense of concern for the contemporary reality. The extreme Indianness in his poetry play a deep and vital role in Mahapatra's success.

Commenting on Mahapatra's writings, Chritan Kulshreshtha writes, "A clinical eye for detail combined with a chiseled and firm syntax enables him to produce a well focused image whose nuances invariably extend beyond more description".

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