

Echoes of Loneliness: A Study of Isolation and Tranquillity in the Selected Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra

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Abstract:

This article examines the hidden paths of isolation and tranquility within the works of the Postcolonial writer Jayanta Mahapatra. Mahapatra's verse explores various aspects, including the emptiness of life, nature, social disorder, culture, myth, complex human emotions, strong imagery, poverty, and a hollow life. This article explores his works, life, skills, techniques in poetry, and achievements. It also examines his contributions and advancements to modern Indian English literature. This review provides a thorough and rich overview of Mahapatra's work and its impact on Odisha and Indian literature.

By analyzing his seminal works such as "A Missing Person", "A Little Hand", "A Rain of Rites", "Ash", "Of That Love", this study explores how Mahapatra uses shadows, loneliness, and death to evoke a sense of isolation and tranquility in the reader's mind. It also explores the possibility of using Stream-of-consciousness and confessional writing in his poetry. This article uses the term "Echo" not merely as a reflection or representation of themes in his poetry, but as a bridge that reflects his past trauma, his anguish, his love for his mother, and the possible domestic violence that he has seen during his childhood. Eventually, the article suggests that Mahapatra's sense of solidarity in his writing is not merely a poetic expression but an experience of complex human behaviors, personal conflict, and cruelty.

Keywords: Jayanta Mahapatra, tranquility, confessional writing, loneliness, solitude,

Introduction:

During the dark era of postcolonial India, a gem emerged who, through his pen, illuminated the vacant human life. He enriches culture, adds grace to heritage, and instils pride in the nation. Odisha saw its first poet to represent it on the global stage. Jayanta Mahapatra, a legend and myth, was born into a distinguished Christian family in Cuttack in 1928. From childhood, Mahapatra was sharp, focused, and dedicated to his studies. Cuttack, the cultural heart of Odisha, taught him about life, values, heritage, and culture. Later in life, he worked as a physics lecturer at various universities in Odisha, including Fakir Mohan University, Gangadhar Meher University, and Ravenshaw University. His professional and personal experiences shaped his worldview, which acted as a catalyst, molding him into a revolutionary poet during his retirement. He received the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for his poem "Relationship" in 1981. In 2008, he was honored with the Padma Shri, which he returned in 2015. Although born a Christian, Jayanta Mahapatra always received blessings from Lord Jagannath. His spiritual consciousness frequently shines through when he mentions Puri in his poems. Questions about life, social injustice, culture, imagery, symbolism, nature, loneliness, tranquility, and a sense of hollowness

pervade his writings. A conflict between science and faith is often evident in his work. His knowledge of science prevents him from openly expressing his faith in Jagannath. This conflict is visible in poems such as “Dawn at Puri,” “Deaths in Odisha,” “Freedom,” “Main Temple Street,” and “Taste for Tomorrow.” Concerning the theme of loneliness, poems like “A Missing Person,” “A Rain of Rites,” “Ash,” “Her Hand,” and “Of That Love” explore this motif in the background.

Objective:

The primary aim of this paper is to examine the sense of isolation in Mahapatra’s poems. By analysing his poetry, this paper will identify why and where these techniques are employed. It will highlight poems most closely related to this theme. This study will demonstrate that Mahapatra employs a partial confessional approach within his poetry.

Methodology:

This review endorses a qualitative approach to configure the hidden structures of Mahapatra’s poetry. Various Books and articles have been studied to produce this article. Other than that, some interviews of Jayanta Mahapatra are also being watched. This paper could not be prepared without the method of hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. A comprehensive textual analysis of selected poems has also done to get the outcome.

I Am No Poet:

Jayanta Mahapatra himself admitted that he was not a great poet. In his words, he said, “possibly I am not a poet at all, I mean just I write some poetry that you have been calling me, I am flattered.” (Unfiltered by Samdish. (2024, February 16) YouTube. <https://youtu.be/N0u50BV627U>). To some extent, the above quoted line are true but not entirely. Though Mahapatra lacks poetic techniques, his choice of simple but eye-catching words, his observation on life, and his presentation of events has some things that many poets struggled to exceed. He always used free verse in his writing to express his feelings directly to the reader. Many English writers in the past used free verse for their writing as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Sylvia Plath. Unable to use rhyme scheme or meter form does not mean a poet is not good; it’s a choice whether he used it or not. Mahapatra’s use of words sometimes reflects his inspiration from Sylvia Plath. Some of his writings have a confessional theme. One of the examples is from his poem “Of that Love”-

And no one's back here, no one.

I can recognise, and from my side.

I see nothing. Years have passed

since I sat with you, watching

the sky grow lonelier with cloudlessness,

waiting for your body, to make it lived in.

(Mahapatra, Of that Love, 2022, Lines 9-14)

Confessional poetry is about writers’ journey, his exploitation, and truth. Here in the above lines, the use of the personal pronoun “I” suggests that the poem is autobiographical, where the poet tells us about his past experiences. In that interview, Jayanta Mahapatra himself admit about his childhood trauma where he was bullied in class. This created a shot of voidness that, in the end, explodes by giving us some of the iconic lines. In the above lines, we can feel the nostalgic magic that created the loneliness the poet has.

The theme of alienation accompanies the lines in which the poet finds himself, a person who feels lonely after being separated from his old partner.

The Lady in The Dark:

In some of Mahapatra's writings, we witness a mysterious lady who lives in the dark. Mahapatra uses metaphorical symbolism to show the atrocities that women of Orissa had to face during those days. He here represents the social dogma where the patriarchal society suppresses women from being free. Domestic violence, rape, and blood are the key points that he mentions in his poems. The poems that merit mention here are "A Missing Person" and "Her Hands". In these two poems, Mahapatra, with a few lines told much more than any other poet mentions. The line that represents his anguish is-

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 hides.
(Mahapatra, A Missing Person, 1976, Lines 1-9)

The poem "A Missing Person" is a symbolic presentation of Mahapatra's concern about the age-old traditional Odia ladies whose voice has been torn up by patriarchal society. The phrase "In her hands she holds the oil lamp" shows the strict rules of a society where a lady has to do only household things. The last line of the poem, "knows where her lonely body hides", has greater symbolic meaning. The line represents the alienation of Odia ladies, their social status, their fear, their lost identity, and their broken personalities. The poem is a precious example of the alienation effect, where the women can't even mourn for their loss of identity. The phrase "cannot find her reflection in the mirror" represents this theme, where Mahapatra uses symbols as a tool. The mirror is not merely the usual mirror in our household; it's the society that Jayanta Mahapatra is talking about.

Another poem in which Mahapatra has exposed the lustful patriarchal society is "Her Hands". In this poem, Mahapatra talked about the greatest tragedy a women face the: rape. The lines of the poem are:

The little girl's hand is made of darkness
How will I hold it?

The streetlamps hang like decapitated heads
Blood opens that terrible door between us.

The wide mouth of the country is calmed in pain
While its body writhes on its bed of nails

The little girl has just her raped body
for me to reach her.

The weight of my guilt is unable
to overcome my resistance to hug her.
(Mahapatra, Her Hands, 2018, Lines 1-10)

This poem is not an image; it's a reality. This is the thing that one may sympathise with but can't feel. In our life cycle, we hear things like rape and ignore it like nothing. But what about those girls who face this cruelty? We did nothing but look into this matter, not a personal responsibility, but as a casual news event. But there is Mahapatra, who can't cope with it, and it's taken. With his simple pen, he unleashed the inner anguish and his anger on this issue. Though he can't face the girl due to the failure of society. The last line of the poem shows how shameful the poet is. The mental and psychological trauma in this age of life broke the poet inside and left his belief in manhood. The phrase "clamped mouth" shows the failure of society, where it stood dumb, quiet, and witnessed the girl's pain from a near distance. Unfortunately, the poet is in the same part of that system. This suffocation of the poet even goes higher when he understands that his choice of words is nothing in comparison to the little girl's pain. From a reader's point of view, the incident that Mahapatra is referring to is real, which he may have witnessed during his childhood. This event broke two people on that day. One is the little girl, and the other is the poet. This created a void in the poet's heart, and his belief in humanity got arrested. Many of Mahapatra's works express this anxiety and pressure, where he shows the real face of the world, which does not affect others' suffering.

Love vs. Loneliness:

Every loneliness has an echo that comes from the core pain. The echoes make scratches giving more pain to the subject. This echoes make him dumb like a statue. It does not let the subject to move on. Eventually it pushes him to great depression by making its heart hollow. It acts as a slow poison who kiss the inner love and passion slowly.

Love in one's live bring perfection, passion, smoothness, and calmness. But when the west wind of separation hits the body, it burns the body with sorrow, emptiness, and lostness. This situation of life taught the poet about solidarity and isolation, where the poet misses his beloved person and mourns over her absence. Some of the prime examples from his poem "A Rain of Rites" and "Ash" where this solidarity comes from missing their loved ones. The first poem talks about his unknown lover who lost her way during the journey. The poem is a marvelous example of desire, faith, love, and questing for God. Some of its lines are:

The rain I have known and traded all this life
is thrown like kelp on the beach.
Like some shape of conscience I cannot look at
A malignant purpose is a nun's eye.
(Mahapatra, A Rain of Rites, 1976, Lines 5-8)

Jayanta Mahapatra uses symbols like puppets in his writing. Most of his symbolism draws on nature, in which he uses natural symbols to convey beauty, love, agony, and the selfishness of society, culture, and heritage. In "A Rain of Rites", he uses the imagery of rain to recreate the beauty of his beloved. For him, she is a cure for his pain, a happiness in his sorrow, a light in the darkness. In the poem, he calls her a grey

cloud of rain that erases the sunbeam and gives him solace. Furthermore, he praises her for her selflessness; even before entering his life, she expunges his problems. But later, his love got separated like seaweed thrown away from the ocean. The poet remembers the sufferings he had faced during the separation. It symbolizes the human pain and loss, what a broken-hearted man feels. The title itself suggests that rites are not always meant to bring happiness. There are some rain of rites that cover the beam of life. At first, it feels soothing and calm, but when time passes, it's hard to move on. The loneliness, alienation, isolation, and tranquility could be seen in the last line of the poem, where the poet refused to overcome the pain.

Conclusion:

Poets like Jayanta Mahapatra burn once in a century. He truly represents Orissa's culture and heritage in the world forum. His skills to present human emotion and complexities. Through his skill of language, he paints loneliness and solitude he connects to the reader's mind. In his writing, we can notice a sense of confessional writing where he faced the atrocities in his past that overcome in his old age through his pen. His personality reflects a holding of vast knowledge and wisdom. Jayanta Mahapatra's contribution to Odia as well as Indian English literature is impossible to measure. He was a gem, a once-in-a-millennium. Furthermore, research is needed to explore more hidden themes of Mahapatra's writing, like using past events and his first-person narrative.

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