Chapter-VII
Conclusion
Mahapatra’s Poetry: “Monuments of unageing intellect”

Amidst the plethora of post-independent Indian English poets, Jayanta Mahapatra has secured a place of his own through his poetry which has achieved such a distinction as can be said in Yeats’s words ‘monuments of unageing intellect’ (Sailing to Byzantium). The ‘newness’ of this poet is not simply restricted to his deviation from the existing conventions but providing his poetry with the wings of the past – the history and tradition – on the one hand and present – the universal angst – on the other. In the words of Rajeev S. Patke, it is explained thus:

The world let in by the poetry retains, in all its varied flora and fauna – [...] the lineaments of a lived reality as well as a felt historical and mythic past. Each phenomenal inhabitant of this dual existence is allowed its fullest measure of twilight-like in-between-ness. The outer world merges with an inner world of familial presences and memories. The two interact in osmosis as if through a permeable membrane, feeding the energies of one into the other, amplifying or neutralizing resonance through incessant conjunctions between outer and inner, making the unconceived appear inevitable through the fortuities of metaphor. (Mehrotra 267)

In a multilingual country like India, the bilingual poet has performed the brilliant task of presenting the national culture through his regional culture, that of his native place Orissa. It is this flavour of regionalism in Mahapatra’s poetry which has succeeded in serving the national interest. His literary standing is deeply rooted in the concept of history and tradition which he believes to be the two arms of a society. Therefore, without
the arms of history and tradition, literature is sure to be robbed of its literary impact. The poetry of this New Poet emerges out of the ashes of our culture wherein its ingenuity lies. Mahapatra’s poetry is a constant reminder that even in this present day world of flourishing culture, it is the indigenous human culture reigning from time immemorial which prioritizes the identity of a nation. Simplistically, it is a journey from the past to the present and again back to the past.

Having his roots in Orissa – a land ever tagged with the daily sights of famine, misery, starvation, the roofless and the terror-stricken – Mahapatra has excelled in the art of transforming his storm-tossed land and life into instruments of life and art. As life continues in spite of all sorrow, so does Mahapatra’s poetic sensitivity flow freely through his pen inscribing his inseparable bondage with the past and the present of his native land. His rootedness is manifested through the relationship between social and personal, wherein the racial myths and heritage of his locale laid out against the broad canvas of time make the poetic self realize:

I have no choice today

The house I have lived in all these years

has forgotten the stone it was made of (Random Descent 47)

Mahapatra’s poetry is responsible to his own conscience and his motherland Orissa bringing about an integration of the inner self and outer reality, proving to be a happy departure in the era of post-colonial Indian English poetry.

The poet’s journey from Physics to metaphysics has been one of revelation of a sense of mystery. For the scientist-poet, poetry is the science of heart’s affections. A Mahapatra-poem leaves one with a sense of mystery and thus it has done its job. Neither a born poet nor aware of any intention of writing poetry one day, Mahapatra, got the blessings of the Muse and became a poet. But as he was shy by nature, he found refuge in
books. Mahapatra's philosophy rests on the contention that our way of life is the way of art. His ingrained sadness from childhood has made him perceive that life is not linear but has to be lived in a circle. Study of Physics helped him in query on mystery - that between life and death, between straight line and a circle, between understandable and ununderstandable, between inner and outer world, between self and other. Mahapatra wrote in a manner he experienced living:

At times poetry pushes its way unceremoniously
to the entrance of life, life's lies at its heels. (*Bare Face* 39)

His life-long Orissa-centric meditation has made his poetry rest on a seemingly religious view of life. The modern Indian English poets are almost always encased in a private world of their own. But Mahapatra's inner self is in constant communion, rather infused with the tradition, myth and history of his land which makes the creative artist go about a ritual - that of blending the present with the past:

No true poet can escape tradition, for all our yesterdays are involved in the poet's deeper consciousness; and no true poet can escape the pressure of the present, for he is in it and of it, and the best he can do is to relate the immediate present to the living past[...](Iyengar 641-42)

Mahapatra's distinctiveness lies in the use of a typically Indian English poetic style. In the use of words and their association, the poet constantly collides with the phantom of words. He is aware of a door in the dark but not aware of what waits him in the dark. This is where Mahapatra's poetry excels:

*Around it the walls keep sweating distances.*

*Their door always sings its song.*

*Behind it I love to keep things:* (*Random Descent* 30)
To confront the physical horror, he takes refuge in the surreal – the unanticipated images and symbols – the mystery of which fuses with the mystery of the age-old stones, giving shape to the ‘unageing intellect’ of the creator and his creation. Mahapatra’s poetry stands out as a suitable alternative in modern Indian English poetry, a mediator between past and present, the exterior and interior reality:

[...] we have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, or finally becoming one [...] interior reality and exterior reality being, in the present form of society, in contradiction, [...] we have assigned to ourselves the task of confronting these two realities with one another on every possible occasion, of refusing to allow the pre-eminence of the one over the other, yet not of acting on the one and on the other both at once, for that would be to suppose that they are less apart from one another than they are [...] for the trend of these two adjoining realities to become one and the same thing. (Breton in ‘Surrealist Manifesto’)

Mahapatra’s poetry has gained permanence in the passage of time as the seat of human wisdom like the sun-temple of his native land, the abode of the Sun-God. For it is here that the inner self merges with the outer reality, the familial history fuses with racial memory and the past creeps out of the present. A critical evaluation of Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry leaves us sure of its immortal acceptability and contented reading for the generations to come:

[...] his poetry can withstand and reward the most intense, close scrutiny with both intellectually and formally demanding criteria for poetry of the highest order. (‘Chandrabhaga’ 9)
Breton, Andre. ‘Surrealist Manifesto’. A lecture delivered in Brussels on June 1, 1934 at a public meeting arranged by the Belgian Surrealists, and subsequently published as a pamphlet. Online. Internet

