ABSTRACT

One of the defining features of the postcolonial Indian English literature is the discourse it creates around identity. This thesis seeks to explore the process and pattern of Oriya identity formation in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra, Bibhu Padhi and Niranjan Mohanty, the three representative practitioners of Indian English verse from Orissa. Attempts have been made to identify the strategies, verbal and thematic, through which an ethnic flavour is imparted to their verse. At the same time the study seeks to determine the ways in which the three poets negotiate the question of hybridity even as they make an alien syntax the bearer of the thematic burden of an Oriya sensibility. The study also tries to be exhaustive in its documentation and rigorous in its analysis of identity motifs in their poetry using theoretical perspectives from contemporary and recent critical literature.

The thesis is conceptualised and presented in five chapters. The First is the introductory chapter which includes post-colonialism, Indian English poetry and identity discourse with special attention to the political, economic and cultural factors which contributed to the arousal of the need for formation of Oriya identity and rise of Oriya nationalism in a historical perspective in a provincial space of colonial India. This sense of identity has been further strengthened and authenticated through literature and culture, art and craft, myths and legends, rituals and religious practices which signify a distinct Oriya sensibility for ages. Indian English poets from Orissa, especially the three poets under discussion, have also crafted an Oriya consciousness through their creative works blending English language with indigenous culture.

The Second chapter is on Jayanta Mahapatra who remains the indisputable pioneer in crafting an Oriya consciousness through eighteen volumes of his poetry in English apart from his Oriya poems. Mahapatra was confronted with an identity crisis triggered by his conversion into Christianity against his wishes and by his choice of English as language of his poetry.
Mahapatra turns to his pre-Christian Hindu past and relates himself to the glorious Orissan history and culture, landscape, myths, legends, rites and rituals and contemporary realities to discover his identity.

The Third chapter is devoted to Niranjan Mohanty who produced eight volumes of moving poetry before his sad demise in 2008. Mohanty, like Mahapatra, has an increasing awareness of the landscape, history, culture, tradition, religious beliefs, Smyths, legends, and contemporary realities of his native land of Orissa which impart his poetry an unmistakable identity as “an Oriya, an Indian”. Wherever he goes, he carries “the seeds of a home” (Rains-7).

The Fourth chapter shifts the attention to Bibhu Padhi whose poetry reveals an identity which is lovable and familiar. Most of his poems center round his family and friends, ancestral memories, the inheritance of blood and his native, old, historical town of Cuttack. Orissan life and culture form the fountainhead of Padhi’s poetry. Padhi’s poetry in general broods over the significance of the place and the community he belongs to, which is an aspect of post-colonial literature in relation to the question of identity.

The last i.e. Fifth chapter concludes the thesis by giving a rounding off of the preceding chapters. All the three poets have revealed their common Oriya identity through their allegiance to their ancestral and mythic past, native Indian, more especially, Orissan culture and Jagannath Cult. All of them have also expressed their concern over the contemporary problems that ail and affect their native state and the nation.