CHAPTER – I

1.1 Introduction

Jayanta Mahapatra (1928) is all about being himself. He is an authentic voice among many pretentious voices of his time. He is one of the English Indian poets who have been honored abroad then at home. He has a beautiful attitude; like a smile of child, a welcome for all and having no shutter for his heart. He has another scale of things; he is the philosopher who prefers to pen poetries rather than to talk. As he writes,

Everywhere, the people talk of their desire for the peace
more than anything else in the world

Somewhere, the urge to talk about oneself
consumes the entire lifetime.

There is (somewhere) a great poem I have to write.

(“The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of a Republic:1975”, FH)

He is a patient listener and critical observer bestowed with a willing ear in choosing the subject for his poetry. Earlier he was a man of Physical Science but now his Physical world copulate with Metaphysical imagery in his poetry. Jayanta Mahapatra successfully portrays all the experiences and pathos. All the unvoiced voices find echoes in his poetry. Myth, Mysticism, History and varied imagery attain utmost importance in his realm of poetry. Jayanta Mahapatra manifests a sensibility moulded by reckless innocence. His imagery flies keeping its feet deep
rooted in the soil. His poems are his communion and a close observation of the region in and out. His poems oscillate between tensions of language and expression. His quiet unassuming voice talks shamelessly about the ground realities. His eyes shift seamlessly across the contexts. He weaves his experiences on the warp and weft of deep Indian consciousness. His homeland becomes the hub of his literary works; his experienced eyes don’t let any cultural corner unvisited. Hunger, Pain, Scars, Communalism, Terrorism, Dirty Politics and Screams of women paints his imagery. The best thing about his reading is that you never know what will turn up in next phase. His consciousness tethered to the belief that every happening has its consequence; in what happened before. His homeland Orissa has been a paradox, contradict of pleasant and painful experiences for him. He holds a heart that can feel the hunger in stomach and the hunger between the two legs. He has the eyes that can see the concern of ageing prostitute and also the concern of a father of teenage girl. His poetry expresses his love and concern for the people of his homeland but he also feels the woe of the victims of Union Carbide in Bhopal and the forced martyrs of Khalistan in Punjab. As he has himself given a clue to his poetry when he said,

“My poems deal with the life within myself where the mind tries to find a sort of coherence from the mass of things in the world outside it.”

Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry is the kind of cross section of the exotic culture and represents socio-culture deterioration of the present generation. He always tries to go deep into the problem. He is concerned about the present state of India. His poetry has a wide range and his thematic circle includes both past and present in its diameter. His poetry is at once encompasses history and also gives a vision to future. This makes him a polar star in the galaxy of Indian English poets. Indian English poets are broadly divided into two categories: one those who identify themselves with the landscape of the place and the contemporary India, and other those who acclimatize the indigenous tradition to English language and Jayanta Mahapatra belongs to both the category. What makes him familiar, absorbed in Indianness and Orissan identity yet exotic and more versatile? The answer to this
question can be found from the study of his poetry keeping their themes and varied imagery in mind and also keeping the historical forces behind it in sight. This chapter is an attempt to show the very making of the persona of Jayanta Mahapatra as his works can not be studied in vacuum. We have to take his surroundings, history, his own very Orissa in to consideration.

The present chapter is an effort to map Jayanta Mahapatra first as a human being, as a child and youth who witnessed a great period of transformation from world war to post independence communal violence. As a observer who felt the pain of untimely deaths due to cyclone in Orissa, thousands of deaths in Bhopal due to poisonous gas, assassination of Gandhi and terrorism in Punjab and Kashmir. It will be incomplete and insufficient without taking in to consideration his journey as a poet and as a human being.

1.2 Title of the Study

A Study of Imagery, Historical Elements and Sociological Perspectives in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Objective gave the perfect definition to the research and researcher. By keeping in mind the objectives of the study, the whole process of research is analyzed. To do any work it is first necessary to decide its objective.

1. To critically evaluate varied imagery in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra.
2. To explore the role of Historical Elements over the themes of the different poems of Jayanta Mahapatra.
3. To Study Historical elements in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra
4. To explore the Sociological Perspective as the driving force behind the Poetic works of Jayanta Mahapatra.
1.4 Importance of the Study

Any research takes place and shapes due to certain requirement of the researcher. It is said that ‘Necessity is the mother of Invention.’ The present work is an attempt to study the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra, with special references to Imagery, his Sociological Perspective and effect of Historical forces that shaped him and his poetry. Jayanta Mahapatra has remained one of the most discussed amongst the Indian English poet, for distinct literary features in his works. He is the one who has completed the circle from inward to an outward, from a regionalism to nationalism and from social consciousness to world consciousness. In the present study researcher will try to sum up all the qualities of the poet Jayanta Mahapatra by taking in view his all poetic works up to the latest . The study aims at finding the above mentioned Research Questions. This exploration will lead the readers and upcoming scholars to understand the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra in a new and may be a better perspective. It will present the unseen side of the poetry, the sensibility, a more humanitarian approach to literature and poetry. The present study will also explore the role of Jayanta Mahapatra in the development of Post-Independence Indian English Poetry. Present study will also explore how Jayanta Mahapatra has maintained an ethnic culture in his poetry. As a number of studies were conducted on the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra in the past and recent times, here the researcher will explore the unexplored side of his poetry.

1.5 Making of the Poet

One of the most renowned and read Indian English poet of our time Jayanta Mahapatra is considered one of the pioneers who set a unique trend in
Indian English poetry. His Poems written in English carry hallmarks of Indianness. His poems are mostly woven around the local myths, traditions, landscape and memories in the chasm of time. Here while discussing the making of the poet researcher tries to place the poet and his work against the literary traditions of past that he has inherited as well as the present which he himself crafted according to his own will giving shape to his own psyche transforming a trail in to a highway for the future to come. Frankly it is also a kind of compulsion while exploring the tertiary of the poet like him. For example his lines like

Did you hear the young tamarind leaves rustle
in the cold mean nights of your belly? Did you see
your own death? Watch it tear at your cries,
break them into fits of unnatural laughter?

(“Grandfather”, LS)

These lines can not be comprehended in the vacuum, you have to have the knowledge to relate it with his grandfather’s life and great famine in the year 1986, and for other to Khalistan. So it will be a blunder to judge any text as isolated work. Jayanta Mahapatra as a poet has made a remarkable mark on the Indian English poetry of the last three decades. Mahapatra began his career after getting completely ripe or as some say a bit over ripe but this gave him determination and edge to make a mark with a bang. It is hard to be angel at home, this short saying suits Jayanta Mahapatra. He is one of the poets who was appreciated and recognized abroad then at his home. His works widely appeared outside India in South and West. Many celebrated and well known reviews like Kenyon Review, Hudson Review, Sewanee Review, New Letters, New York Quarterly and Times Literary Supplement published his work frequently. He also got featured in Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets (1976) an anthology edited by another well known poet R. Parthasarathy and also in A Writer’s Workshop Anthology (1971) edited by Shivkumar. He began late and may be this is one of the reasons that he published volumes after volumes in quick succession. His poems are his soliloquies, his own perception regarding the self and surroundings.
He has chosen themes from both the inner and outer world, and many themes are found to be repeating themselves with new tones and point of view in his work. “His poetry unravels the problems of his inner self as he tries to communicate the correlation of the self with the physical reality.”

Jayanta Mahapatra was a professor of physics who jumped off in this realm as neophyte after taking the great and old resolution as he wanted to do so from a long period of time. Perhaps it is very Indian that we don’t risk our secured place. But he did take the risk whole heatedly. English as a language always attracted him as much as Mathematics and Science and he also used to read books. But it was all to fight back his loneliness within his own secured corner at school and at house. He did not read any poems except those which were included in his course during studies. Still there are few poets like Robert Bly and other poets of American Tradition of late 60’s and 70’s specially the way he uses the landscapes at many times to talk like his very mouthpiece expressing his subjective feelings. The Romantic poets also had a tradition to be one with objects and surroundings and use nature as stimuli to evoke emotions. This is the reason that many of his readers find few shades of Romanticism in his poems. His acquaintance with works of William Carlos William and Ezra Pound taught him to frame up a doctrine. A doctrine that poem is ultimately is an inner voice so its logic must be in relation with the inner world. And outer imagery and narrative are the tools to bridge both the world. He follows method of Romantic poets to project external objects to draw attention in the inner world. Though many critics find it obscure and many thinks this makes him hard to understand. As he writes

I heard him say; my daughter, she’s just turned fifteen…

Feel her. I’ll be back soon; your bus leaves at nine.

The sky fell on me, and a father’s exhausted wile.

Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.

She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,

The other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.

(“Hunger”, RR)
Mahapatra unlike Wordsworth does not have a spectacled view of things in nature rather he holds a critical view of the nature. For him wind is not an innocent force that plays rustling leaves and creating golden currents in the wheat filed. In his poem called, ‘Story at the Start of 1978’ he records how life and amenities have been blown away in great cyclone that hit Orissa and Andhra coast in 1978 leaving behind a sad story of destruction.Love as a theme enters into some different catenations at the side of his poetry. He mixes it with different tone and texture but largely remains unsatisfied and unfulfilled. May be the hand of Adrian inside the folds of skirt of Irene still haunts him? Why not? She was one of the few lovely things in her life but all too short lived: a desire which strangled to death soon after flowering. That is the reason he talks of love and sex together and freely. Most of his love poems like ‘Another evening’, ‘Women in Love’, ‘The Whorehouse in Calcutta Street’, ‘Armour’, ‘Love Fragment’, ‘Of that Love’, ‘Lost’ and few others carry nostalgic treatment. As Mahapatra puts it:

Of that love, of that mile
walked together in the rain,
only a weariness remains…
…years have passed
Since I sat with you, watching
The sky grow lonelier with cloudlessness
Waiting for your body to make it lived in.

(“Lost”, RR)

Many critics like Bijay Kumar Das hold that he talks about love and sex freely in an effort to get over disappointment and failure in love life. He always introduces physical hunger or need of physical consummation in love through his subtle imagery. One of the trends that were brought by western Civilization in the nineteenth century was to see the history with a new and wide panorama. New horizons of the knowledge widen the outlook the way one sees the history. It was the transitional period, a period of dilemma between the roots and new tradition. There was not any facet of the life which remained untouched by the western
influence. The new voices that emerged after independence were influenced by twentieth century poets like Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Pound and Auden. Literature liberated itself from the nationalistic, patriotic and political idioms and emphasis shifted its centre to personal desires and discontent from mythological characters of religions.

This may be called a period of new speciation for Indian English poetry as it found a way between ancient roots and blind imitation of borrowed culture. Past and present copulated to reproduce a progeny having the heredity of past and variation of modernism. The poets were no longer a citizen of Imaginative galaxy but became a layman facing and witnessing the ground realities and reflecting a consciousness of community life. Modern poetry which was indebted only to European tradition due to its mono vision gradually grew and became multi dimensional in terms of receiving World literary traditions like American and French Poetry traditions. At the same time it also increased its depth and enrooted firmly giving due spot to its old and regional literary traditions. Post Independence Indian poetry began redesigning itself by kind of a liberalization and Globalization policy, it kept it ears open for all and became critical in choosing the themes and techniques. Mahapatra busied himself in reading regional poetries North Eastern poets like Anjum Hasan, Robin Nagangom and Desmon and poems of Pablo Neruda. Jayanta Mahapatra was deeply influenced by surrealists. Indian English poetry gained the very apparent contemporary outlook and shifted focus from religion, and musings to the harsh realities. Poets became autobiographical and they have their own story to relate with others. Jayanta Mahapatra speaks on the change that was apparent: “However it was in the eighties or the early nineties that a change was seen in much of the English poetry written in India. The discerning reader no longer wanted to read merely a well-crafted poem of an Indian poet in English, a poem which could have come as well from a pen of poet living in Britain or Australia. Neither was the poet interested only in the dry wit and irony most English poems exhibited. The prevailing poetry scene was witnessing a subtle change.
Poets, younger poets, from various parts of the country were coming out with their poems; suddenly English poems were being written differently in Kerala, in the Northeast, and in my own state of Orissa.”

Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry grown out of his roots from the earth the poet inhabited manifests his belonging to the land. The one who tries to study them in isolation is puzzled by his so called apparent obscurity. On this Mahapatra made his point clear while talking to The Hindu, for him his poems can’t be separated from the social relation and language. For him imagination can not be said a god gift alone, as it grows out of logical and historical relationship. He is not one of the poets who prefer to live abroad exiled by their own choosing. Mahapatra has realized the reason for the failure of the earlier Indian English poetry. He openly declares what he proposes to do: “Frankly, I should like to write such poetry, a poetry which comes out of ashes of our culture.” As he writes,

The dead man who lick my palms
is more likely to encourage my dark intolerance
rather than turn me
towards some strangely solemn charade

(“Ash”, FS)

Indian English literature to the larger extent has remained even today to reach only to elite class of the society as it happened already to ancient Sanskrit Literature. But unlike Sanskrit links up the whole country now so it has got future potential in itself. The poets, who employ English as their medium of expression, came from different culture backgrounds and communities so it is very apparent that their works carry the postage of regional textures. A sense of being rooted in the particular soil, the aroma of the local cultures and the way gives poet a sense of ease while describing it to others. W.B Yeats hade put it in his own way in the following lines,

Many times man lives and dies
Between his two eternities
that of race and that of soul,
And ancient Ireland knew it all.

(W.B Yeats: Under Ben Bulden)

Indian poetry took itself out of the shadows of the trees which sheltered it in the brooding stage and slowly it got more and more matured by adding regional and linguistic identity of the land. Indian Poetry presented a fusion of past and future, it kept its ear open for the new lure and at the same time it secured a special place in the heart for the locality in the form of regional culture and communities. And Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the champions of such fusions. For him there can not be a song of India, as India which lies in Orissa is different from the India of Punjab and the India of Kashmir and Gujarat. So whenever poets insist to be universal or general for all actually the one is risking his very identity. Any literary work and writer can not free himself from the burden of his own past. Jayanta Mahapatra’s identification with Orissa can be easily seen as his all works carry a holographic Orissa as a genuine mark. He says

A man does not mean anything.
But the place.

Sitting on the river bank throwing pebbles
into the muddy current,
a man becomes the place.⁴

(“Somewhere my Man”, RR)

Jayanta Mahapatra often plunge into history and take out something form it cavity. He regenerates the past into his narratives. The local history of Orissa is evident in many of his poems. Orissa was previously known as Udra Desh and later as Utkal and Kalinga. It is even mentioned in Mahabharata’s Sabhaparav, Bhsimaparava and in Banaparva. Mahapatra’s belongingness to the land took him to way back in 260 BC to pen few lines for his ancestors who became martyrs at the hands of the armies of Ashoka. Though Ashoka had given up the violence and accepted Buddhism but it didn’t alter the pain of those slain in the war.

the measure of Ashoka’s suffering
does not appear enough. The place of his pain peers lamentably
from among the pains of dead.

(“Dhaulagiri”, WT)

Jayanta a meek and shy child, burdened with responsibility, belonging to staunch Christian mother and living in area dominated by Hindi rituals and cultures lost his childhood in growing alienation and wait for the betterment. As he writes in the opening lines of his autobiography, “There is invariably a lot of pain in childhood. I remember mine and all of it seems so long ago; yet the pain, or whatever I choose to call it today, paces quietly behind the breastbone.” Mahapatra became a silent observer, there are many chinks in the fence around him and he could see the dead butterflies carried by ants. His loneliness at school brought him to books. He tried to find some loveliness in one of his classmates Irene till one fine day he saw one boy having his hand inside her skirt. He was at open defiance with mother, there was a chasm between them and none of them ever tried to bridge it through talks. He slipped into some cozy corners and covered himself with self-pity as escape from the unfavorable surroundings. “Sitting hours long on the roof of our house, my hands clasped around my knees, watching the pale moon come in with a handful of light that failed to reach the deep corners of my existence.” Those pains which were so invariable hold a strong place in his poems as many of his poems are the remembrance of those days. Darkness of the life made him absorb all the trees, moon, lonely women, moon, river and even the whole atmosphere. And later he allowed them to be dominant characters in his poetry. These are few images which seem to be quiet frequent in his poems. He uses these images to make his silence assert in loud whispers. He never tried to glorify anything on the contrary presented naked body of dark, withered and skinny realities of the time.

We, opening in time our vague doors,

Convinced that our minds lead to something never allowed before,

sit down hurt under the trees, feeding it simply because

it is there, as the wind does, blowing against the tree

(“The Moon Moments”, FS)
His Grandfather’s moss eaten diary took him to the year 1866, when the worst famine struck Orissa. His teenager grandfather took shelter in relief camp run by Britishers. There was no food men starved to death. Hunger made them devour on tender tamarind leaves, few used unknown roots and tuber to quench the fire burning inside but in turn only got typhoid and cholera infections. His grandfather survived in mercy camp but they bargained his religion. Religion has always remained a dilemma and taboo in the life of Mahapatra. He always found himself in middle of hostile flow of religions way away from banks both the side. He brought up in Hindu surrounding; he completed his masters in Patna watching the Ganga. Hindu festivities, celebrations, temples and rituals found a special place in his poetry. He has a fascination for the Hindu way of things but he kept a safe distance from it. As he writes, “I was at the centre of it all; trying to communicate with both, and probably becoming myself incommunicable as a result through years.” The arrays of Hindu religious festivals find a respective place in him. Idols of God, Temple’s bells and Priest always fascinated his imagery. Going through his poems one can easily find that no Christian symbols finds place in his work. As he says, he has been always conscious of his grandfather’s cry tearing the air. Jayanta Mahapatra still finds himself unwelcomed despite his preoccupation with Hinduism. He has never been accepted in to system. Now he also prefers to be a neutral outsider watching the blind faith, customs, and rituals in wish to share with them their tradition.

Undoubtedly he has maneuvered himself with themes, myths, tradition of Orissa but that does not make him holding the narrow view of the things related to particular regional. He has witnessed the great period of transformation both Socio-Religious and Literary catenation. He witnessed British rule and also the struggle for liberation; he has seen the rise of Gandhi and also his assassination. Gandhi in his poetry turns into n image of hero gloriously fighting alone. Gandhi’s death led to emotional outburst from the sensible heart all over the globe and Mahapatra had his share in the emotional comment, “We have burst open his blood.” Gandhi becomes an icon old man as one of the recurring images in his
poems. At the same time the communal clash in the country, terrorism in Kashmir and Punjab also made him pen few poems. The oral tradition that Mahapatra carries with him originally belonged to Oriya poetry, as that of Bengal and can be easily traced back to Charya songs. Charya songs were the religious verses of Sahajasidhas, a sect of Mahayana Buddhism. “We might find in Mahapatra’s English poems a little of the folk qualities of Sarla Das. He might have adopted from Oriya literature the interest in the landscape of Orissa, its culture, tradition and the unique Jagannath cult. But despite his regional predisposition there is much that speaks of English influence in him.” His love for English germinated due to personal reasons. English played the role of his survival and also his conditioning for the future.

Jayanta Mahapatra was aware of the modern and experimental poetry that came to literary scene through pens of Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Mehrotra, Kolatkar, Nandy and others. Some of these poems he had translated but these poems did not have any direct influence on him rather I gave him a kind of parallel evolution. He witnessed some of the movements like Impressionism, Post-impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Symbolism, Imagism, Vorticism and Dadaism. As discussed earlier all these failed to influence Mahapatra directly rather played a role in his evolution and growth. Mahapatra did not remain uninfluenced by change that taking place in India in the form of urbanization. He depicts hissing of the kitchen, the screech of the play house, the swindlers, sluts, robbers and hordes. As in the following lines he describes the change, it may be called urbanization.

Neighbours: the newly-rich silver smith, the vegetable seller
a pasty faced school teacher. And Kamla, the three-rupee whore
from my mother’s remote village with an old, hard tradition

(“The Twentyfifth Anniversary of a Republic:1975”, FH)
Surrealism arrived as a new change between two decades separating the world wars. This term was introduced by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) who believed in super realism or as it was explained by Andre Breton’s first manifesto
of Surrealism as the mind liberated form the chain of logic and reason. Mahapatra was specially influenced by Surrealism and it is evident from his essay published in *The Literary Criterion*. In the essay he narrates about poet’s mental landscape and a world made out of his own desires and longings. He describes it as constantly changing alignment between dream and reality. This matches with Breton’s speech given at the manifesto of surrealism. He had said that a poem takes us abroad on a sort of journey or on a walking tour through symbols and allusion and takes us beyond the human condition. During 1950’s America witnessed the rise of Confessional poetry, poetry with its emphasis on guilt, sex, ambition, childhood memories and amorous experiences. We can found such mode of poetry in Ezekeil’s works. Kamala Das also wrote self-revelatory confessional poems. It can be said another mode of surrealist poetry. Probably it is influenced by ‘open-field’ poetry tradition of Robert Bly and James Wright. Although this kind of poetry it mild in tone and it has less of self revelation than conventional confessional mode of poems. Mahapatra also wrote long poems revealing his inner world and guilt but he used this as accessories with his usual myths, lands and religious symbols. Thus Mahapatra do not commit himself to any corner or ism. He maintains a stern authenticity that put him apart from his contemporaries. However he lives in contemporary world and talks about its problems. He shares the contemporary concern for the predicament of modern man. His poems reveal his ultimate quest for meaning in individual stipulation. He keeps on moving crafting one image after another, displaying history in a new show case with his sociological concern for the land.

Researcher has tried to present glimpse of the journey of Jayanta Mahapatra as a poet. Here researcher has tried to record all the important points which gave the very shape to the poetic persona. But as discussed above Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the few who reveal themselves with child like innocence. His poems are rooted in his past and in his life journey so it becomes inevitable to have a peep inside his biography. Researcher is fortunate to have his biography available through poet’s personal home page on the net.
1.6 A Peep inside Autobiography

For him the pain that he has seen in the childhood lies far behind in the stream of time yet he can see it whenever he becomes prisoner of his own consciousness staring the walls around facing him forever. He thinks of a child within who writhes and cries in a schoolroom more than half a century back. He was youngest and frailest in the class of around thirty. He belonged to poor strata of the society. He was an object of a peculiar ridicule. Many a time he questions himself, why this happened? Did this happen to him because he excelled in studies or because he was meek and shy? He studied at the school called Stewart European run by a British Missionary organization in Cuttack. He used to feel a wrong sense of inferiority especially before his classmates who came from rich, business-class families in the town. As he writes, “They came in their horse-drawn carriages, a few in motor cars; the boundaries of my solitary being shrunk further as I stood and watched the feathers of their power.”

His school days played a great role in his conditioning. English language always attracted him as much as Mathematics and Science. Weekends held a special place in his school life as weekly results were declared on every Friday. And many a time he was honored by principal, as he used to grab him bodily and made him stand on his desk in front of the whole school. Those were the moments when he felt firmness in his throat. He himself writes, “How old I was, I ask myself? Nine, perhaps. But was it at this point in my life that my love and respect for all things English began to grow? Or was it a part of my conditioning? My program for survival?”

Jayanta used to spend his long lunch breaks at school with some books. Other boys were all tall, strongly built and brutal. He preferred books in the library. One day he was caught by few boys bigger than him. They brutally drag him to teacher’s desk and naked him to see how young he was. This incident always remains at the back of his mind whenever he talks about sexual brutality. He himself describes his agony and pain in his own words. “The agony of that noon has never ceased or left me. Why, why were they so cruel? I
have asked myself this question again and again. Naked, my eyes shut to hide my shame; those boys must have seen then that I was really the young boy I confessed I was...and not the dwarfish creature they had made me out to be. My balance seemed lost. I had been stripped down to the wound of sex.”

He house in the Cuttack was located at the end of the clustered houses made up of mostly with clay walls and straw roofs belonging to poorer people who had to dug well and drink water. His father used to work at a steel factory and he was also a sub inspector at a primary school, his earnings were comparatively meager. Jayanta was the eldest son and father’s work kept him away from the home so he had to bear the responsibility. There was no one to talk, younger brother was merely four. There were tall deodars that used to tease his alienation and developed a kind of fear in him. May be this alienation sowed the first seed of observing the surroundings and landscape in him. At many times he had to sit inside the room in darkness staring the evening from inside. Silence had become a recognizable part of his life. It was a kind of education for him.

“It was a way of education, and it is hard to say anything further than that. Often, sitting in my room in the evenings, through the dust stirring to rise in the air, as though I were the only one on this planet who knew of this intrigue in the humdrum of ways.”

He had no big dreams, he simply wanted a bond of love but it was a different time. The world was busy in hating; it was the world war-II. The imposed blackouts, a temporary air base that had been built beyond the river, news papers carried daily accounts of war, and the campaigns which excited him. It was the Orissa then: the poverty of huts and hovels sunk into the red earth of squalid side lanes. Wild growth of vegetation, miseries and diseases surrounded the Orissa. One could find beggars everywhere, the crippled and the blind; miserable wretches with fearful whines and many young boys and girls with eyes gouged out by the scourge of the pox. Jayanta Mahapatra felt really helpless at that time for their seemed to be no remedy for these people; they had to suffer their torn, maimed lives in apathetic silence. He thought about the sickly smell of rotting guavas and it appeared to him there was not much
difference between rotting fruit and the people; the smell of decay and life and
death had become one. After so many years he recalls his house built by his
father, his mother still lives there. He clearly remember the unchanged doors of
the house, it was still there. He remembers the time, he was six, and time was dark
and sightless. He recalls the day when her pretty young cousin who lived some
distance away came running in their house to take shelter. She was completely
terrified and beaten severely by her drunkard husband. Jayanta Mahapatra recalls
his inability and anger to change the ways of the world as he writes, “And how I
used to creep up in the dark to open the door, the slow, cold and anger rising
in me, as I suffered from weakness at my own inability to change the ways of
the world.”

War reached at the door step of India. Japanese troupes had
advanced into Burma. Frequent blackouts had been imposed necessary
commodities became priceless like life. The dreary look was noticeable
everywhere, shortage of flour and sugar compelled them to subsist on rice and
molasses in the main. And to add to the troubles one of his uncles who had joined
Indian army was declared lost on the Burma front. But for fourteen year old
Jayanta, state of world is lesser important than his personal needs or may be he
had seen too much of gloom to remain any sensible. He buried himself into the
world of books. May be this is the moment when his love for poetry germinated in
him. He slowly got himself absorbed in that imaginative world; it sustained him
and dispelled his fear.

1.6.1 Love in the life of Jayanta

Jayanta Mahapatra recollects an incident of his life occurred in December
1941. His final examination had commenced. School had given Christmas
vacation for the remaining classes so entire campus wore a deserted look. There
were only few students sitting for the overseas school certificate examination. He
remembers the girl called Irene, may e his first love or may be his first fascination
or may be his first devotion towards the loveliness of life. The girl was called
Irene. She was tall, a slight build and had been his classmate for a number of
years. Her eyes were gentle and her mouth held a delicious stillness, could
suddenly, be wide open with pearly laughter. He describes her walk as the most graceful, he had ever seen or imagined. She was nearly two years older than him but with a pang he was vividly aware of her presence in his mind and of that loveliness which he is unable to share. But this small phase of untold trust in to loveliness shattered into ashes when one day he found her in a lonely corner. There was Irene, her elfish face close and pressed against Adrian’s, that boy’s hand was inside her skirt. It was difficult for him, he sat though his remaining papers in a daze. An inconceivable silence pressed him in a corner against the wall. And he asked himself, Could I trust loveliness anymore? He writes about this “I realize painfully how silly I was, moping over something which did not concern me. Perhaps this insignificant event was like a tiny chink in the fence round my life; it gave me a glimpse of what was there on the other side; a garbage bin, an inbuilt house, a half dead butterfly surrounded by ants.”

Years later, Jayanta Mahapatra again found himself at the door of love. He fell in love with a woman who was doing a course in English Literature in the college which he had joined as a lecturer in physics. He was twenty one and completed his masters in physics from Patna College. There was a kind of sense of achievement, he watched that girl with her thick plait swinging her way down the college corridors and experienced the emptiness engulfing him once again. But all that happened much later. Within a year he had pursued the girl and married her in the face of stiff opposition from his parents and relatives.

1.6.2 Relation with Mother

Jayanta Mahapatra holds a strange relationship with his mother. His father’s work constantly kept him away from the home and being eldest son, he bore some responsibilities. He never felt the kind of affinity what he felt for his father for his mother. He spent most of the time at home but they hardly talk, he remained absorbed with his alienation, surroundings and society, waiting eagerly for his father’s visits. His mother was erratic in her ways and as he grew up, his conflicts with her increased. She was shrewd, ingenuous, believing in anything
she heard. She believed even a total stranger but not him. Mother’s rantings went on and according to her, something had not gone her way, and he never put in any effort to explain his behavior. She filed all her thoughts, all acts into two closed drawers of her life called right and wrong, and he was flushed with a constant tension. He kept himself to himself only. Mother did not appear to have any trust in him. It was difficult to agree with her. At times he questions himself: Was my only fault in not making myself clear about my own actions? As he writes “The door was in front of me, I was the key. But I did not try to unlock it.”

In spite of all the differences Jayanta Mahaputra could feel the pain and agony of woman inside her mother. The picture of his mother, swathed in sari, holding n to the oil lamp in the shadows, the sooty flame swaying in the breeze, seemed to establish itself firmly in his mind. He could see an inexplicable loneliness linked with the sad-eyed oil lamp of mother. He also felt the same numbing and pity for his cousin who was battered by frequent beatings from her drunken husband. He himself agrees here that this is a kind of training to understand the symbols without going inside very deep. He used these images of his life in his many poems later.

1.6.3 Relation with Father

Jayanta Mahaputra was much closer to his father compared to his mother. His father worked at steel factory at Tata city and also as part time sub-inspector in primary school. His income was not enough and work kept him away from home most of the time. Father’s absence made him bore extra responsibilities at home with mother with whom he could not feel at ease. He waited eagerly for his father’s visits. His visits gave him chance to relax and forgetting the responsibilities piled upon him. His father used to bring few secret of things. There were stories to listen in the uneven darkness, few little anecdotes of his life. He wanted to hear them again and again. But above it all his father instilled in him a new courage and wash off all the darkness and silence within him. After marriage at a point of time he had to left his parental house due to growing
indifference between mother and couple (He and his wife), though he took the great resolution for the sake of his wife Runu. He saw his father dying inch by inch for five years. There were no long talks, no stories but they could understand each other’s silence well. As he writes

“It took three long years for the end to come, and I saw the dignity erode, the year burn out, day by day. Something died before the greenness went. We watched each other in silence the days I sat beside him. We didn’t talk anymore. Voices both of the wind and of my father have made the words of many of my poems.”

1.6.4 Wife: Runu

He met Runu when he was twenty one. She was almost of the same age, perhaps a few months older. Jayanta was firm this time but his parents oppose. His mother had decided on a younger girl. But he was adamant and after agony of few months his parents gave in and he got married in Baptist church, Cuttack on 16 January 1951. But this was the beginning of their trouble. As it happens after marriage Runu suffered her first year. And to add to the pain his mother’s callousness and indifferent attitude towards her took a heavy toll on Runu. She was hospitalized and was seriously ill. And three months later after his wife’s miscarriage and illness, he at last made the move, he had tried unsuccessfully to make since he was a boy. Runu and he left home to live by themselves. He was twenty three years old. Here we can note that Jayanta bore all the trouble but when I came to his wife, he fought and it shows his sense of responsibility and dedication towards the relation. And as a writer and poet Runu has remained the first reader and critic for many of his works. He had read out to Runu bits of the novel he was working on that time. The theme was built over much of on his own life; Runu listened patiently for a while and waited until she gave the verdict, “It reeks of Hemingway.” Mohan, their only son born on the last day of 1955, healed Runu’s old wound. Her pain got lost in the happiness of motherhood.
Jayanta Mahapatra admits clearly that he was able to work because Runu didn’t demand anything. She was the silent companion, when he worked on books she might have kept awake in the next room. Jayanta knows this; he dedicated his books to Runu.

1.6.5 Grandpa’s Diary

One evening during his brief visit to home: his father brought out an old, tattered note book from some where. He watched him as he opened the book and pointed to already yellow first page. As he himself describes the moment in his own words, “The Oriya alphabet on the page was difficult to read; the letters were in a script mostly used by rural, unlettered folk. Father pointed at the writing again and said simply, “Your grandfather’s.” Soon what father wanted to convey to us became clear.”

That ancient little diary is a kind of raw record of his grandpa’s life. In the year 1866, a devastating famine had struck Orissa. English who ruled the country made efforts for food supply into the province. But it was all futile as his grandpa’s village was situated in a remote area where no road facility was available. People devoured even the soft leaves of tamarind. Many tried to quench the hunger fire by eating some unknown roots and tubers; and these in turn caused epidemics of typhoid and cholera. Thousands of died, no one bothered for dead bodies. They were released in to rivers to be devoured by equally starving jackals and vultures. His grandfather was merely seventeen and was in the state of collapse. He staggered in to mercy camp run by white Christian missionaries in Cuttack, where he had to embrace a new religion urged by Baptists. As Jayanta Mahapatra notes in “I could imagine Grandfather; the thin, callow youth he must have been walking the still unmade paths of the land, the long, hot afternoon floating down into the pit of his stomach as death made him stretch his emaciated hands out into the unknown.” And into this camp his grandfather found a girl Rupbati, who had been brought into this camp forcibly to complete the number as one of the child was found missing. A few years later, his Grandfather got married to her. They
must have been devoted couple. They were now staunch Christian. They have got six children; the youngest of them was Lemuel; Jayanta’s father, a name may be given by white missionaries. So they grew up into two worlds. The first was the home where they were subjected to rigid Christian upbringing, with rules his mother sternly imposed. The other was the vast and dominant Hindu amphitheatre outside, with the preponderance of rites and festivals which represented the way of life of own people. That torn and moth eaten diary is one of his most prized possessions. For him it is a history, memory and communication. The very scroll of despair which made him to write one of the poems, ‘Grandfather’

The yellowed diary’s notes whisper in

Vernacular,

They sound the forgotten posture,

The cramped cry that forces me to hear that

Voice

Now I stumble in your black-paged wake

(“Grandfather”, LS)

Jayanta Mahapatra ends this anecdote of his life by saying, “today my brother is a faithful Christian, a leader of the local community, I am not. I hear Grandfather’s cry, welling back, torn in the air.”

1.7 Orissa and its Landscape

The warps and wefts of his poetry are based on Orissan soil. He can not be judged, analyzed and comprehended keeping his homeland aside. Legends, Myths, History and Landscape of the land form the very epicenter of his poetic realm. The poet in the Jayanta Mahapatra becomes the very embodiment of his land, its temples, festivals, streets and its landscapes. As he himself declared after receiving Shahitya Academy Award , “To Orissa, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which lies my Beginning and my end” His poems are the celebration of the Indian pluralism. As Jayanta Mahapatra said, “There is no song of India” as no literary work can claim to represent the whole
cultural amalgamation of India as unity. He believes there are many India and Orissa is one of them. So it becomes easy to judge poets like him against their cultural and topographical backdrop. Jayanta Mahapatra holds that he should be considered as Oriya poet who writes in English:

“Orissa is my land, my roots are there and my people. But my training was in English. I am comfortable with English so I began writing in English. I didn’t write with a western audience in mind or to make a name for myself.”

For his acceptance many critics like M.K Naik pointed out his poetry as “redolent of Orissa scene”. Many of the titles of his poem confirm his love for the land. These poems are like hallmark of his Orissan origin. In various critical evaluations many rate him as a significant poet of Oriyan sensibility but it is a wrong belief. Rather he is humane in his association with Orissa, his poems deal with problems like Love, sex, Hunger, Religious Fanaticism, Problems of women, The Temples which links all human however different in cultures. As we move into the realm of his poetry we can find a successful attempt to metamorphose from Oriyanness to Indianness. He talks about future generation, he talks about Kahlistan and he also expresses his pain for the victims of Union Carbide in Bhopal or even the killings of innocent people in Kashmir.

1.8 Factor of Time and History

Beside all the above discussed factors still there lies a factor which can not be kept aside is the time and history. Jayanta Mahapatra was born in 1928 so he has passed his childhood in the shadow of British Rule in India and eventually he studied in a British run missionary school. He has heard the echoes of world war in India when Japanese troupes were approaching India. He has also seen the grief of losing his one of the uncles, who had been declared, lost in war at Burma Border. He has seen Gandhi and his movements and also seen the pre and post independence communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. He had felt the pain of partition and many a time the terror of epidemics and poverty in the homeland.
He has also witnessed burning wheat fields in Punjab. And this period especially between 1950 up till the present time is the period of radical shifts into the way we are and the way we were. Beside these anecdotes his treatment of Hindu myths and ritual, effort to portrait predicament of Indian womanhood, his close association to the ritual and heritage of the land, his response to concentric eyes of limbless lord Jagannath, his wondering in to infinite possibilities and thoughts when he watches Lingam, temple bells and rituals of priest running from the time unknown all gets recorded in his poems.

1.9 A Glance at the Literary Career of Jayanta Mahapatra

A glance at the autobiography of Jayanta Mahapatra clearly gives a clue that literary world came in to his life like a recue a kind of survival training in the darkness which approached him through every direction. Those books read in the childhood took him in to imaginative world giving some relief from the load of reality. His earlier poems and other work came out as his outburst to break the concrete silence all around him. He felt a strong urge to jot down the pain that he was feeling inside. His honesty with current situation and surrounding gave him an unassuming voice and recklessness to announce the truth. He admits in his biography it was only after his poems had been accepted in to some of the renowned reviews and journals of the time that he became confident enough to risk his identity as a teacher of physics to a poet. As he writes, “I sent “A Missing Person” along with a group of poems to Professor C.B. Cox, editor of Critical quarterly at the University of Manchester in Britain. Two months later I received a warm letter from him, in which he said that it was the first time in the fourteen years of the journal’s existence that they had accepted anything from India….this helped much to restore my confidence in myself. I was long committed. I had begun, I knew, to risk everything for poetry.”

Jayanta Mahapatra began writing his poems rather quiet late; he reached forty while he published his first poem. But he proved to be a dark horse in the race with his contemporaries. His poems were first portrayed in the most illustrated
magazines and journals world wide then in India. His early poems were born of love, of love’s selfishness what he might have felt because of Irene. These poems celebrate not only feelings but also bodily desires with melancholic atmosphere, creeping alienation, fears and sufferings. But slowly this poet who sings of love and his loneliness presented before the world a mirror showing the problems of his home land. He used his pen to draw a caricature of reality and pain. Hunger, Rain, and Temples took the place of love but still alienation shows it glimpse as it is the hallmark memory of his childhood. The richness and sophistication of language, the softness and delicacy of the words, arguing imagery, and varied landscape gives him a cut above the all. He is also considered one of the trios who laid the foundation of Indian English Poetry. He shares this honour with A.K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy. The publication of his first book of poems ‘Svayaamvaraa and Other Poems’, in 1971 was followed by the publication of Close the Sky, Ten By Ten. But it was just the beginning of his epic journey. He is known as creative poet not only in India but abroad also. He is kept with eminent Indian English poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan and R Parthasarathy. He is widely read and discussed; he follows an indigenous tradition to English language; however he creates a new Indian English idiom too. He is sometimes compared with Shiv K Kumar and Keki N. Daruwalla for creating images and learned vocabulary. He won the first ever award by the National Academy, he also got Jacob Glastein Memorial Award for his poems published in Poetry in 1975. He read many books but he did not read much poetry in his life except the poetry prescribed in his course books during studies, may be this resulted in making him quite unique amongst the others. In an interview with N. Raghavan he admitted very frankly “You see, I haven’t read much poetry in my life. As a matter of fact, I haven’t read any poetry until I started writing myself. No, not even poets like Eliot or Whitman or Tagore. I was trained to be a physicist. But I have veered away from physics in a way.” Jayanta Mahapatra is not the one who is needed to be evaluated by list of awards. And far as the list of awards is
concerned, he has got more than 25 awards at his name and the last but not the least; he is also awarded Padma Shree Award in 2009.

1.9.1 List of Achievements

Awards

- Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award – Poetry, Chicago, 1975.
- Cultural Award Visitor, Australia, 1978.
- Japan Foundation – Visitor’s Award, Japan, 1980.
- Sahitya Academy Award – National Academy of Letters, New Delhi, 1981.
- Resident Writer – Centro Culturale della Fondazione Rockefeller, Bellagio, Italy, 1986.
- New Literatures in English Conference, Justus-Liebig-University, Giessen, West Germany, 1989
- El Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, Mexico, 1994
- Mingei International Museum of World Folk Art, La Jolla, USA, 1994.
• Gangadhar National Award – For Poetry, Sambalpur University, 1994
• Ramakrishna Jaidayal – Harmony Award, 1994, New Delhi.
• Vaikom Mohammad Basheer Chair – Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, 1996-97.
• Awarded Honorary Degree – Doctor of Literature, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, 2006.
• Bishuva Award – Prajatantra Prachara Samiti, Cuttack, 2007.
• Padma Shree Award – India's Padma Shree Award, 2009.
• SAARC Literary Award, New Delhi, 2010

Poetry Readings: Outside India

• University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1976
• University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 1976
• University of the South, Sewanee, 1976
• East West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1976
• Adelaide Festival of Arts, Adelaide, 1978
• P.E.N. Centre, Sydney, 1978
• Australian National University, Canberra, 1978
• International Poets Conference, Tokyo, 1980
• Asian Poets Conference, Tokyo, 1984
• Aoyama University, Tokyo, 1984
• Sapporo University, Sapporo, 1984
• Writers Union, Moscow, Leningrad & Lvov, USSR, 1985
• Singapore Festival of Arts, Singapore, 1988
• Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1988
• University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1988
• Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, 1988
• University of the Philippines, Manila City, 1988
• Museong Kalinangang Pilipino, Manila, 1988
• Irish Writers Centre, Dublin, Ireland, 1992
• Sligo Arts Centre, The Grammar School, Sligo, 1992
• The Guild Hall, Derry, 1992
• WEA, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Hexham and Durham, 1992
• The South Bank Centre, London, 1992
• Universities of Hull and Leeds (UK), 1992
• The Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado, 1994
• Instituto de Cultura de Campeche, Mexico, 1994
• Instituto de Cultura de Puebla, Mexico, 1994
• Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, USA, 1995
• Hunter College, New York, USA, 1995
• University of the South, Sewanee, USA, 1995
• Writers Forum, De Kalb College, Atlanta, USA, 1995
• Writers Forum, St. Andrews College, Laurinburg, USA, 1995
• British Council, Kandy, 1998
• Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo, 1998

**Poetry Readings in India**

• Andhra University
• University of Jadavpur
• Calcutta University
• University of Delhi
• Osmania University
• The Poetry Centre, Hyderabad
• Visva-Bharati
• Santiniketan
• North East Hill University
• Shillong
• Tezpur University
• IIT Guwahati
• India International Centre
• New Delhi
• Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal
• University of Lucknow
• DAV College, Kanpur

Books by Jayanta Mahapatra

Poetry
• 1971: Svayamvara and Other Poems
• 1971: Close the Sky Ten by Ten
• 1976: A Father's Hours
• 1976: A Rain of Rites
• 1979: Waiting
• 1980: The False Start, Bombay: Clearing House
• 1980: Relationship
• 1983: Life Sign
• 1986: Dispossessed Nests
• 1987: Selected Poems
• 1988: Burden of Waves & Fruit
• 1989: Temple
• 2000: Bare Face
• 1997: Shadow Space
• 1995: The best of Jayanta Mahapatra
• 1992: A Whiteness of Bone
• 2005: Random Descent, Third Eye Communications
• 2013: LAND

Prose

• The Green Gardener, Short Stories
• Door of Paper: Essay and Memoirs

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter provides details and sets a background for the study. Present study deals with exploring the poetic tertiary of Jayanta Mahapatra with special stress to his obsession for imagery and symbols in his poems which many believe makes him obscure. He prefers to code and decode his consciousness and musing using suggestive symbols. Another major concern of this study includes his commitment towards society, his sociological concern for the mass which live unnoticed and unheard. And lastly persona’s treatment of History, his continuous play and display of past and present together in his poems to connect himself and his poems to the soil. Study explores effect of Historical forces on the themes of the different poem of Jayanta Mahapatra, a critical evaluation of varied imagery in his poems and gradual shift in them.
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