CHAPTER-II

2.1 Introduction

Jayanta Mahapatra drew his own starting line to begin as poet and the Physicist in him created his own metaphysical world studded with myths, imagery and symbols. He took a very late; rather one can say a delayed entry in to poetic world. But he compensated his late beginning with continuous writing and contributing to various world renowned journals and periodicals of the time. Jayanta Mahapatra belongs to famous trinity of modern Indian English poets including Nissim Ezekiel and A.K Ramanujan. These poets created their own ethnic flavors acclimatizing the English language to the Indian soil and gave a new voice to local traditions, culture and their own emotions. Jayanta Mahapatra has handled and still handling a mental duel between binary cultures i.e. Physics versus Metaphysics, Western and Indian Culture and Christian identity and Hindu search for it. These contrasts travel like condensation and rarefaction in his poetic voice. He has used these divergent lines in his poetic world that runs parallel to his surroundings, his memories and his eyes making gyroscopic observation of his land and history. He narrates his own experience of giving voice to his mental pictures which travel on the virtual chords of waves passing through heart and arousing visions.

“Life is a painful, the process of writing a poem is painful, and then poetry is going into and finding the centre of yourself, and I suppose you can’t do this if you don’t give up your own self. It sounds quite ambiguous, but you are
always aware of the silence which occupies your soul or whatever, and words
only go on to make us more aware of this silence which suspends all life,
keeps you hanging…”

The human in him keeps wondering in crowded streets bearing a cross of
identity as born Christian; searching reasons why his grandfather was made to
change his religion, why he feels alone and unwelcomed in celebration world of
his being, he finds the reasons and logic of weird customs and rituals. Mahapatra
weaves his poetry with warps and wefts derived from his multifarious visions of
myths, cultures, society, and pain inside and around him dipped in his imagery
studded with physics and religious, natural and abstract symbols and vision.

“Mahapatra’s poetry is essentially contrived of images. He starts a
poem with an image and thereafter becomes so much self-oblivious in
the world of images that he can not explain his own ability of how he
contrives the images. His poetry is a systematic experiment with the
images and imagery is the single language in his poetry.”

His religious symbols are his mouth piece to assert his negative attitude
for religion. Religious symbols at his disposal take altogether a new meaning and
twist. Priest, temples, rituals, statues etc. appear on his literary canvas every now
and then. He puts forth his poems with accessory of images. His poems walk on
the skeleton of images. Jayanta Mahapatra a Christian by way of inheritance spent
his life in Orissa amidst Hindu temples, rituals, traditions. He found himself
midway in the bi-cultural world. He can not forget his grandfather’s forced
conversion and at the same time he always remember the indifference that he and
his family has received for being an uncommon in Hindu surrounding. Moreover
his Physics makes him analytical and frees him from ancestral beliefs of family
and land. He prefers to reject and accept at the same time to arrive at a safe
ground, as he himself said, “Physics did make me more analytical helping me
to break ties with my ancestral beliefs; and still, the basic quality of
acceptance, of an unshakeable closeness with my destiny persists. I tend to
accept at times the things which happen to our lives and at the other time I tend to question myself but eventually fall back to the safe ground of our destiny. I do not believe in ritual, which seems to hold so much people; the Indian religious are speed in ritual, which appears meaningless.” Jayanta Mahapatra was a physicist before arriving on literary scene like a new phenomenon. He taught physics in Government College of Orissa. He became so attached to poetic world that many times he though of giving up his government job to devote more time to his poetic musing. He himself said, “Physics did teach me a certain discipline. And when I started writing poetry, my science training pushed me to an excessive compression in my poems. But it has taught me to see inside things. It made me realize how objects like a butt of wood or iron, so inert on the outside, hides whirling electrons inside.”

Physicist inside him dominated his life up to forty years till his superannuation as a poet in the last two and half decades of twentieth century. Physical science made his outlook very reasonable and critical. The realm of physics covered the poet till very long behind its momentum but failed to make him inert. Things have gone upside down now, as physics and imagery derived from his scientific background serves his poetry with imagery. It provides reader a binocular look and microscoping observation of his poetic galaxy. Jayanta Mahapatra has openly accepted in his many interviews, prose pieces very candidly that he was without any poetic background to begin with. His knowledge of poetry and poems was limited to few poems of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley which were part of his school syllabus. He was romantic by heart all the time but his profession of teaching physics kept him in dilemma. But he also stresses the role of physics in sharpening his intellect and vision.

Myths, History, Rituals, Traditions, Temples and Legends have been a constant accessory and the very aroma of his poetic realm. He is perhaps in a quest to find is own self beneath the massive load of his past. He portrays his self by projecting symbols of culture. His self gets fragmented between church bells and temple bells, the world of East and West, his love for Oriya and his mastery
using English to express himself. He used metaphors very lavishly from these contradictions in his poetry. In the most of his poem he shares his loneliness and his silence, a boy seating in a corner during school recess, merging his torso between the pages of books to seek relief and companion. Through his poetry he opens that door of hidden corridor; and images are the torch lights to see through the darkness. As narrated in his autobiography, he spent his childhood in silence. There was no one to talk; father mostly remained away from home due to his work. Father’s absence burdens him with new responsibilities and relation with mother always remained a cipher. Silence, Solitude and pursuit for self and reasons have been his constant companions. He talks about his preoccupations with recurrent images in his poem designed for self exploration. “...for me a poem is knit together by an inconceivable silence. Silence which is intangible substance, of which words are but manifestations; words which can build the poem from a silence and to which the poem must eventually return.”

Loneliness and silence lie in the very making of his persona. They were constant companions in his childhood and youth days. The human in him remained silent in those boyhood streets of a village in Orissa where Hindu neighbors performed rituals unwelcomed for his Christian inheritance, but his curiosity badger himself with questions and reasoning. The black outs during world war made him search few shapes inside the creeping darkness. Those palm trees standing alone in corner haunts his innocent, current of dead bodies of animals and human in rivers, and starved jackal feasting over them, pulling them out of water it all get imprinted on the soft and innocent walls of his psyche only to get manifested in his poems. Silent steps of that first tender ray of love which succumbed inside sealed lips and beauty of love get dissolved by hungry fingers inside the folds of skirt. Those school days weekly moments of elation when results were declared and head master lifted him by shoulder to make him stand on his desk for honor get decomposed in assaults of well built beasts laughing over his nude smallness. There remained only one thing for permanent, the long and persistent silence, a sink taking him deep very deep inside. Thus for him
poetry becomes a painful experience and task when he unfolds himself. Poetry is
the stranger within oneself - the ma inside one is unaware of, and the poet is
almost always in the quest of finding this other on sometimes, for hours together I
sit through the night, watching despair - this blank sheet of paper in front of me. I
experience the fearful pull of gravity which pulls me down when words fail to
appear on the paper. Then, suddenly may be, the language is there, flowing into
rhythm, like the unseen wind moving the branches of the mango tree in my little
courtyard. There is a flow of energy as the poem builds up, building up to the
feeling of weightlessness, a sort of zero gravity one call freedom.

Jayanta Mahapatra calls himself an Oriya poet who writes in English. For
him Oriya is his blood and breath. He attains a new height in his quest for
unknown and untraded using imagery and symbols as comfortable steps. Image
holds the very key to understand his subjective world, his works can not be
understood in a vacuum devoid of his past and land. Before crafting a poem he
wonders within his own mental worlds to find few familiar yet uncommon images
to converse with readers of his poem. His images are his indicators solving the
mysterious titration of his lines. Even after producing thousands of poems that
walk holding the fingers of images, he finds it difficult at the time. Talking to
Abraham he candidly accepts, “It is simple for me to begin a poem, with some
phrases or an image perhaps; but then the going becomes difficult as I grope
around from word to word, line to line; as though I had been left behind in a
dark room and was trying desperately to find a way out into the light.”

Mahapatra’s silence made him a keen observer and explorer of his land,
locality and surrounding world. He could not be the part or guest of the world
around him but he felt it very closely, the rituals watched as a small boy made
him ask, himself few questions that lead him to his typical conditioning. The
yellow pages of his grandfather’s diary showed him the colors of misery which
provided him a place to observe the scheme of things with a new perspective.
Orissa has been a victim of men made and God made calamities. The land
becomes his fellow sufferer in his journey. The lepers, hollow eyed people stricken with chicken pox, beggars in the street, hunger of a father and lust of naked eyes find a tongue and talk through images of his poetic world. He feels the burden of innocent dead bodies, succumbed to poisonous gas as well as those who fell victim of poisonous terrorism in Punjab and Kashmir. He unburdens himself by crafting poems and voicing these dead and crushed voices of his time. “...Poetry shall always remain an attempt to remove the burden of time from this world, and poems will continue to be written, to do this through images, metaphors, symbols. Time, ever present, ever passing, making us wakeful while we are asleep, making us hear our pulse in the silence of night.”

The element of subjectivity relates him to his milieu and surroundings. His poems are closely knitted around his childhood memories and experiences. But Orissan world of fairy tales and myths, its legends and Indian Epics are also the epicenter of his works. His concern with the locality gave him themes and he symbolized those themes. Jayanta Mahapatra’s childhood and youth were passed in one of the greatest transitional periods of the Nation and world. He has seen the epidemics, he has seen the world war, the alarming sirens and black outs, cyclones hitting Orissa every now and then, water running over dreams and lack of water spoiling the dreams. He has seen both rise and cruel assassination of Gandhi; he has seen the pain and trouble of partition and also the rise of terrorism in Punjab and Kashmir. All these experiences form the background of his poems. These experiences make him one of the time-conscious poets. His poems center on history, tradition, legends and myths. His introvert, self pitying, self exploratory style is his reaction towards the time. As he writes in his one of the essays called, “Time in the Poem. “The poet is left in a net in his consciousness. The fundamental observation that a man or woman is born at precise instant of time (fixed by set of coordinates), makes him a certain prisoner, true; and this fact lives at the back of his head probably for an initial number of years of his life. It is later, perhaps much later, for the not-so-sensitive that time begins to bother them. Therefore, in a way time becomes the main mover of
our lives. The awareness of this poet may be exceptional, making him/her a hypersensitive person, or a suicidal depressive; leading the person to such an extraordinary degree of stimulation that he/she writes the kind of poem he/she feels in the unconscious.”

Poet is also deeply moved by the sight of suffering that his sensitive heart can see all around. His poems explore the cases of rape, murder and all sort of cruelty against women. He has also composed a whole section of collection in his anthology called ‘Temple’ about the myth of considering women as ‘Shakti’. He presents contrasting realities between the myth and real situation of women in the nation. His poems also depict the journey of the women in the recent times. His images make him visionary and one of the most analytical poets of the era deeply rooted in ground realities. The present chapter is an attempt to depict his poetic journey and a profound study of the development of his imagery and technique.

Many scholars have categorized Jayanta Mahapatra’s imagery that he projects with unmatched perfection. Scholars like M.K Naik quotes Persona’s own lines written in his “Face to Face with Contemporary Poem”, those lines projects three possibilities for the relation between a poem and reader: 1) The poet may reach immediately and spontaneously to its aim as if like an electric charge passes through a good conductor such as Copper or Iron; 2) It may reach with some holt or pause as if charge passing through a semi-conductor material like glass or; 3) may fail to reach altogether due to some gap in between. The capacity poem to conduct itself lies within the poem, in its design. M. K Naik holds that imagery is the major ingredient for his poetic design except in some of his recent works. Mahapatra has further said that he begin poem with image or cluster of images where one image leads to another in a direction unknown. It leads into a dark region inside minds, a place either unvisited or visited without a proper view. He himself remains unaware because he doesn’t know himself how the poem is going to be? M.K Naik did a wholesome study of his poems and he concluded, “A scrutiny of Mahapatra’s imagery reveals that his images are drawn form
two worlds—the exterior world of phenomenal reality, and the surrealistic world. The way these two worlds are related is equally significant."9

But scholars like Zinia Mitra holds another point of view, for her Persona’s imagery and symbols fall in to two categories called, Experimental and Experiential. Mahapatra in the beginning of his poetic career was poem maker the one who was experimenting with imagery and developing a style of his own and many times style over powered the subject of poem. But poet allowed himself to settle a bit and gained experience to lead to another level called Experiential stage. Mahapatra himself says,” My first two books of verse were mainly experimental; it was the language again I wanted to exploit, because I felt I would mould it like clay, and I suppose Adil Jussawalla was right in his own way when he said in a review that I was a “poem-maker”.” 10

However Mahapatra has no clear line that divides or marks his works in to categories or new kind of matter or composition and no radical shift. But one can easily detect maturity of his technique in his works coming one after another and also his confidence in experimenting with syntax, tapestry and landscape in his poems.

2.2 Close the Sky, Ten by Ten

Close the Sky, Ten by Ten, appeared in 1971 contains forty-nine poems. This very first collection carries a big stamp of his, own solitude and silence. He was desperate at this stage to find a medium a tool to build and engrave his vision. He was restless and bit nervous to make mark and was molding the clay as per his needs. This collection opens with a poem called ‘Loneliness’ that unfolds his world of images,

Loneliness is when the ash
upon the veneered table disinteriagtes
from the breath of ruptured egos,
loneliness is when an act, a word
hangs undecided and unborn
in the eyes of longing,
loneliness is of a winner
turned loser, traitor and beggar
in a centrifuge of possessions,
loneliness is of now, of the noises
of the graves, of the silence of the waves,
of the explosions
of nameless, faceless, voiceless atoms,
loneliness is a face alive
labeled form the pyre of plundered seconds.

(“Loneliness”, CS)

This poem carries a scar of his loneliness. His imagery depiction provides a concrete base to his surreal world here. In this poem he uses images form the various sources viz. nature, time and physics. Wings of bird catching fire of summer sun derive from nature, so as waves and flames. Time images like pyre of plundered seconds mark his solitude moments within a secluded corner in the house and school so as the ash upon table marks loneliness and inertness. His loneliness huddles the progress when wheels get gripped in cogs of other wheels. His scientific background peeps through his imagery likes Wheel for progress, loneliness as unseen, faceless atom, and centrifuge of possessions. Entire poem swirls around pessimism and meaninglessness of relations. Silence again comes to surface in his another poem called, ‘Curriculum’.

The irrelevance is always
there, in spite of
arranging for life:
or death:
the bright breaking waves
on the banking sand
is insular
as stony face
and demands
only a cold irrelevance

(“Curriculum”, CS)

Again loneliness gets hold of his poem titled, ‘City Night, 2 A.M.’ the very title of the poem announces an inert world sank into the lap of inactive sleep when his creativity wakes him and he observes alone world in his solitude. He hears the crowded silence of door and hears his own breaths questioning him in the late hours of night. Ground drops below his feet and all answers germinate lies.

The buses and trams are gone off the streets

A city starts bleeding in the neon light
My white eyes are turned in
To doors framed in their crowded silences
where my body hangs in the air as a question.

(“City Night at 2 A.M.”, CS)

All through childhood Jayanta Mahapatra had faced imposed and sometime self assumed silence and loneliness. Same thing happens to his poems as they too hold an obscure paraphrase of silence wrapped in metaphysical images. Concept of loneliness again comes to surface in the poem called ‘The Report Card’, here he depicts loneliness and silence of a son holding his report card and it sprouts like an unknown seed of loneliness.

Yet unknown is the seed of loneliness
which seeks to make a by’s pockets
its dark and poisoned home.
And when I looked at him again,
the drifting leaves struggled in disgrace
losing their fight for time’s possession,
a brown rectangle of card blazed
of power, pitiful seemed
love’s cold hand.

(“The Report Card”, CS)

His poems are pieces of stone thrown into the silence of steady water to create some waves of solitude to travel in concentric circles and reach the target with the help of a medium called image. He sinks deep in nostalgic moments of life, and out of stirring and chaos inside. It leads to development of self awareness in a private world, a world cut to size in close chambers of past and present. He transforms into a philosopher with rituals called solitude and silence. Image of quietness occurs frequently in his poems one such poem is ‘A Ritual.’

Sitting together quietly is a ritual
looking at the stars
calmly she tears off a blade of grass
with one hand
while the other holds on to her
dry earth of day
the quietness is no solace to our shoulders
hunched over the distant stars
even this hold the promise of noise

(“A Ritual”, CS)

In the poem of this collection entitled, ‘Farewell’ he candidly personifies his loneliness stretching hands to touch future and tumbling feet bleeding in the night containing only auroral fire.

…the foundations
of solitude
which already exist,
stretching long hands
into future despair.
This night is quiet.
And the bleeding fit,
heroic tumbling
into darkness underneath,
because this darkness
has to be lived

(“Farewell”, CS)

In the opening lines of the same poem he clarifies his stand for his obsession of symbols and images when he writes,

The form is the thing,
always. The suggestion
of the foundation of solitude

(Ibid)

The form is the thing for always and it is the foundation of his poem which announces his solitude. He keeps on exploring this from in poems like, ‘Day Thought,’ ‘The Builder,’ ‘Love’, ‘moment,’ and in ‘The Movement’. In his poem called ‘Sanctuary’ his obsession with from reaches to another level and this poem also provides him the title of the collection.

now I close the sky
with a square ten by ten
the roof essential
hides the apocalyptic ideal
parting from
fabled parables
I stretch my body
into a trembling flatness
wishing to fall
through the space

(“Sanctuary”, CS)
Here Jayanta Mahapatra uses layers of imagery to arrive at ideal world that he builds for himself. He closes that world in a square of ten in his own coziness and solitude but he paradoxes his closed contour with the roof of sky. Here he pronounces his poetic style in a undertone through his images the most important is the sun, which represents the unending panorama of his poems and apocalyptic ideals and fabled parables suggest his dislike for the contemporary form of the Indian English poetry. Layers of imagery and trembling flatness demonstrate his sticky narratives carrying meanings within the meanings. His experimenting with form often arouses puzzling chaos. Lines of the poem are chopped or in a medium cut to size, often a line is complete paragraph and single word a new line.

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Even
when she is
Even
when she is not
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(“Woman”, CS)

There is no image in the poem or one can say the whole image is a poem. The use of world even leaves many questions behind when she is and when she is not. What bothers him? What are the effects of her presence and absence? All this remain unanswerable. The lack of full stop may be a symbol of the continuity of the mystery of love or it marks the mystery of the male world to understand women. In his another poem called, ‘Love’ he talks about love by comparing it to a poem,

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like poetry
leave thought alone
to find the meaning
that each one
is doing
something new
to words
in a medium cut to size.
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(“Love”, CS)
In the above poem he presents an analogy between poem and love. He brightens his logic behind the poem by calling it subjective as it is left alone on thought for its meaning. And each one is doing new so as he with his symbols and imagery. He not only cut the words to size but also molded them suitably so that they can adjust in to frame of the poems. There are many poems like, ‘The Farewell,’ ‘Sometimes,’ and ‘The Apartment,’ where he projects images to draw a correlation between creative writing, love making and building a house. He seems to be making ground for himself and developing a unified vision of a cozy, creative world. One can easily find domestic images like house, door, window, roof and other in his many poems. His childhood home haunted him due to secluded surrounding and tall trees standing in darkness. In his poem called ‘Looking at Instant’ he presents a vision of home which haunts him.

Home is where
my first breath
blankets me
and my mind
to isolation;
I am that looseness
between, and the last
that traps the moment
going on rampage,
a damp drying feather
from dry uterus.

(“Looking At Instant”, CS)

He presents home as the place of birth, where he took first breath in blanket, death and life and strengthen it with cluster of images. He becomes the looseness between moments going on rampage. Mahapatra’s surrealism makes him use image of house again and again. Many believe the entire collection in an embodiment of claustrophobic world, a world which devoured the childhood. Mahapatra was alone at house, was alone at school, spent many days in imposed
black outs during world war bombing, epidemics of the land, people in unearthly condition with hollowed out eyes due to chicken pox and some hiding their leprosy all made him a cornered entity. May be this is the reason behind reoccurring domestic images. Few other examples of domestic images are as under.

**Your mouth is a room**

holding different views
to avert disasters
of those last hours

(“The Purpose”, CS)

Beside highlighting the analogical relations between a house, love and poem he also talks about the proper atmosphere as an indispensible part of all. Mood and Need are the pre-requisite for every creative piece and same is applicable to love making and crafting a poem. He also knows about stagnation, as all things at some point in the time cease to grow. As he writes in ‘Sunflower’

**But the black mood, angry**

and swelled, comes
by the night. Miles
are more apart now
than through a sun.
To ruin you. I devise
plans, home, yellow-gold
hours, heavy with sadness.
I care for you
for human.
My green words till,
drawing your deep mouth in,
to be filled of silence.

(“Sunflower”, CS)
In this collection Mahapatra has written a lot about love and sex. He has deliberately put love and sex together at many places. His encounter with love was very obscure as stated in his autobiography. In his school days he had a fascination for a girl called Irene, he never uttered though. But one day he found a boy’s hand within the folds of her skirt. And love came again but he got married already. Because of such shamefulness he made his love poems plain and blunt. As he put love and lie together in his poem called ‘The Performance.’

Again tonight
as before
without
the need;
the white right
to lay blame
on your flesh.
Darling
tell me a lie
that would
be love.

(“The Performance”, CS)

Again he put love and lust together, and announces love making becomes a monotony followed by smiling back. And he asks for darkness to feel the newness of body as braille.

Just the unmooring form
a strange girl’s smile,
the girl lifting a tight red dress
walking down the street;
and because nothing really happened,
she did not even notice I was there.
Towards a small surrender.
And nothing happens
as I walk inside wishing
the lights would go off
so I may feel around
in the newness of braille.

(“Smiling Back”, CS)

He then talks about mutuality of love, and makes it a kind of agreement between two. He also hold that it becomes necessary when we see the darkness of other lives around ourselves. As he writes

What is it that decides
I love you
perhaps the fears
for other dark lives.

(“If I am wrong”, CS)

Thus image of love is not at all romantic in his poems; rather he uses it with lust. He calls it mutuality and monotony of married life. Necessities arrive due to fear of dark lives. He also projects images of other human relationships like father, son, wife; daughter and woman are such examples. Mahapatra also brings in to play his scientific background; he used to teach physics before turning a poet. Many times one can easily find use of images derived from various branches of the science and mainly from physics. In the very first poem he finds loneliness when wheels get gripped amid the cogs of other wheels, and loneliness is a nameless, faceless and voiceless atom. In his poem called ‘City Night, 2 A.M.’ he projects an image, a sort of concern for the environment when he writes, ‘A city tree starts bleeding in neon light.’ Mahapatra’s close acquaintance with physics made him rather force him to show glimpse. He uses many scientific instruments like gyroscopes, calipers and terminology as symbols and images in his many poems in this collection. As he describes,

His look calipers,
receives, believing those echoes
he’d been looking for.

(“Passing of a Friend’s Wife”, CS)

And in another example from the poem, ‘The Indian Eye’ he uses decomposition process as a cover over Indian eye

The Indian eye
is large, wild, covered with hungry decomposition.

(“The Indian Eye”, CS)

Even he never forgets to mention some of the contemporary scientific achievements by human e.g. landing over moon. He has written a poem called, ‘The Moon Landing’.

Look, the moment breathes quick silver,
revolves among the many mechanical tests,
the receding orbits of dreaming earth
-pillows. Discipline is dismal
across these shoulders hunched
upside down over.

(“The Moon Landing”, CS)

Beside this many images like near-vinyl hand, geometric mosaic, square of ten by ten, sky tested love etc. announce his love for scientific imagery. Even some of the title of his poems like, ‘The Circle,’ ‘Inertia’, ‘Echo etc. derived from science.

As stated earlier he suffered from vagueness and blurred vision in his early phase of writings. He was wondering in darkness to find some corners for his style. He often gets victimize by obscurity in his earlier writings for his unconventionality. His short poem ‘Faith’ carries his blurred vision. In this poem he fails to denote his meaning and readers get unable to comprehend.
Standing still, I am susupect
against my earth. The star
to symbol, as this open night.
I humour them if I must stand:
no truth could be more alive
than this: that there
are fears for things,
naked when I only will.

(“Faith”, CS)

Religious symbols, myth and rituals are also the source of imagery in his poetic work. Jayanta Mahapatra uses a myth from the Ramayana in his poem entitled ‘The Circle.’ He talks of male ego, drawing a circle and placing woman within its perimeter. And she is left alone in her solitude. In a beautiful undertone here he also talks about a woman being led in to closed corridors or bound under limits. Religious symbols of both Hinduism and Christianity occur in his poems.

a sun’s inciness
rushes
down these hills
what virgin heat
seals
the movements
of her reason
opens
stifled lips
to suck the blood
frozen
in thick branches
of that tender
isolate honour

(“Nun”, CS)
Mahapatra’s eyes scan each corner of the society to which he belongs. His political awareness also get visualize through his images of Gandhi, Tolstoy and politician the rich old men with dogs. He talks about the man woman relationship and deterioration of Gandhian values in his own nation. As he writes in ‘Gandhi,’

We have burst open his blood
to bleed
We are on his side perhaps
We hate him
We do not know it

(“Gandhi”, CS)

He talks about futile and haughty efforts of so called selfish leaders who call them peace negotiators.

For the time being
they understand.
The black windows look on.
Most of them
are rich old men with dogs:
they have been forsaken

(“Peace Negotiators”, CS)

Jayanta Mahapatra is a very keen observer of the society, secluded and unnoticed mass of our society like beggars, people suffering from leprosy. As he writes in ‘The Blind Beggar’,

Light wanders around him the whole day
where he stands. This is the main street
pounding hugely like a leaning heart.
This is the right corner for his quiet feat.
Moments illuminate his slumped
sorrowing eyes can go no farther.

(“The Blind Beggar”, CS)
He uses many natural symbols like Sun, Evening, Air, Night and Rain in his many poems. Imagery of birds and crows also recur in his many poems. Jayanta Mahapatra taking a mammoth breath sinks in very deep and secluded corner of his consciousness to find pearl of images to mould his writing within the mould of his surroundings.

2.3 Swayamvara and Other Poems

This collection appeared soon after his first collection in the same year 1971. This collection carries thirty three poems weaved in Indian sensibility and images. The title itself suggests the ancient Indian royal tradition allowing Bride to choose her husband. Many other poems in the collection entitled 'Bell', 'The Bride', 'Tradition', 'Child and Teacher', 'Traffic Constable' and 'Blind Singer in Train' carry Indian hallmark specially a verbal portrayal of Orissa. In these poems he tries to express Indian traditions, Indian scenes and experiences. Mahapatra in those early years of his new speciation in to poetic world was full of tormenting and tantalizing feelings which make him restless to carve a niche for himself with his own syntax and passion with images. This zest and over concern of his made many critics and scholars to criticize his earlier works and announce him as a poet-maker in the earlier days of his career. Just like his first collection in this collection also he shows his concern with from and language again he gets obsessed with imagery of building materials, symbols of loneliness, silence, poem announcing his visions about poetry, beggars and other unnoticed mass of society, religious symbols of Hinduism and Christianity with frequent experiments with Indian myths and rituals. Domestic imagery depicting house dominated his early poetry. One such poem is 'Apartment'.

Sunlight comes down,
mark time.
The walls come apart,
without cause.
To be on terms,
anonymous;
building an ark
of conscientiousness,
all seasons all seas
to the captive beginning.

(“Apartment”, SV)

This poem wanders in a close cocoon where sunlight coming down apart walls without any reason. Here he also announces his own captive beginning as poet, his scientific background captivated the poet in him for a long time. He portrays Indian scenes within his poems. In the 'Sun worshipper' he presents a religious image of Hindu priest offering water to sun at dawn after taking a dip in water.

With ease he pulls off a silver
of orange sun in two necessary hands,
cups them over his head, together.
The water runs down in vertical lines.
The dawn is suddenly normal again.

(“Sun Worshipper”, SV)

Persona creates a picture vivid and complete in detail, from colour of morning sun to geometrical imagery of water running in vertical lines and hands going over head in a cup. He presents a comic caricature in his poem called 'Child and Teacher', he mocks at dominating teacher who collects vegetable as bribe from students by calling him 'weakminded weather-cock this,

operating on a child's surrender.
Similarly he portrays child comically;
'Idle under the pencil's grip,
yet alone, the child breaks the pundit's
face in vegetable mass

(“Child and Teacher”, SV)
Another Indian image occurs in 'Traffic Constable', the image of typical traffic constable, moving mass of vehicles waiting for his alarming whistle and hands to move. And strict constable does not allow even a mouse to cross the street without signal.

The mouse who tries to cross
the street is a nuisance
that splits his monochrome watch.

..................................................

The click of spurs, a whistle's power,
as child precariously balances
in wide-eyed appetite power.

("Traffic Constable", SV)

Jayanta Mahapatra has seen immense pain all around in his surrounding. Beggars, people suffering from chicken pox, blinded by pox and secluded by leprosy haunt his imagination. In this collection he presents many such images, one such sympathetic image occurs in 'Blind Singer in Train'.

Between successive halts of the guzzling train,
this bamboo-stabled man, rooted
to his night, flutters stone wings as he faces
the clash of silver, the prim dawn light
rushing past his pox-hollowed eyes.

("Blind Singer in Train", SV)

Here also he uses many term borrowed from the different branches of science. From physics he uses terms like

The sheen of this undisturbed sheet
the planet lies tired and dead
when seething uranium plunges into.
Or as he describes the condition after intimacy as faceless explosion of betrayal in the poem entitled 'Intimacy'

the faceless equilibrium,
explodes into a betrayal.

He uses his scientific background as an additional advantage to display his will and connote his meaning precisely with desired effect. This collection also carries a poem entitled 'Faith' like his first collection which leads in to vagueness and meaning gets lost in symbolic obscurity.

We have not known.
How light leaves by the door.
The masses of memory
that grow, mailing them
to doors when we want
them to, are lunging eyes
in a glass wall.
We plod on.
And those eyes, closed,
imprison our reasons.

Theme of love is dominant in this collection too. Here he adds to his concept of love attached with kinesthetic images. He puts love and sex side by side. In the poem called 'Bride' she describes the custom of first night, he uses a transferred epithet to call it virgin night. A night when a newly wedded girl sacrifices her virginity without any resistance to a stranger who turned her master after some rituals called marriage in India. Here Jayanta Mahapatra. He presents again the very Indian scene of the departure of girl from parental house,
Child's tears upon the rock-faced silence of father

(“Bride”, SV)

Here he uses symbol of rock to show the inertness of father as he is not supposed to shed tears. The bride gets numb after constant cry to lament her entire life at parental house. Then at night a stranger enters into the decorated room and touches her and engages her in sex. Here he symbolically compares the role of bride with common harlot's face.

For this moment when the bedecked bride,
   as stone at touch and belled,
   dreads the thunder and lets
   the fierce lighting race
   wave after wave through her
   sun-inflamed flesh.

(Ibid)

He again handles this theme of Indian tradition and ritual with a new angle and deep sensibility in the poem called 'Poster'. Here he talks about love which ends in physical discourse, without much of a compatibility.

A pity we will
   not learn to deceive
   each other
   from the very first time.

(“Poster”, SV)

The title poem of this collection carries a contrast between the predicament of women, here Svayamvara becomes the symbol of change that overtook the right of woman to choose their own life partner. The royal dignity of woman here contrast with the present situation in the 'calcuttas of existence'. It is very important to note here that he dedicates this collection to his wife Runu
Mahapatra but the dominant theme in this collection is loneliness in relations and love as cipher in his life. The last poem of the collection called 'Poem for R.M.' depict loneliness as a permanent fixture within the relationship. This poem at first celebrate few moments in intimacy, and few happy memoriam of married life. As he writes

\begin{verbatim}
you walk over
to me without a word,
in the innocent
trimmings
of your clean nakedness.
\end{verbatim}

("Poem for R.M", SV)

Here he shows the content of a husband when he says 'you are kind' and marks the physical content by saying 'trimming of your clean nakedness'. But this all get confused when he admits it all as 'a plain sadness.' In another poem of this collection called 'Intimacy' poet presents woman as symbol of loneliness as it is the woman who remains secluded like a plate thrown after eating. As he writes

\begin{verbatim}
For how long can we
prolong this togetherness
of being invulnerable together
\end{verbatim}

("Intimacy", SV)

Thus the early phase of literary career of Jayanta Mahapatra clearly depict him as an experimenter and as an evangelist who is seeking images and form to connote meanings. These two early collections carry an oracle view of his later poetry. These collections are also the base of themes and style that he developed in middle and later stage. But this does not make these works a mere apprentice or a work of trainee wants to master the skill. These collections really add to his later poems which makes him class apart. Though these poems carry more of private world, they add to humanistic and sociological perceptive in his poems.
2.4 A Father’s Hour

This collection appeared in 1976 and contains only four poem, two of them are long poems called ‘Performance’ containing VII sections and ‘The Twentyfifth Anniversary of a Republic: 1975’ containing XX sections beside these two poems there are two other poems called ‘Level’ and ‘Assassination’. These four poems further his experimentation with from and language. He again takes a deep plunge in to myths, history, rituals and in social life here. Holding the hands of language he tries to come out of darkness. But that finger get slip at times, Mahapatra candidly confesses that language was a hindrance, especially in the beginning to express, himself in desired way. As he writes

I keep thinking of the wind in the tress,
wearied by the hundreds of words lying dead on such pages:
dead language, always sneered at
by the optimistic rich, these guardians
of the old order rushing always to save the world.

(“Performance”, FH)

He again symbolizes his status, using image of war where he depict himself being unable to hold the flag of language. He describes his constant effort to come out as victorious and resulting suffocation using images of smell of gunpowder and blood. He felt like a warrior who wants to hide after shameful defeat. But he gets rid off this pessimism which arises in ‘Performance’ in another poem entitled ‘The Twentyfifth Anniversary of Republic: 1975’ by writing,

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

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

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

(“A Twentyfifth Anniversary of a Republic:1975”, FH)
Title of this collection suggests one of the recurrent themes of this collection. Here poet presents many shades of the relationship between father and son. He begins from his own childhood memories when he writes,

**It is a long time now I have not followed my mother’s voice**

**down the shrines of her affection**

(“Performance”, *FH*)

He gets knee deep in his early memories and imagines his childhood day and its surrounding which used to haunt him, those trees around house. And again jackal comes out of his forest of images, as he writes

**an ally, cruel;**

**like the trees around my house setting back into place,**

**and the moon running white among the clouds**

**like a jackal**

(Ibid)

He returns to present from the valley of past and accepts silently, time to be never restored to its place. He releases the pressure that kept buzzing inside with increasing irritation in the following lines

**if I were young I could have killed myself**

**for not being loved back, or simply**

**for the right to fall in love, perhaps**

**to write poetry with tears and gall**

(Ibid)

He again portrays father son relationship in present perspective and expresses a contrast a gap between the generations. Old generation is clinging to its roots and heritage and young wants to uproot himself and restore to some other terrain, where he can get his own soil of freedom, though unknown and unwelcomed. Son is ready to shake off the parental ground like a grown up bird wanting to pursue its own sky. Father and son symbolize two generations. The
word ‘faced’ in the first line is used deliberately to show the recurrent tension in the relationship of the two.

This morning I faced my son and said:

I don’t want you to die alone
in some strange country.

(“Levels”, FH)

Apart from father-son relationship this collection carries a longer scale of themes compared to earlier collections. Through his images he depicts contemporary realities involving deeply in the land and its reality. Poet takes a shift from inner terrain of memory of love, silence and sexuality to a local world surround, its usual occurring and socio-economic situations. “Apart from the preoccupations with childhood, history and tradition of his people and their rites and rituals, he becomes deeply concerned with his contemporary social reality”11 The third poem of the collection entitled ‘The Twentyfifth Anniversary of a Republic: 1975’ is set against the contemporary socio economic condition of the nation. Here persona uses symbols and images to show his concern and hopelessness for the state even after twenty five years of republic. He opens poem with a release of new postage stamp on the occasion on of silver jubilee of republic. He reflects the condition of the nation in following lines,

The new postage stamp gleams in silver and grey:
it’s such a thing that brings a faint flush on our weeks,
like a sudden wind that slips under the door and stirs
the papers silent on the desk and other objects
that learnt to live without their knowing.

(“A Twentyfifth Anniversary of a Republic: 1975”, FH)

Here he beautifully connects silence with forgotten papers on some desk which suddenly catches attention in the gust of wind. Here these silent papers symbolize the silent people of the nation who live without their knowing. He further writes directly,
The prostitutes are younger this year:
at the police station they are careless to give reasons
for being what they are.
And the older women careful enough not to show their years

(Ibid)

In the above four lines he describes how due to unavoidable economic condition some women choose prostitution and he stresses when he says prostitutes are younger this year. He presents naked reality. Prostitutes are careless to give reason for their situation and the old women trying to hide their years. In the same poem in next section he uses image of crows to refer to priest. He compares crows perching on bronze statues at cross road with priest wearing handsome and mysterious robe. Crows also stands for deceitful trickery.

There are new statues on the cross roads, newer dead,
that are visible from far and wide.
The wind continues to search for dead boughs,
soot and litter and dust, the ruins of dead skies.
The coarse crows perch upon the shoulders of bronze and stone
like crafty priests looking handsome and mysterious
in the counterfeit glow of light.

(Ibid)

Persona here mocks at the custom of our nation of paying tribute to leaders whether a true one or corrupted by setting statues on cross roads where crows and other birds sit on their shoulders to perch on them. He uses other images to showcase contemporary and recent changes that are taking place. He talks about new steel mills, dams and new statues of newly dead people. He also symbolizes darkness using color images like black, grey along with image of dust and soot. His vision turns tragic and surreal as he questions,

What is wrong with my country?
The jungles have become gentle, the women restless.
And history reposes between the college girl’s breasts:
He also depicts the poverty and misery of his land using symbols like beggars and fakirs. He also includes his surrounding within the syntax of his poem. he talks about market place where a man of silence is surrounded by throng of children, Rama Devi the old social worker, school teacher, kamala-the three rupee whore. He also uses religious symbols like Priests, mosques, fakirs and Shiva Lingam. As he writes,

The milk runs over a much-whored lingam,
the ritualistic coconuts before the gods,
the offered fruit beat silence against the mind.
The flickering feeble flame draws some darkness aside.
The Ganga stretches out its leisure hand,
the whole of its vanity lying like an old newspaper
that contains the poverty of those words which carry
their own deaths within them

Mahapatra uses his all the recurrent themes as he ends the poem with the image of rain and expresses his own preoccupation with all these themes.

Am I too tired to climb the familiar stairs? Or,
too tired to notice the street move up to my door?
To see the rain come? Through half-shut eyes
I see the countryside
melt away in the rain.
then watch a crowd of crows swoop down over the statues
of the great dead.

Mahapatra’s earlier vagueness gets replaced by crystal clear vision in the collection. In his earlier both the collections there are poems entitled ‘Faith’
where he talks about faith but fails to express clearly. But in the present collection he talks clearly and precisely when he writes,

   The faith is a blind child holding on a man’s hands.
   Where is the determined hunter that picks up the spoor of peace?

   (Ibid)

Like Faith he also talks about peace invariably in his poems, some times he presents ‘Peace Negotiators’ and here he talks about desire for peace getting lost in petty issues, when he writes,

   Everywhere, the people talk of their desire for peace
   more than anything else in the world.
   Somewhere, the urge to talk about oneself
   consumes an entire lifetime.

   (Ibid)

In the last poem of this collection called ‘Assassination’ he talks about poor strata of our society and use image of grass to show their status in our society.

   And they are close to me. I Know,
   those silent people. Uninvolved, who do not use calendar,
   who parade with the eyes of lonely mountains,
   who grow like tough coarse grass from cracked pavements.

   (“Assassinations”, FH)

2.5 Rain of Rites

   ‘Rain of Rites’ holds a significant place in the poetic pursuit of persona. By this time the poet in Jayanta Mahapatra has caught hold of earlier claustrophobic expression and restlessness as well as has found equilibrium between his private and public world around him. He has earned a great command over his own style by this time, over his galaxy of verses studded with clusters of images and symbols. Many of the poems in this collection deal with the deeper
world wrapped in some mistrial symbols but he proceeds there with calm and compose of the style and language. “All through the poems the impact of the time against the timeless, of the sharply located present against past, of working against dream is depicted with calm, dignified control.”

Title of this collection carries two words ‘Rain’- it is always an important metaphor and dominant image throughout the poetic agitation of persona. Rain stands for life, for hope, sometimes it also stands for havoc in the land, a wait which earth has to bear every year throughout summer. But here rain stands for Orissa, and for the continuity of rites and rituals in the land. Orissa is the land of temples, rivers and Rites. These rites form the very base and locate of Orissa and the background of the poems. Imagery of the land, its past, its landscape, its stone, its rain, priest, temples, paths and ethos all find a place within the perimeter of his poems. His poems display rites of priest, housewives, whores, children, crows, and rites of cripple, poverty of young girl and of the land. Mahapatra blends his inner and outer world within few symbols and images drawn from the world of nature, science and feelings and some times from abstracts.

Woman is one of the dominating themes of this collection. He portrays painful plight of Ahalya, pain of her grandmother and widow mother, dark streets of whores, loneliness of housewives and fantasy world of young girls. In poem called, ‘Summer’ he talks about the plight of Indian Girl. A girl combing her mother’s hair under a tree occupied by restless crows. Poet watches future of that girl which compel him to announce,

The home
will never be hers

(“Summer”, RR)

But innocent girl is still unaware of her future. And she is young enough to doubt and not to hope. Poet presents a hope in her world through image of green mango of desire which falls on her ground.
In a corner of her mind
a living green mango
drops softly to the earth

(Ibid)

In poem called ‘Dawn’ he compares woman with dawn, captured within frames of the door colorless, under the pile of silence in her solitude. He then presents symbolizes woman with red chilies, kept in sun for drying, to kill their moisture.

Red chilies spread an a red mat
Deeper in our skins
The women.

(“These Woman”, RR)

Like chilies they loose their life after some years of taming in to household slavery, forgetting their originality and existence. In the same poem he compares woman with dry onions and herbs. In one of the poem he presents an image of his own daughter. Personas gets surprise by rapid physical changes in her body and out of her love for the daughter appreciate her as,

My precious golden daughter
looks out though the glass

(“The Stranger, My Daughter”, RR)

Whore houses of Kolkata also finds abode in his poems. He projects dark and forbidden streets. He mocks at male morality which arises like sea weed only after high tides, only after crossing the limits and crashing the boundaries. It’s a realization which comes only after passing of heat of the moment. Mahapatra presents this as,

You fall back against her in the dumb light.
trying to learn something more about woman
while she does what she thinks proper to please you,
the sweet, the little things, the imagined,
until the statue of the man within
you’ve believed in throughout the years
comes back to you, a disobeying toy

(“The Whorehouses in a Calcutta Street”, RR)

The statue of man stands for the morality of the man which becomes the
toy in hand of the whore and moral consciousness reaches quite late as usual.
Jayanta Mahapatra is a true Socialist; he also puts another side of coin before us
in the poem called, ‘Hunger’. Orissa has remained an old and frequent victim of
the famine. He presents an image of hunger stricken fisherman selling his
daughter. Here he talks about the hunger of the belly and hunger called lust. He
uses image of fish and rubber for the lust and reproductive organ.

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)

He recalls myth of Ahalya, a sage woman who has been cursed by her
own husband. Her husband turned her stone, for getting fooled by another god.
She was compelled to wait for ages for the arrival of the God, to reincarnate her
as woman again and for ending the curse. In the poem entitled, ‘Sunbursts’ he
uses image of cow and buffalo which are considered goddess and god in Hindu
religion to present suffering of woman in a undertone of the poem.

A black humped bull rides cow:
two gods copulating on the warm tar,
the morning closed,
the grass throbbing cruelly ablaze.
The great body of the cow gropes for breath.
He talks about one of the burning issues of our society which is getting even worse by now. He presents how girls and women are compelled to lower down their eyes when their skin burn by naked eyes watching them in a long stare of lust. In the poem ‘Sunbursts’ he presents how school going girls watch buffalo riding cow, and they have to fast their legs. In another poem, ‘Girl Shopping in a Departmental Store’ he visualizes uneasiness of girls, who maintain silence while shopping to avoid attention of sex-hungry people all around them. In poem called, ‘Idyll’ he talks about married life through symbols of sex and love, creeping in through dim lights of the room and a man watching the girl whom he married once.

And something is woman’s eyes tempts confessions from her husband as they stretch out to sleep
A time never lost rising as a mist, that floats upon the consciousness

(“Idyll”, RR)

Orissa has been the biggest inspiration for the persona. The Towns, villages, streets, folks, fables, temples, rituals, festivals along with landscape of Orissa, gel together in verbal canvas of Jayanta Mahapatra. In the poem entitled ‘Dawn at Puri’ he symbolizes hunger of people through image of the landscape, suing image of crow and skull in the sand.

Endless crows noises
A skull on the holy sands
tilts its empty country towards hunger

(Dawn At Puri”, RR)

Sea beach of the Puri reminds him his widowed mother and her desire to be cremated at the Puri beach. He calls it ‘swargdwara’. He expresses the importance of the place in one’s making when he announces that, ‘it is land which means’. This shows how he is tied to the place.
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

(“Somewhere My Man”, RR)

Images sets style for the persona and also announce his obsession for the place and his locality and its history. Temples, priests, clay idols of Durga, nuns and bells appear as religious symbols in this collection. He talks about myths and contrasting realities of our society. In the poem called ‘Moving’ he uses image of ten armed idol of Durga.

The ten armed clay Durga

framed in a mythic past,

carried slowly by twenty four tired men.

(“Moving”, RR)

Here the idol made up clay stands for baseless myths of our past and tired twenty four men are twenty four hours of the day, holding load of myths and religion on their shoulder. He then uses image of temple priest with melting tar of streets during summer.

A group of temple Brahmins

singing, the tar

quietly melting along the lane

(Ibid)

He presents dumb silence of gods and uses image of temple bells,

Face upon face returns to the barbed horizons

of the foggy temple; here lies

a crumpled leaf, a filthy scarlet flower

out of placeless pasts, on the motionless stairs

old brassy bells
moulded by memories, dark, unfulfilled,

to make the year come back again

(“Myth”, RR)

Religion has remained a taboo, a memory that persona wants to get rid off. But it always lurks back to his mind like an old pain. His biculturalism provides him a spectacle which allows him to filter whatever comes through religion. He still feels and recalls the helplessness of his grandfather who accepted Christianity instead of death. He finds himself many times unwelcomed in surrounding Hindu world, as he writes,

Vague grieving years pit against

the distant peaks

like a dying butterfly

as bearded, saffron robed man

asks me, firmly:

Are you Hindu?

(Ibid)

Rain has remained an important ingredient in poetic making of the persona. Symbol of the rain is most recurrent in his poems. Rain is the propeller of activities for his land and a catalyst for his poems. Rain appears in the very first poem of this collection.

Sometimes a rain comes

slowly across the sky, that turns

upon its grey cloud, breaking away into light

before it reaches its objective.

(“Rain of Rites”, RR)

Rain announces beginning of life, awakening of the nature, it’s a pious link between the earth and the sky. But sometimes it also stands for the restlessness of the land. He visualizes waiting earth staring the sky through its parched face and asks ‘what holds my rain?’ Sometimes rain combines with
torture of memory and in to a consciousness transforming the past pain into present reality. Homeless children wandering road side, cripples at the steps of the temples, poverty stricken woman and rickshaw driver all catch his attention. In the poem entitled, ‘Main Temple Street Puri’ poet depicts the reality lying outside temples.

**Children brown as earth, continue to laugh**

- at cripples and mating mongrels
- Nobody ever bothers about them.

**The temple points to unending rhythm**

(“Main Temple Street Puri”, *RR*)

Poet depicts verbal image of Indian village in his poems. in poem entitled, ‘Village’ poet uses symbols like ‘peepul tree’, ‘palm trunk bridge over irrigation canal’, ‘ the low mud walls of the huts’ and ‘vermilion seared stone of whores’ all these images bring ethnic Indian visual before us. At the same time he portrays towns like Cuttack and Bhubaneshwar in his poems. as he writes,

**In the cold main road of my rain smothered town**

- a man begs for alms, sitting under an old tree
- holding his paralyzed boy with dump, awkward arms.

(“The Tattooed Taste”, *RR*)

Mahapatra’s craft of maneuvering his images and symbols within recent realities and heritage and link them with myths and legends of the land accounts for his significant place and makes him polar star. Every atom of his surrounding becomes part of his poetic realm.

### 2.6 Waiting

Waiting appeared in 1979, many critics and scholars believe this collection to be a mark of Mahapatra’s maturity, his strong communion with surroundings. Jayanta Mahapatra became more and more connected with his society. The loneliness and self centeredness get dissolved in his social concern drenched in his contemporary realities. His Orrisan identity comes out here from
the carved stones of Konarka. His solitude becomes the solitude of widows, solitude of prostitutes. The evil all around stares him hard from the eyes of priests, a shadow moving in darkness and through plays of crafty crows. History calls him aloud from the ruins of temples and shrines. The recurrent themes of this collection are Stone, Priests, Ruins of Temples and Shrine, Widows, Prostitutes, Children, River, Light, Dust, Death and Stone. The Image of Stone which appeared a number of times in ‘A Rain of Rites’ grows much deeper in this collection. Persona himself announces one of the themes of this collection in poem called ‘Bhubaneshwar’, as he writes,

**Stone is the theme,**

*and the endless, forbidden temple wall*

*goes from lighted shadow into shadowy light,*

*by the west bank of the stale and futile Bindu Sagar,*

(“Bhubneswar”, *WT*)

Another theme of the collection is his close attachment with the land, with the soil, history and contemporary situations of his very own Orissa; his earth. His poem takes culture, myth, traditions, temples, streets, rivers, rituals of the land within its diameter. Naked realities of the land become another recurrent theme in the collection.

**The naked earth is my radius. Each tropic hour**

*has moved west, ordaining me into the quiet whiteness*

*to warm brown ground, swinging me to sleep.*

(“Living”, *WT*)

Stone holds a very special place in the history of the land. Stone carvings of temples, stone tablets that lie buried under the earth, statues of lord, Shiva Linga and stones bearing the current flow of river water all has a story to tell. Stone stands for cruelty, for rigidity, for pride, for vastness, for craft, for immensity and for art and sculpture of land. In this collection ‘Bhubaneswar’, ‘Living’, ‘Dhauligiri’ and ‘Konarka’ are some of the poem carrying different metaphoric impressions of stone images. As Meena Alexander has said, **“Stone is**
crucial to Mahapatra’s cosmogony. It was there at the beginning. It is the penetrable permanent. He inhabits an earth where monuments of stone crumble and crack, yet survives in the same realm as human beings, the glory of stone glimpsed momentarily by consciousness. Stone does not vanish as flesh does, yet to reach the still point it must be transcended just as the self must be emptied out\textsuperscript{13}. Silence has been a hallmark theme with Jayanta Mahapatra; in poem entitled ‘The Earth of July’ he finds the silence in stone as he writes,

\begin{quote}
Keeping silence

a stone celebrates with its wreaths of faith,

in the ages underneath it.

(“The Earth of July”, \textit{WT})
\end{quote}

Every stone is a box hiding some secrets inside. Stones peeping through earth carrying ruins of monuments are eager to tell something. Persona’s symbolic world prompts him to provide a mouth to these stones in his poems.

\begin{quote}
Easy on the eye, the ruins of temples everywhere

defeat the tale of memory and dream,

caught as spiders in the dawn’s afflicted light:

this mining of time

where stones have been lost and won

to reappear inside our separate births.

(“Bhubneaswar”, \textit{WT})
\end{quote}

Persona digs history of his homeland and carries out few stones out of query of time. Stone is past, a virtual reflection of poet’s remembrance of past. Persona finds himself admits red and black stones staring him from everywhere. He embraces stones as close as breath and gives them life as he writes,

\begin{quote}
I will not find

any right to my death;

there I stand, close to the stone,

trying to smear it with blood
\end{quote}
to give it life,
for behind the music, silence
as distance behind the wheel;
while
the shadows in the stone
are wrenching the light away
from its roots

(“Konarka”, WT)

Stone brings him closer to history and he remembers his ancestors who lost their lives in the battle of Kalinga. He finds few blood smeared stones there in his conscious looking at the history of his land. However Ashoka’s heart melted after the war but for persona his grief was never the great as he writes,

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

(“Dhaulagiri”, WT)

Another striking thing of this collection of this collection is titles of the poems. He begins collection with time consciousness as starting tiles of the collections are like ‘The Morning-I’, ‘The Morning-II’, ‘Nightfall’, ‘Taste for Tomorrow’, ‘Song of the Past’, ‘Dusk’, ‘Thought of the Future’, ‘a Saturday Afternoon’ and ‘Walking Home at Night’ all these titles indicate time. And title of the collection is ‘Waiting’ so in a way persona here maintains a time consciousness to signify his wait. Beside woman other frequently appearing image of this collection is Woman. Persona presents woman in different shades in different images but all shades are grey and dull. He portrays the plight of Indian woman very significantly.

He depicts a sweeper girl in the first poem of the collection. He portrays a verbal caricature of the girl carrying all sorts of waste in her can and side by side he also presents an image of a woman staring from open window.
The sweeper girl passing by,
the can of human excrement
    cradled in her frail arm.
          A window
    is thrown open to the street.
Some woman’s derisive look
    falls from the cool shadows

(“The Morning-I’, \textit{WT})

In poem entitled ‘A Summer Night’ he presents an image of domestic wife
of Ramlal; the grocer. As he writes

\textbf{Across the road}
the rich grocer’s wife is already asleep,
the youngest son coughs in the house.

\textbf{Who knows}
when in the dark Ram Lal, the grocer goes,
from where he returns?

(“A Summer Night’, \textit{WT})

In the same poem he compares the plight of woman with white jasmine
which drops every morning with new scars. Here image of jasmine is used
beautifully to describe the innocence and helplessness of the house wife and scars
as an attack on her desires and wishes.

\textbf{Tomorrow}
when the sun shines the white jasmines
will drop, there will be a net of scars

(\textit{Ibid})

In the poem called ‘Afternoons’ persona uses image of woman to describe
the naked hunger that lies in the eyes of men. He uses word lethargy of dreams to
describe the nudity of fat shopkeepers thought. This poem portrays a harsh reality
that is the very part of our every day life.
The fat shopkeeper follows with the look
of nude hunger in his eyes the two big-arsed
Srikakulam women who have entered his store
for four kilos of rice
and fans himself in the lethargy of his dream.

(“Afternoons”, WT)

Many times persona uses religious symbols to show plight of women. Even our goddesses like Sita, Parvati and Radha fall victim of male domination then what about the plight of a mere woman. He uses image of Radha and Krishana to show the pain of woman when her desires go dry in her silence and wait.

Radha, still standing
on the night of warm mists,
abandoned, and yet boundless
with pain and desire;
Krishana, far away,
like the silence on the river,
secretly always victor.

(“Orissa”, WT)

He also presents image of mother, keeping her lingering eyes on her children, image of women returning from the work, his own mother sitting in veranda, prostitute girls etc. in the very collection. Like his other collections here also persona uses religious symbols like priest and linga. In the poem entitled ‘The Morning-II’ he uses image of priest as old myths lying under this earth. He also presents an image of naked Jain Monk, using a transferred epithet.

Ruins everywhere
holding dim interiors of myth
And priests
always trying to prove they’ve been.
A starkly naked Jain monk
calmly walks down the determined road,
centuries beyond his body
support his sacrosanct instant.

(“The Morning-II”, WT)

He again presents image of priests in his poem entitled ‘Waiting’ and compares voices of priest with quicksand ready to engulf everything. As he writes

voices of priests are like quicksands,
waiting for your apprehensions to enter them.
The death that comes swings back and forth
like a bewitched barge upon a weaker race

(“Waiting”, WT)

Beside priests he also uses image of temples and images from Christianity. Few times persona uses his poems as a platform to express his philosophy of life. Nature is also one of the image with which he is obsessed all the time. Nature becomes the main concern in some of the poems. He paints his surrounding in his forests and hills of imagination where he flies like a bird beside the sun and moon.

The river crosses the forest of sal and deodar
in a gleam. In the thin moonlight it breaks the trails
where my Aryan ancestors once stood, flushing

(“Way of River”, WT)

Jackal and tree are his companions since the beginning of his poetic journey. Again they catch his attention when he writes, he puts an image of Jackal as smouldering the skull of past.

Trees deep set between the burning hills,
the strench of worms in the summer heat.
On the river bank a jackal
slinks past a smouldering skull.

(“Among the Trees”, WT)
Beside priests and prostitutes other mass of society like beggars, five faceless lepers crossing by priest, boys droning over their lessons, rickshaw driver collapsing with exhaustion, a girl dying of tuberculosis, naked children, pundits, palm readers all find abide in his poems as various images. His sociological perspective draws him close to the forgotten and crushed mass of social set up. He portrays their miseries. As he writes,

the legless cripple
under the peepul tree
smells a strangeness in air

(“Story at the Start of 1978”, WT)

Thus ‘Waiting’ marks a coherent, balanced and unified harmony in development of Jayanta Mahapatra as a poet. Many scholars like Bruce King finds sign of brilliance in the compilation but these signs are patchy. As here also poet relies more on internal world providing few glimpse of it through his external images.

2.7 False Start

This collection is an internal move and conscious effort of the persona to remove earlier restlessness and weakness of structure. He moves inside to find coherence between his inner and outer world. This volume marks a journey to find reality even after taking a start which is false. It is an oscillation between internal world and external forces. “It is a journey from, external realities to external reality, a journey in which he takes into account every little delicate, minute gesture in life, even in its falseness and pretentions”

Though this compilation appeared in 1980, it contains few poems written far back in 1974. This is done deliberately by persona to maintain unity of themes. This collection carries three sections, these three sections represents three main stages of the life namely Childhood, Middle Age and Old Age. It deals with
preoccupied themes and myths but with a novelty of view and introspections. It again fondles images like moon, ash, voice, silence, loneliness, heart, earth, cruelty etc. He uses many images related to water viz. rain, cloud, river and sea. He holds crest and troughs of waves moving in his consciousness and propagating through medium of his images and symbols on the sheet of papers. He talks about body and soul; of fantasy, dreams and harsh realities. This collection floats over sea like clouds searching their reflection on water playing with waves. Persona here avoids to experiment with the structure and holds all ends together in his hands. In the very first poem of the first section which is referred as Childhood, he talks about life as a dream; a haunting memory. He refers to its tenderness using image of mimosa.

……There’s

a summer hiding away behind the hills,

a haunting dream whose meaning

always escapes me,

like the sad shut tufts of mimosa

(“A Day of Rain”, FS)

He presents an agrarian landscape and presents natural scenery. He uses different images for the rain in this poem like, ‘light feet’, ‘excited wings loosening from the dark’. He finds hills hiding behind hills and hears stupid code of cricket. This code suggests meaninglessness of life, as he himself declares at the end, ‘my aimless hearing of the rain’. He deals with the themes of silence, love, memory, loss, desire and absence. Image of children and his childhood appears again and again in this section. As he recalls his own childhood days in the poem entitled ‘Something Spreading Itself’.

A quickenign
that contains all the colors of the rainbow,

as in the man I had to be, while still a boy,

in my mother’s house when father was away.

(“Something Spreading Itself”, FS)

He recalls days when his father had to remain away for months due to his work. He used to sit in a reserved corner bearing the load of man of the house and holding his silence for his mother who never tried to break his silence. He again uses image of childhood, when he asserts,

And if on the endless blue waves of your body
someone leaves a boat, a touch,
it would only drift about, like a child asleep,
tired after the day,

(“Woman in Love”, FS)

He uses image of wave and boat to talk about life. Another theme that appears again and again in this section is of loss and absence. All through the volume he asserts about disbelief about hope sliding away very fast in to despair. As he presents his longingness for the face which is absent,

So every day, we shall long for those faces
which have taken away the quiet taste of our time,
which have surprised us by a word, or a look

(“Absence”, FS)

In another poem he finds his memory growing older against the measure of time. Absence grows inside with time and gets enrooted in memories. He talks of memory as being indefatigable thing.

....Your absence
is a part of growing older, and this october
a time for measuring an indefatigable memory
In the poem called, ‘Through the Stone’ he holds cloud shifting against the shoulder of sky and questions it. He finds meaningless of the thing called life in trembling, in a pull of desire. He talks about the meaninglessness of the life and measures it’s against the time calling it ‘a slit left behind by year’s flood’, he uses multilayered imagery to talk about life, loss and memory whirling up somewhere in the span of time.

Life is not a precious corner, lyrically hidden,
dreams bobbling up and down on the water-line of sleep.

It is potato-peel the teeth won’t let go

(“Something Spreading Itself”, FS)

The concept of the time presented beautifully in this collection by Persona. He holds time a center, to draw concentric circles of time viz. past, present and future. He holds today in equilibrium position then let it oscillate between past and future. Time becomes the main guiding force leading ahead of life and consciousness. In all the three sections of this volume concept of time enters into chambers within chambers, moving towards some corridors swirl up in mist of doubts and loss.

Today? In the blank moonlight
of night and day, today is a small knot
tied up in my vein, ready to burst.
Ignore it? Can one?

(“Today”, FS)

Persona puts a number of rhetorical questions, regarding the importance of the time. He finds time entangle somewhere as a knot in the vein. He finds today as the focal length of the time, a place which can lead ahead or backward. He uses complex symbols and images of the time.

Today leads me, round the corners of your memory,
as time flutters like a prayer-flag
in the dispersed belief atop an abandoned temple

(Ibid)

He finds time fluttering like a flag, in to some unknown reasons. Time presents his gloomy view towards the life. He recalls the time of his childhood and finds all those all haunting memories standing in that lonely corner of his mother’s house. As he compares his past with ghost in the poem entitled, ‘The Day’

At times a day of my past
stands in front of me, ethereal as ghost.
And my body wanders to the dark ends of my story.

(‘The Day’, FS)

In the poem entitled ‘Ash’ he visualizes time dissolved in jerks of the clock, and each memory floating away in it like ash. Ash is the symbol of death, and it is the symbol of ruined existence. He uses image of the bird fluttering its wings and clock hand moving with jerks.

Now the world passes into my eye;
the birds flutter towards rest around tree,
the clock jerks each memory towards the present,
to become a past, floating away like ash, over the bank.

(‘Ash’, FS)

Concept of time again reappears in the poem entitled ‘The Moon Moments’. He visualizes time opening a door which leads to something never allowed before, a place under a tress where wind blows against it. Here the image of wind suggests its fast flow and tree rooted deep stand for life and memories. Image of door is one of the most recurrent themes in his poems.

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 simple because
it is there, as the wind does, blowing against the tree.

(‘The Moon Moments’, FS)

Side by side his visual imagery of time he uses wind as an accessory. He finds wind hoping around with time. Wind also stands for the flow of time, it suggest change and weather in different shades. Persona talks about relations especially about friendship in this collection. He presents how friendship is shrinking somewhere under the load of some selfish motifs of the time. He finds relations drifting away as priorities change their focal lengths rather dramatically in recent times.

I know how to defend myself
(Yet really can I when the moment comes?)
with my breath and my walk
in this awareness of departure and ashes, friendship and hate.
Who knows how to emerge with dignity?

The curtain of the day

(‘A Sense of Obvious’, FS)

He again recalls his old friends who have become godly and great with times. He finds reflection of past robbing him, of the use of my nibbling mind. He recalls those friends lost a long back in to some unknown terrain. He finds door of history opening and visualizes, ‘The truck full of old papers and things’.

The reflection in the mirror
robs me of the use of my nibbling mind.
Yet what can it do without me?
There are those friends I have not seen for years

(‘The Day After My Friends Become Godly and Great’, FS)

Persona also presents blood smeared streets of the nation. He portrays cruelty that is growing like weeds in every corner of our society. Blood appear as image in many of the poems of this collection. He visualizes droplets of blood
hanging from the branches of the tree and finds his voice under the shadow of blood.

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my voice crouched in the shadow of split blood
hanging on a branch like a droplet of water
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(“Time Drawing in”, FS)

He again finds smell of blood or smell of iron after the trains has left,

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There is always the feeling
Of something spreading itself inside the chest,
like blood or sweat
or the smell of iron on iron
after the train has left
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(“Something Spreading Itself”, FS)

He finds his loneliness in these blood marks. His sensible heart also visualizes cruelty of man to dumb animals and to the very nature. He presents image of dumb animals taken to slaughter house.

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In this December fog that comes crowding in
from nowhere, my life feels its weakness again,

As the cool air of the humble leaves
hears the cry of the slaughtered sheep in the butcher house
and awakes;
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(“Time Drawing In”, FS)

The image of woman as whore, girl, his mother, house wife and woman as general appear in many poems wearing shrouds of silence, solitude and cruelty of the society and life. He visualizes woman in multiple roles and in every roles he find pain seeping though some shadows hidden behind her external coat. In the poem entitled, ‘Woman in Love’ he asks rhetorical questions to the woman who wanted to be loved.
Woman, what things
you would make me remember,
what would you make me do?

(“Woman in Love”, FS)

He then finds silence growing as pain in her body. He compares her soul with ‘tide, along the endless drift of seaweed’. In the poem entitled, ‘Slum’ he presents visual scene of poverty. He depicts misery of whore and their body, consumed by harsh times and their tired breasts trailing everywhere for jackals who want to devour the carcass.

The familiar old whore on the road
splits open in the sugary dusk,
her tired breasts trailing me everywhere:
where the jackals find the rotting carcass

(“Slum”, FS)

As stated earlier this volume chiefly talks about stages of life, and time. Death appears as image in many poems of this volume. Persona uses his poems to express his philosophy regarding time, memory and life. He calls life, ‘a potato peel that teeth won’t let goes’ he finds it drifting away in some ‘fragments of yesterday’. His philosophical bent produces some lines having standard of proverbs. In the poem entitled, ‘Measuring Death’ he finds death as,

Your death is simple plan: the old bricks of blood
have traced out your path precisely; you’re afraid

(“Measuring Death”, FS)

He finds life moving in crisscrossing of railway junctions in to the black acres of the sun. Then he finds death, ‘a handcart you push’. Another powerful theme which persona uses here is the image of ‘House’. In the poem entitled, ‘House’ he talks about house of his childhood. He found his house staring him in silence. He presents house as the beginning of everything as he writes,
A child’s first drawing with a door
through which clouds enter, a promise of life

("House", FS)

He then finds it is same everywhere, as in body, as in heart and mind, or in writing. ‘It is always war’. He finds some warning elements within the house so asserts

Later perhaps you find a house is not a plaything,
the chance o its being so a mere hypothesis.

(Ibid)

He then mingles house with rain and uses symbol of rusted iron, a gray looming mountain of ash to talk about the house which is no longer a house. He recalls his own childhood experiences and memory of that haunting time spent in that house, standing tall holding its silent pride at the door, which is locked for him.

Just when the house is no longer a house,
swathed in rain and rusting iron,
a gray looming mountain of ash-
like the lunar-night soul you’ve never known:

("Measuring Death", FS)

All through this volume persona seems to wander inside inner world, holding his consciousness and all sensible senses. He enters in to inner world layer after layer, withdrawn and closed in shut tufts of mimosa. He finds his locale swimming as metaphor somewhere in his consciousness. He continues this quest using walking sticks of physical objects and images drawn from his locale and from his love for Orissa.

2.8  Relationship
This epic work appeared in 1980 and consists twelve sections. Here Jayanta Mahapatra at length celebrates his land, its history, myths, culture within the mould of his own history and memories. Here lies a beautiful amalgamation of Orissan history and tradition with his private world of memories of life. Poet coins invariably a unique metaphor within this poetic journey in to the space containing glorious past of land. He presents himself and land in the multitudes of awareness. Persona opens this collection with following lines of Walt Whitman from his poem called, ‘Song of Myself’

I am large,

I contain multitudes.

I exist as I am, that is enough,

If no other in the world be aware, I sit content,

And if each and all be aware I sit content.

He also provides a note on the locate of the poem in the beginning of the book to provide outsider with a clue to the context of the poem. In the very first section of this poem he presents Orrisan world with a beautiful backdrop of its natural beauty and a heavy load of past on its shoulder in a language drenched in passion and decorated with images and symbols. He starts this long poem with homage to his land Orissa.

Once again one must sit back and bury the face

in this earth of the forbidding myth,

the phallus of the enormous stone,

when the lengthened shadow of restless vulture caresses the strong and silent deodars in valley,

and when the time of the butterfly moves inside the fierce body of the forest bear;

and feel the tensed muscles of the rock

yield to virtuous water of the hidden spring of the
Mahanadi

(RS-Sec-I)

He begins poem with an assertion that once again he is burying his face into history and myths. Here he uses earth as symbol standing for history and asks one to bury his face in to that to have look in to his own existence. He again sits back in a corner and stare back his past, observing his childhood, his existence between Hindu world and Christian identity and compels himself to bury his own face in to myths, traditions and history of the land. Stone and rocks are his symbols for the past which is visible through ruins of the temples having stone carvings, the tensed muscles of time. Stones stand for the heritage of the land, which is ruined by time again and again. He also celebrates natural wealth and geography of the land with his poetic pigments; describing Bear, Deodars and Mahanadi. He again puts forth the image of stone to describe history and cruelties of emperor, who used thousands of slaves and artist to carve those stone pieces of rocks. He feels blood marks on the chests of those rocks as he writes,

Our lives are only of the seeds of dreams,
forgetting the cruelties
of ruthless emperors who carved peaceful edicts
of blood red rock,
forgetting our groans and cries

(Ibid)

He takes out memories from the eternal vaults of the time. He takes a long breath to take a dip in to history. He recalls smell of gun smoke and smoldering flesh. He refers to temples of the land like famous Konarka, Lingaraja Temple and Bhubaneswar , Lord Jagannath’s tempel at Puri. He uses symbol of stone with different connotations like history, time and glorifies it.

Only that the stones were my very own,
waiting as mother or goddess or witch,
as my birth feeds on them
as though on the empty dugs of sorcerous thought

(Ibid)

In section two of the poem, he brings in to play his own history, his private myths, his relationship with mother, father and his daughter. He uses his old domestic images like doors, windows and his recurrent solitude and silence. He also uses colors as symbols to connote his meaning and feel.

**Today I watch through the window**

the grave that is my mother's

watch the old impulses in red and yellow

chalked across the white terraces of childhood,

in the shores of distant refrains

(RS-Sec-II)

Here the grave suggest his dead past, and colors associated with his mother red and yellow suggests her restlessness and her indifference and disease towards her where as the white terraces of childhood stands for the silence and solitude of childhood home. He also refers to his dead father in the same section. He co-relates his aging father with rotting paper, twisted metal and foul flesh and his memories as a rat scampering in the dark.

**Now like my quickly-aging father**

my mind fumbles at the frail substance of ash,

and my memories are rats scampering in the dark

gnawing at rotting paper,

twisted metal and foul flesh,

and my blood becomes to share his curse.

(Ibid)

He uses multifarious visual imagery to showcase museum of history carrying corroded past. He uses symbol of Orion and spider crawling in sky and
talks about a forgotten king some where in the history with his sword coated in layers of rust.

Orion crawls like a spider in the sky
while the swords of forgotten kings
rust slowly in the museums of our guilt.

(Ibid)

In section three he takes a turn towards the history of his land. He recalls the war of Kalinga, when hundreds of his ancestors killed cruelly by the army of Ashoka and thrown in the water of river Daya.

How the age old proud stones
lost their strength and fell,
and how the waters of the Daya
stanks with the bodies of my ancestors;
my eyes close now
because of the fear that moves my skin

(RS-Sec-III)

He relates the past with the present scenario and puts a nude picture of reality using symbols like the moon and lamplights. He finds our courage to be swept away in the summer dust in the thirst of the land where a starving mother feeds her baby with his dry and drooping breast. In an undertone he refers here to starvation and famine of the land and present decomposition of our society producing pimps, gigolos and cock suckers

So we would go on
reading the epics in the lamplight,
sucking our mother's dry and drooping breasts,
watch the thin moon blend into that darkness.
Where gigolos and pimps and cock suckers
jabbler excitedly in a language of monstrous flowers.

(Persona also announces his intentions to write poems not on envy and malice but on the dark crevices of stones)

Now you don't even want me to write my poem,
of those words which spit blood and vomit
and speak of malice,
but only those which shut out the wind
and lay them in the dark crevices of stone

(In section four, Persona, opens his thousand windows of his sorrowful heart and searches in light having no leaves which is silent and hiding the truth of secret miracles of darkness. He peeps back in his childhood through many images related to his childhood. He uses animal images like Hyenas and Bears. He once again apostrophizes his father,

Burden of your peace, Father
Theme song of my life that burns my tongue

He relates his own private world carrying his childhood memories with the culture milieu of the land. Religion, myth, customs all crowd in within the perimeter of his words and take a new meaning into his relation within world inside and outside. He talks about the rice harvest of the land about temples and festivals of the land.

my love of gold nose -rings and laughing earrings
of towering ruins of stone painting in the dark,
of loyal lions guarding the diamond navels of shrines,
of amber breasts and secret armpits

(In Ibid)
Persona clearly asserts that his poem and life finds its existence within the altar of his origin, of his land saturated with myths, religions, customs and festivals. He uses visual imagery like hollow horn of buffalo which is blown early morning to awake the humanity from the slumber. Sacred life begins with prayers and with some rituals. In section five, persona uses myths from Ramayana and Shiva Purana. He uses myth of the golden deer tempting Sita and lord Rama chasing it. He recalls the marriage procession of lord Shiva. He searches for few miracles.

So I shall seek the sleep habit
of the golden deer, tempter of the tastes,
in order that I might see outlined
against the vast forest of the heart
the miracles of living, so that others may pity me.

(RS-Sec-V)

Konarka reappears as metaphor of Orissa with its stone carvings and ruins of granite. These fallen stones of Konarka inquire the sensible heart, what was the fault of those hundreds of artisans who died prematurely working here continuously for the pride of emperor. He can see naked walls of the Konarka groping in the rain as he writes,

…the burnt granite of fallen Konarka
binds the sun to a rhythm of desire,
and the supple figures multiply
their mute echoes of another fire stone

(Ibid)

Jayanta Mahapatra has been compared to Wordsworth a number of times by many scholars and critics for his portrayal of nature in his poems. But unlike Wordsworth, he holds a mirror of reality with romanticism to it rather than only a glorious side of it. He presents a prophetic vision of the mangroves and swamp
grass over the sea shore of the Konarka which protects near by villages from the wrath of sea.

a sleep, of swamp grass and mangroves,
like a humid fever,
which protects the shores of life from savage storm

(Persona begins section sixth with the symbol of sleep and silence carrying endless wind of rituals. He refers to past and glorious history behind it as voices going in and out. There is a tone full of melancholy as he has not seen these monuments in their complete beauty which gives only few glimpses now through ruins present around.

the lioness’ roar, the endless ritual
of the black kites on faraway hill
silenced in the whiteness of the clouds?
voices go in and out of the city gates

(He also points to the strength of the time. Time carries Past, Present and Future in its fluttering wings. It holds a lot of room for cries, whispers, for nameless sighs and for sharp blade of love within its three sides, forming a closed triangle of existence. He beautifully uses symbol of clock.

The clock
stabbing in a Cobra’s tongue across the air,
an unknown bird brushing past with the flap of wings

(In seventh section of the poem, persona talks about Vishnava saints and their tradition. He uses many symbols and images in undertone. The philosopher in him talks about the fallacy of our body and eternal force called soul. He talks about duality of our existence hidden behind the layer of body as truth of soul.)
One can find concepts of Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta in here, as he puts body in to witness box before time as shackled pink muscles.

How long does it take one to know
that it is he who is standing there,
alone by himself in the witness box
of shackled pink muscles

(RS-Sec-VII)

Persona sees all around him ruins of past, glorious somewhere and now decomposing. He inspects wall lost somewhere behind the layers of algae. He searches his will, urge and pride in broken statues and ruins. He symbolizes these evidence of past with the help of the statue of the seated Buddha.

left alone in that no-man’s land
where venison tastes like cotton wool,
and where the seated Buddha of my urge and will and pride.

(Ibid)

After talking about body as shackled pink muscles, he talks about our five basic senses referring to them as five shadows. He also maneuvers the old folktale of six blind men defining elephant differently. Here he tries to present multifarious view of life, time and heritage of the land and his relationship with it. He also talks about his poem and its continuous union and germination within the folds of the heritage of the land. He rather asserts about prejudice of writing, of every view that sings its own songs of time. He talks about forward and backward motion of our thoughts using image of Galvanometer needle fluttering sideways of zero.

the rules of our song
that can only move back and forth
like a galvanometer needle
between zero and the hundreds of gloom
Persona continues his prophetic vision, reviving lost heritage. Konarka reappears like a memory of lost love again and again carrying its granite. And every stone with its carved face has something urgent to tell. He wonders within the cordoned areas of the heritage inspecting the ruins of magnificent past holding pride of emperors tall on its roof with blood marks of artisan who were forced here to work and only to receive wrath of their emperor. He asserts,

It is my own life
that has cornered me beneath the stones
of this temple in ruins, in blaze of sun.

He refers to one of the stories related to Konarka, the story of child called Dharma who set its crowning slab after failure of thousands of artisan including his father. The child jumped in to sea to perish and preserve his father’s name and pride persona finds him somewhere in the damp wind across the sea coming at the top of the temple as he writes,

Far into these granite peaks of dream
where the air is moist and soft in the smell of the sea,
where the dying child lays his father on the sands
blind solitude

He also finds different carvings on the top of the temple and portrays a verbal caricature of sculpture describing about various forms like ‘spacious body of woman’, ‘the fruit and the flower’, ‘gentle leaf’, ‘folded belly and the sweeping fire’. He compares these images with warm water around fish. He talks about the door of Konarka carrying three kingdoms of mineral, vegetable and animal and finds them essential to experience fever of love and deeper undulation of the earth. Many scholars like Swain finds here in undertone a fine portrayal of three basic Gunas portrayed in Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta as Satva, Rajas and Tamasa.
He depicts loneliness of the life in ‘dark chariot of the sun. He refers to lustful night of dark Shiva, he uses symbols like Linga and Yoni to describe world of sex, lust and fertility.

This is the real body: raging pachyderm
with the crazy testicles, red and wild,
the lusting god of the blackest Siva night;

(Ibid)

He ends this section with a rhetorical question, ‘How would I pull you out of the centuries of fallen stone?’ In section nine he return to present scheme of things and finds ruins of lost traditions and of life itself everywhere. He finds happiness as myth and listens cry of wounded sun that has been silenced among the ruins of Konarka. He recalls those who spent their lives in myths without defining their reasons. He also points out our cruelty towards nature too by depicting images of trees getting sparse and clouds dwindling in colder air. He also finds the warmth of heart is disappearing with the heritage of the land as humanity is lost in some dim rooms where ideas broom and die in unstable heads.

He laments about his land Orissa the land full of wealthy history, monuments, architecture is facing indifference of people. Pride of Konarka mixing in dust and in damp air of sea. Now what he finds growing prostitutes, pimps and cocksuckers, newspaper bringing terror each day and virtues being lost in fashion which he symbolizes as ‘shameless fevers, whose viruses tear the skin like paper’. He talks about friendship in such scheme of things. He says friends only know how to be self centered and keep walking towards themselves along the upraised road, with unsullied guilt and belief. He finds mistrust everywhere and seeks shelter in myth of sleep as he writes,

I tried to speak of the myth of sleep and action,
in the hope of soothing myself and those others,
rummaging through the secret blood
of the wind in the pines
and awaiting the deepening nature of all things

(RS-Sec-IX)

He hopes this deepening nature of things can reach a stage where one can again love his neighbor and a mother can give her breast to her dry neighbor’s bawling child. He also projects the myth of Savitri who fights even the Yama to restore life of her husband as he writes,

..a dark eyed woman climbs the endless stairs

of her abandoned house…

(Ibid)

This abandoned house is death with what she was fighting to rescue her husband Satyavan. He feels we need this care and devotion to restore glories and heritage of past. He ends section with present reality contrasting with myth of Savitri.

there are prostitutes with white hair
who are excited simply by having stared
at their inaccessible sons,
and friends whose eyes are black and bitter
with malice
like envelopes with poisonous glue on their flaps

(Ibid)

In section ten he again looks back to heritage of the land and recalls the sage with troubled mien sitting alone under peepul tree. He finds water flowing in without purpose when replicas of temple lie scattered before him and again he seeks shelter in time conquered by sleep that had come as rest over unending dramas of the past.

a giant tree speechless above the sacred hill,
scores of women waited, their heads
covered with devotion,
like the leaves, shaking as though possessed
with sprits malign

(RS-Sec-X)

He talks about Cuttack and Durga festival when thousands of idols of
goddess brought home for worship and then offered back to river at the end of the
festival with a promise return back next year. There are thousands of artisans
making such statues from the clay.

Cuttack where I was born,
it's lanes scarred by ruts from whose clay
the goddess take their sacred shapes year after year

(Ibid)

He also refers to broken empires and lost dynasties of the land. He also
talks about the ahimsa propaganda of Ashoka who killed thousands of his
innocent ancestors before realizing it. He wraps himself again and again within
the folds of sleep to find comfort within the heritage. Rumination past holds pride
in him and he stands with a sense of completeness among the ruins

Now I stand among these ruins,
waiting for the cry of a night-bird
from the river’s far side
to drift through my weariness.

(Ibid)

In section eleven he presents image of mirror to sum up the past as mere
reflection seen through it though he still continues to recognize his present within
the ruins of the past. Konarka appears with lotus and twenty four blue spells
stands for image of time, for twenty four hours of the day and wheel symbolizing
progress. And stone wheel of chariot with twenty four stone spokes each spoke
stands for an hour of the sun.

For lofty as they are on their twenty four blue spells,
In the last section of this epic poem he bids farewell to his guilt and consciousness wandering within private and common heritage of his land and life. He puts image of Tandava or Cosmic dance -the dance of Siva to end the world ad also begin a new world, whole world dances with Siva with its life and death. This dance also ends his relationship.

2.9 Life Signs

Life Signs (1983) marks a new phase in the poetic journey of persona. Other Compilations like Dispossessed Nest (1986), Burden of Waves and Fruits (1988) also bears the mark of Life Sings, reaching at this phase Mahapatra, seemed to reach centre of the thing or saying in his own words, ‘he has reached centre of web’ i.e. half way between his own history, his childhood and memories and myth of the land along with realities lying at the ground. His words show a shift from personal symbols hanging on some private braches of his psyche, which are not easy to access to symbols rooted in physical world; a common denominator between us and all. He slowly and steadily moves form personalize realms closed in some squares of childhood to symbols having references in to common myths of the land. He becomes more and more sociological in his perspective and outlook. He uses sings like Temple, Priest, River, Rain, Time, Stone, Woman, Devotees, Fields and Farmers of the land. He still explores personal myths but only as a set indution of misery of the world that lies in general term. He is at the centre of the web of all these things; he is concerned for site, situations, his biculturalism, life, future of the nation, history and heritage.

In the poem entitled, ‘Violence’, he talks about the violence which chokes his mouth using a whip and burden creating black pressure on dragging ribs of the
future. He beautifully uses image of door and bullock pushing the loaded cart as he writes,

The day dims. When I open and shut
my mouth
the darkness chokes inside.
The sad light pushes against
a bullock cart-driver’s whip
which rests in a corner of the corridor

(“Violence”, LS)

He further moves to the image of Gandhi heads on coin that is so peaceful within the pocket of child. But child is shrunk like a caged bird within his classroom under the loads of future and expectations and hands busy in accusing others and securing the coin in pocket. The image of child as caged slave and head of Gandhi on peaceful coin has a lot of things to say in undertones.

The children sit in their classroom,
shrunken like caged slaves,
pointing accusing fingers
hands that keep their hold
on coins in their pockets
with peaceful Gandhi heads.

(Ibid)

Image of child, full of fear appears in, ‘Total Solar Eclipse’ when he describes how solar eclipse becomes an old myth and a taboo for the nation. And how this unique and brief period of night feels animals like cobra and hyena with surprise and bird gathering over palpitating gulmohar.

day that became meek as a frightened child.
A banner of pale human skin
fluttered on top of the temple of Jagannath.
In the poem entitled, ‘The Captive Air of Chandipur-on-Sea’, he takes another usual dip into the past of the land. He refers to the ancient legend of the land related to Chandipur. In distant past this place was one of the main places of the trade though marine way. Persona recalls the moment when all the fisher women congregate at the coast watching their husbands leaving for the trade with Java and Sumatra. In the poem Chandipur appears as the symbol of glorious past forgotten and lying somewhere under the dust of indifference of the people. Now the pace is a fading replica of its past with few tourists who come here by mistake. The past heritage is forgotten as he says it seems only a memory now, a torn breath. He questions,

Who can tell of the songs of this sea that go on
to the battle and double the space around our lives?

Or of smells paralyzed through the centuries,
of deltas hard and white that stretched once ..

(“The Captive Air of Chandipur on Sea”, LS)

This poem presents image of housewives waiting for their husbands. Women abide with special reverence within the lines of persona. In his each and every collection women has remain a dominant theme. But this theme becomes even stronger here. He presents image of housewives, girls, ugly girl, prostitutes, goddess, poverty ridden laborer and old women dancers. Whenever he presents image of women, he actually puts questions on the face of the nation which can only treat them as goddess-Shakti or as prostitutes. He seeks an existence for them in demography of this land. He can watch their shoulders, “drooping like lotuses in the noonday sun”15. In, ‘In a Night of Rain’ he depicts an image of the poverty ridden women who lies in her destitute hut at the edge of the river.

the dark space at the river’s edge
where our homeless women have put up their huts,
there’s a sound of crying in, there,
of an evening jasmine being born,
the sounds of satisfaction after love’s been made.

(“In a Night of Rain”, LS)

On the other hand in poem called, ‘Man of His Nights’ he presents a contrasting picture of the lust of the man who deliberately ignore wives waiting at the home and indulging in with prostitutes. He uses kinesthetic image of a plump whore. In the ‘Lost Children of America’ he presents cluster of images related to women. In opening of the poem he provides a verbal image of whore,

... the passing by big-breasted, hard-eyed young whores
who frequent the empty space behind the local cinema

(“The Lost Children of America”, LS)

An image of women, victimized by poverty drying herself after bath in her only sari appears in the same poem. Her life is lost somewhere in the nameless solitude, humiliation and hunger and in the well being of a woman.

drying herself with her only wet sari
after her bath, and nameless solitude
that has nothing to hide behind

(Ibid)

He gain uses image of woman to present a contrast between belief and reality in this land tied closely within the boundaries of ritual clad in superstitions and contrasting realities. He presents an incident of the rape of a girl, who was raped by so of priest just behind the stone of shrine.

In the Hanuman temple last night
the priest’s pomaded jean-clad son
raped the squint-eyed fourteen year fisher girl
on the cracked stone platform behind the shrine.

(Ibid)
In, ‘Again, One day, Walking by River’ persona depicts condition of women laborer working at noon time on road engulfing their bodies in molten tar in front of judge’s bungalow.

**A tar drum smoulders in front of the judge’s house**

*as four women workers rub the hot tar*

*onto the pitted face of the road*

(“One Day Walking by River”, *LS*)

All critics must agree undoubtedly that Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the poets with social cause. His poems serve as the means of his socialism and may be his dream for the perfect state. He frequently talks about problems of present time. In the poem entitled, ‘A Country’ he talks about Marxism and Naxalism. He uses an image of Naxal girl,

**Why am I hurt still**

*by the look in the hand*

*of graceful Naxal girl*

*who appeared nowhere that winter,*

*holding a knife as old as history.*

(“A Country”, *LS*)

Persona talks about the hunger not only in his own land but in the whole Asia and the world. In the same poem he refers Asia as the place where air is burnt, and ash pile up the place where hunger keeps growing from Turkey to Kampuchea. In ‘In the Lost Child of America’ he mocks at politicians of our nation as he can’t see a single leader amongst the whole lot of so called leaders who take oath for country’s welfare. He refers to town hall of the city as a place where corrupt politician go on delivering their pre election speeches. He again uses image of politicians as corrupted in, ‘A Monsoon Day fable’, where he sees day standing mature like prime minister. He further writes “I pick up the morning newspaper and see how a nation goes on insulting itself”. He even feels for the animals like cow and goat those are sent to slaughter house each day in thousands of numbers. As he writes
The Cuttack dawn herds the emaciated cows
towards the municipal slaughter-house.

(Ibid)

Flow of river, its water which hides both hope and despair, both life and death within its bosom holds a frequent place in the poetry and landscape of Orissa. Persona refers to rivers creating visual, symbolic and olfactory images. In many of his poems he refers to poems as he writes,

**the same river, the same sun, the same town.**

**out of the corner of my eye**

**the barge loaded with golden bay**

(Ibid)

In dead river he talks about the dry land and silence which keeps its face beneath somewhere, like his dead father who can be traced now only in photos. He uses symbol of a static boat, that can’t move in this dead river, made sluggish by the bones of the past. Like rivers stones are also constant obsession in his world of imagery. Stones appear as stubborn, as past and as silence, as loneliness, as inhumanity and as marks of cruelty. As he says, “the echoes of a bruised presence lying like a stone at the bottom of the soul’s clear pool”. In ‘The Lost Child of America’. In ‘Dead River’ stone appear as rude,

**Walking past,**

**along the rude embankment of stone,**

**this silence opens like a face beneath**

(“Dead River”, *LS*)

Nature has always played hide and seek with Orissa, sometimes it makes it wait and wait for single drop and sometimes it overdone it. Along with this sea often gets moon and wind stricken along with a long history of epidemics. This pain and misery often depicts through poems of the persona. Rain, Sea and disease are recurrent symbols in his poems. As he refers to Cuttack as dusty malarial lanes and refers to sea of Chandipur as drunk, and Puri as lonely foetus.
He recalls the great famine which struck Orissa and compelled his grandfather, who starved to the point of death to change his religion to Christianity.

The imperishable that swung your broken body, 
turned it inside out? What did faith matter?

What Hindu world so ancient and true for you to hold?

Uneasily you dreamed toward the centre of your web.

(“Grandfather”, LS)

2.10 Dispossessed Nest

Jayanta Mahapatra's *Dispossessed Nest* (1986) is a versed tale of social and political crisis in India during the year 1984. The year 1984 holds a significant place in the history of the country with two major incidents rather accidents, rise terrorism and self consuming fire of separation in Punjab, putting a question mark over the unity of land and another is an Industrial tragedy in Bhopal. This collection contains thirty five poems or thirty five sections edited by R. D Yuyutsu and Ramanand Rathi. Poems of this collection do not carry any title as they deal with common theme i.e. dispossession of life and humanity from the land, desertion of mankind. Blasts shoot outs, curfews, poisonous gas engulfing thousands of lives and bright hopes are major concerns of the poems. These thirty five poems are divided in to two sections namely, 1) Bewildered Wheat-fields and 2) A Dance of Bejwelled Snakes. These titles are very symbolic of the theme they explore. Punjab is the region of the land which produces highest agricultural yield due to its ever flowing five rivers. These fields have gone numb in to blood sheds and bewildered by recurrent blasts and killings. Section two points to one of the biggest industrial disasters of the world, poisonous gas methyl isocyanide creeping in to the sleepy streets of Bhopal suffocating and strangling lives. It also marks dirty politics and propaganda how common men are cheated by these bejwelled snakes called Politicians. These sections are forwarded by the lines of Pablo Neruda. Lines which hold, melancholy and despair. These lines are repeated thrice to show blood shed everywhere.
Come and see the blood in the streets.

Come and see
the blood in the streets.
Come and see the blood in the streets!

Editor begins the introduction by throwing some light over the themes and metaphors used in the book. He holds poetry of Mahapatra as burning rods of truth, that brands our consciousness. “In these poems we find deeply anguished outpour of an acutely sensitive man aspiring to capture a disintegrated world in the light of metaphors of the country's recent past or from a minute observation of the natural components.” (introduction 2)

The poems included under the title, 'Bewildered Wheatfields' present theme of decay of humanity, bloodshed and terrorism in Punjab. In section one poet describes dry river beds and a night of decaying bodies of loved one. He can smell the terror which reverberates in the ruined lights of star. Poet uses these images to depict social horror and frustration of the community as:

The dry riverbed
wrapped up in a shroud of moonlight.
A death lasts.
This night of the decaying bodies
of those whom I love,
reverberates
with ruined light of stars.

(DN, p.14)

Here dry river bed symbolizes destruction and drying up of emotions which make us human. The continuity of death becoming common and people don't even care for their final rites as these dead bodies are decaying somewhere, it also points to decay of humanity. Here the image of ruined nature is transferred epithet to the soil of Punjab. The people of Punjab, who love to be calm and jolly, eating happily and dancing their Bhangara experience the heat of terror in their
blessed nests. Wheatfields feel the chaos of the situation and stand bewildered. As he writes,

Somewhere
amidst the bewildered wheatfields
the cool night wind snips off the skin
from the fruit of reason

(Ibid, p.15)

The pain of the land draws persona back to his own memory when he can see the same kind of pain in the eyes of his dying father. As he writes,

And the old man whom I call father
slowly opens his mouth to swallow
the spoonful of glucose being fed to him
I have been watching him lie in his bed
for every two years now.

(Ibid, p.16)

Mahapatra puts few questions before us like, why this 'killing drama' is on in Punjab? Why this terror threatening the rivers of life? And how long this hate will continue? His questions depict the suffering of humanity. Newspaper and television bring sad news of blast, killing outs, shot dead people, curfew in one or the other corner of the land. But hope in him wishes to see something good on 'TV tonight'. But the again same blood sheds peeps in to his room through the news telecast on television. In Punjab even the eyes of some masks appear fearsome. The dead bodies are looking for their heads; all this creates a picture of mad violence. He puts it like this,

Around
a slender waist
a petticoat stirs
in the wind, looking absurd
the torso
looking about
for its missing head.

(Ibid, p.18)

Persona feels even the whole nature has lost somewhere in this chaos and violence, the bird of peace has flown away from this retreat making it a dispossessed nest. He calls is 'death's wild land' as wind brings violence and decay. The world of nature is rendered in the context of the 'human destruction' as

Sultry july
the grasses of the dead
are growing fast

(Ibid, p.19)

Persona also remembers the hijack episode; terrorist hijacked flight number 405 and took it to Lahore. The humane behavior of terrorist generates confidence at first but in the end the evil of terror gets hold of the passengers. This incident is directly related to the decaying of human values, disintegration of values. Poet creates an irony when daughters of one of victimized parents are eager to listen, their tale of woe again and again. Persona observes it as;

The vermilion on the woman’s forehead
ripples in the dark. Her kid daughter wants
her favourite hijacking anecdote narrated again
to lull her sleep

(Ibid, p.21)

Poet further summarizes the pain of Punjab using various images depicting violence, fear and restlessness. The land becomes accustomed with ‘curfews’, ‘Ambulance’, ‘blowing sirens’, ‘bullet shots’ and ‘death’. The land gets besieged by fake promises of the politicians who come flying in jets. He portrays the land of terror;

In the city of the round-the-clock
curfew, and the white trucks
painted AMBULANCE fighting
my thought in the sun

(Ibid, p.22)

The life breathing inside nests is under threat of terror; all hopes gets shattered and disappear like water from the dried river. And every hope for its end fades in the ‘mind’s expanding nova, the dispossessed nests’. Every blast snatches innocent lives and government distributes allowances for suffering. Poet creates an image of a lonely women standing alone in queue for the allowance. He records the anguish as;

the voice of the lonely woman
standing in the queue for her sustenance allowance
(her husband shot dead by terrorists last month)-
a voice which the roar
of the Minister’s jet cuts short

(Ibid, p.24)

Mahapatra again talks about the lonely women living in some corner of this bewildered Wheatfield. He portrays the evil mentality of many towards a helpless woman. Any woman in such houses having lost one of their pillars becomes target of male sexuality. So called male force rape her and murder her. As he writes,

Now a man knows only two ways
for dealing with stray woman:
  he rapes her
  and he kills her

(Ibid, p.25)

What has led to such a fanatic world? It is only selfish motives of our policy makers, the selected leaders who become dictators, ruling over our petty lives. He lashes at their hypocrisy and brings out the stark reality. Political lobby of the nation has lost its sensibility and concern for the nation. He symbolizes
leaders as ‘tall dark mountains, in false snow to stifle their laughter’. He sums up his concern with image of Gandhi and a rhetorical question to go with it,

Gandhiji, only an act you put on for posterity?
With India, our India, barely worth raping?

(Ibid, p.34)

He depicts one after other pictures of terror, children becoming orphan, and how a father is helpless to save his child. He uses image of slaughter house and child’s innocence being almost killed like a ripe fruit. He takes a plunge in to his ‘Konarka myth’ and recalls death of Dharma, who sacrificed his life to save his father’s name.

you might after all,
take this as another, episode in an enormous pathological
dream of Dharma

(Ibid, p.38)

Second part of the book entitled, ‘A Dance of Bejwelled Snakes’ puts another picture displaying the same amount of turmoil. It is related to Bhopal, how thousands of people sacrificed to callousness of an industry. The section begins with lines of India Today, cover photograph, 31st Dec. 1984- “Victim Number 569, Leela aged 5, daughter of Dayaram of Chola Kenchi, Bhopal. Died of gas poisoning on 3rd December 1984.” Part two of the poem is woven around the tragedy in Bhopal and death of Leela and her fellow sufferers.

The eyes are deep and hard in Leela’s sockets.
And the face looks peaceful in death
That’s what they say, the onlookers,
what would Leela have said
had she grown up to her father’s age?

(Ibid, p.41)
Persona puts himself at the place of such luckless father and thinks what would be the state of that father. While recording the reaction of the father, he says, it was impossible for the man to realize that her small child strangled to death very untimely by very unaccustomed way. He narrates her father Dayaram’s condition as,

…..his half-walking mind 

trying fruitlessly to drain the sea of reality. 

(Ibid)

Poet further uses image of a fish caught in the net to describe the suffering of the people caught in the middle of that poisonous gas. Leela failed to dream but persona feels for her and describes her pains like, ‘sails filling the wind’. He finds some bejwelled snakes responsible for this disaster. He can find evil shadows and ‘feudal landlord’ and ‘iron bars.’

Somewhere the rain kicks someone 
like an enraged feudal landlord, 

somewhere the wind cuts a tender face 
without reason like mean whip.

Somewhere a dance of bejwelled snakes 

binds two impoverished eyes

(Ibid, p.43)

Poet even feels for the whole nature, trees, animals and even soil has become poisonous. He finds leaves of India gasping for breath and streets getting congested by the load of dead bodies. In poem number 33, persona handles a social issue. He brings forward issue of abortion, female foeticide. He presents a woman called Yashoda, belonging to poor family. She is preparing for second abortion of her fourteen year daughter. Poet asks her, ‘Why do you need a family Yashoda?’ Abortion has become a common for many. This brings growing callousness in our lives and moral decay of the society. Thus ‘Dispossessed Nests’ presents moaning of a golden bird who used to twit somewhere in the
morning belonging to distant past. That bird now opens its mouth only to moan, watching his nest getting withered by political winds of betrayal, darkness creeping inside us, threat of multinational companies, terrorism and social turmoil of the land.

2.11 Burden of Waves and Fruits

This collection discusses same images and themes which are so recurrent in the poems of the Jayanta Mahapatra but with a new meaning and new treatment all together. Beside much discussed old and frequent images presented in to a new flavour the nobility of this collection is persona’s conscious effort towards his, own ageing and the whole process ageing. By the time this volume appeared persona has reached the age of sixty. So naturally the concerns and signs of aging come here. In a general sense this volume becomes a response of persona towards his growing old, and towards the whole process of aging. As stated by Ravindra Swain “in the forty eight poems of this collection, the process of aging and the problems of coming to terms with it through poetry becomes the agonizing ordeal of the poet”16. Mahapatra has presented same images in to new context and myths here. It is much like visiting the same place and noticing new settings, with arrival of new books he present a new architect and interiors. He presents visuals, auditory, natural and physical images. Images of sky, oriole call, the book of earth, pond heron, grass, water, darkness wild weeds etc. mingles with his presentation of the landscape to weave a new pattern of world breathing in with images and symbols. The dominant images of this collection are varied and showing restless and violence inside and outside he moves in darkness feel the burning sensation of wound and handles his old age, idea of death, fatigue, defeat and ultimate destruction of the body. As Bruce King has aptly observed, “to bridge as epistemological, phenomenological gap-to know, be part of, enclose, experience- with the world and the other, whether it be a woman, temple stones, a Hindu priest” 17He presents the agrarian landscape beautifully in the poem called, ‘Events’
Above town’s dusty streets
The moon is almost up, lighting roofs, stiles;
A distant whistled tune
Saddens the jungles of the night

(“Events”, BW)

He philosophize events and incidents that takes place in his locality. Here he presents multiple images to shape his ideas. He uses image of moon, lighting up the roofs and sadness of the jungle. In the same poem he visualizes funeral pyres breathing quietly in the peepul tree. In another poem called, ‘Voice’ he presents imagery depicting his homeland Orissa and its landscape personifying it with cruelty of present times. He visualizes same uneasiness growing in forest which is engulfing humanity in its artificiality.

The hills are on fire,
The cries of crickets swell with each warm hour;
Desperate for friendship a movie queen somewhere
Knocks breathlessly on an unknown door.

(“Voice”, BW)

Rain is the one of the chief themes of this collection, as publisher remarked very aptly in his note on the book, “India is everywhere and nowhere” in this book and in the forty eight poems. He presents the fierce sun of the summer, continuous down pour of his Orissan roof, flow of river in its inner and outer being, its multifaceted dawns and there are glimpse of concern over this nation, the violence against children and women. Image of poverty clad children appear in the poem entitled, ‘A Summer Afternoon’. He depicts the poverty of the town and describes how poverty of the town is a refugee outside the temples of the town, where God is hiding somewhere in sheltered shrine. Actually he
presents a contrasting idea that how almighty god, the lifeless statue is well sheltered but not the poor children fighting for food.

Outside, in the bright sun,
the screams of five children crying
for slices of watermelon pierce his ears;
he sees a tree of ten hands
scoffing the atrocious innocence of Jagannath
in his sheltered shrine.

(“A Summer Afternoon”, BW)

He again portrays agony of children and mother in his poem entitled, ‘Twilight’ he presents a young child under mother’s face which is dead like a water which is dying somewhere in the throat of the river.

In the children’s ward
Under a mother’s face
the dead, always so young.
Water startles in river’s throat.

(“Twilight”, BW)

Mahapatra wanders like a lonely cloud in his romanticism and portrays his homeland and its landscape with details. But his eyes are not close to the harsh realities of his time. He holds a very sensible heart which concerns for the every living being around him. In one of the poem of this collection entitled’ ‘Winds of Spring 1983’ he talks about cruel and inhuman massacre of women and children on 18th February 1983, in paddy fields at Nellie in Assam.

Winds in the fields of uneven ground
growing wider where the fleeing children of Nellie
watch the moon shudder and crop somewhere behind
the points of there bare screams
slaking on their mothers’ slashed stomachs

(“winds of Spring 1983”, BW)
He even feels for those dumb goats that are sent to slaughter house. Here the image of goats and slaughter house stands for the cruelty which is the way of life in the nation. At the same times he uses image of lonely pigeon which stands for the peace

A lonely pigeon floats past
like a spirit
over twenty-four docile sheep being herded
to the municipal slaughter house

(“River”, BW)

Rain appears in the poems like, ‘Rain in Orissa’, ‘Another Day in the Rain’, ‘A Rain Poem’, ‘This is the Season of Old Rain’ and in ‘Again the Rain Falls’. In all these poems he depicts different forms and meanings of the poem. The same rainfall holds different meaning in different situations, sometimes he calls is a ‘fatal touch of inactions’, and sometimes he visualizes its atrocity when desperate poverty stricken children bears pain without any shelter, ‘children stink like wet dogs’. Rain is the symbol of regeneration and origin of the life, it stands for the transformation and beginning of new relations. Persona links his old age and death with rain, he sees death only as new beginning. In the poem entitled, ‘This is the Season of the Old Rain’ he depicts this beautiful linkage as,

This is the season of old rain,
Always with much to answer before time is done
with decay and death and shutting our minds.

This is the time when fruit of my life
Seems humble and tender against the dark banyan
When season comes alive with memories
of earlier years.

(“This is the Season of Old Rain”, BW)
Similarly life giving river appears as terror and he visualizes images on placid river passing by a ruined town. Here the ruined town stands for the old age and images for the memories and river may be for the flow of time. He associates grass, stone, time and memory with death.

The sky darkens. The afternoon wind 
drifts through the lanes of this ruined town 
and wrecks the images on the placid river 
that holds the sudden terror 
of a man falling into frigid depths

(“The Wind”, BW)

He again falls in to frigid depths of his passing days about to close somewhere. He finds wind getting buried under, peepul by the river. Peepul tree stands for his old age here

And the light stirs, as if to rise, 
but is buried under the old peepul limbs 
by the river. Pain rolls in water’s unconcern 
where we keep on seeing shapes

(“River”, BW)

Here poet’s body becomes his concern his centre and consciousness. It makes all the other images less substantial as body overpowers:

I touch my shoulders; they are bare, contrive. 
Like the shape of deserted park bench in the rain. 

(“Burden of Waves and Fruits”, BW)

He feels the burden of his body as shoulders growing weak and withered like limbs of old peepul. He finds his heart beats going silence and sullen. He can feel its fatigue and has nothing more to learn about love and life. A sense of unfulfilment grows over satisfaction making one restless, and hastens the tired legs to start the pursuit with a new zeal which is no where to find. The urge to make something of one’s self, before saying good bye over powers other feelings.
In one of the interviews persona himself has said, “I am writing about death. Not in the way I used to, the day of death is an ending, death giving movement to life, not inn that sad, closing way. I want now to write about death in another way.” He uses bare, blunt, rusted, ruined and withering images to depict the idea of ageing. In the poem entitled, ‘River’ he uses image of left out cars which rust in dumping ground. Persona finds these cars staring him from a corner of their age smeared in rust.

In the poem entitled, ‘Burden of Waves and Fruits’ he asks ‘do we have to be uncertain of ourselves, bathing our bruised bodies in the waters of the pestilential river’. He also refers to ‘old myths arguing with vital organs of body and mind o approach towards a rear entrance to the page’. All this refers to process of aging. He talks about death; he compares old with enchanted fruits and youth as the fragrance of the freshly cooked molasses.

All through this volume persona makes a constant effort to show how he is approaching death altogether in a new perspective though with his usual world of imagery and symbols. He triumphly comes out of his weak and claustrophobic body, burdening his consciousness up to the death. He accepts it with calm and warmth and voices it. He presents it not as a fear but an opportunity of transformation as he writes,

**The rusted body of a mutilated automobile**

  watches me behind closed eyelids.

  With barely a whisper my blood shuts the door.

(“River”, *WB*)

In the poem entitled, ‘Burden of Waves and Fruits’ he asks ‘do we have to be uncertain of ourselves, bathing our bruised bodies in the waters of the pestilential river’. He also refers to ‘old myths arguing with vital organs of body and mind o approach towards a rear entrance to the page’. All this refers to process of aging. He talks about death; he compares old with enchanted fruits and youth as the fragrance of the freshly cooked molasses.

**in the Sunday marketplace of enchanted fruit**

  when the fragrance of freshly cooked molasses

  floats on the wild laughter of youth

  into the dimmed eyes of an old man

  living on one foot on charity?

(“Talking of Death”, *BW*)

All through this volume persona makes a constant effort to show how he is approaching death altogether in a new perspective though with his usual world of imagery and symbols. He triumphly comes out of his weak and claustrophobic body, burdening his consciousness up to the death. He accepts it with calm and warmth and voices it. He presents it not as a fear but an opportunity of transformation as he writes,
And who would not take few steps  
into that garden  
that sleeps with dreams in its flowers  
and returns the green earth to him  
in the grains of the dust on the soles of his feet?  

(Ibid)

2.12  Temple

Temple is the longest poem by Jayanta Mahapatra. Unlike the other longer poem Relationship, here persona moves in to a world varied and public rather private. This poem marks a break over his obsession with locale and self. Persona seems to come out of his cocoon, secured space of his land and its rituals. Here tone and muses go out of area which is untraded till now. This is an entry into a new realm with new variations of tone and structure. It has more than nine hundred lines divided in to three sections which are further subdivided. The first part is divided into seven sections, the second into eight and the third into four. This poem begins with a news item from, The Times of India dated March 24, 1980, news about the suicide of two octogenarian weaver couple, Ramanujan (85) and Chelammal (80) out of poverty and loneliness. He deliberately divides this poem into three sections referring to three different parts of a Temple, 1) The Hall of Dancing, 2) The Hall of Offering, 3) Sanctum Sanctorum: The Shrine. These three sections cover within themselves three major stages in the life of a woman-girlhood, marriage and motherhood. Prologue along with epilogue containing a news story about a twelve year girl being gang raped and murdered are biggest suggestive of the theme of the poem. Persona passes from each section to another sections describing about the pain, the endless melody in women’s life. He portrays pains and pathos of Indian women, who live among cruel contradictions
of being a Goddess or prostitute. He presents suffering of divine women like Sita and Parvati to present the plight of ordinary women of the land. He makes Chelammal his mouthpiece and a protagonist in male dominated territories. The ruined temple becomes the mark of ruined women; crushed under the loads of her own existence. Temple is a journey in to female consciousness filled with many myths, illusions and disillusions of history. Within the triangle enclosing tenderness, violence of tenderness and subdued violence, persona weaves an honest image, a fine replica within the microcosmic world of his lines wandering in some ruined temple. The prologue of the poem announces suicide of the Chelammal but it is also her way to moksha from suffering, her wish fulfillment, her deliverance from being a pawn in cosmic design.

**now in a new reason of awakening**

**stirred a frenzy to force into the moments of your fantasy**

**something that, even in fantasy, you did not possess,**

**something other than the fearful flashes of human goodness.**

*(TP)*

The first section called, Hall of Dancing comprises seven different sections showing Chelammal’s early stage of life. Her physical growth, her puberty and curiosity, heat of her physical passion, her consumption in to marriage and her realization of her helplessness for being a poor woman in male dominated world. As stated earlier this section portrays tenderness in both protagonist and into her locale the landscape. The episode of Chelammal’s girlhood and growing in to women have been merged in to store house of past. Images hold tenderness of her meek life ended in suicide. Images like ‘mirror’, ‘wind’ and ‘river flowing backward’ serve the purpose of persona in portraying the tenderness.

**This memory is strange as a taunting mirror**

**shifted as the wind, keeping to it shrine**

**like paddy in heat before it bursts into fruit**
or the mournful eye of a stone buddha set in flight.

(Ibid, p.14)

Here the image of paddy in heat suggests her teenage as well as awakening of her sexual desires. In section two of the Hall of Dancing persona symbolizes her faint awareness of virgin body growing in for womanhood.

her growing breast two swells of pain
fell the first touch. Then evenly it spread
its humid fever into the waiting brain.

(Ibid, p.15)

Here the word, ‘waiting’ and ‘humid fever’ stands for her awareness, a hint of her sexual knowledge. Further persona uses image of old well, the first darkness which catch her awareness in the failing light. Persona keeps on dropping suggestive images again and again as ‘games of leap-frog’ or ‘snatch the bride’. Section three of ‘The Hall of Offering’ holds voice of Chelammal, who first questions myths of the land, where she argues and exposes grief of goddesses like Sita and Parvati just for being a woman. Here she becomes the mouthpiece of persona who uses these great ladies of myths as symbol of sorrows of women.

O solemn Ayodhya skies!
O savage dens of Siva!
let me not awaken
the meaningless tears of rage and hate
when you fumble at the catch of my consciousness
before you cut the heart out of my body
and nights scour my womb
with ashes of my solitude.

(Ibid, p.33)

In section four Chelammal’s voice gains even more confidence and she directly accuses male class of oppressing woman. She questions the male world of their hypocrisy and conspiracy.
Leader of the conspirators.
starved all these years,
We’ve no strength left,
while you go on drawing power
into your arms!

(Ibid, p.38)

This self consciousness liberates her mind from the cords of myths and douches her face with the cold water of realization of her own existence. At this stage she reaches self actualization and thinking what she wants and ponder over the way of deliverance. In the last sub section of, ‘The Hall of Dancing’ she finds herself as a pawn in this whole cosmic design.

‘The Hall of Offering’ asks for the sacrifice of Chelammal’s chastity as attaining puberty she was raped and left to her fate. Poet refers to her puberty age as, ‘the stage of ripe thighs of temple dancer’ her rape is her forced sacrifice it is symbolic of ‘The Hall of Offering’. After her rape she finds her father and brother all moving with sadness of men, belonging not to her. Persona aptly describes her predicament through fish spawned in the rice fields.

like the fish spawned in rice fields,
wasn’t she fated to be caught
when the terraces were finally drained?

(Ibid, p.29)

He furthers talks about the existence of woman as alone in surrounded rituals and ethos. He finds every woman in isolation within some laxman rekha. He portrays her violation as human at the hands of the male dominated world. Every woman is unaware of the real purpose and in search of the way like Chelammal for her moksha.

There is no woman
who is not alone,
no woman who is sure
she has found her way

to her real purpose of life,

no one who doesn’t return to the idea

(Ibid, p.23)

By the time Chelammal reaches third section called, ‘Sanctum Sanctorum: The Shrine’ she realizes herself and her own way of the life. She is ready to combat in her own way. The loads of suffering starts to suffocate her breathe and she throws away the robe of myths and crosses the boundaries. Unlike divine women Sita, Draupadi and Parvati, she chooses her way at her own will without concerning about the world. She chooses her own myth; she only eyes her own moksha at any cost. She takes evil way to justify her journey and righteousness. Instead of being goddess she becomes a demon called Putana. Here persona uses myth of demon lady Putana who is sent to kill child Krishna. She breaks regular myths of Sita, who made her lord chase golden deer and Draupadi who could not be disrobed. Chelammal is aware of her plight as she proceeds,

And now the ogress,

transformed into lovely woman,

her poisoned nipples

the moksha-centre of her martyrdom,

awakens the women of the mind.

(Ibid, p.48)

Putana achieves her desires paradise, as she was killed by God himself. And as she acted as God’s mother, even though evil one. Chelammal grows at the end with a new myth; she gets promoted from a pawn to a mother in cosmic realms. The very dream of Chelammal playing the role of Putana restores her to the world of reality. At the end she reaches the shrine, where eternal opposites merge in divine union.

a circle which returns the endless shrines

to the soul from their crumbled temples
and brings back all shapes
to light from the nothingness of space.

(Ibid, p.55)

2.13 Whiteness of the Bone

This collection carries fifty nine poems appeared in various Literary Journals, reviews and in anthologies. Title of this collection symbolizes general theme of these poems, title is no where a part of poem. It suggests lifelessness, death, melancholic nature and tragedies of the land. The very first poem of the collection called ‘Sunset in the Valley’ opens with a note of melancholy

Te world is full with toys, many of them unused.
Do I detect a note of melancholy in my voice?

(“Sunset in the Valley”, WB)

He uses image of toys to talk about the time and past. Toys also stand for innocence and childhood days. Unlike us toys never let their innocence in span of time. We grow and change with time but toys keep themselves intact, these toys somewhere reaches to persona when he talk about how we are ceasing to be human, leaving our heart and sensitivity far in a corner, decaying in some photograph.

Toys are unaware how we grow
They live near our childhoods
which can only meet us with photographs now

(Ibid)

The tone of melancholy continues in next poems, he recalls his father and his last days, he also recalls his mother’s pale face in the darkness.

My loving mother turns pale and crass.
In the darkness someone called God
runs his vain fingers
over the treasures in his planet

(“In God’s Night”, WB)

Here he question the very concept of religion through symbol of God’s vain finger running in to treasures of this planet and he also visualizes him as standing in the darkness. Persona finds same kind of tinge and suffocation when he sees the present scenario of his mother land thrown in to hands of Terrorism, Separatism, Religious Fanaticism, and Communal Violence with old wound of partition. He uses image of map getting strange to describe the condition of land. He finds future blurred in white mist, painting a layer of whiteness of fear over the faces of sons.

Rain grates in the silence. My son
walks in through the dim walls,
a strange map drawn by life

(“Unreal Country”, WB)

Hopelessness continues as he sees son’s face dropping in white enamel. He finds rain hanging by branches of trees. He laments all the great people who lost their lives for the nation using image of ash.

The south wind blows steadily from the river,
overtakes me in a fancy of fight;
it startles the ashes of the land

(“Another Autumn”, WB)

He again finds himself at the windows staring fallen branches and some selling maps of past. He cherishes past in his poems. He sings songs of past whenever he watches ruins of past looking blankly in a hope towards him, making him much more closer to the land, as he writes

in those songs of pain and loss,
to make me cry like my father’s child

(Ibid)
Just like map he also uses symbol of ‘Unknown horoscope’ to describe about the uncertainty of this land, where a palmist reading its fate through lines of ruins and rituals. Same kind of hopelessness he can see for nature, for trees. He uses image of tree getting blur and spreading blood to the buds, here blood going into buds is suggestive of recent blood sheds what we are giving to our future generations. He compares India with an old temple,

**India like the decapitated old temple by the river,**

**its mouth open, and starting,**

**all its bewildering hunger born into sorrow**

(“A Dark Wind”, *WB*)

Persona presents a beautiful contrast between our vision which always find miracles and tourists who visit here and find reality of this land in poem called, ‘Tourists at the Railway Hotel Puri’

**They watch themselves walk across the sands,**

**sniffing the dead fish smell of their lust,**

**tasting the seat of ritual sleeplessness.**

**It’s we, the ignorant, who keep on seeing miracles.**

(“Tourist in Railway Hotel, Puri”, *WB*)

In poem entitled ‘Summer Palace of Tipu Sultan, Serigapatam’ persona presents a visual image of faded and mildewed over Tipu’s seated effigy. In another poem called ‘Afternoon’ he visualizes past lying everywhere, like water. In poem called ‘When You need to Play-Act’ he writes philosophically

**All truth is rather like a war.**

**Making love I chance to get a glimpse**

(“When You need to Play-Act”, *WB*)

In the same poem he uses image of roses, thistle, mirror and war to depict our lives as a need of play-act. He ends this poem with a rhetorical question

**How could the shadows**

**of hidden bones cast by the sun**
drive out the iron from my wide open dawns?

(Ibid)

In poem called ‘Shadows’ e puts forth image of ash white mist of the morning turning dark against the heat of the day. He also uses image of railway tracks running in an unending line like hands those appear to meet after months of departure like two strangers.

In all this land
dream is lost like unending railway tracks
How true that these hands appear
to meet again after months, like two strangers.

(“Afternoon Ceremonies”, WB)

Again he talks about the relation between man and woman in poem called, ‘In the Autumn Valley of the Mahanadi’. He recalls history, his dead father coming as memory in his mother’s eye from the last year’s calendar hanging on the wall. Again he refers to time as ‘being a green mango’. He also uses domestic imagery to symbolize the time, he watches time through lowered eyes of windows,

A remembered face a window,
time’s lowered eyes;
hunched and trembling, hope survives.

(“A Death”, WB)

In some of the poems of this collection like, ‘Light’, ‘All Poetry there is’, and in ‘From Star to Star’ he refers to poem apostrophically using various symbols,

Let not the morning remain behind
as a poem, to be questioned
like a misdeed or some trophy
to be understood

(“Light”, WB)
In poems like ‘Behind’, ‘House’ and ‘Sickle’ he talks about his locality. He describes his surrounding life, the world full of temples, rituals, diseases like chickenpox, malaria and leprosy, poverty and gloom that thicken on the walls of existence. He writes

**Does this**

*ritual full, noisy malarial town*
*only float back into the weary jaws*
*of myth; do we have to wait for*
*the bright milk of ritual to nourish*
*the linga of rebirth as we sit*
*in ashes blackened over our dead?*

(“Behind”, *WB*)

Here Siva Linga stands for religion, myth and for rituals of the land. In another poem called ‘house’, he uses symbol of summer *loo* that blows in barren streets of the land in summer days as breath of a woman so near. In ‘Deaths in Orissa’, he uses various images to demonstrate naked reality of present time and he puts himself as a poet who barks like a dog.

**Oh I am a poet, who barks like a dog,**
*..let not my memory e like tiger in ambush*

(“Deaths in Orissa”, *WB*)

In poems like ‘The Rage in those Young Eyes’, and in ‘Waiting’ he continues to talk about the present affairs of the time. He uses Gandhi as symbol of our forgotten hero, an alone leader standing as ghost in some corners and staring us through questioning eyes. He talks about our hollowness while we worship Gandhi, the murdered hero by keeping a safe distance from him

**When you are safely distant from living,**
**you can worship the murdered Gandhi.**

(“Waiting”, *WB*)
Gandhi reappears in the poem called, ‘The Fifteenth of August’ as persona describes his photo in new airport lounge.

Rain has been a constant image in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. Rain forms the very texture of his poem, rain is the symbol of growth, symbol of development but it is also the symbol of flood and famine and hunger of dry bellies. In the poem called, ‘With Broken Wings’, he finds rain holding the ghost of his grandfather watching the secret between smoke of past and his grey eyes. He many times uses colors as symbols to present metamorphism and cluster of meanings in undertone and to announce the mood and locale of the poems through colors like White, Black, Red, Yellow, Grey and Blue of the sky. As he writes in poem called, ‘The Time’.

\textbf{The white wake of the time is this paper}  
\textit{on which words go up ad down}  
\textquote{The Time Afterward’, \textit{WB}}

Again in the poem called ‘Bhopal Dawn’ he compares dawn as lying open in white. He also uses visual imagery with minute detailing to project various day to day life scenes of the land surround him. As he writes,

\textbf{From the road, the crude slap}  
\textit{of a whip against bullock’s flanks}  
\textit{carries in the morning wind.}  
\textit{otherwise all else is quiet.}  
\textquote{The Hill”, \textit{WB}}

or as he describes summer of the land knitting it beautifully with his underlying purpose in the poem

\textbf{Like a patient crocodile}  
\textit{she leaves her prey to rot into softness}  
\textit{fastened beneath the roots}  
\textit{of some banyan of our heritage}
that overhangs the river of our time.

(“A Sullen Balance”, WB)

He clearly asserts about his obsession with imagery and symbols in his poem called, ‘Another Love Poem’.

In a country drugged with its image,
I only find my way in metaphor:

(“Another Love Poem”, WB)

2.14 Shadow Space

This collection appeared in 1997, carries fifty four poems. These fifty four poems explores metaphysical world lying inside science adapted humanistic heart of the persona. Title of this compilation is very suggestive; it stands for some shadows moving in mental currents of the persona when he wants to talk about history, land and realities. As usual imagery is far fetched and highly personal bearing hallmarks of his world inside and outside. His imagery lies divided between two coaxial world of Science and Arts, between his Christian Identity and Hindu Reality, between his aesthetic breaths and insomnia of thoughts. His fission between two worlds drench in different religions makes him unstable in between waiting half way. He rejects religion and accepts humanity. He moves in the world full of shadows having multiple realities and illusions. As he writes in poem entitled, ‘Living in Orissa’.

Only shadows shift now.

They have the eyes of defeated spirits.

(‘Living in Orissa’, SS)

In the poem entitled ‘Landscape’, he again refers to space around few shadows peeping in through landscape of the land close to him. He refers to young girls and fields rugged with fears and uses an image to connote his meaning.
Again the fields of man are rugged with fear.
And the breasts of young girls
do not rise and fall with their own breathing

(“Landscape”, SS)

Shadows keeps on appearing wearing multiple meanings in number of poems of this collection. The concept of shadow is used very beautifully in the poem entitled, ‘Widow’ to describe about the predicament of woman after death of her husband.

Her skin breaks into fickle shadows
that trail her to the corner of the little room
where a stone icon stands, weary with vermilion

(“Widow”, SS)

Another image that holds a high frequency of usage in this collection is of rain. Image of rain occurs in poems like, ‘Shadow of the Day’, ‘A Hint of Grief’, ‘1992’, ‘Raining’, ‘Quest’ and in ‘June Rain’. He presents the thirst of earth waiting all through long summer for rain. He calls rain home, as Orissa and its culture has a close association with rain.

The Rain is home, clinging
pitifully to the Orissa countryside.

(“Hint of Grief”, SS)

He further visualizes rain as frightened and dropping comic books of our history on stones. He symbolizes rain as call of dead ones or the call of history.

Heat the rain tapping against the door
so persistently and you think
the dead themselves are trying to come in.

(“1992”, SS)

Persona’s concern for the history, landscape and realities of the present time makes him time conscious poet. In his poems time finds a new epithet and quality in each new compilation he presents newer version of symbols to describe
light weighted feet of time, walking in with few marks on the pages of history, which only an eye of concern can see and heart of humanity can feel. He beautifully mingle the damp air of monsoon with time as it enters in to the time piece and hurdles the way.

**Time has lost its hands, trying to keep still**

**Like the damp clouds widows deaden the light of the sun**

(“Trying to Keep Still”, SS)

He gain refers to time as our biggest possession in poem entitled, ‘Possession’

**Time, our strongest possession, bleeds.**

**It tastes salt and sickly on the tongue.**

(“Possessions”, SS)

He presents shadow of sorrow and hopelessness for the future and for the nation. He uses image of shadows of sorrow, kinesthetic images, images of insects and reptiles like chameleon. He many times creates verbal caricature of nature but unlike Wordsworth he adds colors of reality, most of the time harsh and bare in to his canvas.

**The worn-out face of India**

**holds the weak eyes of dumb, solitary poets**

**who die alone,**

**silenced by the shapelessness of life alive.**

(Ibid)

He utters another note of hopelessness when he refers to state of the nation rusting somewhere in damp air of corruption helped by impurities of our politicians. He is unaware of the fate of poems and poets. So he asserts,

**I wish someone could tell my son**

**that when I died, I died bravely**

(Ibid)
Persona presents predicament of women in the nation. He uses myth of Ahalya, a woman who has been cursed by her own sage husband of being a stone till Lord Rama himself come for her deliverance by touching the stone with his feet. He finds air which flowing through village in evening hour stranger than the rape and murder without a scream. And he finds even God’s greatness lies on the sacrifice of the women. He uses image of Ahalya for this,

what has happened is till not over  
because it is made of a woman’s sacrifices,  
as Ahalya goes back to bed,  
a guilty look on her face.

(“Village Evening”, SS)

Poet again drifts back to his own childhood and find few shadows inside that old and familiar space of time. He gets swirled around by swarm of memories, hanging like mangoes some are ripe and some are raw and fallen down untimely in to his mind disturbing the flow of present current. As he writes in poem entitled, ‘Defeat’.

childhood sits in shadow  
like an eye in a face that I dead

(“Defeat”, SS)

He again refers to shadow spaces as uncorrupt, as these shadows can’t cheat you like politicians. He again takes his childhood as reference point of his memories in to shadows around space of past.

As a boy I remember the time my father threw  
those shadows of his on the walls of our house.

(“Shadows”, SS)

He recalls his childhood again the tress of the land, and uses tender leaves as a symbol of poetry and his memories as trees.

That day I had been under the deodar trees,
bored, hot, and I let my lost childhood
crowd everything else from my mind.
I’d have burned all those trees
to let the tender green leaves speak.

(“Walls”, SS)

He also uses image of poem with multiple symbols and shades in poems like, ‘The stories in the Poetry’. He finds poetry a cage of word, outraged without explanations when it offers no stories to relate as he writes,

The world plots on.
And poetry stumbles and falls.

(“The Stories in Poetry”, SS)

On the other hand he finds poetry a beautiful landscape, a river but a river without a water, a river of word and each word has its own price. He finds it as combing out words, like someone pulls knife out of wound and unable to staunch the flow of blood. As he writes,

Today,
I stand on the bank of the poem,
even though each word has a price,
even though this poetry appears as river,
a river without water.

(Ibid)

Persona’s love for images make him personified wind, sky, river, stones, birds, poems, freedom and even diseases as in one of the poems of this collection called, ‘The Sunset’ he personifies Cancer and wind,

The cancer can not speak for the web
of anxiety that covers his mouth.

(“The Sunset”, SS)

and in the same poem he personifies wind when he finds wind twisting his arms,
The breeze grips my arm and twists it.

(Ibid)

Beside this many familiar images like Gandhi, school teacher, image of birds, image of rivers and presence of his mother, father and grandfather occurs in many poems of this collection.

2.15 Bare Face

Bare Face holds a cover resembling the hall mark of persona’s poetic realm. Front cover of this book has Egyptian Hieroglyphic images, which was used in Egypt during era of Pharos, Pyramids and mummies. These poems show persona’s obsession with symbols and imagery depicting bare realities of history and his time. Along with these recurrent themes in this compilation there are numbers of poems holding his philosophy of life, Poetry and God. Poems speak through graphical language where words are arranged in altogether a new architecture. This collection is divided in to two sections containing twenty six short poems and one long poem called Requiem- a poem having twenty sections within it. In the very first poem persona uses beautiful images creating a silence and gloom of atmosphere.

The saints are silent inside their own truths.

Moss broods silently in the cracks of the stone.

Four-year-old Pratick is silent inside his screams.

Nobody answers him although they surround his fears.

(“Silence”, BF)

In the same poem he compares rain as having capacious body like female and further calls it unknown arithmetic. Rain again reappears in the poem entitled, ‘Collaboration’, when he finds rain gazing in the light of dead things. In the poem, ‘Silence’, he uses an image of garden spider silently spinning its web and sigh also curling up in the web somewhere. Theme of silence moves ahead with
another poem entitled, ‘Only Twilight’, where he beautifully symbolizes silence getting loose somewhere around the walls of consequences.

**Born of this sad gold, the night**
*opens one more cage, loosening*
*the animals of reveries through the trees,*  
*so that we would be quiet*
*and our silence would have no consequences.*

(“Only Twilight”, *BF*)

Orissa with its whole host of landscape and geography occupies an eternal place in poetic craft of the persona. Rivers of the land like Daya and Mahanadi along with sea beaches of Bhubaneshwar and Konarka appear again and again wearing newer and newer forms of symbols. In one such poem called, ‘In Time of Winter Rain’, he creates a pictorial image of the river bed of Mahanadi.

**the almond-eyed boats clutching time in their fists**
**in the Mahanadi River, the light shoulders**
**of peaceful lotuses floating motionless**

(“In Time of Winter Rain”, *BF*)

He beautifully describes the shape of the boat and motionless lotus on the lap of the river. Like rivers temples and rituals of the land also find frequent references in his poems. He uses religious symbols to connote layers of the meaning. In the poems like, ‘Concerning August 1998’, ‘The Return’ and in ‘Abandoned Temple’ he uses image of flag and Siva Linga.

**The sad voice of earth is crouched in city’s chaos.**
**The fluttering flag doesn’t remember anything further than that.**

(“Concerning August 1998”, *BF*)

Again in the poem entitled, ‘The Return’, he talks about the tragedy of human relationships comparing it to image of a flag hanging like a limp in airless atmosphere. In, ‘Abandoned Temple’ he talks about an abandoned temple holding some statues of serpent girl, elephant gods and fiery birds.
A wandering boy hurls a rock through
the ruined entrance. Shadow in retreat fly;
of serpent girls, elephant gods, fiery birds.
Mosquitoes slap the Siva linga in ignorant stillness.

(“Abandoned Temple”, BF)

In many poems of this collection he refers to the concept of time like he
did in most of his earlier collections. Through clusters of images he talks about
the concept, importance and nature of time. Sometimes he finds it unreal like a
paper star that rises out of sight and sometimes he finds his land running like time
inside clocks.

as I watch the land of my birth
run roughly like a clock
that was always thirty minutes slow

(“The Return”, BF)

Jayanta Mahapatra uses his poems as a medium to talk about the history,
his pain as a human being, and his concern for the nation and his concern for each
and every living being. He snatches all the masks that politicians of this nation
hold to cheat the democracy after regular intervals bringing in pile of lies as
promises before the nation having differences over every issue. In many of his
poems he has used image of Gandhi as symbol of an old man, a symbol of true
leader, a symbol of concern for the future of this nation, a symbol of loneliness
and as a symbol of truth. As he writes,

Even the headless torso of Gandhi
in the city square can speak.
Like truth, unsaid most of the time

(“Sometimes’, BF)

Like other themes the theme of love also finds place in this collection also,
in poem entitled, ‘The Woman Who Wanted to be Loved’, he talks about the
loneliness of her soul which dies somewhere in quietness as ghost of love and her smile getting lost in sacrament of blood.

Love can break and still keep its promise.
It can borrow a dawn and haunt it through time.

(“The Woman Who Wanted to be Loved”, BF)

Side by side love he uses kinesthetic images. These images show predicament of women, lust that is recurrent in our so called religion bound society. In poem called, 'Watching the Tribal Dance in an Orissa Village' he uses an image of a young girl comparing her to young mountain rice.

The young mountain rice trembles as I watch
on the rim of the circling dancers,
a girl touches her softening nipples.

(“Watching the Tribal Dance”, BF)

In another poem called, 'Postcard from Home', he talks about hatred of a woman for impotent husband as in India, it is woman only who have to bear the load of impotency whether she likes or not whether she is or not.

In the neighboring house, a woman hides
her impotent hatred for her husband.

(“Post Card from Home”, BF)

This collection carries persona's philosophy of life and his philosophy behind the poems. There are number of poems in this compilation talking about the need of poems. He talks about poems using clusters of images in the poem called, 'Not in Defense of the Poem'.

It's the poem which can flatter;
so one is afraid of it.

(“Not in Defense of Poem”, BF)

He furthers uses image of upturned cockroach kicking in heart's air and reason for its silence. He then compares poem with a lady.
Sometimes I see the poem
as one who stands
with her arms folded,
as if holding herself for control,
as though she were cursing me,

(Ibid)

He also hopelessly compares it with an old woman, he talks of it having no future. In poem entitled yet again he talks about poems but here tone is not more gloomy than one finds in earlier examples. Here he drench his images in a coat of little hope.

They are like grains of sand everyone
walks on, sealed into the ground.

(“For the Days Together”, BF)

He further uses an image of a young girl,

This poem becomes a girl growing up,
while keeping her legs pressed chastely together,
looks around shyly

(Ibid)

He calls poetry his mother, a cocoon of his broken soul and a bird beating its wings against the bars of conscience. In many of the poems he creates a beautiful images, penning some thought

provoking epigrams like,
Perhaps life is an empty noun,
hiding its thousand destinies

(“The Taste of Sunlight”, BF)

Or

Truth is a sheep lying with its newborn lamb

(“Postcard from Home”, BF)
Requiem is one of the epic poems by him. It contains twenty sections. It begins with a prologue where a girl child is playing in the sun and rain. Her face was clear as the sky after rain. She was without any concern and knowledge of this brutal world. May be this girl is our home land, our country. The rudrakshya in her hand stands for religion in our nation, sun and rain stands for miseries and prosperity, a destiny which can not be escaped. In this poem persona talks about present state of life in the nation. He talks here about vedas and Christianity. Assassination of Gandhi and his image appears again and again in this epic poem. As title suggests this poem is requiem of lost heritage and glory. In section one persona portrays our artificiality and mechanical life when he writes,

Those were fixed smiles;
like people who had been defeated
but who smile when a camera is trained on them.

("Requiem" Sec-I, BF)

He talks about our fading humanity and our indifference to our roots. He finds humanity flickering like a fire fly somewhere in night. In section thirteen he again symbolizes humanity,

The long evening of your life
haunted by a mystery
you could never solve
like the face of humanity
that had lost its future

("Requiem” Sec-XIII, BF)

He talks about the forgotten hero, assassinated by one among us. Those Gandhian traditions and values are fading like his images hanging in some corners of office walls and may be at some cross roads where birds and crows respect it in their own ways. He lashes at our present pettiness in the following concluding lines,

What you have left behind are
faded pictures on bare office walls. A day
every year as national holiday.
Growing, seething leper colonies.

(“Requiem” Sec-I, BF)

2.16 Random Descent

As the title suggest this compilation carries persona’s random thoughts that has been portrayed in earlier works in a new perspective. This compilation is divided into three sections. first section is called Old Violins of legends it opens with a quote

And, without dreams or music, funerals
File past, in slow procession, in my soul;
Hope weeps defeated; Pain tyrannical,
Atrocious, plants its black flag in my skull

- Baudelaire (Trans: Joanna Richardson)

These lines serve the purpose of prologue announcing the general theme of the poem included in this section. This section carries thirty five poems talking about hopelessness, as hope lying defeated wrapped in tears somewhere on ground, a pain that stands everywhere tyrannically and atrocious climate and all this get planted like a flag in his skull. He talks about his painful past, his dead grandfather who starved to the point of death before accepting Christianity, his father, the land and rituals which he observes as an outsider. In the very first poem called ‘Genesis’, he talks about stony silence and a long yawn of recurrent myth in his poems. Myth has its head stuck somewhere in the fork of tree and knowledge won’t allow it to past. He pictures painful scenes that surround him; in poem called he presents an image of paraplegic boy and compares it with cross, are unable to move, fixed and nailed somewhere. Persona’s neutral negotiations with religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam make him use religious symbols lavishly in his poems.
The paraplegic boy stands like a cross,
shivering in the cold seeping through his fingers

(“Winter in the City”, RD)

He projects image of the landscape of Orissa in his poems. Temples, Rivers, Ruins, festivals along with folk of the land find a constant abide in his poems. He also portrays image of the famous Chilika lake of Orissa, in poem called, ‘Winter in the City’ he describes Siberian birds coming to lake Chilika and taking not more than what they need.

Women always hold a place in his poems. Persona portrays their existence in the Indian society, swinging wildly like pendulum between a prostitute and Goddess, as humanity fades somewhere behind in old streets. Image of his mother, daughter, old women ad prostitutes reoccur in many of his poems. In one of the poems of this section entitled, ‘Palmistry’, he talks about the predicament of girl through images like wind, cloud, and cage built on her palms through lines and haze called husband wrapping her mind.

The girl’s line of life climbs those sheer vertical walls she’ll never be able to climb herself

(“Palmistry”, RD)

He portrays how a regular woman is assailed by false declaration of love. She becomes the victim of humiliation and cruelty and violence in every familiar street, by strangers, by her own family and children. He puts image of woman dragging her knees close to her breast, to announce the fear around her in our society.

The woman with her knees drawn to her chest
And the wild that deceives itself
it has tellingly carried the scream of the girl
who is dying in her mother’s arms.

(“Traveller”, RD)

He symbolizes restlessness of every sensitive heart using image of bird fluttering its wings. He finds warmth in dark vapor that rises from the dark
corners of the earth like a new hope. He uses image of back water longing to meet the ocean. This image symbolizes the crushed section of our society longing to mingle in main current of the nation and it also stands for the individual history that wants to relate with common history of the land.

**Today even the dead backwater**

**looks helplessly around for ocean’s hues**

(“The Uncertainty of Colour”, *RD*)

In the poem entitled, ‘Signs’, he finds his memories glancing at him over his shoulder, and what he finds is old clothes, familiar days and those small but intimate things. He also recalls the pain and use image of cat climbing in there like sorrow of childhood days.

**The childish sorrow**

**leaps at me like a cat, when I feel**

I have become someone else.

(“Signs”, *RD*)

He also uses image of cage and torture room, a close chamber to describe the pain of the past. In poem entitled, ‘A Gray Haze over the Rice Fields,’ he again laments his childhood and mixed feelings of pain and pleasure when he recalls his grandmother and mother respectively.

**I am looking out in search of memory,**

not death. Those little kisses on my cheeks

my long-dead grandmother gave me, or

the soft dampness of my tears when

my mother didn’t notice me

(“A Grey Haze Over the Rice Fields”, *RD*)

His childhood memories also lead him to his unwelcomed existence in the Hindu world of Orissa hanging dubiously in his Christian identity. He feels the tinge of this incompleteness, and it makes him frustrated. He feels like a shadow, a thing born before him, so he was never alone as human but that shadow covers
him all the time, people know him by his shadow without knowing his reality which they fail to see. He talks about a ‘promised land’ a land of prosperity and equality; it symbolizes Ramrajya of Gandhi, who sacrificed his life in search of that perfect land. He uses symbol of puppets and calls this land a puppet land manipulated by false strings

Man who for years
desired a country in vain and then
fell in love with the first puppet land they gave him,
even if it failed
to correspond exactly with the promised land

(“Of Story Telling”, RD)

He compares this land with a dead body in another poem

At times, as I watch
it seems as though my country’s body
floats down somewhere on the river

(“Freedom”, RD)

The second section called, Another Ruined Country, 2002 contains ten poems describing about various mishappenings and tragedies that undertook during the year 2002. This section opens with translated lines of Amichai, translated by Ted Hughes.

They said: Aren’t men weird and crazy
to decorate a sword made to kill
with beautiful carvings and precious stones

These lines put before us a rhetorical question. This section opens with a poem entitled ‘The Portrait’, where he describes an evening having rigid face as if it had a stroke. Yes it had a stroke, felt in heart of girl who was raped brutally. He symbolizes the incident in following lines;

Does a raped sixteen-year old girl
build a hymn of the world
where living is a flamboyant metaphor?

(“The Portrait”, RD)

In the poem ‘Night Coming in’ he describes hunger of the children who died in dark alleys of the city where death have chewed their dried bellies. He also uses images of a hangman standing upright against voiceless screaming, cutting the history. Poets sensitive heart pictures the very visual of the a small girl’s dead and raped body.

This 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

(“The Romance of Her Hand”, RD)

He symbolizes hospital wards dying in by some unknown disease and time when oxygen, hisses like serpent. He also highlights corrupted and liars called politicians who come and cheat through their long speeches creating propaganda and each of us seeing it from different point of view. He gain demands the perfect land, he visualizes that land in his poems. He demands a land of prosperity not a ruined land as he writes.

I want the graveyard to flower without its corpses,
and the sunlit street
to shine without its shadows.
I want the flames to warm the empty heart
of love, not burn a city with pitiable hatred.

(“The Land that is Not”, RD)

In third section of this compilation called, Three Shores of Darkness and Light, carry four poems dealing with the theme of darkness and light. In these poems persona projects these themes again and again with different angles and
connotations every time. He always looks for new possibilities and experiments. As he writes in poem entitled, ‘The Shores’;

    At times the boatman
    fears someone would push
    his craft into the river.
    egrets surge past,
    monks wearing the same grey cassocks.

(The Shores”, RD)

or as he writes,

    How can the afternoon hold us
    like a keening hymn in the dark wounded fields
    we keep pressed between our palms?

(The Plot”, RD)

2.17 Land

This volume is his recent work appeared in 2013, containing thirty one poems as the title suggests all these poems refers to one theme i.e. the land, the soil containing past and present of the poet. These poems walk with him silently on the blood-smeared soil of Dahuli where lies blood of his ancestors. He recalls Kalinga, Ashoka and recalls the famine which compelled his grandfather to change his religion. This volume also projects recurrent images like River, Stone, Door, Shadow, Hunger, Jasmine etc. He again takes dip in to the past where stands Asoka with his hand stained in blood. Asoka becomes a symbol of injustice an irony here;

    Slashed with blood-red light, Asoka
    turns away from himself, proclaiming
    “All men are my children.”

(‘Asoka”, LD)

His favourite images like Rain, women, village and darkness come together in his poem entitled Village Mythology where he portrays through these images life of a woman and her day routine in Indian villages.
Firewood on their heads, a file of women
stagger along the last rain-wet road.
Suna, the faithful village wife, carwls through darkness
as she moves beyond birth and death
from one night of rape to another.

(“Village Mythology”, LD)

2.18 Conclusion

Thus an overall study of the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra reveals his ability to transfer codes of his consciousness to the realization of his readers through his images and symbols. His images are his medium, a tool to wipe out the blurred curtains and portray his experience. Images gives his poems a pluralistic approach having more than one meaning where meaning can float in like his concrete and abstract images in to new and unknown possibilities. It is literally impossible to comprehend his poetic world without peeping inside his land through binoculars of his images. He is one of the most subjective and impersonal at the same time, he fondles with contrasting ideas and images in his poems. Duality, pluralism and indeterminacy of his poems are due to his sticky images; yes sticky images which get unfold in to many layers after every new reading in to his poems.
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