

Post Colonial Features in Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry

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Jayant Mahapatra (1928) occupies a pivotal position amongst the Indian English poets. He belongs to the famous trinity of modern poets including Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan. His contribution to Indian English poetry is immense with poetic outputs such as : 'close the SKY', 'Ten by Ten (1971)', 'A Father's House' (1976), 'A Rain of Rites (1976)', 'Waiting (1979)', 'The False Start' (1980), 'Relationship (1980)', 'Life Sign' (1983), 'Disposed Next' (1986) Selected poems (1987), 'Burden of Women and Fruits', (1988), 'Temple' (1989), 'A Whiteness of Bone' (1992) The Best of Jayant Mahapatra (1995), 'Shadow Space' (1997), 'Brave Face (2001)', 'Random Descent (2005) and so are.

Mahapatra immensely contributed to Indian English poetry as his poetry encapsulates enlargement of its theme. His originality of approach to, his treatment with subjects, his employment of imagery, sometimes realistic, sometimes symbolic, sometimes surrealistic and sometimes related with commoners make his craftsmanship superb. Mahapatra is intrinsically enamored by the stark realities of nation and very frequently raised the problems like hunger, calamities, passion, anger, frustration, love, problem of identity, myth, tradition, customs, rituals etc. His extant works are based on this close observation of realities and this is the reason that his works exude the post colonial leanings and spirit.

Bruce King Writes about Mahapatra : " Jayant Mahapatra seems to closer to the modern movement of the First half of this century with its open ended literary forms and reliance on securing symbols to provide coherence to non-linear, fragmented structures. Mahapatra's persona is an estranged, distanced, sensitive artist rather than an invisible or playfully prominent post modernist authors. As a modernist writer there is less importance on the material world and more emphasis on subjective memory and the inner self. The psychological is contrast to the post modernist's emphasis on almost totally self enclosed forms" (195)

'Post colonialism' is a concept that refers to the theory, text and the modes of activism that outrightly discards the structural inequalities and tries to bring about the social justice and stands for the sake of 'self identity'.

B.K. Das writing about post colonialism in this article entitled 'The Critique of Post Colonial Theory' :

"Semantically, Post colonialism means something that has a concern only with national culture after the departure of imperial power. But in actual practices, it has to be understood only in references to colonialism. Like colonialism, post colonialism is a state of consciousness, a Critical Stage in the Continuum of our Cultural Process and self-awareness. Colonialism involves two types of imperialism - Political and Cultural. Therefore, myth and history, language and landscape, 'the self' and 'the other' are all very important ingredients of post colonialism".

Mahapatra's poetry envisages Oriyan cultural heritage, belief folk tales, myth and ritual with his own attitude reflecting the Indian ethos and representing the macrocosm. Mahapatra's

poetry depicts his integrated experience incorporated with the history and myth of his land. The Oriyan landscape comes fully alive in this poetry particularly in 'Relationship. Historical places like 'Konark', Jagannath Puri', 'Chilka,' Chandipur' etc occupy central position in his poetry. Besides, references to Odissa, his birth place, he also includes the other parts of the country in his poetry but as far as the question of identity is concerned, as it is articulated with the reference to land, a sense of belongingness is established if the poet is able to connect the place and community.

Mahapatra evokes the sense of Indianness both in content and form, through his poetry. His symbols and images are evocative and suggestive for his significant linguistic versatility. The poem 'Taste for Tomorrow' reflects it:

“ AtPuri, the Crows
the one wide street
lolls out like a giant tongue
five faceless refers more aside
as a priest passes by and at the streets and.
the crowds imaging the temple door.”

Mahapatra's poetry possesses the depth of feelings and true poetic imagination with variegated themes. Orissa's landscape frequently used in Mahapatra's poems represent India's Culture and its past glory. His simultaneous depiction love, sex, delineation of poverty stricken society, and the plight of women and pitiable conditions of beggars asking alms all give us the picture of hollowness of modern existence. His superb craftsmanship, his mastery over the use of native language, his unhindered description of nature landscape in alien language spurs him to decolonize his poetry. He appears to be struggling for establishing his own and nation's identity like the other post colonial writers of nations such as Africa, Australia and Caribbean nations, whose identities were over run by colonizer:

Eleke Boehmer writes :

“ Indian, African and Caribbean nationalist writers focused on reconstructing from the position of their historical social or metaphysical difference, a cultural identity which has been damaged by the colonial experience. The need was for roots, origins, founding myth and ancestors, national for mothers and fathers in short, for restorative history” (Bohmer, 1995)

Mahapatra, in his poem 'Rain of Rites' tries to search out his native identity:

“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.”

His another poem 'Crows' is a symbolic poem which symbolizes evil, guilt and destruction. 'Water' symbolizes Clarity and wisdom and rain stands for the purification or salvation. Taking inspiration from T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, Mahapatra employs scientific images in his poetry to bring about the vices of modern life. T.S. Eliot used the scientific imagery; "Patients etherized upon the table", in his poem "Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", to express the mood, a mood primarily that of disillusionment with the futility of city life. In the same way Mahapatra in the poem the line "Mornings like pale-yellow hospital linen" symbolizes the poor health of entire nation.

Mahapatra is a very much conscious of poverty. His poetry elucidates the plight of masses as well as the pathetic conditions of women as victim of male lust in our society. His poems 'Hunger' and 'Whore house in Calcutta street' and 'Man of his Night' center around the theme of poverty and sex. Mahapatra focuses on the futility of sex and treats it mere as a expression of love and the vehicle of procreation. However, he is shocked at the reality when he finds the utility if sex to be perverted from its proper functions. Modern man's degeneration, hollowness and sterilization torments Mahapatra very much. He feel disgust at seeing the plight of poor people and the pathetic condition of malnourished and starving children which apprised us colonial condition. Post colonial approach and global; vision made him averse to unjust and unequal forms of political and cultural hegemony. He defends the weak and struggles for the deprived. He delineates in his poems the stark realities of the society how it is still the facsimile of the colonial chaos. His poem "The stories in poetry" tries to show how his humanistic soul cries out the pitiable condition of the starving people.

"A world where hundred dies of hunger in Somalia and elsewhere
Where poverty is no mystery even the most tender embrace says
there is no heroism for us to live on
for there must be;
a world where hundred die-
of hunger insom some excused I can make to get out of my myself.
These words I comp out.

as if I were pulling the knife out of the wound, unable to staunch the flow of blood, knowing I must stay in the wings with others."

(The Line of Downs- 147)

Mahapatra appears to be haunted by past, whether it be the sad colonial or historical or cultural. Getting the reminiscence of past he feels solace, calmness, bliss and peace. In this way he remembers this forefathers and again being afraid of the present he wishes to escape even the present.

In his poem 'Whiteness of Bones' his longingness for search for oriyan family and his dying father's memory can explicitly been seen:

"My father, teetotaler, vegetarian
Took two bath a day'
one at down, the other
before his evening obeisance
to Lord Shiva at temple"

(A whiteness of Bone)

Mahapatra's attachment to tradition can be explicitly in his homage to the martyrdom of tradition of Orissa. In shadow space, PoemII" he says,

"To live here anlered in sickness and disease in the past uncomprehended totems and in the split blood of ancestors one would wear like an amulet"

(Shadow Space Poem")

Mahapatra's capability of creating a myth well established him as a post colonial poet. His projection of myth about Gandhi Jee as a champion of non-violence and truth in his poem

'Excerpts of Requien'

“You became the red earth
that a perfect, constant gravity
achieved through the aeon.”

Mahapatra observes many strategies of Gandhi to be associated with post colonial activism. He is dejected at the disgrace and disregards to Gandhi Jee :

“Your eyes blossom
There flowers realize
Safety is not a word for you
Today is the voice that points
Floats over the breath of discarded ideas,
the breath of dead flowers day after day Rajghat.”

In conclusion, we find Mahapatra's poetry to be soaked in post colonial ethos. He succeeds in decolonizing the culture, tradition, society and Indian poetry in the post colonial era. He is against the imperialism and enthusiastically evolves indigenous culture and tradition. He substantiates his indigenous past and entwines the bygone culture with presents. P.P Ravindra Writes. “Alone of all Indian poets writing in English, with the possible exception of A.K. Ramanujan, it is the Jayant Mahapatra's poetry that this decolonizing act takes on a quality and especially comparable to the best verse written in Indian regional languages”. Mahapatra formulates a new Indian English Idiom, Ensures a new identity independent of the colonizer and establish a new paradigm to delineate the contemporary society in poetry. All the post colonial features like multiplicity of themes, motives, symbols, imagery, a new idioms and his outlook, establish him as a leading post colonial Indian English poet.

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