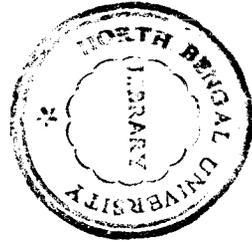


# POETRY OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: A STUDY IN THE PATTERN OF IMAGERY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE NORTH BENGAL UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

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# Certification

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JAYANTA MAHAPATRA (b.1928)

Crossing life , often the tired lines  
seem to run under my palms.  
Someone talks of a work of art,  
looking into its little secret:

(Jayanta Mahapatra, A Rain of Rites : 36)

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## PREFACE

You said poetry contains us both.  
So it appears logical  
I should search for poetry.

(Mahapatra, Shadow Space:59)

It might seem surprising that I have not chosen Shelley, Keats or even Eliot for my dissertation as might be expected of a student of English literature, these poets forming a major part of my syllabus when I did my M.A. in English. To reason out, if poets are supposed to reflect our sentiments and emotions, an Indian poet could do mine better than any overseas poet.

India is a multilingual, multi-religious nation where the culture of one state varies widely from another. To excerpt Niharranjan Ray's welcome address at the seminar at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla :

It has been said that though written in different languages Indian literature is one, that is, in whatever is written in India and even outside by Indian authors there is something which is specifically Indian, the analogy perhaps being that even in a very cosmopolitan crowd consisting of men and women from all nationalities and large ethnic groups, one,

having the minimum knowledge and experience of ethnic and behavioral characteristics of Indians, can easily find out who the Indians are. (A.Poddar 1972:5)

This perception of unity of the Indians has incited our poets and seers to create a territory more stable than any political boundary, despite all its regional diversities. This Indian terrain has always been a part of the Indian psyche. Indian literature is an expression of this Indian psyche. It is this 'Indianness' that an Indian reader immediately recognizes and cherishes.

Creative writing in English forms an integral part of the literary traditions of South Asia. According to K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, "Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks. " (Srinivasa Iyengar 2004:3) From the volumes of English fiction and poetry being published in India, it is clear, that much of imaginative writing is now concentrated on the Indian English novel, the short story and Indian English poetry. The Indian novelists and poets have already gained much international attention and awards. Arundhuti Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri, Pankaj Mishra, A.K.Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra and many others have given the readers and publishers enough excitement.

Jayanta Mahapatra interests me because he as a contemporary poet, is keenly conscious of the existential questions that glare at the face of modern man. Although history and myth find their way

into his poetry, he is seldom lost in their imaginary glorious past. He is sentient of the present circumstances that burden the modern man. Mahapatra's poetry accentuates a keen consciousness of cultural and sociological traditions of his native locale. It is interesting to note how his vision gradually surpasses the regional periphery to embrace the social and political questions of the country and sometimes traverses further across to attain a universal implication. He is never impervious to the incidents around us that bring out the essence of nature of man and society.

This dissertation aims at exploring the pattern of imagery in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry. My maiden correspondence with the poet had initially flared my passion for his poems. After I began reading the volumes, which the poet himself had sent me, I was amazed by the range of images that have tinted not only his imagination but have also served as an outlet for his poetic sensibility. I was led to this belief that without a proper study of images Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry cannot be properly evaluated.

Jayanta Mahapatra (b.1928), a senior academic, started writing late but not without results. His powerful and visionary work won him the Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award (Chicago 1975), Sahitya Academy Award (1981), Gangadhar Meher National Award for Poetry (1995) and Ramkrishna Jaidayal Harmony Award,(1994.) His volumes begin with *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (1971), and end with *Random Descent* (2005).He has been a member of the

University of Iowa's International Writing Program. "Jayanta is a close observer of men and things," says Iyengar and ensues :

The lyric notes are sharp, they sting-yet somehow satisfy .The cripples at Puri who are taken for granted, the white -clad widows: Truth seems twisted sometimes, yet pitiless. (Iyengar 2002: 713)

A search reveals that none of the existing critical surveys is devoted entirely to the imagery of Jayanta Mahapatra. R. Shankar in his book, *The Poet: Quest for Identity*, has established Mahapatra as a postmodernist. *The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra* by Bijay Kumar Das deals with the thematic study and technical accomplishments of the poet. He seeks to evaluate the poet as a modernist, and later as a post -modernist poet.

After enumerating the national and international journals where Mahapatra's poems were published and the various awards that he has won C.L.L. Jayaprada in *Indian Literature Today* writes:

His [Mahapatra's] is the case of a writer who is first recognized abroad before getting deserved attention at home. Even now one could say that critical output on Mahapatra is not appropriate to his own work.

(Jayaprada 1994:86)

Arun Kolatkar is of a similar opinion. He holds that although published in several important anthologies, including *The Poetry*

Anthology (1912—1977) edited by Daryl Hine and Joseph Parisi, Mahapatra's poetry has not got the attention it deserves in India.

It is definite that this poet needs further exploration. I have chosen Jayanta Mahapatra's images as my area of study because it seems to me that a systematic study of the imagery will facilitate to reveal his poetic persona. Moreover, my dissertation will facade the poet's vision of life embedded in his myriad images.

The Oxford Dictionary explains the word 'pattern' as a 'decorative design', 'a regular form or order in which a series of things occur'. (Indian Edition:2001) The study of the pattern of imagery is a study of the series of images that recur in Mahapatra's poetry.

In the *first chapter* of my dissertation, *Imagery: Concept and Function*, I have attempted to explain the concept of imagery, its various meanings and definitions in the broad sense, as we understand them. Imagery, which moves us towards a perception of concreteness, refers to all objects and qualities of sense perception, visual, acoustic, tactile, thermal, olfactory, gustatory or kinesthetic, referred to in a work of literature. This may be either by literal description or by allusion. The other looser and more complicated meaning that has been attached to imagery is, any outcome aggravated by literary language metaphors and similes that pertains to senses. New critical poetics that regards the entire poem as image encourages analyses of poems as nearly concrete objects. It must however be noted that a study of imagery is not a verbal analyses of literary work.

My *second chapter, Mapping Mahapatra*, locates the poet against the cultural and social milieu of Orissa. I have placed him against the literary outpourings of nineteen sixties and seventies seeking to measure the influences, personal and literary, that went into the making of the poetic psyche. Mahapatra insists that he ought to be studied as an Oriya poet who writes in English. I have, therefore, given a brief account of the Oriya poetic tradition in order to bring out how much he has, as he claims, inherited its tradition. No culture exists in a close cocoon without being affected by the overall progress around. Every culture is a social and a shared phenomenon. The influences of other poets, influences of literary theories and literary aesthetics, literary ideologies and movements work on a poet depending on his exposure to them. I have shown how the various literary influences have gone a long way in the making of Mahapatra (sometimes overtly).

The *third chapter* titled *Pattern of Imagery*, which is the crux of this thesis, examines the imagery in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry. To facilitate this study I have divided his career into two phases. In the early phase of his career as a poet, (as Mahapatra himself would reflect today) he was rather immature in handling his theme and language. He displays a desperation for grappling his medium of expression. By the third volume, *A Father's Hours*, published in 1976, he overcomes this desperation and emerges as a confident poet sure of himself. From the third volume onwards, the sensitive

and value-oriented poet that he is, he deals with the similar kind of images to express his concern over the incidents affecting the nation and man. I, therefore, find it judicious to divide his career into two phases:

- i) The Experimental Stage
- ii) The Experiential Stage.

Phase (i) deals with his early phase when he was experimenting with his medium of creative expression, that is, poetry, and, Phase (ii) shows him the established self-assured poet. Many of his images elicit the disillusionment of the poet with society, its conventions, idealism, love and human compassion. To carry forward his theme the images he employs are drawn from nature, animals, memories, and the incidents occurring around. He is acutely conscious of his cultural past its myth and history.

In the *fourth chapter* titled *The Poet As A Social Critic*, I have attempted to analyze the images in Mahapatra that turn our attention to the bleak reality around. As a sensitive poet, he seldom remains impervious to the incidents of disaster and violence that affect the country and its populace. His images bring out the truth in human relationship, in the customs and traditions that man imbues from society and the victim that he is of poverty and hunger. The images falling under this category are those of hunger, poverty, disease, lepers, beggars, prostitutes, the suffering women and children and the images of his country.

Writers usually tend to make certain words or images typically their own and individual poems often become a part of that larger corpus by which they are recognized and understood. Some images survive with the poet through the years giving his work a unified vision. No ivory tower confines a poet in isolation. If it does poetry disparages into insignificance. Authors customarily share something of their contemporary's concern and those concerns and modes of expression shape their own writing. I have placed Jayanta Mahapatra amongst the other leading Indian-English poets in my *fifth chapter, Jayanta Mahapatra Vis-à-vis His Contemporaries*, for the final evaluation.

My thesis concludes with a brief *Conclusion*, a *Bibliography* and an *Appendix*.

For notes and references, works cited and the bibliography, I have strictly adhered to the instructions given in the MLA handbook.

Very few indeed have the privilege of working on a poet living and active. Jayanta Mahapatra has rendered valuable help to me and I must record my thankfulness to this Muse of Orissa. After I had read a few of Mahapatra's poems and had decided on further reading, he promptly sent me his volumes along with photocopies of his personal volumes. When *Random Descent* was published in 2005, he sent me a copy with his best wishes. He has answered my queries from time to time and I greatly enjoyed corresponding with him as much as I enjoyed reading his works.

I am especially indebted to my supervisor Prof. Binoy Kumar Banerjee for his persistent guidance and for the stimulating discussions that unfolded before me new ways of looking at poetry. Professor Niranjana Mohanty of Viswabharati University has been a constant guide revealing before me the uniqueness of Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry. He never failed to give me quick solutions whenever I turned to him in confusion. His advice has gone a long way in shaping this dissertation.

I am also thankful to Dr. R.K. Swain, a Mahapatra scholar and a poet, for his constant guidance and help. He has been a steady friend giving me information on the different web pages concerned with poetry. He has briefed me on Oriya Literature and patiently discussed with me whether Oriya literature, as the poet claims, has influenced him at all.

I am obliged to the faculty members of the Department of English, University of North Bengal. They have helped me whenever I approached them with academic problems relating to my thesis.

Last but not the least, my thanks to the librarians of North Bengal University who have taken pains to help me with books and necessary materials.

Zinia Mitra

## Introduction.

India is the third largest English book-producing country after the United States and the United Kingdom. The largest numbers of books published in India is in English. (Srinivasa Iyengar 2002:702) Creative writing in English forms an integral part of the literary traditions of South Asia. To quote Srinivasa Iyengar:

English, then, is one of our national languages, and Indo-Anglican literature too is one of our national literatures. We have reached the point where we are able to see Indian writing in English as a distinctive literature---a tree that has sprung up on hospitable soil from a seed that a random breeze had brought from afar. A critical study of this literature, however, needs much more than acknowledgement of its existence for yielding satisfactory results.

(Iyengar 2002:15-16)

Literature in English marked by strong local colour had poured out from India since the colonial days. In the beginning the writers were mainly British or Anglo Indians who sought to appeal to the public of England. The English community of India also formed a portion of its readers. This literature is now better known as the

Anglo-Indian Literature as distinguished from the Indian writing in English that encompasses writers of Indian origin.

*The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* records a number of Anglo Indian writers who produced the first Anglo-Indian Literature from India, some whilst their stay in India, others after retiring to their country after years of service in India.

The first book of Indian English verse, as M.K. Naik records, is that of Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami's translation of Arasanipala Venkatadhvarin 's 17<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit poem *Viswagunadarsana* (1825). It was published in Kolkata with the help of donors whose list includes the names of Rammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore. It was, however, an English rendering and therefore has not received the status of an original work. The first Indian English poet to be hailed is certainly Henry Vivian Louis Derozio, who signaled the birth of Indian English poetry with the publication of *Poems* in 1827. Although Derozio's satirical verse and long narrative poems illustrate an obvious semblance to Byron; his imagery an influence of British Romanticism, and his diction, traces of neo-classicism; many of his poems like *To India-My Native Land*, *The Harp of India*, and *To the Pupils of Hindu College* have a clearly identifiable genuine nationalistic articulation that establishes Derozio (1809-31) as an Indian English poet.

O! Many a hand more worthy far than mine

Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,

And many a wreath for them did Fame entwine  
 Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave:  
 Those hands are cold -- but if thy notes divine  
 May be by mortal wakened once again,  
 Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

( Derozio: The Harp of India)

Derozio was also one of the foremost of the Indian English poets to freely allude to Indian myths and legends, though he also alludes to western classical myths with an equal proficiency. Three years after Derozio's publication of the first Indian English verse Kashiprashad Ghosh (1809-1873) appears on the Indian poetic scenario, the poet who can claim to be the first purely Indian English poet, Derozio being the son of Indo-Portuguese father and English mother. Kashiprashad's *The Shair of Ministrels and Other Poems* emulates by turn British Romanticism, love lyrics of the Cavalier Poets and didactic strain of the Neo-Classical poets. But he does show flashes of originality in employing powerful rich imagery:

How like the breath of love the rustling breeze  
 Is breathing through the fragrant sandal trees!  
 How sad but sweet the bulbul sings above...  
 Like liquid silver yon soft-gliding stream  
 Wanders and glistens in the lunar beam,

(Kashiprashad: The Moon in September)

His portrayals of Hindu festival or poems like *The Boatman's Song to Ganga* are candid efforts to strike the parochial note. Kashiprashad Ghosh's verses were followed by the inconspicuous Rajnarain Dutt's *Osmym : An Arabian Tale*, Soshi Chunder Dutt's *Miscellaneous Poems* (1848) and Hur Chunder Dutt's *Fugitive Pieces* (1851). It is noteworthy that Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) the epoch-making Bengali poet had begun his career as an Indian English poet. The *Dutt Family Album* is a family anthology of a hundred and eighty seven poems by the Dutt brothers Govind Chunder, Hur Chunder and Greece Chunder and their cousin Omesh Chunder Dutt. Like the poets of the earlier generation they also expose painstaking imitations of the British Romantic poets.

Ram Sharma, pseudonym of Nobo Kishen Ghosh (1837-1918), however, displays the first sparks of mystical flame that was to burn brighter later in Shri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and Tagore (1861-1941).

The first period of Indian English literature is said to have ended in 1850s a few years before the Revolt of 1857 that had ushered in antagonistic ideas about the British rule in India and marked a turning point in the rapport between India and Britain. By the next two generations the Indian English literature slowly grew out of the shackles of British imitation and found the bona fide Indian voice.

D.C. Mallick in his works (1919) records his responses in a usual imitation alluding to the western legends.

“It was with Toru Dutt (1856-77) that Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authenticity.” (M.K.Naik 2004: 37)

An example of prodigy, well versed in English, French and Sanskrit Toru Dutt displays an originality of imagination not easily seen in the earlier poets. Although she quotes freely from English poets like Pope and Wordsworth she never relapses into psittacosis. Her originality stands out prominent when we compare her with another poet of the time Behramji Merwanji Malabari (1853-1912) whose *Indian Muse in English Garb* unequivocally flatters Queen Victoria and Prince of Wales. Some lyricists like C.N. Vesuvala (nom de plume Chili Chutnee), M.M.Kunte, and Nagesh Viswanath Pai published from Bombay but it was Kolkata that dominated the Indian poetic scenario for long.

Romesh Chunder Dutt’s translations of Sanskrit and Prakrit classics including the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Rigveda*, *Upanishads*, *Kalidasa*, *Bharavi* and Buddhist texts like *Dhammapada* are worth mention.

Our next significant poet, Manmohun Ghosh (1869-1924), studied in Oxford and specialized in classical literature. He came in contact with the poets of the Decadent school and had his poems published in the collection of *Primavera* where Binyon was one of the editors. Manmohun shared with Stephen Philips, Laurence

Binyon and Arthur Cripps the mood of yearning and world-weariness and the colorful aestheticism of eighteen -ninetees. Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) his younger brother, who proceeded from patriot to poet to seer enjoyed a poetic career that is sixty long years. His diverse and impressive works include lyrical, narrative and philosophical pieces, short poems and also an epic. His short poems deal with the typically romantic subjects like love, sorrow, death and liberty in a characteristic romantic style. His longer poems reveal his fascination for quantitative hexameter. His epic *Savitri* with the subtitle '*the legend and a symbol*' is an explanation in itself, for Aurobindo here makes the ancient Hindu legend of Satyavan and Savitri his symbol of divine realisation. A grand work of its kind it echoes Milton and the Romantic poets. Aurobindo's influence continued in the poets like Dilip Kumar Roy, Nahar, Prithvindra Mukherjee, Madhusudan Reddy, in Godkak's *Song of Life and Other Poems* (1947) and in Srinivasa Iyengar's *Tryst With Divine* (1974).

On the eve of departure to England for medical treatment, Tagore(1861-1941) had rendered some of his Bengali poems into English, which was later published retaining its original Bengali name; *Gitanjali* (1912). Tagore, who enthralled W.B.Yeats and William Rothenstein, took London by storm. *Gitanjali* was followed by *Gardner* (1913) and *The Crescent Moon* (1913) and came his Noble Prize for Poetry.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), who was again strongly influenced by the Romantic Poets, also won recognition in England. By now there were scores of voices singing in English and many of them had overpowering mystic vision. Joseph Furtado here needs mention for he was probably the first Indian English poet to write in pidgin English though for comic purposes.

Sly rogue, the old Irani!

has made a lakh, they say ---

A lakh in land and money ---

By mixing milk with pani.

( Furtado:The Old Irani)

The end of the world wars marked the beginning of new thoughts and expressions:

... the scene was set; it repeated what

Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed

To something else. Its past was a souvenir.

It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.

It has to face the men of the time and to meet

The women of the time. It has to think about war

And it has to find what will suffice. It has

To construct a new stage.

( Wallace Stevens: Of Modern Poetry)

Modernism began for Virginia Woolf in December 1910 and for George Levine in 1922. Whenever was its commencement, there was new poetry in England and in France. India, which emerged, as a free nation in 1947, was no exception.

The country scenes of England so loved by Robert Bridges came to be elegiacally celebrated by Osbert Sitwell. When the war came the poets had greeted it as patriots but soon enough felt its futilities. The next few decades were muddle of contraries in England. It swayed between hope and despair, peace and violence, energy and exhaustion, revived faith and growing scepticism.

Eliot's *Wasteland* appeared in 1922 and a vision of the twenties was fashioned in the light of the poem. Huxley expressed post-war a-morality, disenchantment, and disparagement. Along with these the decades also belonged to Edith Sitwell, De la Mare, Brooke, Dylan Thomas, Macneice, Spender, Day Lewis.

Twentieth Century France was characterized by an expansion in literary output and a rapid experimentation with new means of expression. Under Andre Breton Surrealism aimed at absolute revolution of visual arts and verse. Albert Camus and Simon de Beauvoir echoed Philosophical Existentialism that dominated post-war France with Jean Paul Sarte as its leader. From 1950s the dominant trend was however the New Novel or the Antinovel, represented by Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor and Alain Robbe Grillet. Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida provided fresh insights into analysis and criticism.

Modern Indian English –language poetry is one of the many ‘new literatures’ which began to emerge at the end of the Second World War after the end of Colonialism (Bruce King 2004:1).

By 1950s New Poetry had come into being in India. When C.R. Mandy became the editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (1947) which was one of the most widely read magazines and decidedly published poems by Indian English poets this ‘New Poetry’ obtained a new prevalence and our poets gained popularity.

Nissim Ezekiel played a significant role, who after publishing in a few journals and editing a few others, among which was *Thought* which had P Lal as a columnist, became an assistant to Mandy, advising all those who aspired to write English poetry. Ezekiel next joined *PEN* and founded *Quest* modelled on English journal *Encounter*. According to King, *Quest* helped to make modern Indian poetry part of contemporary Indian culture. (King:15)

Among the significant poets published in this journal were Dom Moraes, P.Lal, Adil Jussawalla, Kamala Das, Katrak, R. Parthasarathy, A.K.Ramanujan, Dilip Chitre, and Arun Kolatkar.

The Writer’s Workshop that was established in Kolkata in 1958, by P.Lal and his associates readily became a very helpful forum for modernist poetry.

The workshop ‘Manifesto’ published by P.Lal, depicted the school as consisting of a group of writers who consented that English has

proved its ability, as a language, to play a creative role in Indian literature. Though they had individual differences they all converged on some important points:

1. We affirm our faith in a vital language as sufficient to write in. A vital language may be in modern idiom or ancient but it must not be a total travesty of the current pattern of speech.

2. We think that poetry must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience. That experience may be intellectual or emotional ...but it must be precise and lucid and tangibly expressed.

3. Poetry must be free from propaganda.

4. We claim the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojni Naidu.

5. We condemn all forms of imitation.

(Lal 1958:31)

In the second of the Writer's Workshop, when P.Lal published *A Miscellany of Creative Writing*, there was an interesting convention on queries such as: Is the English language capable of expressing Indian imagery and tradition? Can real Indian poetry be written in English? Although they might sound today like The Mystic Masseur's *101 Questions and Answers on Hindu Religion* they were the questions of the hour.

By early 1960s Writer's Workshop had become a publishing center for important poets. The Indian reader steadily grew familiar with the names of Nissim Ezekiel, P.Lal, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra and of the other Indian poets in English. English poetry still exerted its influence on Indian English poetry but there was a radical shift of focus from the Romantic poets to the more modern Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas, also to Allen Tate and Wallace Stevens. Jayanta Mahapatra's *The Exile* shows the influence of Wallace Stevens:

amidst the smell of smoke and gunpowder and blood,  
 am unable to hold aloft the flag of language  
 in a shameful battlefield of defeat  
 as I watch the play change ,  
 new characters come on stage ,  
 and while so surely they go about their well-rehearsed acts,  
 I wait

(Mahapatra: A Father's Hours :12)

By 1965 modern Indian English poetry books were in publication. The poets now attended scenes that were typically Indian and dealt with the characters who were not mythical heroes but the modern men or the downtrodden.

With the subsistence of new poetry the entire array of Indian English poetry came to be broadly divided into pre-independence poetry and post-independence poetry.

There are two schools of critics, the traditionalists, like V.K. Gokak, who extol the pre-independence poetry demeaning all that is post-independence, and the modernists who find all pre-independence poetry pathetically hackneyed.

After Harold Bloom the concept of influence itself has undergone a change. Influence is now regarded as inescapable and after T.S.Eliot's *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1932), a less derogatory term. Tagore, one of the greatest voices Indian Literature has known, confesses:

Kotha hote kon gondho je churi kori  
 Sandhan taar bolite pari na kahare  
 Je ami swapan muroti goponchari  
 Je ami amare bujhite bojhate nari  
 Apon ganer kachete apni hari  
 Sei ami kobi ke pare amare dhorite.

(Tagore Utsargo: 24)

[ I cannot point out definitely  
 From where do I pillage which aroma  
 I who am visionary unrevealed  
 I who am incomprehensible to myself and others  
 am beaten by my own songs  
 That 'I' is the poet, none can grasp me.]

We must admit that the Indian English writers and poets, however influenced they were, have played a great role in adapting the language and establishing a niche that has ensured both its survival and significance here.

## CHAPTER I

Imagery:  
concept and function

In words  
our lives  
dwell.  
In words  
made  
and broken.  
Words  
with a hiss  
of silence  
rushing in  
from  
someone's ribs.

(Mahapatra , Dispossessed Nests:32)

Discussion on imagery has its roots in classical Greek Philosophy. Plato (427-347 B.C.) in *Philebus* (360 B.C.) speaks of an artist within us busily painting pictures in the chambers of the soul. Aristotle (384-322) in *De Anima* (350 B.C.) introduced the notion of imagination, which along with perception produced and recalled imagery. Aristotle is acknowledged as the first systematic cognitive theorist. He considered the perception of imagery of primary importance in cognition. 'Without the imagination the intellect cannot work through lack of matter' (Butcher 1951:126)

Descartes (1596-1650) who professed mind-body dualism, defined imagination in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) as 'nothing more than to contemplate the figure or image of a corporeal thing;' (Descartes, Meditation II :13), and later as, 'a certain application of the cognitive faculty (*facultas cognoscitiva*) to a body which is immediately present to it,' ( Descartes, Meditation VI :34). Descartes gave importance to the notion of the mind as a special arena distinct from the physical world and populated by mental images of what we see around us. Image thus came to be realized as a picturing in the mind. Imagination and imagery, as we see, were known to be directly related. Imagination is the name of the faculty of image production, the mental precinct in which the images are comprehended. When Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) in his essay *An Answer to the Question What is Poetry* (1844) says that Poetry 'embodies and illustrates its impressions by imagination, or images of the objects' in order to communicate the feeling of truth, he places images as almost synonymous to imagination as conveyors of truth. (Hunt 1965 :256)

Hobbes (1588-1679), Locke (1632-1764), Berkley (1685-1753) and Hume(1711-1776) shared a pictorial view of imagination. The world is in a constant flux. It is chaotic, partial and unstable and yet the world that is delivered to our minds is a stable constant and ordered universe. This creating order out of the disorder is the

work of imagination. “Art creates an idea of order where, to the inartistic or unphilosophical observer, life is only a whirl of action and a chaos of emotion.” (John Gassner 1954: xli)

The same strain was carried forward to the nineteenth century. Pater (1839-1894), for instance, believed that all artistic ability is founded on the power to envision humanity in a conspicuous new way, replacing the meaner world of ordinary living with the idyllic world of creation. Thus we find that Imagination held a very valued place in the theories of creative art. Imagination was closely allied to images, the mental pictures through which truth or beauty was conceived.

Aristotle had declared long ago in his *On Memory and Reminiscence* (350 B.C.) that thinking was impossible without an image. Aristotle gave importance to imagination, “Without imagination the intellect cannot work through lack of matter.” (Butcher 1951:126) Rational knowledge is necessary and useful for work-a-day world but the romantic artists and some philosophers insisted that there were other forms of knowledge, more subjective and intuitive. Descartes in his *Meditation III* (1641) proposes to obtain intuitive knowledge by turning his mind away from all external objects :

...I turn away my senses from their objects, I will even efface from my consciousness all images of corporeal

things; or at least, because this can hardly be accomplished, I will consider them as empty and false; and thus, holding converse only with myself, and closely examining my nature, I will endeavour to obtain by degrees a more intimate and familiar knowledge... (Descartes Meditation III:17 )

The lines reveal two aspects of Descartes' philosophic approach, his recognition of the mind as being overcrowded by images, and his acknowledgement of intuitive knowledge.

This kind of 'intimate and familiar' knowledge was, what the Romantic Poets claimed, fundamental. For the Romantic poets imagination was not only the unconscious synthesizer of experience, for Blake (1757-1827) it was God himself operating in the human soul. Coleridge (1772-1834) went further and distinguished between primary and secondary imagination. The primary imagination was the workings at the unconscious level, the 'living power and prime agent of all human perception.' Secondary Imagination was taking the material generated by our primary Imagination and while 'dissolving' and 'dissipating' it, using its elements to create imaginary worlds.

Aristotle, who had inherited from Plato the notion that art was an imitation of reality much like holding up a mirror to nature, nevertheless, admitted in his *Poetics* that imitative art, whose

highest form he recognized as poetry, was an expression of the universal element of human life:

The first distinguishing mark, then, of poetry is that it has a higher subject matter...it expresses the universal not the particular the permanent possibilities of human nature; it does not merely tell the story of individual life; 'what Alcibiades did or suffered'.

(Butcher 1951:164)

Coleridge had his conviction: " 'I adopt', he says, 'with full faith the theory of Aristotle that poetry as poetry is essentially ideal'...".

(Butcher 1951:195) When an artist produces a thing he does not merely copy reality for the sake of it but copies the 'higher reality'.

Aristotle followed Plato's footsteps to believe that there was an ideal form present in every individual phenomenon but that its manifestation was imperfect, the real world being the unsatisfactory repetition of the ideal. Like Plato, Aristotle did not believe that the artist attempted a pitiable imitation of the imitation. He rather believed that the ideal form made an impression on the artist's mind, which tried to give it a complete expression, that an artist gave shape to the ideal in his creative art, which is always partially revealed in the mundane world. Imitation thus became a creative act with Aristotle. The imitative artist, while remaining true to the ideal, gave it a concrete

expression through an image. It is the expression that limits the art:

The capacity of poetry is so far limited that it expresses the universal not as it is in itself, but as seen through the medium of sensuous imagery. (Butcher 1951:191)

The same idea of creating a unity out of chaos is taken up by Shelley (1792-1822) in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) and he expresses it with the traditional mirror image. Shelley says that poetry is a 'mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.' (109) For Shelley poetry was the very image of life that articulated perpetual truth. Since image helped to reveal the ideal form, it was believed to be a radiant truth out of space and time that was revealed to the artists in blissful moments. This experience was variously termed as 'vision' after Blake, or 'epiphany' after Joyce.

The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure. (Joyce:193)

Stephen Dedalus, the Joycean mouthpiece in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* expounds Aquinas' 'claritus' as:



artistic discovery and representation of the divine purpose in anything or a force of generalization which would make the esthetic image a universal one make it outshine its proper conditions. (Ibid)

This 'vision' or 'epiphany' was the exclusive gift of the creative artists, who were essentially different from the common lot. This especially fated lot were known to be seers, the ancient 'vates', the term that denoted both the poet and the prophet, for 'they have penetrated, both of them, into the sacred mystery of the Universe'.

(Carlyle 1965:218)

The poet remained a heroic figure in all ages. Baudelaire was a self-confessed seer. He was sensitive to the horrors of the city where he belonged and his sensitiveness led to isolation. The notions of the image and the consequent isolation of the artist gained force in England with the Romantic artists. Even Wordsworth (1770-1850), who believed that a poet was 'a man speaking to men' distinguished him by 'more lively sensibility', 'more enthusiasm and tenderness', 'greater knowledge of human nature' and 'more comprehensive soul' than the common men. (Wordsworth 1965:11) The English poets, like the French, drew their cult largely from Jacob Boheme (1575-1624) and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-

1772). Blake in *Memorable Fancy*, has a revelation of himself clad in white holding Swedenborg's volumes.

The artists, endowed with the power of apprehending the image, generally suffered from isolation from the society of men who did not understand them nor had access to what they had. Frank Kermode in his *Romantic Image* (1957) has shown how the capturing of image by the artistic mind and his isolation are inextricably related.

To be an artist in quest of the image is to accept sorrow as a condition of life. Keats believed that the joy of the vision and the cult of the isolation resulting into a depression are inseparable:

Ay, in the very temple of Delight

Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine.

( Keats :Ode on Melancholy)

Pater (1839-1894) in his essay *Winckelmann* says that,

The mind begins and ends with a finite image, yet loses no part of the spiritual motive. The motive is not lightly and loosely attached to the sensuous form, as its meaning to an allegory, but saturates and is identical with it. (Winckelmann :1893)

Pater in the essay, proceeds to distinguish the oriental thought from the Greek, who, according to him, have not plunged into the

depths of religious mysticism as the Orientals and therefore with them Beauty is given 'a right to fame' as an expression of the ideal. To Pater this ideal beauty finds its finest expression, in the statue. Pater had the Greek statues in mind, but realized that the statue is not and cannot be the only expression of the finest. Different approaches to imagination find its natural outburst in different forms of art. Painting, music and poetry are the unique arts that have been valued since the ancient times as expressions of the truth. Elements like colour, form and sound combine with each other along with movement in poetry making it an appropriate medium for expressing delicate thoughts and feelings. Pater emphasizes on the basic ideas of imagination and images when he bequeaths art with the power of selection, transformation and recombination of images in accordance with the choice of the creative intellect. He bestows art with the power to elevate a situation or a character that is not poetical or elevated in itself. Art, according to Pater, purifies upon thought and passion a thousand fold. He takes the instance of Robert Browning's *Le Byron de nos Jours*, from his *Dramatis Personae* (1864), where the two world-weary Parisians that Browning deals with are not essentially appealing; they begin to interest us when they are placed in the special situation. A number of factors including

rhetoric, suggestions, and images contribute to the effect of singling out a moment and making it noticeable to us.

Shelley in *A Defence of Poetry* defines Poetry as 'the expression of Imagination'. (Shelley1965:102). He compares a man and his impressions with the ever-changing wind on the Aeolian lyre. The impressions that man receives produce not only melody but also harmony.

The Neoplatonist tradition regarded poetry as transcending the world of appearances and apprehending divine truth itself. The truth in poetry, however, is not linked to the truth of science or observation or the reasons that guide our daily existence. Thus art is from one point of view quite useless and dead. Yet it has always been uniquely alive and seen as participating in the order of existence as does the portrait of Dorian Gray. In Keats' *Grecian Urn*, the cold marble radiates a love 'for ever warm'. The paradox of the urn, as that of all work of art, is that it transcends time by making one single moment last forever and thus become timeless. The escape into the world of unchanging art is achieved at a certain price. The 'breed' (class) of men and women on the urn become 'brede' (embroidery). They become eternal in the world of art at the cost of sacrificing their biological lives. The statue is one moment of perfection. The image on the canvas captures one moment that defies time but has no change or growth and

therefore no decay. If the immortal characters in poetry and fiction know no death it is because they know no life. The psychological factors of life and death affect those who fall within the time sequence. Life is transient, discontent, fleeting. The world we inhabit is a place:

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes  
Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

(Keats: To a Nightingale)

Art gives permanence to the fleeting moments of life. The permanence in art is, however, neither cold nor inhuman. The work of art has its own life more vivid than actual life. The images of poetry have, more permanence and therefore believed to infuse more reality than action can have. Action dies at the moment the energy is spent. The world of imagination is infinite and eternal whereas the world of generation and vegetation is finite and temporal. The fairies in Yeats' *The Stolen Child* tempting the child to the world of multihued imagination, bring out the quintessence of this world as: 'The world is more full of weeping than you can understand.' This might lead us to think that art is an agreeable escape from the dissatisfaction of life. It might be so for the voracious reader but the creative artists strive towards an ideal. For Yeats, Coleridge or Shelley certainly art was not an escape.

Yeats moved towards an ideal. Blake painted the symbolic world in his attempt to redefine the chaos. Coleridge attempted a magical explanation of the divine order. Keats oscillated between the two states of life action-inaction, contemplation –vision. Shelley's was a striving for a visionary world.

The Romantic poets had reacted against the Realism of the previous century and had developed a philosophy adversary to that of Realism, taking cue from the earlier philosophers whose thoughts coordinated with theirs. The Romantic theory of image continues to influence, as Frank Kermode has pointed out, many of the modern approaches like distrust of paraphrase, or even in the attitude that holds that the author has no business to interfere with his work.

Once the work of art is completed, the author has no right to press his own interpretation on his work. He can only talk about it like anybody else from a particular point of view. Kermode has shown us some of the curious disguises under which the image, and also the concept of the isolated artist appear in the main tradition of modern writing.

Although William Radice admits that he was not happy with many of the words he had used in his translations of Tagore's poetry, he does not make any changes in the reprints of the translations in 1985 and 1987, for he likens his translations to grown up children

who have gone out into the world. Can the parents then change or control them? (Radice 2000 :7)

Imagination can give life to things we see around us making symbols of them which otherwise would be dead. Such was the view of Blake who insisted on the need for concreteness choosing sharp outlines of childlike perception. The concreteness that is missing in nature can only be fulfilled by imagination. For Blake, as for Yeats after him, imagination was divine that bestowed symbolic concreteness to the otherwise muddled universe. Imagination, that was the truth and eternity for them, had little to do with the intellect.

Image is not an artifact of intellect. Intellect is involved along with the whole mind in the creative process. But image is the product solely of imagination and intellect taints it. Blake, Yeats and Wilde expressed their abomination for an educational system that cultivates the memory more than the imagination.

Blake was greeted as the forerunner of symbolism. He was the first poet to preach the enduring matrimony of all great art with symbol. He called the revelation of images 'vision'. These images, which consequently became symbols was the only means of expressing the invisible essence.

Symbol is another device the poets can use to extend meaning. Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken*, for instance, gains force

when we consider some of the words in the poem symbolically. A symbol is a recurrent image which stands for a person, an object or an idea, which is generally a substitute, or an indirect reference calling to mind some characteristic trait that forms the substance of the thing symbolized.

The poet, endowed with the power to see behind and beyond the obvious, can discern inherent characteristics that are revealed only in the ideal world. It is by means of symbols that he communicates the essence of things.

Yeats (1865-1939) considers these melancholic lines by Burns as perfectly symbolical.

The white moon is setting behind the white wave,  
And Time is setting with me, O!

(Burns: Open the door to me, O)

If the 'whiteness' attributed to the moon and the waves is removed the beauty of the lines will be marred, for their relation with the setting time described is too subtle for the intellect to comprehend. All the words working together evoke an emotion for the readers, which is not possible with other colour combinations or with other words, says Yeats in his essay *Symbolism of Poetry*:

We may call this metaphorical writing, but it is better to call it symbolical writing, because metaphors are not profound enough to be moving, when they are not

symbols, and when they are symbols they are the most perfect of all, because the most subtle...

(David Lodge 1972:30)

Having given this method of writing a definite name Yeats goes on to explain why this is so:

All sound, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion... (ibid)

Symbols penetrate beyond this gross reality into a world of ideas. The poet arranges his images with relation to another by means of a 'symbolic kinship' and many of his images become potentially symbolic. Symbols become images not through likeness only but also through a kind of association whereby the symbol can be

interchangeably used with images. Images and symbols are considered as two sides of the same coin.

Yeats was of the opinion that solitary men in moments of meditation received creative impulse. There are also images and symbols whose function is not to evoke emotion alone, but to induce ideas. They are intellectual symbols. The metaphysical poets in their conceits attempted to knock this intellectual faculty of the readers. One is away from symbols and images when one is worldly active, but images and symbols are revealed to the poets in trances, in meditations and also in madness:

“I then saw,” wrote Gerard de Nerval of his madness, “vaguely drifting into form, plastic images of antiquity, which outlined themselves, became definite, and seemed to represent symbols of which I only seized the idea with difficulty.” (Lodge1972 :33)

Plato had used myths, images and symbols to express his ideas. We have seen that Aristotle had recognized the importance of images. With Goethe every idea took the form of an image. (Butcher:194) Images were present in poetry from the time they were composed. The old English poetry had an abundance of imagery of sea and sailors. They spoke of ‘jewels of merit’, ‘swanlike whiteness of old age’, described the human heart as

'treasure chamber', the body as bone chamber. Much of it was for the sake of alliteration and verse music. The Anglo-Saxons had a sombre imagination of a landscape united with the violent pictures of cold and the perils of sea that yields to a fascination. Milton showed Puritanism at its best, Pope drew images from the society; the Romantic poets drew images from nature.

C.D.Lewis in his *Poetic Image* (1947) quotes a series of critics and their views on poetic images. Herbert Read judged a poet, 'by the force and originality of his metaphors.' Aristotle held that, 'the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius.' Dryden said, 'Imaging is, in itself, the very height and life of Poetry.' (Lewis:19) The critics of sixteenth and seventeenth and eighteenth century pertinently spoke of imagery as 'ornament, mere decoration, like cherries tastefully arranged on a cake.' (Lewis :18) Carlyle, Pater, Leigh Hunt, Newman all had their views on imagination and images. But the notion that imagery is the centre of a poem and that an entire poem may be an image formed from the plexus of images that appear within it was never prevalent until the widespread of Romantic Movement. All the hue and cry on imagination and imagery that began with Romantic Movement later gathered force from the Imagist movements and the Symbolist movements.

Symbolist movement in literature that began with Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* (1857) included later French poets and extended in the decades after World War I with Dylan Thomas, Yeats, Pound, Crane, Cummings, Wallace Stevens. It was a multifaceted movement in literature that deliberately exploited the suggestive power of words to express the feelings, sensations and states of mind that lie hidden beyond ordinary wakefulness. The open-ended symbols created by Charles Baudelaire linked the invisible with the concrete through sensory perceptions like sound and smell.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842 - 98) conceived that symbols were of two broad categories. One was created by the artist by the projection of inner feelings onto the outside world, its movement was from inside to outside. The other existed as embryonic words, which slowly permeated the consciousness of the artist and expressed a state of mind initially unknown to their originator. This movement was from outside to inside. He developed the art of suggestion, introducing rare words, private associations, and syntactical intricacies. Single words opened up multiple interpretations. The implied meaning faded out and there remained objects inexplicably introduced made indispensable by verse skill. Much was mixed up in this movement — decadence, aestheticism, romanticism, and

occultism. A sort of belated Rousseauism returned poetry that now explored the inner lands of the irrational. Poets focused on their inner lives. They pursued strange cults. The irrational gave access to a larger and more liberated world, and from this belief developed Dadaism and Surrealism. Baudelaire who regarded symbols as corresponding to an ultimate reality, experienced life grievously, and poured forth his experience in his unique style; Mallarmé was absorbed with words and turned them into beautiful creations that evaded the exterior world. Rimbaud loosened his senses to create amazing poetry. Rilke forsook wife and human society to be attentive to the message when it came. Valéry retired from the world to attain mastery of traditional French verse. Symbolists like Gerard de Nerval, Huysmans and Maeterlinck believed that it is through the symbol that the soul of things can be made visible, that the human mind is so constituted that it can recognize images of which it can have no perceived knowledge.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), who related symbol with the supernal beauty, enquired whether the external could be evaded altogether and poetry exist only as abstraction. The French poets took up the notion enthusiastically and strove for 'poesie pure'. The rational world had decencies and passions, which were quite useless. The only valued things were language with its connotations, melodies and phonetic properties, and symbols that

were never random but developed by the poets. With recurring use of fundamental symbols the poets were intercepting the emblematic nature of language that we now call after Northrop Frye the archetype. Imagism was another movement in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century that insisted the importance of images. Revolting against the sentiments and artifice typical of Romantic and Victorian poetry the imagists abandoned conventional poetic materials and versifications. They declared themselves free to choose any subject or rhythm they wanted, used common speech and presented hard, clear and concentrated images. Imagism isolated objects by using, what Ezra Pound called, 'luminous details'. Pound (1885-1972) influenced by reading Ernest Fenollosa expounded the practice of Ideogrammic Method that helped in expressing the abstract through concrete images. The March issue of Harriet Munroe's *Poetry* magazine (1911), contained Ezra Pound's *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste* where he formulated perhaps the most widely used definition of image today: "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."(Pound, *Poetry* :1911) Images in poetry came to be regarded as the discovery in words of the poignant, rational and tangible objects that we experience around us in any given moment. Pound continued :

I use the term 'complex' rather in technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we may not agree absolutely in our application. It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously, which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.

( Poetry : March, 1911)

The image is often seen, after it has been penned down, as being one of these two things:

1) It is either something that represents an object and experience in the factual world,

Or

2) It exists on its own (accord), divorced from the burden of representing anything other than itself.

An image does not simply express in words something that is not present, a substantial object that is absent to the readers, but rather allows a full experience of the absent object in words. If we take into account the view that an image exists free from the

burden of representing the concrete, even then we find the fullness of immediate experience. When we read in Tagore:

Clouds rumbling in the sky; teeming rain.

I sit on the river-bank, sad and alone.

The sheaves lie gathered, harvest has ended,

The river is swollen and fierce in its flow.

As we cut the paddy it started to rain.

(Tagore: The Golden Boat)

The clouds, the rain, the collected sheaves, the loneliness of the poet are given to us every time we read the lines.

The work of the poet is to present the image as well as possible in a way that feels very real and human and to give us a concrete, intellectual and emotional experience.

Images can be defined into two broad categories: literal and figurative.

A literal image is a mental impression created by direct description. Literal images arise out of the writer's use of concrete, specific, sensory words to directly describe something, someone, some feeling, some vision or some experience.

Jayanta Mahapatra's *Hunger* is an example of how a writer employs concrete, specific sensory description to create literal images for readers. The title itself has a sensory appeal –that of the desire for food. This desire is an undeniable one especially for the starving. The connotative meaning that it carries is an appetite for sexual gratification. The word 'flesh' used in the poem in its literal sense enhances the suggestion of a strong desire for sexual communion on part of the poet. Later as the fisherman's daughter spreads her legs wide, the poet sees hunger there. The word 'hunger' unites the fisherman and his daughter with the poet, one the need for food that makes the fisherman and his daughter ignore all social values, the other the sexual hunger of the poet.

The other kind of imagery is figurative imagery. Figures of speech like metaphors, similes, and personifications abound in poetry.

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) *On the Words in Poetry* says:

What I like to do is treat words as a craftsman does his wood or stone or what – have – you, to hew, carve, mold, coil, polish and plane them into patterns, sequences, sculptures fugues of sound expressing some lyrical impulse, some spiritual doubt or conviction, some dimly realized truth I must try to reach and realize. (Early Prose Writings)

In *The Hand That Signed the Paper* Dylan Thomas focuses our attention on the hand of the ruler, his five 'sovereign fingers' instead of the whole person. We come to see how this hand itself comes to represent his imperial power:

Hands have no tears to flow.

If we take the example of Tennyson's *Tears Idle Tears* we can see how figurative imagery is woven into a poem. The poet proficiently uses oxymoron, alliterations and repetitions and similes to evoke music:

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
 Tears from the depth of some divine despair  
 Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
 In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,  
 And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,  
 That brings our friends up from the underworld,  
 Sad as the last which reddens over one  
 That sinks with all we love below the verge;  
 So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

(Tennyson: *Tears Idle Tears*)

Northrop Frye had asserted that one of the essential roles of literature is to refashion the material worlds into an alternative

verbal universe. Creative writers use words more consciously than any other professionals. They stir the reader's imagination; evoke feelings, thoughts and reflections, by thoroughly exploiting the power of words.

Amongst all kinds of creative writers, a poet's usage of words is the most deliberate. A poet may be direct or indirect but poetry is never approximate. To meet this demand of poetry a poet has to always cull the exact word to say the unequivocal. Even Wordsworth for whom 'all good poetry' was 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' had used the word 'spontaneous', as Aidan Day has pointed out, in the eighteenth century philosophic sense of 'voluntary' or 'of one's free will' and not in the sense of 'unpremeditated'. (Day: 98)

Every poet then is a versifier, every fine poet an excellent one, he is the best whose verse exhibits the greater amount of strength, sweetness, straightforwardness, superfluosity, variety and oneness. (Hunt: 279)

Finished poems are very deliberate products toiled over and carefully revised. Even the spontaneous prose of the American Beat Poets of the 50s and 60s was never spontaneous in the true sense of the term. Purely automatic writing that Yeats had

practiced for a while with his wife produced realms of interesting material. But it was permissible to select and shape his material:

The first edition of *A Vision* did not appear until early 1926. Soon after, Yeats realized that much of it was too close to the original automatic writing, and that further elucidation was necessary. (Richard Ellmann 1979: xix )

Poetry works its magic by the way it uses words to evoke images. A poet employs words to create images to convey a concrete mental impression. This impression may be a visual one creating a picture or a series of pictures in reader's imagination or it may be sensory. Poetry communicates experience and experience comes to us principally through the help of the senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, and touching). An image too pertains to any of these senses since it is a depiction in words of a personal sense experience. Though the primary meaning of image is that it is a mental picture, that is, something seen through the mind's eye and the visual imagery is a kind that is most easily comprehended in poetry by a casual reader, an image may also represent a sound; a smell; a taste; or a tactile experience:

The commonest type of image is a visual one: and many more images, which may seem un-sensuous, have still in fact some faint visual association adhering

to them. But obviously an image may derive from and appeal to other senses than that of sight. (Lewis 1992:19)

In Wordsworth's *The Reaper* there is a movement from visual to auditory image:

Behold her, single in the field,  
 Yon solitary Highland Lass!  
 Reaping and singing by herself;  
 Stop here, or gently pass!  
 Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
 And sings a melancholy strain;  
 O Listen! for the vale profound  
 Is overflowing with the sound.

( Wordsworth :The Reaper)

An image can be conjured up by a single word; a rush of phrase, in a line or in successive lines. Sometimes an entire poem might convey an image. Every image we come across, is placed in its exact position, by a conscious poet, by particular choice of words. Some poets are dexterous at crafting rich vivid images with very few words. Some poets use a few more, but comprehending images forms the basis of understanding poetry. It must, however, be noted that a study of imagery is not a verbal analysis of a literary

work. The analysis of imagery places poetry in some deeper structure and proposes to dig out the inner meaning.

Images do ultimately convey a complete human experience in words and that is why a study of poetry almost always begins with the image. Understanding the use of imagery in poetry is essential for the comprehension of its overall meaning. When we read a poem with a critic's hat we begin to think of the images as tools that the poet has used to reveal the meaning in the poem.

Similar thoughts on imagery, as the ones we have discussed, coloured the literary theories in India. When Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) in *Future Poetry* (1919) says that the greatest motion of poetry comes to man when his mind is still and the ideal principle works above and outside his head, he echoes both Yeats' thoughts on symbolism and Wordsworth's 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. Lewis in his definition of image insists on 'words', for images essentially are 'picture made out of words'.

In order to exemplify, clarify and beautify his thought the poet weaves the series of word pictures. The image,

transmits to us through the emotions and associations it arouses, something of the 'wholeness', the depth and richness of the way the writer views, conceives or has felt what he is telling us. (Caroline Spurgeon 1988:9)

Images are thus word -pictures. They work by association. Although the poets invoke images they are essentially created by the associations that the readers make within their minds keeping within the linguistic context of the text. B.S. Mardhekar (1909-151) formulates the poetic process schematically as this:

POET: WORDS: MEANING: BEAUTY:

He divides words into two categories, as sound and as meaning. Meaning again falls into two categories: intellectual meaning and emotional meaning. Emotional meaning again has two divisions: aesthetic and poetic (G.N.Devy 2002:174). In the analysis and study of images we are concerned with this aesthetic and poetic meaning of images.

Kuntaka in late 10<sup>th</sup> Century delved at the meaning of words in poetry:

That 'meaning' is what is signified and word is that which 'signifies' is so well known that it needs no elaboration. Yet in the province of poetry their true nature is as follows:

That unique expression which alone can fully convey the poet's intended meaning out of a hundred alterations before him is to be regarded as word. Similarly that alone which possesses such refreshing

natural beauty as to draw the appreciation of the delighted readers is to be reckoned as 'meaning.'

(Devy 2002:47)

Yeats tells us that an image grows in 'pure mind' and that anything around us, however trivial, may be a rich source of imagery to a poet:

Those masterful images because complete  
 Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?  
 A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,  
 Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,  
 Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut  
 Who keeps the till.

(Yeats: The Circus Animals' Desertion)

Poets cannot present the colour to the eyes as does the visual artist, or the music to the ears as does the musician. He has to employ words to call up images of that which he wills to represent and an appropriate metre to convey music.

Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) has shown that how despite all his propaganda of choosing low and rustic characters as speakers of plainer and more emphatic language, Wordsworth had to purify the diction of all provincialism and grossness and so far reconstruct the language with rules of grammar that ultimately there remained no difference between what he professed to be the

language of his poetry and the conventional poetic expression, the language of the learned. Coleridge arbitrarily chooses a stanza from Lyrical Ballads –

In distant countries have I been  
 And yet I have not often seen  
 A healthy man, a man full grown,  
 Weep in public roads alone.

( Coleridge :48)

to prove that there remains an essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition although Wordsworth asserts that there is none. This does not, however, mean that the language of poetry should necessarily have a regular mode and a metre producing what we call verse music. Trends differ from one age to another.

From the verse music based on stress and alliteration and closed couplets poetry has travelled through liberated blank verse to verse libre. Yet they are all poetry.

Coming to the Indian context we find that the aesthetic and mystic elements formed a characteristic basis even for ancient Indian poetry. The ancient Indian poets highly valued the teachings of literary theorists like Bharatmuni (3<sup>rd</sup> century or older) on Natyasastra or dramatic art, Tholkappiyar (4<sup>th</sup> century) on diction and syntax, or Anandavardhana (9<sup>th</sup> century ) and Kuntaka (late

10<sup>th</sup> century) on structure and poetic meaning and metaphor. The aesthetic enjoyment that the spectators or the readers experienced from creative art was termed 'rasa'. Great importance was placed on both the expression and the appreciation of this emotive experience. That poetry conveyed something that was beyond the obvious was also the strain of some of Indian literary theories. Aurobindo Ghosh in *The Essence of Poetry* (1919) says that the poet attempts

to embody in his speech truth of life or truth of Nature. It is this greater truth and its delight and beauty therefore a joy forever, because it brings us the delight of the soul in the discovery of its own deeper realities. (Devy 1951:163)

He too like Blake and Pater speaks of a 'vision' whereby poetry becomes a vehicle of the truth. This is done partly by 'a stress on the image replacing the old sensational concreteness', and partly by 'greater attention to the suggestive force of the sound, its life, its power, the mental impression it carries.' (ibid) We turn around the key words: truth, vision, image. Anandavardhana in his *Dhvanyaloka* (8<sup>th</sup> Cen A.D.) says that 'the soul of poetry is suggestion'. He speaks of two kinds of poetry, the implicit and the explicit.

We are accustomed to call these broad categories, after Lewis and Kermode as poetry with literal image and those with figurative image. Anandavardhana says:

of these the explicit is commonly known and has been set forth in many ways through figures of speech such as similes by other writers. But the implicit aspect is quite different from this. (Devy 2002 :32)

He expands his idea later into: 'Meaning alone is the soul of poetry'. (ibid) For all good poetry have both a literal and a suggestive meaning. A casual reader might be enchanted with the beauty of words and their music, but the real meaning lies within it:

Just as a man interested in perceiving objects (in the dark) directs his efforts towards securing a lamp since it is a means to realize his end, so also does one who is ultimately interested in the suggested meaning proceed by first evincing interested in the conventional meaning. (ibid)

Aurobindo too like Blake and Yeats places intellect below the imagination. But owing to uncertainty of our knowledge of the ancient Indian classical theories and unavailability of these works to the masses, how far these traditions and theories influenced our

post-colonial poets we cannot say for certain, as did Symbolism, Imagism, Surrealism or the Confessional mode.

Indian English poetry, though imitative of the English poets in its early stages with images of ivory towers and Muses as in Dongerkery, Queen May, twilight caves, Knight and Nymphs as in B.N.Seal, nevertheless displayed sparks of original images from time to time. In Kashiprasad Ghosh we hear of 'Ganga's billows'. A crow is the 'gay minstrel of the Indian clime', the 'Surya from his throne' paints the day with brightest colours. Harindranath Chattopadhyay is strikingly original in calling the noon a 'mystic dog' who runs across the sky 'licking the earth with tongue of golden flame'; or likening the time to 'a hind in sore distress'.

While Indian English fiction exploited the Indian heritage, culture, and the Indian milieu for evoking the typical Indian response, like in the novels of Bankimchandra, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand or R.K.Narayan, the Indian English poets tried to draw images from the Indian environment, history and mythology. Derozio's *Chorus of Brahmins* and Kashiprashad Ghosh's *To a Young Hindu Widow* dealt with the Indian customs. Madhusudan Dutt's *King Porus*, Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *Sivajee*, Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Buddha's Death* were based on Indian history. Poems such as Dilip Kumar Roy's *Krishna and the Snake* and Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Sita Lost* were based on Indian mythology. Sarojini Naidu chose

characters form the common Indian horde like: snake charmers, wandering singers, corn-grinders, beggars, fishermen, widows, bangle sellers, milkmaids, and palanquin bearers. Torulata Dutt's voice is held to be the first authentic Indian voice in poetry. (M.K.Naik 2004:37) With the post-colonial poets like P.Lal, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarathy, A.K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Keki Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, imagery became characteristically Indian, rising from Indian experience to life and things.

Modernist literature was born in the city with Baudelaire. With the modernist poets there is a shift of focus from the rural to the urban themes and images, be it the Paris of Baudelaire or the 'Unreal City' of London of T.S. Eliot or the Bombay 'sick with slums' of Ezekiel, it is the city that the poets turned their attention to. The Romantic poets drew their inspiration from nature, but as time passed nature showed its darker side. Human receptivity was haunted by poverty, population explosion, exploitation and other challenges of life. A significant embodiment of Modernist sensibility was T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* (1922). The image of the arid land where the dead tree gives no shelter and dry stone no water has ever since become the symbol of the dismal facets of urban life. The post-colonial Indian English poetry has images of the bleak realities of poverty, sickness, beggars, cripples and prostitutes.

While the urban images are dismal the rural images were not always idyllic:

Crumpled old villages ,  
Overgrown with skin and flesh.

(Jayanta Mahapatra:Rice)

Thus we find that although all the poets through the ages have employed images to enhance their themes, the set of images that the poets make use of, undergo change from one era to another. “In the one case the reader is utterly at the mercy of the poet respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion.” (Coleridge : 66)

Different poets and theorists have used the very word ‘image’ variously in a multiplicity of contexts. Image is something that has been a constant element in poetry right from the time when minstrels composed and sang their verses to this post-modern era. Movements come and go altering dictions, metrical fashions, subject matter, reader-poet relationship, verdict of the critics, but image remains in a true wedlock to poetry.

## CHAPTER II

## Mapping Mahapatra

Somewhere, the urge to talk about oneself  
 consumes the entire lifetime.  
 There is (somewhere ) a great poem I have to write.

(Mahapatra, *A Father's Hours*: 21)

The study of images, as we have seen, is central to the understanding of poetry. Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry has a wide range of images that calls for serious study. The background of Indian English poetry and the influences at work on the poet forms a fundamental segment to the understanding of his images. Mahapatra is widely known today and shares a place amongst our leading poets. He cannot be studied in isolation. Mahapatra is keenly conscious of the predicament of modern man. His poetry accentuates a keen consciousness of cultural and sociological traditions of his native locale. My attempt here is not to delve into all the incidents of his life in order to link up the major events of his life with his outpourings. This chapter places the poet and his texts against the ethnic and literary tradition that he has inherited, and the literary influences that have worked on him giving shape to his images, making him one of our contemporary Indian poets.

If we do not relate the lines like “There’s probably something good / on television tonight. /Another death?” (Dispossessed Nests: 4) with the violent movements for Khalistan, or,

The leaves of the dark tree of India  
 are grasping for breath  
 across the green air.

(Dispossessed Nests: 29)

with Bhopal Gas Tragedy, we cannot get the complete importation of what the poetry means and what ails the poet.

One of our weaknesses has been, especially after the New critics and structuralist semiotics, the tendency to treat individual texts as isolated, closed entities and to center our attention solely on internal structures:

The concept of intertextuality reminds us that each text exists in relation to others. In fact, texts owe more to other texts than to their own makers. Michel Foucault declared that: The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.... (Foucault 1974, 23)  
 (Daniel Chandler:Semiotics for Beginners)

Eliot defined tradition in his essay *Tradition and Individual Talent* as that which,

compels a man to write not merely with his generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (Eliot 1932: 49)

The study of poetry involves a study of the poet's ethnic background and tradition along with an awareness of the time frame within which he exists. Jayanta Mahapatra as a poet has made his indelible mark on the Indian English Poetry of the present decade. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademy award for poetry (1980) for his volume *Relationship*. This was the first honour of its kind given to a volume of Indian English poetry. Mahapatra, a contemporary of A.K.Ramanujan and Ezekiel took to writing late, but not without results. He has several volumes of poetry to his credit: *Close the Sky; Ten by Ten*; (1971) *Svayamvara and Other Poems* (1971); *A Father's Hours* (1976); *A Rain of Rites* (1976); *Waiting* (1979); *The False Start* (1980); *Relationship* (1980); *Life Signs* (1983); *Dispossessed Nests* (1986); *Selected Poems* (1987); *Burden of Waves and Fruit* (1988); *Temple* (1989); *A Whiteness of*

*Bone* (1992); *The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra* (1995); *Shadow Space* (1997); *Bare Face* (2000); *Random Descent* (2005).

Mahapatra has contributed to various national and international journals and has received several awards like Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award from Poetry Magazine Chicago (1975); Gangadhar National Award for poetry from Sambalpur University (1994); Ramakrishna Jaidayal Harmony Award (New Delhi, 1994). He held the Vaikom Mohammad Basheer Chair at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam from 1996-1997. Mahapatra has bagged the second prize in International Who's Who in Poetry Competition, London (1970) and the first prize in Scottish International Open Poetry Competition (1990). He was the invited poet at Cuirt International Poetry Festival, Ireland (1992); Poetry International, London (1992); El Consejo Nacional Para La Cultura y Las Artes, Mexico; (1994); Mingi International Museum, U.S.A (1994), ACLALS Conference, Sri Lanka (1998) Indo-Soviet Cultural Exchange USSR (1985); Asian Poets Conference Japan (1984). He has visited Malaysia, Indonesia, Phillipines, Singapore, West Germany, England and U.S.A. to give recitals to his poetry. He has been a member of the University of Iowa's International Writing Program during 1976-77. Mahapatra was initially recognized abroad before getting his deserved attention at home.

The poets who were generally included in the numerous indiscriminative and selective anthologies that published and promulgated Indian English poetry were Dom Moraes, Ezekiel, Parthasarathy, Ramanujan, Gieve Patel, Arun Kolatkar, Mehrotra, Daruwalla and Kamala Das. Prithish Nandy who published *Indian Poetry in English* (1947-1972) and *Strangertime: an Anthology of Indian Poetry in English* (1977), was one of the few to publish Mahapatra. Mahapatra who was widely published outside India in *South and West* (USA), *Hudson Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *New Letters*, *New York Quarterly*, and in *Times Literary Supplement*, was first published in India in *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* (1976) edited by R.Parthasarathy and in *A Writer's Workshop Anthology* (1971) edited by Shiv.K.Kumar. Mahapatra's rapidly published volumes record his qualms, his perceptions of the self and of the outside world, often repeating the same theme from different points of view. His poetry unravels the problems of his inner self as he tries to communicate the correlation of the self with the physical and inner reality.

Although it is difficult to trace all the influences that shape a poet, Mahapatra seems to have been most influenced by Robert Bly and the American poets of late 60s and 70s in using the landscape as a means of expressing his subjective feelings. The Romantic poets had also used the external object or an object of nature as a stimulus to the deep ruminations of the self. We sometimes find

Mahapatra distantly echoing poets of the Romantic tradition like Keats or Shelley. Acquaintance with the works of William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) and Ezra Pound (1885-1972) helped him to build up a belief that the logic of a poem was ultimately in its inner relations rather than in its being narrative or argumentative.

The method of Romantic poets to begin with a projection on an image of an external object and then turn to a reflection of the self was given a new twist by these American poets. Robert Bly is said to have discovered in his *Silence in the Snowy Fields* the spirit of the American (prairie) landscape. Although considerably influenced by Spanish, Chinese, and Latin American poets, there never remained a perception of an alien culture in Bly. The American land seemed to have breathed through him. The fields and rural buildings open out into this large dimension of the human self in Bly. "We are all asleep in the outward man," Bly quotes Boehme, as an epigraph for the book, then goes on to offer poems which, taken all together, call to us, to wake up in and through the inward man. Reading Bly, one senses the need to discover the other-dimensionality of being. In his essay *The Dead World and the Live World* (1966), Robert Bly distinguishes between two kinds of poetic consciousness, that which brings 'news of the human mind' (he would have included the confessional poets in this category) and that which brings 'news of the universe'. The second kind of poetry requires that the poet go deeply inward, 'far back into the brain,'

where he is likely to find what Bly calls, 'some bad news about himself, some anguish that discursive reasoning had for a long time protected him against' (66-67). But the poets ought to continue his inward journey without break. They must penetrate much deeper than the ego and thus grow aware of the multiple beings that live within. (Dead World: 6). Finally, the poet reaches those depths where 'life inside the brain and the life outside' exist 'at the same instant' (7). The manifestation of the poem crystallizes at this point of perception, at this personal instant of instantaneous interaction between the perceiver and the perceived. This type of poetic consciousness that seeks to integrate self, others, and the cultural and physical worlds, that is sometimes called the incorporative consciousness, prevails in Mahapatra. As a result subdued anxieties, fears, desires and hopes along with landscape, myth and history surface in his poetry.

One of the basic concerns manifested in the nineteenth century literature written in almost all the languages was to come to terms with the impact of western civilization. It affected the Indian writer's sense of history, his understanding of the past, his idea of progress; in short, his total view of life. Dr.Sisir Das points out that this created a tension between the two modes of life, and of art, that could never be completely resolved as neither a total rejection of the contact nor an unconditional acceptance was possible. The tension became more intensified with the passage of time, with a

fresh understanding of our own heritage and of the nature of the foreign rule that culminated during the organized struggle of the people against the British Domination. (Sisir Das:2)

The voices that emerged after independence were influenced and excited by their appreciation of late nineteenth century and twentieth century poets like Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Pound and Auden. The nationalist political idiom was no longer needed. The emphasis was now on the personal desires and discontents rather than on mythological characters. With each passing decade after independence, a heightened awareness of actual Indian experience was apparent in Indian English poetry. The poets were no longer detached from real life experiences and reflected a consciousness of community life.

Modern Indian English poetry was indebted only to European poetry at the beginning of experimentation. But it gradually grew receptive to World Literature in general like to the contemporary American and South American poetry. It also extended its array of interest to include old and regional Indian Literature, Indian legends and myths. Post -independence Indian poetry began restructuring itself by incorporating themes and techniques from French experimental poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century like Rimbaud (1854-1891) and Lautreamont (1846-1870), from 20<sup>th</sup> Century modernists like Eliot and Pound, from the political poetry of

Neruda (1904-1973), and from the movements that comprised modernism in literature.

Mahapatra read as his favourites the poems of Pablo Neruda, North eastern poets like Anjum Hassan, Robin Ngangom and Desmon while he himself was influenced by the field poetry of William Carlos Williams, James Wright, Bly, Pound and by the surrealists.

The change that was apparent with our contemporary Indian poets was that they had shifted their focus from the visionary religious and hackneyed musings to the reality. One of the significant changes was the shift of focus to the poets themselves. In the autobiographical nostalgia of Dom Moraes, in the distanced reflections of Ezekiel, or the highly emotive confessions of Kamala Das, the poets were gradually creating a space for themselves and their experiences.

Mahapatra speaks on the change that was apparent:

However it was in the eighties or the early nineties that a change was seen in much of the English poetry written in India. The discerning reader no longer wanted to read merely a well-crafted poem of an Indian poet in English, a poem which could have come as well from a pen of a poet living in Britain or Australia. Neither was the poet interested only in the dry wit and

irony most Indian English poems exhibited. The prevailing poetry scene was witnessing a subtle change. Poets, younger poets, from various parts of the country were coming out with their poems; suddenly English poems were being written differently in Kerala, in the Northeast, and in my own state of Orissa. It was the native culture showing in the poem of the Indian English poet. It was poetry which eased itself from the earth the poet inhabited, nurtured and nourished by the soil and air of the place. There was a distinct sense of belonging; it couldn't be mistaken.

(Mahapatra: *The Daily Star*, January 10, 2004)

Subsequent to Mahapatra's publication in the *Writer's Workshop Anthology*, *Prithi Nandy Anthology*, and in the *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets in India*, the reviewers were puzzled by his apparent obscurity. A review published in *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, said that Mahapatra 'focused on the subliminal private world behind the poem.' (Bruce King 2004: 86) But Mahapatra's own standpoint was unambiguous:

Many of our poets (those who live in a bureaucratic or academic world) elevate the artist to the ethereal, where we deny the connections between the self and other, separating language from social relations. We

revere this isolated human being (our artist, our poet) and treat his imagination as something he has inherited, a gift from god, as though there were no logical relationship, or historical relationship between the self and the world. We are then aware that we write without any real sense of community or audience. That is probably why the poetry of many Indian English poets fails, when these poets prefer to live abroad, exiled by his own choosing. (Mahapatra: The Hindu March 18,2001)

Having identified why contemporary Indian poetry often failed, Mahapatra goes ahead to say what he proposes to do: “Frankly, I should like to write such a poetry, a poetry which comes out of ashes of our own culture.” (Ibid). This ‘ash’ image found early in Mahapatra contained the germ of what he expounds:

all the poetry there is in the world  
appears to rise out of the ashes.

(All The Poetry There Is)

While dealing with Indian English literature, we find that much of it today, is an expression of cultural and linguistic zones that divide India. The poets who employ English as their medium of expression, which like ancient Sanskrit, is nobody’s mother tongue but is generally associated with the elite, come from the different

communities of India and likewise their literature very often reflect a distinct regional colour.

This is the place  
 where I was born .I  
 know it  
 well. It is home.

( Ezekiel : After Reading a Prediction)

What gives a poet a sense of belonging to a particular country or region, a sense of being rooted in the soil, is his identification with the particular place and the ethnic group. W.B. Yeats had made it explicit in his *Under Ben Bulbin*:

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

A poet's identity is not only a private and personal upbringing, his response to landscape, his consciousness of the culture and tradition of the ethnic group with which he identifies himself make up his inimitable identity. Judith Wright Kohli has made a significant observation in this respect :

Before one's country can become an accepted  
 background against which the poet's and novelist's

imagination can move unhindered, it must first be observed, understood, described, as it were absorbed. The writer must be at peace with his landscape before he can turn to its human figures.

(Basavaraj Naikar 2003: 88)

The search for regional and linguistic identity in Indian poetry has become an essential characteristic today. This is a continuation and implementation of cultural decolonization that has inspired India since its independence. It is a celebration of India's pluralism. Texts in the various regional languages that pour out throughout India, and also the Indian English texts that have, as we have seen, by now become specifically and occasionally consciously Indian, are sometimes interdependent and interrelated, at the same time they are a part of the history of the community that has produced them. 'There is no song of India' says Mahapatra in *Song Of The River*. For no literature can be representative of the cultural locus of the whole of India. Jayanta Mahapatra believes that there are many different Indias. Orissa is one India, Bengal is another, Maharashtra, Kerala, Kashmir all are different Indias. It is easier to identify and judge a poet against the backdrop of his particular locale than to try to place him in the milieu of the entire nation. The very concept of India as a unified geographical territory is not a solid one. The tribal girl Bhanumati

in Bibhutibhusan's Bengali novel *Aranyak* (1938) tells the narrator that she doesn't know where Bharatvarsha is located. The India of Ashoka, that of Akbar, that which the British ruled and that which we now live in are not one and identical. States are constantly being formed and political boundaries renewed. In addition to the instable geo-political boundary, there is diversity in population. Eventually religion and language become the chief factors of communal identity.

Jayanta Mahapatra insists that he should be considered as an Oriya poet who writes in English:

Orissa is my land, my roots are there and my people.  
 But my training was in English. I'm comfortable with  
 English so I began writing in English .I didn't write  
 with a western audience in mind or to make a name  
 for myself .I wrote because it was easy for me to write  
 in English. But I still consider myself to be an Oriya  
 poet. (Shormishtha Panja 2001 :26)

Mahapatra's identification with Orissa is sincere and complete. He says:

A man does not mean anything.

But the place.

Sitting on the riverbank throwing pebbles

into the muddy current,  
 a man becomes the place.

(Somewhere, My Man)

Many of his poems bear the unmistakable stamp of Orissa. He refers to 'The noble proud Konaraka of the soul' early in his third volume of poetry. In *A Rain of Rites* we have such poems as *Main Temple Street Puri*, *Dawn at Puri*. In *Waiting* he turns again and again to Orissa. Poems titled *Bhubaneswar*, *Orissa*, *Konaraka*, *Dhaulagiri* crowd the volume. Poems such as *The Temple Road Puri*, *The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore*, *The Captive Air of Chandipur on Sea*, *Rains in Orissa*, *Shapes by the Daya*, *In an Orissa Village*, *Deaths in Orissa in Bare Face*, *Watching Tribal Dances in an Orissa Village*, *Living in Orissa*, *Landscape* and *A Hint of Grief* illustrate his preoccupation with Orissa.

Previously known as Udra desh and later as Utkal and Kalinga, Orissa finds mention in the Adiparva, Bhismaparva, Sabhaparva and Banaprava of Mahabharat so also in the conquest of Karna. Kalinga King Srutayu is said to have assisted the Kauravas in Mahabharat. Recorded history of Orissa, however, begins with the great war of Kalinga in 260 BC, where the Magadha King Ashoka had given up violence and accepted Buddhism. Mahapatra records the sufferings of those slain in the war, the sufferings that still ring within him:

the measure of Ashoka's suffering

does not appear enough .The place of his pain peers  
lamentably

from among the pains of the dead.

(Dhaulagiri)

While writing this poem Mahapatra had felt, as he says in the interview with Sumanyu Sathpathy, (Shormistha Panja :31) that he was back in 261B.C. watching the massacre. The memory of his ancestors slaughtered by Ashoka's army on the banks of river Daya haunts him again in *Burden of Waves and Fruit*.

Here

where we discover we don't have to look  
for victories. My hands and eye overwhelm,  
and this scarred land stares up with such hatred  
that it makes one cry out as if under a blow.

(Shapes by the Daya)

Orissa the ruins of Konarak and Puri, the river Daya  
where king Ashoka converted to Buddhism after the  
bloodbath of a pyrrhic victory are eloquent and are  
participants in the racial experience of the poet.

(C.L.L.Jayaprada 1994: 86.)

Mahapatra similarly draws on the myth of Konaraka. The myth of twelve hundred artisans working day and night under a ruthless emperor is accessed with sympathy. Legend goes that a twelve-

year-old boy was finally able to fix the crowning stone of the Sun Temple at Konarak, which twelve hundred artisans after repeated attempts could not. The wonder boy then jumped from the top of the temple and committed suicide to save the name and honour of his father:

as the twelve hundred builders of my hoped –for triumph  
 overcome the humility all along the journey  
 and avidly prepare to claim recognition  
 for that noble, proud Konaraka of the soul.

( Performance)

This racial consciousness continues in *Konaraka*:

and inside me  
 is the boy I found,  
 tracked by stone,  
 the ceremony finished,  
 his thin cry  
 pointing at my life. (Konaraka)

As his racial memory haunts him he takes us to the ancient harbour of Chilika and Chandipur to the cemetery at Balasore.

“You can’t separate yourself from history or myth.” says Mahapatra.(Panja: 31) Muslim and Maratha invaders had economically despoiled Orissa during the reign of Jahangir. (1605-1627). It was under the rule of Mughals till 1751 and then under

the Marathas till 1803 when the British occupied it. The British later split up Orissa into several parts and merged it with the neighbouring States. In 1905, Bengal was devastatingly divided by the British rulers for, what they said, administrative purposes, into a Hindu West including present day Bihar and Orissa and a predominantly Muslim East including Assam. Hindu-Muslim conflict at once came to the forefront. As a result of a strong and violent agitation the British finally united the East and West Bengal in 1912 but made Bihar and Orissa a separate province merging Bihar with Orissa in 1914. Cuttack, Puri and Balasore now represented Orissa instead of the vast empire of Kalinga of the past. Demands for a separate state emerged and continued until, following the recommendation of Odenail Committee, Orissa gained her statehood on April 1st, 1936. Neighbouring feudatory states and zamindars joined in to make its statehood complete with Gajapati Krishna Chandra Narayan Dev as the first Prime-minister in 1937 and Sir John Austin Haback as the Governor.

Born in 1928 Mahapatra was too young to feel this communal zeal. The Second World War had begun when he was in school. Air base was set up beyond the town, the daily newspaper brought in news of war. The Japanese had advanced into Burma. The defeated British army retreated. The poet's uncle who was in the Indian army was declared lost. The Mahapatra family shared the anguish with many others suffering similar losses in the country. Blackout

was imposed in the town, shelters for air raids were erected. There was a scarcity of the essential commodities and for a time the poet's family like many others had to exist on rice and molasses. What affected him most was the poverty that hit Orissa. Poverty stricken men whimpered and suffered from epileptic fits. There were blind boys and girls with eyes hollowed by pox. There were cripples, threatening lepers and beggars all around the town. All these recur in his poems as images. Even after twenty-five years of Indian Republic, 'The destitutes everywhere' remain his 'sense of guilt.' (The Twentieth Anniversary of a Republic: 1975)

But he was still young and therefore sought a habitual escape from reality into the world of imagination that seemed to offer him some relief :

...for the boy of fourteen the state of the world is of lesser significance than his personal needs. A moment comes when one has seen enough of all that gloom that one must try to get away from it all; which is what I probably did, burying myself in the world of books - seeking new authors and discovering the nuances of a language I had been taught to love. The romantic worlds of Walter Scott, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Rider Haggard offered me escape enough. (Mahapatra: 140)

What was he escaping from? Was it only the horror the war had left behind? He ran away from his home thrice. The home located at the end of a huddle of houses with clay walls and thatched roof surrounded by tall deodars and palms that filled him with fear; the home where he had a lonely childhood, an abnormal relationship with his mother, with his father mostly away, the insecure eldest having to shoulder odd responsibilities. Mahapatra never seems to have got along with his mother having disagreements every now and then with this

... indefinable mother who merely  
sits around not knowing what to do,

(Song of the Past)

Mahapatra slipped into dreams and self-pity as a means of escape from the unfavourable surroundings:

sitting for hours long on the roof of our house, my hands clasped around my knees, watching the pale moon come in with a handful of light that failed to reach the deep corners of my existence. (Mahapatra: 39)

He absorbed the entire atmosphere, the trees, the darkness, the lonely woman, the moon and later transformed them into dominant metaphors in his poetry:

like the trees around my house settling back into place  
and the moon running white among the clouds.

(Performance).

Childhood occupies an important place in Mahapatra's poetry. Many of his poems are a looking back to the unforgettable past that he tries to reconstruct never in the golden halo of angel infancy, but in a contemplation of what it had actually been.

there is a past which moves over  
the magic slopes and hamlets of the mind,  
whose breath measures the purpose of our lives.

(The Rising)

The uncovering of his childhood exposes old sores and anxieties but seldom offers relief:

as in the man I had to be ,while still a boy,  
in my mother's house when father was away  
Yet what is there lives  
in the secret hollows of the old belief,

( Something Spreading Itself)

"I always feel alone," confesses Mahapatra, " alone when I'm with my family or a part of a crowd. There's a chasm inside which can never be bridged." Says the poet. (Panja 2001: 31)

Mahapatra feels alienated like many other Indian English poets by the choice of the language in which he wrote. With Dom Mores he

shared the troubled and insecure childhood, and like Ezekiel, who belonged to a Bene-Israel family which migrated to India generations back, or like Gieve Patel who was a Parsi, Mahapatra felt that he was somehow alienated from the core of Indian ethos. He was born into a Christian family in a predominantly Hindu locality. The conversion of his grandfather was one of the factors that had affected him like his insecure childhood, and the social milieu.

One of Mahapatra's prized possessions is his grandfather's diary which records the family history of embracing Christianity, a diary that had turned yellow with time when his father handed it over to him.

The yellowed diary's notes whisper in vernacular.

They sound the forgotten posture,

The cramped cry that forces me to hear that voice.

Now I stumble in your black-paged wake.

(Grandfather)

Orissa was struck by a terrible famine in the year 1866. The English, who were the rulers then had made sincere efforts to help the suffering. There was no food available and men starved to death. Hunger made them eat tamarind leaves, unknown roots and tubers. Typhoid and cholera took the shape of an epidemic. Thousands died. There were none to cremate the dead. Jackals

and vultures devoured the corpses. Mahapatra's grandfather, starving to a state of collapse, had managed to stagger into a mercy camp of the Christian missionaries in Cuttack. They gave him life but bargained his religion.

Dead, empty trees stood by the dragging river  
 past your weakened body, flailing against your sleep.  
 You thought of the way the jackals moved, to move.  
 Did you hear the young tamarind leaves rustle  
 In the cold mean nights of your belly ? Did you see  
 Your own death? Watch it tear at your cries,  
 Break them into fits of hard unnatural laughter?  
 How old were you? Hunted ,you turned coward and ran,  
 the real animal in you plunging through your bone,  
 You left your family behind ,the buried things,  
 the precious clod that praised the quality of a god.

(Ibid)

His grandmother too was similarly fated. A bullock cart carrying twelve children headed for conversion at the same camp. A girl amongst them had escaped and Mahapatra's grandmother was forcibly taken to fill in the place. Mahapatra grew up between two worlds, to use his own phrase from *Old Palaces*, 'in a limbo of things'. The home that followed rigid Christian conventions and the Hindu world outside with its festivals and rituals:

I was at the center of it all; trying to communicate with both, and probably becoming myself incommunicable as a result through the years. (Mahapatra:142)

Mahapatra was bullied in his school and, sensitive as he was, he suffered from a trauma that had made a deep impression on him making him aloof. The estrangement continued into his university life :

Besides the differences in language, I experienced a huge cultural gap .I also realized painfully that I would have been subjected to unnecessary ridicule from other students in those lodgings had they known I was Christian. (ibid)

But in time, as is usual, a sense of spiritual union grew and the Hindu festivals became, as he says, a part of his university life. He could reiterate with Ramanujan:

I must seek and will find

My particular hell only in my hindu mind.

(Ramanujan: 34)

There is an array of Hindu religious images in his poetry, idols of gods temples, temple bells and priests. It is noteworthy that we do not find so much of Christian religious connotations in his poetry. Mahapatra's brother, as the poet says, is a faithful Christian and a leader of a local community. But Mahapatra could

not become one. He has always been 'conscious of his grandfather's cry tearing the air'. (Mahapatra:142)

Despite his preoccupation with Hinduism as an inseparable part of his life he feels that he has never been accepted into the system. He remains an outsider watching the blind faith, the customs and rituals in a wish to share with them their tradition but often finds himself a misfit amongst the crowd:

Somewhere in this air  
a small grief burns at the feet of an ikon.

(Nightfall)

He grows acutely aware of it when it is Christmas. In a poem satirically titled *Brothers* appearing in *Bare Face* Mahapatra records a vain endeavour to bridge the disparate Hindu mind and the Christian mind:

Today no one I know has died in our street;  
when I go out I will meet the same people again  
and act with the same polite formality  
as we did when they first spoke to me ;  
the carefully kept distance between us  
starts shaking its head.

That and a little more is what I know.

Or what I think I know.

Can't one give himself to a different faith  
if only he has faith in himself and his own?

I wonder if I am naïve enough for that  
 Our rites have become burdens  
 given to us like curses upon our souls,  
 and hope has become God, difficult to see.  
 But it is Christmas and there in the street  
 are children so young they must dream of it .

The assassination of Gandhi on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948 had imparted a tragic glory to the life of this undaunted leader. It turned into an image of a lonely hero glorious in tragic struggle whose representation urged a guilt of patricide. The incident stimulated hundreds of elegies and dirges in prose and verse like those of Dinu Bhai Pant's, Buddhihari Singh Ramkar's or Harivanshrai Bacchan's and Ananta Patnaik's. Jibanananda Das registers this transformation:

Look  
 how an old man  
 travels forward  
 from one road to the other  
 from the edge of time  
 to the heart of time  
 to discover the Truth.

(Jibanananda Das :Satti Tatar Timir )

Mahapatra had his share in the emotional outburst that had flooded the country, 'we have burst open his blood', he laments.

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten). He creates his own icon of Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi as a lonely old man, an abandoned leader is one of the important images that recur in Mahapatra:

One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. (Eliot 18-25)

In the interview with Sumanyu Satpathy, Mahapatra says that his poetic psyche is composed of the strong oral tradition imbibed from Oriya poetry. His rhythm is not an English rhythm but that which he has absorbed from Oriya songs. The rhythm, he says, exists in his blood. The use of refrain and repetition of a word or a phrase that was the technique of the oral tradition, however, has few instances in Mahapatra as in :

My love of gold nose-rings and laughing earrings,  
of towering ruins of stone panting in the dark,  
of loyal lions guarding the diamond navels of shrines,  
of amber breasts and secret armpits  
of cries and the soft of thighs,  
and of the old emptiness of my own destiny;

(Relationship :18)

or in *Summer Afternoons* :

It is my own presence today  
that hardens  
the trees and their fruit,  
the light of another year  
that splinters on the hard floor of this year,  
the light in the eyes of children  
that haunts the broken toys in their sleep.

He rarely uses this well known technique, used by the writers of Psalms and later revived by the Liverpool Poets in the 1960s, to impart a bardic quality to his lines. His is rather an incessant experimentation with form, diction, syntax and punctuation and a turning on unexpected epithets and oxymoron.

Following Mahapatra's avowal a little probing into Oriya poetic tradition will perhaps reveal the influences that contoured his poetic mind.

The oral tradition that Mahapatra speaks of as the origin of Oriya poetry, as that of Bengali and Assamese, can be traced back to the Charya songs. Charya songs were the religious verses of Sahajasidhas, a sect of Mahayana Buddhism. The earliest Oriya literature to be traced is the 12<sup>th</sup> century palm- leaf chronicles of Jagganath temple. The Jagganath cult is unique to Orissa and Mahapatra's poetry sometimes refers to 'the limbless One/ at Puri' (A Summer Night), to the Hindu pilgrimage where the widows wish to be cremated (Dawn at Puri), and to the temple with 'huge doors'. (The Temple Road, Puri)

In Bengal the poems of Jayadev steadily developed towards a doctrine of faith and love towards a personal deity in human form. Poet Jayadev, whose Sanskrit work *Geetgovinda* had long influenced Bengali literature, is often supposed to be an Oriya himself, born in a district of Puri. After Charya pada period many of the texts are not traceable except those of Chautishas and Sisurveda. The fifth century saw the appearance of a multi-volume epic, the Oriya *Mahabharat* by Sarala Das. After Sarala Das there was a steady evolution of religious songs variously known as Bhajana, Janana, Studi, Guhari, ali, prathana, kirtan etc. comparable to padavali and baul songs of Bengal. Oriya literature upto 1500 AD mainly consisted of religious poems and prose pieces with gods and goddesses as their main theme. The Jagannatha Dasa Period that stretches till the year 1700 begins

with the writings of Shri Chaitanya whose Vaishnava influence brought in a new advancement in Oriya literature. Balarama Dasa, Jagannatha Dasa, Yasovanta, Ananta and Acyutananda were its main exponents. The composers of this period mainly translated, modified, or replicated Sanskrit literature. The two poets Radhanath Roy and Madhusudan Rao along with the novelist Fakir Mohan Senapati are credited with the birth of modern Oriya literature. Just as Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) is the classic progenitor of the modern Bengali poetry in the conventional sense, Radhanath Roy (1848-1908) is customarily regarded as the first modern Oriya poet. Madhusudan Rao added another thread to this modernity. His was a deep and personal voice in quest of spiritual union with the divine. Between the period from Radhanath and Madhusudan upto the thirties and the forties two eloquent literary groups came into existence: the Sabujas and the Satyabadis. The Satyabadi group, including Gopabandhu Das, Nilakantha Das and Godabarish Mishra was founded on nationalism. They tried to voice the national tradition by a kind of cultural renaissance. They sought to restore the legends, the myths and ballads, the folk-tales that were fundamental to the Oriya social tradition in a kind of Celtic revival. As it happens with all patriotic poetry, their vision remained limited by nationalism. The Oriya Sabuja poetry (Baikunthanath Patnaik) 'was to a great extent poor shadow of Tagore's mysticism' (Sitakant:3).

Satchidananda Rautroy was the precursor of 'neo-modernity' in Oriya poetry. A romantic revolutionary, he experimented with the variety of poetic techniques. As Mahapatra has acknowledged, no major Oriya poet remains wholly uninfluenced by Rautroy. Nutan Kabita published by Guruprasad Mohanty and Bhanuji Rao (1955) created a literary sensation. The school of poetry of Sochi Rautroy consisted of poets like Sitakant, Soubhagya, Rajendra, Dipak Mishra, Harihar Mishra, Haraprasad Das, Kamalakant Lenka, J. P. Das, Pratibha Satpathy, Sourindra Barik, who have all contributed to Oriya poetry, a tradition that Mahapatra claims to have absorbed. Jayanta Mahapatra, having turned bi-lingual, falls amongst the emergent voices of Oriya poetry.

We might find in Mahapatra's English poems a little of the folk qualities of Sarala Das. He might have adopted from Oriya literature the interest in the landscape of Orissa, its culture, tradition and the unique Jagganth cult. But despite his regional predisposition there is much that speaks of English influence in him.

Mahapatra was himself fascinated by the English language. But the beginnings of his love for English had stemmed from a personal reason. He studied in Stewart European school run by a British missionary. He suffered from an inferiority complex as the other students came to school in horse carriages and motorcars.

The Mahapatras were underprivileged. When he was regularly harassed by the other students in school for being meek and timid and felt the lumber of insecure lonely childhood at home, his British headmaster was the only one to raise him to the platform of commendation. Mahapatra excelled in studies. "But was it at this point in my life that my love and respect for all things English began to grow?" Mahapatra reflects in *Contemporary Authors Autobiography*, "Or was it a part of my conditioning?" (Mahapatra:137)

Srinivasa Iyenger tells us that tradition is infused into individual consciousness:

No true poet can escape tradition. For all our yesterdays are involved in the poet's deeper consciousness and no true poet can escape the pressure of the present for he is in it and of it and the best he can do is to relate the immediate present to the living past... (Iyenger 2002: 641-42)

Jayanata Mahapatra was aware of the experimental poetry that began in the pens of Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Mehrotra, Kolatkar, Nandy, Chitre and other such poets, some of whom he had translated. But, as Bruce King points out : "... it is less likely that there was a direct influence rather than a parallel evolution." (King 2004:163)

When we speak of modernism we do not constrain it to a single movement in a single field. It is rather the sum total of all the movements in arts and literature that brings in the radical modernist stance. Among the significant movements are Impressionism, Post-impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Symbolism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism, Surrealism.

Charles Baudlaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) is sometimes considered as the first specimen of modern poetry. Some however prefer to trace it to Edgar Allen Poe and even to Walt Whitman. Paul Verlaine was one of the first to declare that the profound originality of Charles Baudlaire is to represent effectively and essentially the modern man. Baudlaire whom T.S. Eliot has called 'the greatest exemplar of modern poetry in any language', was a poet of the city. He does not describe city in his poems glorifying its sights and sounds. The prostitutes, demons, robbers, swindlers, beggars, and other urban types parade through his poems. The description of urban scenes with their bleak realities and characters became a prototype of the modernist ethos with Baudlaire:

From the chimney here and there smoke curled above  
 The harlots, with mascars around their eyes  
 Slept open-mouthed, in silly sluggishness;  
 The beggar-women, dragging scraggy breasts,

Blew on their coals and hands, against the frost.

( Baudlaire: The Crepscule du matin, Les Fleurs du Mal)

Mahapatra, who did not remain uninfluenced by the movements that attempted to replace and redefine human existence under post-war changed conditions, has a pageant of the urban types in many of his poems :

Neighbours: the newly -rich silversmith, the vegetable- seller  
a pasty-faced schoolteacher. And Kamala, the three-rupee -  
whore

from my mother's remote village with an old, hard tradition.

(A Father's Hours XIV)

Or,

... the eyes of youth whose fears

lurch about the doorways of their homes.

The prostitutes are younger this year:

At the police station they're careless to give reasons

For being what they are.

And the older women careful enough not to show their years.

(A Father's Hours II)

This city where we hear the hissing of the kitchen, the screech of the playhouse, the swindlers, sluts, robbers and hordes, is sometimes interpretive of Baudelaire's mental process:

Paris may change, but in my melancholy mood

Nothing has budged! New palaces, blocks, scaffoldings,

Old neighbourhoods are allegorical for me

And my dear memories are heavier than stone.

(Baudlaire: The Swan)

Mahapatra's landscape too is interpretive of his mood often helping him to alleviate his sufferings:

I would forget the causes of suffering, mine and others,

To justify my evening's spirit,

(Evening)

In the city a poet lives his precocious existence in a physical listlessness and mental languor. Loneliness is his punishment for an unknown sin. Amongst the other decisive books that radically changed the modern man's attitude to life and interpretation of nature are Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), and *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*' (1905), Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867), and James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Baudlaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* is the archetype of modern consciousness that closes within it the awareness of urban anguish. In his *Preface* Baudlaire has documented the sinfulness of human condition, unhesitatingly accepting the darker side of the human nature :

Folly and error, sin and avarice

Work on our bodies, occupy our thoughts.

(Preface: Les Fleurs du Mal)

Mahapatra admits that to write realistic poetry, cultivating the relationship between the social and the personal, results in a self-consciousness that involves the 'loss of moral poise'. (King:86) This 'moral poise' was something that was disregarded as the modern poets accepted the darker side of human nature:

In my dreams I fondle Kamala's brazen breasts

(A Father's Hours XV)

Jean Moreas (1856-1910) published his manifesto of symbolism in *La Figaro* in September, 1886. The major exponents of this movement were Charles Baudlaire, Stephen Mallrame, Paul Verlaine and Jean Arthur Rimbaud. Its influence was felt in England in the works of W.B.Yeats and T.S. Eliot who in turn influenced much of modern Indian poetry. The Imagist movement, which is often regarded as an advance on French Symbolism, began in England in the first quarter of twentieth century under the leadership of Ezra Pound (1885-1972). The others involved were T.E.Hulme (1883-1917) Wyndham Lewis, Amy Lowell (1874-1925), Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961) and Harriet Monroe (1860-1936). An Imagist poetry sought to use the image as the center of the poetic expression, seizing the image in its keen and bare essence. Such a poem tends to be short, with lines of short length, avoiding abstractions and treating images with hard and clear precision.

Some of Mahapatra's poems like *Indian Summer Poem*, *A Missing Person* and *Dawn at Puri* are Imagist poetry. *Indian Summer Poem* is a short lyric with a succession of vivid and concrete pictures that do not help to develop any specific theme. Only the title of the poem gives us a clue to the theme that Mahapatra is describing an Indian summer afternoon. We are expected visualize the Indian summer on the basis of these cluster of images:

Crocodiles move into deeper waters.

Mornings of heated middens

smoke under the sun.

The good wife

lies in my bed

through the long afternoon;

(A Rain of Rites)

*Dawn at Puri* depicts a scene on the sandy beach at Puri with a similar string of images:

Endless crow noises

A skull on the holy sands

tilts its empty country towards hunger.

White -clad widowed women

past the centers of their lives

are waiting to enter the Great Temple.

(Ibid)

In *A Missing Person*, there is a woman placed in front of the mirror with a burning oil lamp in her hand. The flame quivers. What bewilders the readers is that this lady with the lamp cannot see her reflection in the mirror. We are told that these 'yellow drunken' flames know where her lonely body hides. The successive images make it an Imagist poem but we also find in the poem distinct influences of Surrealism.

The two decades that separated the World Wars (1920s and 1930s) saw the rise of Surrealism as a movement in art and literature in Europe. The term first used by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) was 'super-realism' meaning a world of connotations that transcends the mundane world. Andre Breton's first manifesto of Surrealism (1924) recommended that the mind be liberated from the chain of logic and reason.

That Mahapatra was specially influenced by surrealism is evident in the essay published in *The Literary Criterion* (xv, no, 1,1980, pg.27—36). In the essay he speaks of a poet's mental landscape, a world made of his personal desires and anguish, of his secret allusions, a world that is spaced by the poet's personal life with 'a constantly changing alignment between dream and reality'. What he says is in tune with the Andre Breton's Surrealist manifesto (A lecture given in Brussels on 1st June 1934 at a public meeting organized by the Belgian Surrealists, and issued as a pamphlet

immediately afterwards). Breton expounded in her speech that a great poem takes us aboard on a sort of journey or a voyage through symbols and allusions, and takes us beyond the human conditions.

The associational poetry with its emphasis on guilt, sex, ambition, childhood memories, amorous experiences was a component of the Confessional poetry began in America during the early 1950s. The confessional mode is found in Ezekiel's poetry who constantly alluded to his personal life. Kamala Das wrote self-revelatory confessional poems. Recent poets like de Souza, Shetty and Silgado are skillful craftsmen composing poems with suggestive confessional understatements. Strongly allied to the confessional mode is the kind of obscure and surreal poetry that Mahapatra writes. Possibly the influence of the 'open field' poetry of Robert Bly and James Wright has strong hold on him. Mahapatra sometimes begins with an observation of the natural world that rapidly gives way to obscure personal associations of guilt, failure, childhood memories, hope and desires that finds fulfillment in the private visionary world. Although this kind of poetry involves lesser self-revelations than the confessional mode, it displays similar fluctuation of moods. It turns on unanticipated imagery that sometimes results in the difficulty that Mahapatra readers confront. It appears to be attending to the self more than the confessional mode does, using fantasy to explore the areas of the

self that men generally repress or are reluctant to display.

Mahapatra acknowledges the intricacy his readers faced:

When the 'confessional' poetry of the sixties in America (markedly) gave way to a new 'surrealism' it evidenced a new ambiguity—not what the lay or common reader could follow, not something he had come to regard as poetry through the years. Generally speaking, today's poem utilizes a number of images and symbols to form a whole, leaving the reader to extricate himself with the valid meaning or argument from them. Thus the reader is left to find out his own meaning from the poem; this, I admit painfully, is true of much of the poetry I have written. If contemporary life is no longer what it was, twenty-five years back, can one expect the same content, the same form, the same substance from contemporary poems? (King 2004: 86)

Besides the experimentation, frankness, the sense of immediacy and self-revelation apparent in modern Indian English poetry it shows a growing interest in the long poem. The long form is an attempt to overcome the isolated fragmented vision of the short poems, to come closer to the experience of reading classical epic. R. Parthasarathy's *Rough Passage*, records the alienation and desire for regeneration into cultural tradition. Kolatkar's *Jejuri*

gives an account of the incongruity between legend and actuality. Daruwalla's *The Waterfront* sequence records the poet's desire of reunion with tradition from which he feels alienated. Mahapatra has also tried his hand at the long form in *Relationship* that won him Sahitya Akademi Annual award in 1981. Mahapatra here combines history, myth and vision to achieve something beyond the scrappy experiences. Orissa's historic past is evoked with a sense of pride that blends with the myths of the land that have, through the generations, served to shape the lives of its people. He turns to his nautical ancestors who brought glory to the state, to Cuttack, which has the Barabati Fort, to the temples where the important gods and goddesses are worshipped and to the myth of the sun temple that is the seat of the sun god. But soon a sense of reality overrides the poet as he moves away from these stories of the past to the contemporary anguish of modern man.

Romanticism had placed the personality of the poet at the core of poetry. T.S. Eliot insisted on the surrender of the poet's individuality to tradition and the need for depersonalization. Many of the poems of the Romantic tradition invited the reader to identify the protagonist with the poet himself as in Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805; revised 1850) or in Keat's *Ode to a Nightingale* (1884). One of the issues that contemporary criticism is concerned with, is the identification of the voice that speaks in the poems, or more precisely, the relationship between the empirical self of the author

and the self that appears as the speaking voice in the work, that is, the persona. In Mahapatra the protagonist can usually be identified with the poet. Besides, he often retreats into his habitual romantic sadness and often unconsciously echoes Keats, Shelley or even Eliot.

I know the wind must sway the leaves again  
 The throat of the bird in that invisible tree  
 Must choke with the callings of my life

(A Father's Hours:IV)

The lines distantly echo Keats' *To a Nightingale*. Here the poet remains chorded with life while his father becomes a sod. Similarly, we are strongly reminded of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* when we read in *Assassins*:

Like huge banyan trees, standing on the sides of the road  
 Before daybreak, like ghosts, goaded by the invisible wind,  
 Like dark figures rising slowly from under  
 Dead leaves or tired newspapers.

Ajit Khullar points out that Eliotian images specifically pervades Mahapatra's lines on loneliness:

...on an October afternoon when he sees 'the secret coves on the naked beach/charred by old fires and littered with picnic paper and empty bottles.' Such images as 'a galvanometer needle/between the zero and the hundred of gloom' and 'shameless fevers whose

viruses tear the skin like paper' are all Eliotian. (Ajit Khullar 2001:195)

Although Mahapatra's poetic persona is usually at the center of the poem he does not meddle with the incidents or the scenes described, but maintains the stance of the distanced and estranged spectator. However, he is never the invisible playful persona that we have come to associate with post-modernist authors. Like a modernist poet his prime focus is on the subjective memory and the inner self rather than on the materialistic surroundings, but he shares the contemporary concern for the predicament of modern man. Meherotra's anti-art and iconoclastic leanings have often led to contentless writings. Mahapatra's poetry is never contentless. He can say with Joshi's Billy Biswas that the meaning of life lies not 'in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark messy labyrinths of the soul that languish for ever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun.'(Arun Joshi: 2) Mahapatra's poetry reveals a desperate quest for meaning in the individual stipulation.

## CHAPTER III

## PHASE I

## Imagery in Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry

## The Experimental Stage

a word the wind  
 pushing across the free fetch of notion  
 turns it into a world of changing boundaries  
 that become mere names / numbers  
 and hard metal signs.

(Mahapatra, *Close the Sky*, Ten by Ten :38)

Mahapatra's work, says Bruce King, "has no clear demarcation of contrasting opinions, new kinds of material or radical departures in organization." (King2004:206) Many of Mahapatra's poetry approach the same theme from a different angle or from the same angle with different arrangement of words. His poems thus appear to be a continuous rumination on themes like silence, guilt, loneliness and relation of the self to others. The images found in *Father's Hours* (1976), like those of religion, silence, stone, wind, sky, river, also recur in his other volumes. Many poems share the same or similar titles. *Svayamvara and other Poems* (1971) has two poems titled *Poems*; one distinguished from the other by its dedication to R.M.(Runu Mahapatra). The volume has a poem titled

*Morning* which it shares with two poems of similar title appearing in *Waiting* (1979), these again are set apart as *Morning (I)* and *Morning (II)*. *Waiting* is his fifth volume having a title poem that it shares with a poem in *Burden of Waves and Fruit* (1988). *False Start* (1980), *Shadow Space* (1997) *A Whiteness of Bone* (1992) *Random Descent* (2005) all have poems titled *Shadows*. Both *Rain of Rites* (1976) and *Bare Face* (2000) have poems titled *Silence*. Some words appear repeatedly in his titles, like, while his first volume has *Love*, the second volume has *A Kind of Love*. *Rain of Rites* has two poems appearing one after the other titled *The Face* and *The Faces*. The images are also closely woven in the poems appearing throughout his published fifteen volumes. It therefore becomes difficult to divide the corpus of his work into several distinct periods for study.

The gamut of his poems can, however, be distinguished into two clear stages, the experimental stage when he was experimenting with his medium of expression, and the later experiential stage when he emerged as a poet sure of himself. It is apparent that phase (ii), thematically and stylistically speaking, grows naturally out of the former.

This chapter, dealing with the first of the two phases, deals with his early volumes, namely, *Close the Sky*, *Ten by Ten* and

*Svayamvara and Other Poems*, both published in 1971. The poems that appear in these two early volumes deal with similar images that emanate from the personal and turn around the private world, and are impassive to his native backdrop and its inhabitants --a trait that stamps many of Mahapatra's later works as regional. In this phase he displays a fascination for experimenting with form and syntax. The images in these two early volumes are alike. The poet searches for an abode that will serve as a shelter, both for him and his visions that at times turn surrealistic, but simultaneously expresses his dissatisfaction for the limitations imposed by his habitual existence that keeps him, and all that he aspires to, within constrained margins.

Jayanta Mahapatra, extensively in print today, entered the literary scene in a way that had amazed all. He taught Physics at Ravenshaw College in Orissa and took up his pen at forty, when most of the poets reach the crest of their career. In a desperate urge to express himself, Mahapatra had tried his hand at a sentimental novel based on his own life, a novel that 'reeks of Hemingway' observed Runu Mahapatra the poet's wife and perhaps the only reader of his unfinished novel. (Mahapatra:144)

Mahapatra also wrote a number of short stories and sent them to the *Illustrated Weekly of India* only to be rejected. Disappointment made him disinterested in writing: "My poetry came to me at an age when most poets would have been basking in the warm glow of success: I was forty ", writes the poet in *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*. (144)

Mahapatra began with his poetic career with two thin volumes; *Close the Sky Ten by Ten* and *Svayamvara and Other Poems*. In the poems of these volumes he displays a restive and a probing impulse to revise his style in accord with his innovation. These two volumes show his desperate attempt to grapple with the medium of expression he had finally chosen.

Typological arrangement of words is an important element in poetry for conveying the intended effect as the conventional elements as words, rhythm and rhyme.

Mahapatra does not reduce words to their elements or letters as does E.E. Cummings to convey a dropping leaf or structure up an *Altar* like Herbert or skyscrapers and phallic symbols like Arvind Kumar Mehrotra does in his *Pomes/Poemes/ Poemas*, but many of his poems in these early volumes show Mahapatra's experimentation with typological arrangement of words.

i feel the walls

for reasons

every spider  
 has its own  
 looking  
 like a star

(The Purpose)

or ,

i am lonely

to call loins sacred  
 crumpled against  
 my body's geometry

(Traditions)

Here the meaning the poet wants to convey depends much on the typographical arrangement of words. For in *Farewell* he admits:

The form is the thing,  
 Always.

In many of the poems this preoccupation with 'form' is evident as in *Three Poems of a City*, *The Peace Negotiators*, *The Performance*, *If I am Wrong*, and *Instant*. In *The Movement*, Mahapatra states:

As if to avoid a fall, leaning  
 A word first in one direction  
 And then the other, the white frame

Of thought proceeds with a balanced skill.

Mahapatra writes poetry in an effort to articulate his private world and tribulations concerning the relationship between the self and reality. Bruce King refers to an essay published in the *Literary Criterion* (xv) where Mahapatra speaks of the poet's mental landscape, the inner world that he specifically creates, a world adhering to his private system of references. (King :86)

My hunger of words covered me with

Walking into the village of my mind.

(Shadow Space:69)

Mahapatra who was much influenced by surrealist poetry characteristically closes the sky, early in *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* with a concrete image of a roof that must hide his 'apocalyptic ideal' and at the same time retains the wish to fall 'through the space' knowing that space 'sings'. (Sanctuary)

F.A. Inamdar points out that the title of Mahapatra's first collection of poems, *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* is symbolic of claustrophobia, "We impose on ourselves self-willed imprisonment. We miss oneness with others." (Inamdar 2001:85) Mahapatra is haunted by this sense of imprisonment as is evident in the image of 'cage' that recurs in many of his later poems. The image of the confined or ensnared birds and animals to show that

imprisonment of the self prevents it from realizing its potential. Men are shown to be trapped by dreams, memories or words. In the present context the images of imprisonment reveal that we lack the desired candidness. We live in a closed existence that results in a severance with the others around us. The captivity of the soul is represented in these two early volumes by the images of house building, the material restrictions and tangible limitations that enclose space. In *An Ordinary Day*:

the walls join themselves  
 to two chairs  
 a tumbler beside the bed  
 dry and hard from the dark  
 commencing the slow leak of day

(Close the Sky Ten by Ten:23)

In the enclosed space trickling in of the day is measured. It is the predicament of *Some People* in *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*, to hide under 'the waves of thought in doomed/ living rooms.' For they are trapped in space like the image of green parrots in a poem pertinently titled *Inertia*.

Sometimes the walls 'join themselves'; sometimes there are 'walls beyond'. The poet comes home, from walking 'through these walls'. Existence is necessarily within the walls where:

your mouth is a room

holding different views.

(The Purpose)

In *Looking at Instants* home is a space that 'Blankets' the poet's mind 'To Isolation'. It is a confined existence and the poet cries, 'living moss makes me catch my breath'. (Going Out)

The poet is segregated into a closed self in a private world that is part of our predicament but the escape that the poet seeks has no intonation of any utopia. While what confines him is definite, what he seeks to escape into is unclear and carries no ethical tenor. His room prevents the entry of the birds who bring in passion, earthseed and rain. (The Birds)

Closely linked up with 'Close the sky' is the image of 'close the circle'. In *A Kind of Love in Svayamvara and Other Poems* the poet handles such images. The circle representing our enclosed self therefore becomes a significant symbol for Mahapatra. Lakshman's (although the footnote says that it is Rama's) magical circle on the ground and his advice to Sita not to step beyond it becomes symbolic of our fear that keeps us in our cocooned existence:

With each quiet breath he draws his circle still

(The Circle).

Since Mahapatra has expressed the closed existence by the images of closed circle and edifice of walls, some kind of vent becomes crucial and we come across images of windows. Windows are significant for they are receptive as well as they help to expose emotions:

the silent windows of my body open

(Absence: Close the Sky)

and one with a 'lonely heart' stands by the window as in *The Marriage Portrait*.

The space that the poet inhabits is sometimes paradoxically depicted as a vast infinite space within the enclosed space, such as in *Day Thought* :

All the world and I

The room overdone,

When the walls 'come apart/Without cause ' and the poet is released from his humdrum existence into the larger vision as in *Apartment*, the experiences are surreal.

Poetry reveals the process of the poet's mind. When the Confessional poetry paved the way for Surrealism in America in nineteen sixties, the readers witnessed a new kind of ambiguity that were not yet familiar with. The poet's employed private symbols and images of which the readers often had no clue at all,

and the poems were left entirely to the mercy of the readers for their own interpretation of the images. Mahapatra confesses in *Face to face with the Contemporary Poem* that this applies to many of the poetry he has written:

If contemporary life is no longer what it was, say,  
twenty-five years back, can one expect the same

content, the same form, the same substance from  
contemporary poems? (King 2004:86)

American confessional poet John Berryman had successfully created what Lowell calls a 'waking hallucination,' the form which unites conscious design and unconscious drift. This fusion of the conscious and the unconscious is, time and again, found in Mahapatra's poetry as in *An Ordinary Day*. In the poem 'the walls join themselves' and the poet carries his body after love - making with a wave into the black streets. Surrealism fuses the peripheral world with the inner world of the poet but there seems no final escape for there in the black streets the poet grows into walls.

When Mahapatra declares that he has been 'groping' from poem to poem he unconsciously refers to the image of blindness. (King:86) This blindness that he refers to becomes a significant image in his early volumes.

In *Close the Sky , Ten by Ten , 'The Indian Eye'* is 'wild, covered with hungry decomposition'. Looking eyes are shut for fear of contamination. We hear of 'whining retinas' and of Braille. The wind that blows in through the windows stumbles. The blindness that Mahapatra depicts is like that of Gloucester, in King Lear:

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;

I stumbled when I saw :

( King Lear : IV i)

Images of blindness recur in *Svyamvara and Other Poems*. In *Blind this World*, the poet's fettle is that of the unsighted : 'Now there are things I do not see'.

Blindness appears in *A Kind Of Love*. The blindness that estranges the beggar from the society and leaves him alone, unites the poet with him in *Blind Beggar*. The Blind Beggar stands in a crowded and lighted market place. He is lonely.

Loneliness that surfaces from his personal life emerges as one of the major themes in Mahapatra's poetry. He is also alienated from the rites and rituals around him, that form the core of the ethos of Orissa. For him, life itself sometimes takes up a meaning of loneliness:

Life is a lonely leaning memory. (If I am Wrong)

Images of alienation haunt his poetic psyche and by their recurrence become motifs. It forms one of the major images that connect this phase with the later one. These motifs help in giving unity to individual poems and the volumes of poetry separated by many years so that they appear to be a continuous meditations on his favorite themes.

*Loneliness*, the first poem of his first published collection remains invasive in Mahapatra's poetic universe. In the poem he measures his 'loneliness' against time and space and attempts to express it through a series of unusual images. Loneliness is not only seen against 'where' and 'when', it is also of 'now', of his hidden psyche:

Loneliness is a face alive  
labelled from my other selves

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten:1)

In *Snakes* the poet inquires

How do we release  
ourselves? In the stretched, dropped  
scales of loneliness?

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten:20)

*Loneliness* in his first poem, 'is of a winner/ turned loser, traitor and beggar'. If loneliness is the condition that establishes the familiarity between the poet and the beggar in *Blind Beggar*, the beggar in *Blind Singer in a Train* is juxtaposed against the

academic cultured embarrassment of our 'bone's blind beggary'. Beggars, who become an essential element of the landscape in Mahapatra's later poems on Puri, do not emerge as strong elements in these two early volumes. *The Indian Eye* gives us a faithful picture of the beggar who showers blessings on those who offer alms and curses all those who do not.

The beggars are not the only characters depicted as lonely. Loneliness engulfs all the characters in *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* and *Svayamvara and Other Poems*. Mahatma Gandhi, the peace negotiators, the nuns, and men and women in love relations, father and son, all are lonely.

Gandhi, appearing early, emerges as an icon in the later phase. Gandhi is here depicted as an abandoned leader and our attitude to him is indecisive:

We are on his side, perhaps

We hate him

We do not know it

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten:12)

*Gandhi* unites with the 'Winner turned loser' image of *Loneliness*.

The peace negotiators, the old men who talk of peace 'under the gaze of war' have been deserted. The Nun is lonely with her 'isolate honour' and 'isolation of skin'. The sun in the nun's world

suffers from 'iciness' and ironically *The Peace Negotiators*, who have been forsaken:

Most of them

Are rich old men with dogs:

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten:18)

*City Night 2 AM* is another poem in his first volume that records loneliness. The buses and trams are no longer plying. The doors are all closed. A city tree, representing man, begins bleeding in the neon light.

His quest for love includes the personal, and the protagonist is in most cases identified with the poet. The quest either relapses into physical love or leaves the lovers lonely. *The Anniversary* in his first volume rings no note of rejoice. It is rather clouded with cynicism:

Nothing happens. It only seems a pity

We have the need to tell each other

Of this painful nothingness.

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten:31)

*The Performance* brings out the tedium of love-making:

Again tonight

As before

Without

the need :

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten:37)

The last poem of Svyamvara, *Poem for R.M*, depicts loneliness as existing within personal relationships. It celebrates the intimate moments of connubial life but the moonlight distorts the features and the bedroom mirror is veiled. Through silence and words what emerges is 'plain sadness', an utter loneliness of existence. The situation brings to mind Mrs. Moore's contemplation on analogous subject in *A Passage to India*:

She felt increasingly (vision or nightmare?) that though people are important the relation between them are not, and that in particular too much fuss has been made over marriage; centuries of carnal embracement yet man is no nearer to understanding man.(E.M.Forster 1996:134)

Mahapatra's images of physical union leaves us contemplating similar thought. In *The Bride* the newly married girl's lonely wait for her husband after 'many a virgin night' is with no aura of love, but for

Artificial dell of joy  
from a stranger's anonymous care.

(Svyamvara and Other Poems :17)

Finally, when her husband comes in like a 'mammoth' her experience of love is likened to that of a common harlot. In

Mahapatra's universe love fails. The man-woman relationship establishes no communication. In *Love's Caress in Svayamvara and Other Poems* the poet does not hear the voice of flowers and his night remains without love's caress. In *Bells* he cries:

Can love talk in odd and secret voices?

Every poem cries in gloom;

(Svyamvara and Other Poems :16)

In *Intimacy*:

Whatever joined my lips to yours

Was not intimacy,

(Svyamvara and Other Poems :16)

In *The Poster*, in early volume, the poet's affectionate tone of love ends in a ruthless irony:

a pity we will

not learn to deceive

each other

from the very first time.

(Svyamvara and Other Poems :31)

It is perhaps ironical that the volume *Svayamvara and Other Poems* dedicated to Mahapatra's wife with eloquent "these poems for R.M." contains poems that deal with loneliness in personal relationship. The volume *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* dedicated to his father with a quotation from Nissim Ezekiel

“My father, sceptic, rationalist,  
 trying every curse and blessing  
 powder mixture, herb and hybrid.”

includes the poems that deal with loneliness in the filial relationships. Two poems in this volume deal with father, *To My Father* and *The Report Card*, that won him the Poetry Award for 1970. The two poems are allied to each other by the image of loneliness. In *To My Father*, the father depicted has withdrawn himself into seclusion with age and a wall separates him from his son. The son too in *The Report Card* is as lonely:

Unknown is the seed of loneliness  
 which seeks to make the boy's pocket  
 its dark and poisoned home

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten: 45)

This 'green isolation of our skins' (Betrayal) is embedded in silence. Silence is another theme that emerges as one of the major themes in Mahapatra's later volumes. Images of silence help the poet to bring out the deep inner silence of a conscious being. Silence of inevitability "could be more eloquent, more meaningful to the writer of words", says Mahapatra. "It is easy to find instances in our own century of writers who chose not to write after being completely successful in the one or two books

they published.” He gives the example of J.D. Salinger and believes that the silence of Salinger is his own making, “a silence that served his needs of life and which his words were unable to fulfill.” (Shormistha Panja 2001:19)

That Mahapatra takes words to be an inadequate means of expressions, although, paradoxically, he as a poet depends most on words to express himself is evident in many of his poems. In his later volumes there are many instances of juxtaposition of silence against words. For Mahapatra, silence is sometimes that of the skin, like in *The Birds* or in *Betrayal*, for

After a while  
the word  
is no longer a gift'

(Svyamvara and Other Poems :10 )

In *Marriage Portrait* silence becomes a necessity. Widows lips 'assume' silence (*Bells*). In *Intimacy* the poet is cynical about the durability of togetherness of the poet and his lover but what shall actually remain of their relationship is 'indifferent silence'. Silence is also a ritual. The silence of the lovers sitting together is described as a ritual in *Ritual* but it is never the unconditional silence the poet looks for and therefore brings no consolation to the poet:

the quietness is no solace to our shoulders

hunched over the distant stars  
 even this holds the promise of noise

Inamder in *The Symbolic Mode in Poetry—A Critique of Jayanta Mahapatra* points out that: “ For Mahapatra’s lovers speech is distasteful. Since, their love has died, it serves as a ghastly reminder of hypocrisy which loveless communication entails.”

( Manmohan K.Bhatnagar 2001:85)

In Mahapatra’s early volumes, closing the world into a poet’s inner world that distances him from the reality around is a recurring theme. In *Morning* the poet returns to the image again:

the morning seems distant  
 as I climb into words

( Svyamvara and Other Poems:21)

The process of composing poetry that in effect distances the poet from the reality sometimes merges into experience of sexual love as in *The Wave*:

feel each particle of the mind  
 how it rises to an attitude  
 before sliding down its own lift  
 back where the old trembling was  
 and you realize what has passed  
 is not the mad rush of a sentiment  
 nor the steep pulse of a vein.

(Close the Sky,Ten by Ten: 38 )

Speaking of the analogy that the poet attempts between love making and writing poetry R.K. Swain points out that Mahapatra strikes such a parallel since both the acts are spontaneous and conscious acts. Mahapatra, Swain says,

tries to strike a balance between the heart and the mind in the body of his poetry; he wants his love as well as his poem to be “in a medium /cut to size” conscious as he is that “is doing /something new/ to words”, he is also aware that the creative experience is eventually inexpressible and opaque.

(R.K.Swain 2000 :29)

These analogies are not, however, achieved by passion but rather by astuteness:

Mahapatra seems to have evolved his poetry largely on his own as an intellectual act. Many of the poems in his first book, *Close the sky, Ten by Ten*, are curious experiments and read more as if willed by intellect than produced by emotion. (King 2004:196).

Mahapatra neither had the training nor a penchant for poetry like the other contemporary poets such as Shiv Kumar, Nissim Ezekiel, P.Lal, R.Parthasarathy, Adil Jessuwalla, Gauri Deshpande, Arvind Krishna Mahrotra, Agha Sahid Ali, Darius Cooper, Meena Alexander or Bibhu Padhi all of whom taught English nor was like

Ramanujan who was a Professor of Linguistics. The poet admits in an interview:

I had no idea of what earlier poets in India had done. Nor was I aware of the poetry being written outside my country. I was teaching physics, true, but my interests lay always in novels and stories, mainly in English. I was doing a lot of reading and was acquainted with the fiction being written and published abroad. Of course I wasn't into poetry .

(Contemporary Poetry Review: April,2004)

In the first two successive volumes the poet remains fretful with form and language. In both *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*, and *Svayamvara and Other Poems*, the poet is preoccupied with the imagery of building materials and its necessary components like doors, windows, walls and roof.

The visual images call for no display of colours. We rather hear of darkness. The window is 'dark', the sun is icy and the 'noonday sun' is covered with darkness. The mountains are 'black', the hours 'black'. Amidst this darkness the lone tree bleeds, as does Gandhi. The tree at night is not green, the parrots are, but they are only impressions on a plate. Greenness is the colour not of innocence or natural world, but of isolation. When a flower is seen to bloom in 'yellow light' the poet distances himself. Occasionally

we come across the silver star or the 'silver of the sun'. The poet depicts a world where men wait for colour.

Everyday

We drag our bodies

Into the sky ,

Waiting for the colour.

(Where Does Night Begin?)

Auditory images are inconsequential, especially in these two volumes, for silence emerges as a significant image.

The poems strike us for their unusual and highly stylised verbal constructions. Many of Mahapatra's early lines carry a conscious juxtaposition of contrary or contradictory words and ideas. We come across lines like 'the defense /of a smooth defenselessness'.

The wind is in place and 'still' while we learn to 'move'. In *Instant* we have :

the instant

will -born

dying...

(Close the Sky, Ten by Ten:15)

Similar juxtapositions are found in *Svayamvara and Other Poems*.

In *Morning* for instance we come across:

climb into words

shrinking from lotus.

There occur oxymorons like 'blind man stares', 'looking, eyes shut', 'sun's iciness', or 'crowded silence'.

Most of the poems in these two volumes are short where only *Traditions*, *Intimacy*, *If I am Wrong*, and *Henry the Robot / A Theme of Love* stand out as exceptions. John Berryman's *Dream Songs* has Henry as a character appearing sometimes as a sulking man, at other times as an indifferent man. He appears in so many different contexts that it becomes impossible to pinpoint who he is. Mahapatra's Henry is clearly not all robotic. He is a body 'pinned with consciousness'. He has his private images and associations but understands nothing of the conditioning the hard pressed world forces on him. While Henry remains impenetrable with his private associations the poet is 'afraid / in the big joke to be understood.'

Many of Mahapatra's early poems revolve around this private world with a 'secret progression of thought emotion and dream' that Henry speaks of. The stanzas are irregular, the lines are short, sometimes one word forms a line, and sometimes one line is a stanza with no punctuation marks. At times this brevity is achieved by discarding verbs or articles. In this early phase Mahapatra comes out as a novice preparing himself for the next volumes to come.

## CHAPTER III

## PHASE II

## The Experiential Stage

Life:

the silt left behind by the year's flood  
 a telegraph key tapping away in the dark  
 In its years is the smoke of our fires  
 which didn't burn out all we wanted to end.

(The False Start:37)

Jayanta Mahapatra's third volume, *A Father's Hours* (1976) declares the end of his experimental stage. By his third volume Mahapatra emerges as a poet sure of himself pouring out volume after volume of all that lay deep within him seeking expression.

In the first two volumes Mahapatra shows an urgency to grip his medium of expression. He had used form and syntax like a poet unsure of himself:

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 Jussawala was right in his own way when he said in a review that I was a poem-maker. (N.Raghavan:60)

By the third volume we find that his syntax becomes relaxed. Words deliberately unconventional are no longer yoked together but their flow seems more natural as do the epithets. The poet has finally gripped his medium of expression and his obsession with words and forms are on the decline. However, the poet's love for unusual epithets persists in his later volumes calling for his uniqueness in expression. This phase has the poet, now sure of himself, pouring out themes beyond the private and the personal to encompass the landscape, myth and history, rites and rituals of his region and later his canvas encompasses his country and

beyond. Although he still draws on images from his private life and personal associations, they are now presented in clearer terms. The images of this phase are diverse including religion, landscape, animals, human, and more abstract ones like silence, guilt, and loneliness. His later volumes have images of decrepitude and death, his contemplations on life, along with the other major images of the experiential stage.

One of the major themes haunting the poetic psyche is religion, the Hindu rituals and practices that he sees around him, but from which he himself has been estranged by his grandfather's conversion into Christianity.

Consequently, we have a profusion of religious imagery in Mahapatra. He seeks the truth behind the pious practices that the men and women around him so faithfully follow: 'Does the praying fakir know from where the questions come?' asks the poet. (A Father's Hours :28) He tries to find out 'what is there in ceremony, in a ritual's deeply hidden meaning?' (A Rain of Rites:15) Religion is a probable expiation of guilt:

The great Indian sun in its millionth run  
 Opens its memory doors. There within sits a man  
 With a lifetime of half-understood guilt  
 Shuffling like beads through his unseeing fingers.

(A Father's Hours: 33)

Whatever Mahapatra's formal commitments to Christianity might have been, his religious images stem from Hindu beliefs and rituals. Scattered throughout his volumes are temples, temple bells, priests, sacred thread (Waiting:16) and offerings to gods such as coconuts, charred coconuts of the festival (32), flowers,

milk , vermilion , 'balls of cooked rice to appease the dead'.(41).He refers to the Jagganath temple, Lingaraja temple, Hanuman temple. He speaks of the throng outside the temples; the long waits for worship, the fasting, the ringing of the temple bells and the offering of fruits and flowers. Mahapatra's images capture the beliefs and practices that form the essence of Indian tradition:

An old woman prostrates herself to the days last sun.

(Waiting : 42)

Mahapatra is not content only by giving us a faithful picture of the rituals and practices. His attitude to religion is not as simple as it appears. His manner is not that of resignation to god for a solution to all the problems around. Early in his third volume man's blindness to faith is exposed: 'Faith is a blind child holding on to man's hands.' (A Father's Hours :33)

The volume containing poems dealing with mysterious religious symbols of people who settle down peacefully into a deep-rooted tradition of their ancestors is aptly titled *A Rain of Rites*. *Listening to a Prayer* beautifully brings out the helpless dependence of men on god as a reliever of all pains:

A bell trembles

Touched by the pain

Of countless people.

(A Rain of Rites: 29)

The wind that blows across the temple square settles on the poet's shoulders. But the poet is unable to give any answer or alternate

solution. It therefore has nowhere to go with neither a silence nor an answer.

Although priests are bathed in the religious aura Mahapatra never speaks of them with veneration. He is rather skeptical in his treatment of them. Priests are 'crafty'. Although they look handsome and mysterious, the associative 'glow of light' is 'counterfeit'. (A Father's Hours :19)

When the Puri priest stands in the sun, the sunshine is described as 'indulgent' (Waiting:14).The Brahmin priest is 'proud' (Waiting:15), and shown as waiting haughtily by the 'temple door'.(A Rain of Rites:8)

The images of abandoned temples suggest lost faith.

When he refers to Christianity it always associates a feeling of alienation. As in *Brothers*, or in *Requiem XV* : 'I look into the white sea of sunlight/ Flooding the sixth century before Christ. / There were no walls then.' Later god became a 'terrible mental silence'. (Bare Face: 71).

Mahapatra seems fascinated by the stone representation of shiva, the lingam. They are phallic representations that symbolize the moment of generation itself. Steeped in Hindu system of beliefs he speaks of 'primitive purity of afterlife' (Waiting :45).The poet, however, remains a detached observer of this faith, the customs and practices from which he has been separated by the early

conversion in his family. His attempt to enter the temple where 'myth shifts' from hand to hand, eye to eye results into confrontation: 'Are you a Hindoo?' (A Rain of Rites:22)

By his ninth volume (1986) the poet displays a gradual disillusionment :

a temple drifts away

From vague stretched -out hands. (Dispossessed Nests:15)

A thirteen-year-old girl who was religious, meticulously fasted every festival-day and followed a strictly vegetarian diet on Mondays and Saturdays, who visited the temple and smeared god's vermilion, dies of tetanus. The poet's voice is that of contempt:

You would think our gods are as the winds, reaching away

In fairness everywhere;

(Burden of Waves and Fruit: 29)

In *Bare Face* although the religious images continue 'god hides in the dark like an alien' and the poet tries to grow out of these practices by not wearing ashes on the forehead. (35) In an interview with Sumanyu Satpathy the poet says:

I grew up in Cuttack, close to a temple. There were two rivers close by. The ways of life there were different. I was into religion. My poems today don't have those old images. I have taken temple out of my system, (Panja 2001:31)

Religion is so intertwined with every aspect of the Indian life and its cultural expressions, music, art, dance, painting, sculpture, or

architecture, that the poet's delineation of religion becomes a characteristic representation of India. Later the suffering country is likened to

The decapitated old temple by the river  
 Its mouth open, and staring  
 All its bewildering hunger born into sorrow.

(A Whiteness of Bone:7)

“It is absurd to wince at being called a romantic poet. Unless one is that, one is not a poet at all”, says Wallace Stevens in *Opus Posthumous*. Nature imagery that the romantic poets abounded in continued into poems of the later age. Marianne Moore draws lessons from seagulls or fishes. Richard Wilbur has composed a modern *Beastuary*. Robert Frost images forth truth about man and nature from birches or butterflies or cows. The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra emotively leads to a landscape that is characteristic of Orissa.

Mahapatra's nature images carry forward the theme of his poetry, the strain of which is generally more solemn than the mere fascination of nature. Mahapatra is not a romantic in the sense Wordsworth or Keats was. In using the term Nature imagery for Mahapatra we should not be guided by the ideological framework of what the Romantic poets stood for. He never turns to nature for the mere enchantment of it, missing its serene radiance like Yeats' 'I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;' (Inisfree)

nor is he a pantheist ,trying to  
 see a World in a Grain of Sand  
 And Heaven in a Wild Flower,

(Blake: Auguries of Innocence)

Mahapatra is a modern both in terms of his sensibility and expression.

Among the chief natural images employed are: flower, sky, wind, rain, stone.

In human history, every age is found to have copiously used flower imagery in art and poetry. In almost every culture be it East or West, we find flowers woven into fabric, carved into architecture, painted along borders of text and glazed onto porcelain or used profusely in poetry and songs. Flower has generally been associated in poetry with beauty, tenderness and brevity. The burden of a Shakespearean sonnet is that if the cruel time destroys everything

How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,

Whose action is no stronger than a flower? (Sonnet :65)

Of the flowers rose held a special place as a symbol of love and beauty:

There's sweetness in an apple tree,

And profit in the corn;

But lady of all beauty

Is a rose upon a thorn.

(Christina Rossetti:The Rose)

Mahapatra never chooses the rose as of a symbol either of beauty or frailty or lost love. The most frequent flower to occur in Mahapatra is the jasmine, 'the frail white flower' with an intense smell. 'Jasmine is sweet, and has many loves', wrote Thomas Hood in *Flowers*, but himself had finally preferred the rose.

Flower is an important image in Mahapatra's religious scenes.

Flower for most part associates the custom of worship:

...a frail white flower of worship

pays for my sins and watches. (Waiting:14)

A man bathes at sunrise plucks some holy flowers and sits down to worship. (A Rain of Rites: 42) While worship is holy, the flowers, an inevitable part of worship, become holy themselves. The 'holy flower' includes marigold along with the white flower. Thus flowers themselves become symbolic of the rites and rituals of worship. 'Flowers, dried and sacrificed, smile at the poet.' (22) The temple rituals embodying the image of sacrificial flowers smiling at the poet bring in suggestions of Devdasis, the dancers at the temples, who sacrificed their lives to the service of god. Flower images associate girls as in *To a Young Girl, Waiting for Summer of 1994*. The whiteness of jasmines serves as a reminder of stained purity. Mahapatra's jasmine images hold associations with life in *Twilight*.

There is a sound of crying in there

Of an evening jasmine being born

The sounds of satisfaction after love's been made

Who cares why a frail flower raises its head

And smiles? (Life Signs: 13)

When the unrest in Punjab fills the country with blood and death

the jasmine's arms stretch out

over the frantic waters of Yamuna.

(Dispossessed Nests :37)

In *Waiting for Summer 1994* the stories of summer that 'smelled of god and was a flower' denotes the poet's search for happiness and life after rioting in India. (Shadow Space:50)

Sometimes it is the flower in general that is a chronicle of the life lived: 'In her eyes the dim flower of her days glows' (Waiting:43).

Sometimes they are minutely visual images involving unexpected similes. In *The Return* the gulmohars 'glowed red like bureaucrat's eyes/ in the midday sun' and bougainvilleas 'Burst through like victory banners' (Bare Face: 21), or, in lines like 'the tight grey knots of days on the horizon' open 'like a flower in slow motion' (A Father's Hours:15)

Hyacinth, the Christian symbol of prudence, peace of mind, and the desire for heaven that came from the legend of Apollo's accidental killing of Hyacinthus is associated in Mahapatra with death and reawakening.

In *Temple*, as the river 'brooded over the burning corpses', Chelammal found herself waking up within her own shadow 'to

the mauve tissues of hyacinth' (17). Sometimes flowers associate the conventional romanticism as in *Harvest*, or serve as reminders of lost loves:

..the flowers dangling over the silence,  
trying desperately to look like friends I knew once.

(A Father's Hours:13)

Thus we find that the flowers in Mahapatra are not constrained to a particular meaning. Their connotation is diverse, perhaps best seen in the lines of *Father's Hours* where the poet says, 'This kingdom/ or flower or sentence/which remains simply an ambition, / perhaps one that would be understood by a parable.'

Later in the same poem flower is used as a synonym to 'idea' since idea too 'flowers' like a plant does. (A Father's Hours:10) In 'Ash' the flowers along with the rain are part of the ways of liberation.

(51)The flower is not only a means of redemption. The poet asks whether the flower he 'perceives' pulls him down to 'despair'. (11)

The unusual treatment of the poet of the flower image lies in his repealing the weakness and brevity that are associated with the flowers.

the wind  
tearing the white flowers apart  
without causing harm to its myth of strength.

(A Father's Hours:11)

“For T.S. Eliot the sky is a universal symbol of god, so too it is for Mahapatra”, says Inamdar. (Bhatnagar 86:2001). The sky exists in the poet’s consciousness, as the vast undeniable space. This indifferent vastness stands as a contrast to the trivial things that occur on the earth that share undue importance. In *Main Temple Street, Puri*, the poet depicts scenes like children laughing at cripples and mongrels mating. The focus then shifts to the sky, which exists irrefutable in its vast presence:

And the sky there

Claimed by inviolable authority

Hanging on to its crutches of silence.

(A Rain of Rites:16)

The firmament that covers the earth remains indifferent to all human affairs. The ‘sky’s face’ is expressionless. Sickness, hunger and losses are ‘vain to the sun and the sky’. When the thirteen-year-old Lakshmi dies, her tragedy is broken by celebrating voices and laughter ‘before it rolled over and faced the blue sky.’ (Dispossessed Nests: 53).

In *The Lost Children of America*:

the emptiness of skies luminous bowl

fills their eyes with a single hue

the colour of the Third Eye, the oblique, the great.

(Life Signs:25)

The sky’s stillness is no verdict. Man’s hatred is as meaningless as the silence of the sky. (A Whiteness of Bone: 62) When the poet

carps of his country's politics as in *Possessions*, The sky's indefiniteness is stressed to convey the country's deferred policies. This indefiniteness, this inactivity also works on the personal level:

Was the earth and sky  
 Taking a last chance  
 To exercise its power over me?  
 To find me with that impotence  
 Which had so often  
 Overcome me in the past?

(Shadow Space:28)

In *Dispossessed Nests* (1984) the poet is concerned with 'mad unrest' of Punjab that throws the country into chaos. The first part of the volume *Bewildered Wheatfields* concentrates on the communal violence that took place under the cap of insurgency. Like the confused wheat fields of Punjab, other natural images are employed and shown to respond to this human carnage. The riverbed dries up, the rainbow chokes and the moonlight is pale. Only the grasses of the dead grow fast. The sky here is presented the space that keeps the seeds of every incident to be unfolded in time. The idea that the sky is the space connected to distance, to time, to the occurrence of the sequence of things past and future occurs early in *A Rain of Rites*:

In limbo of things that accept the past  
 the blood grows softer, glossier, in the shadows.  
 Here the string goes lax

that holds the sky ,fluxes of the will ,the vague far places.

The distance opens and closes the palms of my hands. (4)

Elsewhere the sky is a refuge, the protection of the earth. When the poet feels discarded by his friends, Chinu, Bibhu and Ranju, he feels insecure, like the dawn under a rain tree , ‘ seeking its sky’. (A Fathers Hours:15)

Sky is also the mental ambience. It comes down to the mind when the poet walks alone. (Waiting:69) Sometimes the ‘Sky grows lonely’. (Life Signs:36) In ‘*Hunger*’ when the hunt for food makes the father oblivious to morals and conventions of society and offers his daughter to the poet for enjoyment, ‘the sky falls’ on the poet suggesting the eventual crumple of ethical values. In *One Clear Night* when ‘the end of a love comes near’ the sky referred to is ‘cold’ and ‘stony’. The ‘wet sky’ is ‘no meagre comfort’ (Bare Face :18).The child close to nature who plays in sun and rain like Wordsworth’s *Lucy* has a face ‘clear as the sky’ that ‘mirrored the purity of her soul.’ (Bare Face:55). In *Days* the poet observes how the days come and go, in an endless reiteration, so endless that the days do not seem to go way at all nor do they stand in his way. Pondering thus, the poet reflects that he is ‘one with the sky’. Here the emphasis is on the unchanging aspect of the sky. For all, the poet realizes his limits of expression and laments that the vastness of the sky ‘is not my freedom of speech’. (Shadow Space:17)

Rain the reliever of the scorching summer heat, a welcome break to the tedium of regular schedule has always occupied a major segment in the Indian poetic consciousness. The cursed Yaksha in Kalidasa's *Meghdootum* separated from his beloved likens the gathering clouds in the month of Asadha to a mature elephant playfully knocking against the river bank and notes that even the mind of a happy person is excited at the sight of a cloud. (Part I) Poet after poet poured out songs addressing the rain. The tumultuous thundershowers; the merging of forest, field, river and sky into a single continuum of watery mass; the gathering of the rain clouds played upon Tagore's imagination. He wrote several poems on rain. The approaching rain made the poet's heart dance 'like a peacock' (New Rain). Sometimes rain brought in an association of loneliness;

clouds rumbling in the sky ,teeming rain

I sit on the river bank sad and alone. (The Golden Boat)

Rain knocks on Mahapatra's imagination and he has a number of poems on rain. *Rain Sense, A Rain, A Rain of Rites, Four Rain Poems, Again the Rain Falls, Rains in Orissa* are some of them. Rain is captured in many moods, sometimes it comes slowly across the sky, (A Rain of Rites:10) In *Unreal Country* when everything merges in the darkness of gloom and there is defeat in

the poet's eye ,‘Rain grates in the silence’. Here is also the concrete image of rain hanging from the branches. *The Wound* that portrays the decayed world begins with darkness and cold, has rain slashing the streets. (Life Signs: 3). When the country is in turmoil due to communal violence, the rain ‘falls heavy hard as stone’ (Dispossessed Nests:20).*June Rain* tries hard to give ‘darkness and light an organic unity’. The air smells of raped woman as well as of henna. Rain’s trapping against the door is sometimes so persistent that it is mistaken for the dead themselves are trying to come in. (Shadow Space: 14). When the familiar rain that the poet has trampled on is thrown like some seaweed on the beach, it associates guilt,

like some shape of conscience I cannot look at

A malignant purpose in a nun’s eye. (A Rain of Rites : 10)

Sometimes it is not guilt, but an embarrassment that rises as the rain ‘stinks of mould and wet dog’s skin’ in a country stricken with suffering and poverty. (Life Signs: 13)Rain is attributed with ‘clear wise eyes’ when he relates it to the game one played in childhood in *A Rain*. ‘Word’ and ‘rain’ co-exist in the poem as a means of profuse expression that will reveal the poet.

While rain is profusion of expression, water is a refuge, a means of hiding. When ‘The water’s dying’ in *Letter* the poet’s concern is ‘What will I keep secret to myself when nothing is unseen any

more?’ (A Whiteness of Bone: 49) In *A Rain of Rites*, the sky shakes itself from ‘long burning rains’ and

the year’s

newly resurrected gods

move out of their sleep (A Rain of Rites:8)

Autumn that celebrates the festivals like Durga puja, the festivals relating harvesting of new rice, restore the gods back to life once more as though they all reawaken after sleep. Rain as a means of regeneration is seen in *The Fifteenth Of August*. The poet’s concern with the country’s future merges into monsoon rain. Where the rain fails to wet the earth the desired regeneration fails. A rain that cannot wet the earth, therefore ‘has lost its purpose’. (Life Signs:13)

Rain again works as something opposed to revitalization, related to an insipid living when the men returning from a cremation defiant to memory, succumb to rain once more and the waters of thought moves into an ‘even sleep of blood’ (23). Here rain stands for docile existence disparate from reawakening. In *Tonight I Hear the Water Flowing*, the poet’s hearing ‘the water’ instead of the blood in his veins emphasizes once more the passivity and meekness of existence.

The ‘voiceless rain’ associates memory. (A Rain of Rites:24) as it does consistently in *Life Signs* (Life Signs:12), in *Unreal Country* (A Whiteness of Bone:4), or in *Poem for Angela Elston* where the ‘soft

rain' brings in memory(A Rain of Rites:18).This alliance of water and memory is made explicit in poems like *A Morning Walk in Bhopal*, *A Rain Poem*, *Hands*, *River*, *Afternoon*.To sink under water is a trait of a poet or a lover that is impulsively linked to cynicism. The poet's father who keeps faith even unto his last days 'cannot drown himself in water' and is, therefore, neither a poet nor a lover (A Whiteness of Bone:2).

Rain images bring in multiple levels of meaning and evocations. Rain associates physical yearning in *The Rain Falling*. For rain is 'Capacious, like the body of a women.'(Burden of Waves and Fruit: 13) It knows that 'Rain is her mother /a fitful time of sweat and tears.' (Bare Face: 28)

Like Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' the poet's identification with the natural order is complete in: 'I move on like rain, to its flaunting flight.' (Waiting:50) He aspires to obliterate the exhaustion of the spirit, flying over cruel hearts and alleys to the river. Realization is the cloud, which rains pains of awareness. (A Whiteness of Bone: 50) Rain and pain are linked again in *The Hollow Mouth*.

Like rain and water river images recur in Mahapatra, sometimes taking up similar connotations. An aspiration for self-realization is expressed in terms of the river's desire to merge into the sea. When the self cannot be realized due to the corporeal desires it is

like a 'river swallowed up by deserts / before it reaches the sea.'

(Life Signs:31)The water that by its very nature seeps into the earth, also seeps through the poet, and suggests a progression towards realizing a vision of life's immense potential

absently I stare towards the east,

towards which a river flows, deep in the hills

of my blood ;I remember

it is summer's end and far out ,a storm is about to begin

crying from the lonely places of the sea. (Life Signs:33)

In *The Life*, the poet draws an analogy between life and river. Life and its philosophy are brought forward in the images of river and water. Life is a 'river' that flows helplessly forward and even a thousand monstrous winds cannot rework its direction. In the end it is again the 'river's mouth' form whence the red first 'current' had emerged. While everything floats in this river somewhere the belief of that ideal refuge, a respite from the being ceaselessly carried forward, exists in the human imagination. The 'giant wave' of time cannot hold the instant between present and future. We have not much option than to surrender to this surge. Since Life does not teach happiness, 'What harm is there if the water carries away /your ailing mind?' (Burden of Waves and Fruit :43)

Mahapatra's wind, of all his nature images, most actively responds to human agony. In *Winds of Spring, 1983*, written on

the brutal massacre of women and children in the paddy fields at Nellie, Assam, nature is shown as actively responding to the carnage. The winds grow 'wilder' and the moon shudders and drops when the women are slashed. The winds can lift the body of spring over the abyss and travel to 'find death' in the trodden paddy fields. It can partake of the slayer's delight, 'bear the pleasure' of the slicing of the tender flesh. Wind is shown as partaking in human action. In *Another Hour's Bell* where 'pain is the scent of earth' the poet inquires, 'how far away have the wounded winds gone?' (*A Whiteness of Bone*: 56) When something dies underneath the grass, there is the 'wind's low whine'. (*The False Start*:13) The wind also bears the 'excited beat of lines of marchers' protesting against a corrupt government (*Dispossessed Nests*: 24) The human mind too is responsive of the wind's behaviour. In *A Dark Wind* the woman answers to the 'wind's dark pull'. Wind sometimes brings in dreams, sometimes 'a prayer to one's lips' (*A Whiteness of Bone*:27), sometimes it is just the cool air, and after storm when the fury of the wind is spent 'It opens the knotted bit of mind', and gives it harmony. (42)

*Macbeth* has the image of the wind, 'sightless couriers of the air', as the vehicle on which pity shall ride to blow the horrid deed of murder to every eye. Mahapatra's wind functions as a courier of news of death and destruction. When the poet's mind turns on the miseries of the world, to someone who a revenges upon himself for

his broken life, or to a girl dying in her mother's arms, the wind eloquently carries her scream. (Bare Face:16) The wind as the news bearer is present in many poems of Mahapatra. In *Shapes by Daya*, which turns on the slaughtering of the Oriyas by Ashoka's army, 'the wind blows everywhere and words dance/like the ghastly remains of long -dead men.' (Burden of Waves and Fruit: 21) In *The Wind* it carries ash, smoke and odour of a funeral. It twists and turns and rises like flowers of fierce colours. Wind functions not only as bearer but also as revealer of truth. In *The Twentyfifth Anniversary of a Republic: 1975*, the occasion is celebrated with the launching of new postage stamp that brings 'faint' colour to the otherwise dull weeks is like 'a sudden wind that slips under the door and stirs'(I), but neither the poet nor the wind stops at that. The occasion has new statues put up on crossroads, but the wind

continues to search for dead boughs

soot and litter and dust ,the ruins of dead skies (III).

The wind here reveals the dire aspect of the town underneath its glitter as it does in *The Wind*. Sometimes the revelations are simple (The False Start: 51), sometimes by 'the early wind's, unease', a whole world of manifestation is laid bare (42).

A sullen wind stalks out

even the restful dead in this country.

(A Whiteness of Bone:57)

In *A Time*, a suggestive 'naked wind' blows from the river where Lakshmi was raped the night before. Although the wind 'pushes' the poet into contemplating the past calamity, the wind does not bear any hint of the scent of trampled grass from the foregone night. (Burden of Waves and Fruit: 17) The wind, the mighty force of exposing the truth is sometimes shown as feeble. When city is in plight of misdeeds, 'a lustful fire' smolders in green grass, and the trees are charred in the poisoned air, 'The once proud winds are without the strength to blow.'(72) Here we have the powerlessness of wind. The same manner of suggestion is continued in *May*. In a country where 'dust thickens on the trees', a country which makes the poet mortified, the wind continues to blow over the 'unexpected walls' and the 'stiff statues', powerless to bring change. (32)

The imagery of stone helps the poet to look into the traditions and beliefs of his people, and contemplate on the metaphysical and personal arguments that arise in him. The stone as a slab is worshipped as god, it exists as a part of a temple that shelters age-old traditions and beliefs, stones exist in ruins as on-lookers of the historic past. The stone that tolerates, that retains its comprehensiveness in its ruins, by its very subsistence is a witness to the art-form that lives beyond the temporal as in *Ikons* or *The Ruins*. The enduring quality of stone is also representative

of the continuity of ideals and values. The scabbed stone characterizes the Hindu home as does the cow and the sacred plant. The father's touching the linga with his forehead asserts his belief in the traditions. (A Rain of Rites: 40)

'Stone is the theme,' says the poet early in *Bhubaneswar* (Waiting 8).

Stone, the witness of the ages, linking up the mythic and the historical past with the present is seen in poems like *Stone*, *Orissa*, *Song of the River*. In *Konaraka* stone chronicles the legend of the crowning slab of the sun temple. The legend goes that the top wedge of this thirteenth century temple structure could only be fitted into place by twelve year old boy, the son of chief architect, after all attempts of the twelve hundred artisans failed. Later the boy jumped to his death from the temple top to save his father's name and honour. Here are also allusions to the inhuman toil undergone by the artisans, the ancestors of Mahapatra, under tyrannical kings. The poet's own standing 'close to the stone, /trying to smear it with blood/to give it life' is a measure of apology for his apathy to that wounded past that he shares with his race. The poet is unfaltering in his responsibility to bear his tradition and says, 'I must carry the stone I found.'

The stones are also a testimony to the killing of the ancestors of Mahapatra by Ashoka's army beside river Daya:

Rock, altar of my ancestors,

teach those who rule my impoverished land today

to stand in your valley of the tortures of the dead  
and feel the shudder that runs down your granite back,

(Bare Face:22)

The stone that exists as a raconteur, chronicling 'a stony epic of loneliness and desire'(Waiting :56) is also worshipped in the form of a slab. One of the significant associations of stone is with god Shiva the ultimate witness, the forbearing creator, and the destroyer. Shiva linga is the 'Vermillion smeared whored stone' (A Rain of Rites:3).On the block of a 'common stone/ The blue shadows of worship rest'. (38)

Among the other nature images that occur in Mahapatra, though not as frequently as the major natural images are sun, moon, stars, trees, dawn.

Sunlight appears in *A Father's Hours* as indeterminate reality against which the men bound in hard old traditions, like the silversmith, the green grocer, the schoolteacher and Kamala, the whore who reappears in Mahapatra, are juxtaposed. The movement of the sun is a measure of the time as in Donne. It 'makes lotuses age'. (31) The 'frail early light' that breaks with the rising sun also associates hard reality. The image of dawn recurs in poems like *Morning, Dawn. Dusk* is the time that 'melts into future'. In *Bhopal Dawn* the daybreak is likened to a white open

page. The moon on the other hand associates death, decay, old age.

The moon's babble grows incoherent  
like a dying man's, hour to hour.

(Burden Of Waves and Fruit:16)

F. A.Inamdar points out that:

The antithetical symbol of the sun is the moon. It evokes the situation of a man whose dreams fall to pieces. Therefore the moon symbolizes our broken dreams ... in Moon Moments sometimes we get a powerful symbol of the moon representing death of our dreams. (Bhatnagar 2001 :87)

Stars associate the memory of the dead, as in *A Father's Hours and Ann*. It refers to the belief that the dead become stars. The poet also reinforces the idea that the heavenly bodies are bound by laws that they are compelled to observe. The evening star returns to the sky. 'Night is where slavish stars move.' (*A Whiteness of Bone*: 44)  
The sun 'pushes on' suffering in the loneliness of compulsion. (*Shadow Space*: 67)

The rainbow often associates emptiness, the mountain's loneliness, or the dawn travelling alone is symbolic of the alienation of man. The abundance of nature images in Mahapatra makes John Oliver Perry in *World Literature Today* anoint Mahapatra as a Wordsworth 'operating in the Orissa landscape'.

The Orissa landscape, its culture and history, rites and rituals constitute an important theme in Mahapatra. He never let's us forget that on the banks of River Daya the Ashokan army had slaughtered the Oriyas, that twelve hundred artisans toiled under a tyrannical king to construct the sun temple and that the chief artisan's son had jumped off from the temple top after placing its crowning slab. Poems alluding to ancient culture and history include Orissa poems, Orissa landscape and Konaraka among his many others. Relationship is a volume that combines myth and history of Orissa. Many of his poems bring out the characteristic atmosphere of Orissa, such as Dawn at Puri, Taste for Tomorrow, Slum and Evening Landscape by the River.

*A Kind of Grief* explicitly states the poet's love for his state:

From somewhere

One calls back the love

Of what one hungers to be touched by

So I can call you by your name---Orissa.

(Shadow Space:13)

The Orissa temples, its men and women, beggars, cripples, lepers, priests and prostitutes everything appears as a part of the place. Images of fishermen that appear in some of his poems serve to enhance the ambience of Orissa. Orissa is shown in its festivals,

in its sufferings such as hunger and poverty, bound in its rites and rituals.

Intertwined with Orissa are the images of hunger, poverty and cripples. It is a town that celebrates its festivals in the 'whine' of cripples and lepers. (Waiting :27)

Many of Mahapatra's images are derived from his childhood memory. T.S. Eliot in *The use of Poetry and the use of criticism* has said that only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood. Mahapatra's father, mother, grandfather and his conversion to Christianity, his own strained relationship with his mother, his study in 'Stewart European, with the ecclesiastics', his lonely childhood, all appear in his poetry. He could never leave his childhood behind, and asks in *In a Time of Winter Rain* :

Does childhood spread out all its way

From the hills of innocence to horizon of the sea ?

(Bare Face:18)

In *Collaboration* he speaks of the corridors of his childhood he hasn't left behind. Children serve as a means of identification with the place. Since the childhood he depicts is characteristic of his native land it brings in associations of poverty, disease and negligence. *Hands, On the Banks of the Ganges, Five Indian Songs, An Old Country, A Twilight Poem, Learning to Flow Free in the Chariot Festival at Puri, Main Temple Street, Puri* foster images of childhood.

Among the other major imagery at work in Mahapatra's poetry is the animal imagery. Mahapatra does not have a wide variety of animals recurring as images in his poetry. He rather turns within a few selected species among which are jackal, cow, bull, water buffalo, and the goat. The birds are more varied, have a wider range and implication than the animals. These birds are no longer the 'sadeyed birds' of his first volume, who dare not enter the poet's room but take up a variety of functions. The most frequent animal and bird to occur are the jackal and the crow, both the typical trickster figures, associated with trickery, intelligence, cynicism, and both are scavengers.

Jackals are associated with a physical union without love. When the familiar old whore with her tired breasts trails the poet in *The False Start*, 'jackal's find rotting carcass.'(29) Sometimes when the poet's mate's presence becomes 'body's presence' and the poet is simply not seeking perfection in the desired interactions, the jackal 'flashes its sudden obscene smile.' (Bare Face: 48) This genital instinct associated with the jackal characterizes the animals in general:

The young are excited by mysterious graffiti

On walls and monuments

And crouch like animals

At the edge of this breathless jungle. (Dispossessed Nests :47)

This association often extends to include the jungle, the home of animals. In *A Father's Hours*, 'the jungles have become gentle' and the pretty neighbour, sparkling on golden stage of life with a divorce and a Ph.D. hides 'jungles' in her purse. (27)

The crow is an important image in Mahapatra. The crow, a fine synthesis of many folktales of different parts of the world, also associates selfishness, greed and aggressive mischief along with the qualities that characterize the jackal. A sharer of many common qualities, the crow brings to the poet's mind, similar kind of associations.

When one is fearful of acknowledging past adventures he is also frightened of 'raucous cries of crows' (*The False Start*:74). The poet's mate wakes up in a different place, hearing the 'Orion-call' but the recognition 'Of love's bare hour of absence and drift' begin a 'flight of crows in the blood'. (*Burden of Fruit and Waves*:33) Crows appear in *A Summer Night* with associations of general degeneration, but, they are, for the most part associated with social and political manipulators.

In *The Twentyfifth Anniversary of a Republic, 1975*, the celebration that begins with the launching of 'new postage stamps' has new statues placed on crossroads. But on the statues of these exemplary dead men sits the 'coarse crow'. They are compared early to the 'crafty priests'. (*A Father's Hours*: 19). Indicating that the country's history is at hazard 'crowd of crows swoop down

over the statues of the great dead men'. (36) But these crows, the crafty priests, who are an important part of our country's guidelines, do not aim merely at the dead:

I thought I saw crows aiming at the leafy places of the soul, scavengers crawling along the tracks of stagnant shores of existence (37)

The world that the scavengers crawl into is a sunless world, where marigolds flower in the 'wrong way'. For all their wish to crowd into the delicate essential places of existence, the leaves are so conditioned by now that they 'are weary and can feel no more' (37).

The crows also bring in associations of individual contention:

A ten- year old girl  
combs her mother's hair  
where crows of rivalry  
are quietly nesting.(A Rain of Rites: 14)

The voice of a crow has no music. It caws in a hoarse voice and in a gross language. The crows are neither beautiful nor have sweet voice but draw our attention by their 'noises', which are not songs.

Their call brings in unpleasant effects.

Endless crow noises.

A skull on the holy sands

Tilts its empty country towards hunger. (A Rain of Rites:28).

Even the sacred crows of Puri have 'clumsy sardonic persistence'

and sink away 'the progress of rain's logic' (Waiting :45).

In *Evening*, the evening's spirit offers a solace that makes the poet forget the causes of his as well as other's sufferings. Yet it cannot obliterate 'all that is to happen' and the poet remains apprehensive:

Like the smell that lingers of a dead cow's entail

The day's crows have dragged up to the skies.

(A Rain of Rites : 37)

The crow's scattering of debris and smell, serve to add up to the list of their wrongdoing. Its reference is coupled not only with the socially and politically significant but sometimes associates the tedium of regularity, like in 'the dawn crows flying back at sunset' (Waiting:18) or the tired man.

Mahapatra turns to scavengers, be it the crow or the vulture when he is skeptic:

a lifeless story

chewed on by the vultures of a country's leaders.

(Dispossessed Nests: 30)

As the political leaders tell convincing lies the birds in the trees are dreaming and hungry.(Bare Face: 23)

The significant are not only crows. The social worker Rama Devi is compared to a victorious snake which has just shed its skin' (A Fathers Hours: 32). What coils around our errors are the same venomous creatures, as in *Assassins*. The hawk on the other hand carries the image of isolation and of melancholy.

And I know I am alone.

Tonight I can remember the lost mornings.

A hawk cries in gloom: (A Rain of Rites:32).

A surrealistic proclivity is evident in the poet's fascination for sinking under the surface, implying a going beyond the obvious.

The water buffalo goes into water, crocodiles move into deeper waters (A Rain of Rites: 35), and, 'elsewhere a hawk stoops to its deep existence of hope.' (15) In *Another Day in Rain* the pariah kite is 'of another world and light'. (Burden of Waves and Fruit:8)

Pigeons are symbols of indolence:

Two gray wood pigeons as though half awake  
Grove around like new ashramites in Rishikesh.

(Wating: 33)

In *Dispossessed Nests* they take on a different meaning. Pigeons, the symbols of peace are necessary for rectifying the harm done by the crows. The pigeons must perch on the bronze statues, on which the crows had alighted :

pigeons of my town  
must fly and perch on the unspoken sadness  
of the bronze statue  
decapitated once in sudden redness. (35)

Later, they are again the indolent creatures.

Mahapatra uses animal imagery sometimes as a natural part of a landscape. The small patient birds that sing in summer twilights (A Rain of Rites:50) are as much a part of the Indian scenario as the Shiva linga .The dog that 'scratches itself and lies down again'

is a natural part of *A Day*. (The False Start:31) The cow is kept with reverence in the Hindu home.

In *Total Solar Eclipse* there is a group of animals. Their responses show the effects of the eclipse on the animal world. It is noteworthy that both the crow and the crocodile are compared to the priests.

While the crows are 'crafty priests', layers of sleep protect the crocodile. In *Another Day in Rain*, Mahapatra uses a number of animals and shows their behavioural pattern in rain. (Burden of Waves and Fruit: 8)

But for most parts, the animal images are employed with a purpose of carrying forward his theme. A cow and a bull mating in the marketplace and the consequent embarrassment caused is 'part growing up, part sacred, most part lust.' (A Rain of Rites: 30)

Some animal images are suggestive of life as the monkeys in *Ceremony*, or the oriole in *Story At the Start Of 1978*. In *Temple* glit-winged orioles challenge the sun as Chelammal goes through the unpleasant memories (47)

While the Oriole preserves the sequence of the season in its throat some birds, like the Swans are essentially voiceless. Mallarme in his famous sonnet *La Virge* depicts the poet's failure of imagination through the remote but lovely symbolic image of an earthbound swan trapped in ice. Mahapatra who repeatedly displays a concern for the act of composition has his swans sink wordlessly into the carpet. The gulls cry. Swans remain indoors

while the gulls are in the open green but when the swans accompany the gulls, they too fold their 'cold throats'. (*A Rain of Rites*:41) This voice of the swans, now the voice of slumber, is what the poet must carry:

I must carry its voice, the swans  
Of slumber, with me. It's delicate ivory, I know,  
shall destroy me while I live.(53).

When the paddy is ready for reaping 'the throats/ of mynah break with tunes of hope:' (*Burden of Waves and Fruit*:31)

Sometimes birds with voices desert the poet as in *June* leaving the active poet inactive and mute. The parakeets circle for a time 'before their cries are lost' (*Burden of Waves and Fruit*:24). The flutter of birds may quieten at night but the poet confesses that his knowledge and time 'Fail to quiet the night.' (*Bare Face*:16)

*A Rain of Rites* introduces the sparrow. Sparrow is associated with softness: 'The sun beats slowly like an exhausted sparrow'. (9)

Or again,

how that time  
blew away softly with her, like sparrows in a gust of wind  
but perhaps I am embarrassed ;I stand back  
and find another world, the music of peacocks  
frozen in rain.' (*Burden of Waves and Fruit*:29).

Peacock associates multihued beauty as in *Temple*. (19). The analytical mind questions the way of life as the peacock wonders, 'What made him dance to the rain'. (*The False Start*: 33)

Fanaticism in religion brings the peacock back in *Dispossessed Nests* whose bends now blazes with hatred and the pale rain of monsoons shrivel like the skin (28).

Fireflies signify a blazing up after bearings of life's events early in *Bare Face* (19), they become the glimmer of compassion as the Hindus and the Muslims seek union (67), later they are like the precedent beauty:

The past becomes beautiful because it faces us.

Like old fireflies against the cold banyan.

(Burden of Waves and Fruit :59)

What the wise owl stares at is 'our narrow world' (*Waiting* :41). The poet who is not blind to the social scenario has his longing seated 'Like a gray owl on a branch of my breath/Eyes wide open in another dumb, dirty trick.' (*Burden of Waves and Fruit*: 53)

Goats, the dumb creatures that are butchered haunts Mahapatra as a cruelty towards the innocent.

Brother

Late at night, as you come home

There will be goat's heads

Staring at you with glaucous eyes

From the wooden blocks of butcher's shop. (*Life Signs*:18).

Vegetarianism is rooted in Indian culture and religion as a part of the doctrine of ahimsa. Gandhi, who becomes an icon with Mahapatra preached the power of peace. A story goes that

Gandhi's childhood friend Sheik Mehtab succeeded in convincing Gandhi to eat meat and he eventually ate goatmeat secretly. Gandhi writes in his autobiography that he had a very bad night afterwards. Everytime he dozed off to sleep he felt that a goat was bleating inside him and he woke up with repentance. The butchering of the goat placed with Gandhi is significant since he preached the gospel of peace but, was assassinated incongruously. *30<sup>th</sup> January 1982:A Story*, the day of Gandhi's assassination in 1948, begins with: 'Another day. Like any other'. In no way different from any previous one, it has the dumb goat on the butcher's block taking its last breath and staring with wide eyes while the butcher thinks that his knife is losing sharpness, is juxtaposed against Gandhi's 'once-favourite hymn'. (*Burden of Waves and Fruit:26*) When the goat occurs again in *Bare Face* it recalls Gandhi again. In *Sometimes* man is shown as divided against man. The statue of Gandhi's chest in the city square speaks the truth. It calls to mind the goat again.

Sadder like the bleat

The slaughtered goat gives out

From the dinner plate. (*Bare Face: 29*)

Gandhi is universally associated with truth and non-violence. He is the national leader, who, with Mahapatra becomes the emblem of peace and of all the unrealised dreams of the country. There are Gandhi's head on coins in the children's pockets, the spinning

wheel whirrs on. *Dispossessed Nests* that speaks of violence and death has the 'redeeming monument of Gandhi'. In *Bare Face* we hear of compassion, the whirring of the spinning wheel and the dying man's last words: 'He Ram'. Even the headless torso of Gandhi speaks the truth. (Bare Face: 29) He is the leader of the heart, his head being superfluous. In *Bare Face* that speaks of India as a little girl, Gandhi is shown as spinning sorrow and turning them into threads of love.(63)

The images of the trapped bird or the caged animal that occur in his early volumes recur in his later ones as well. They bring out the idea of the confinement of the self in the material world. The poet himself is suffocated and asks for an open window so that he can 'breathe'. His reminiscences are like a fierce animal ensnared. (A Whiteness of Bone: 31)

Sometimes the self is restrained by the earthbound duties that one has to perform. In *Rising* it is the hidden nest that stops the bird from flying. The trapped birds and animals are next related to words in poems which are trapped within define forms and expressions. The poet expresses discontentment caused by the gap between thought and expression. Words are poor means of expression. A poem is compared to a trapped bird in *The Lines Of My Poem*:

Today a line of this poem

Has lost the use of its healthy legs,  
 Trapped like a sparrow  
 Which has strayed inside,  
 Beating its wings against  
 The bars of world's conscience.

Myth and legends provide the poets with countless stories from which they can draw their images and allusions. When the subject is myth, the story has been established over generations and the readers are well aware of allusions. Mahapatra often alludes to Indian myths and legends and many of his images are drawn from the Ramayana and Mahabharat. In *A Father's Hours* he relates the images from the game of dice in Mahabharat to the legend of the sun temple. Here the 'brooding dots on six deathly pale faces' bring to mind the death of the twelve-year-old artisan. The ruins hold the 'interiors of myth' (Waiting:2) Radha from the legend of Radha - Krishna symbolizes the Indian women in search of true love with its accompanying pain and desire. Mahapatra alludes to the myth of Ahalya from Ramayana in a poem significantly titled *Appearances* for the myth of Ahalya turns on the woman's mistaking appearance for reality. Ahalya myth is reinterpreted in *The Women Who Wanted To Be Loved* where a woman whose passions are dried up turns into a stone. In *Bare Face* he seeks the truth like a karmayogi, like Parvati undergoing penance for

union with shiva. The word 'myth' appears many times throughout his volumes. The poet speaks of old myth in the clouds (Life Signs;12), the 'myth of sun and rain' (A Whiteness of Bone:65), of the dumb order of myth in *The False Start*.(52)The poet's use of the myth allows him to escape from the transitory and the fragmented. The myth of the land, racial consciousness and personal experience are intertwined In *Relationship*. He refers to the legend of Dharama, to Ashoka's killing of the Oriyas in 260 BC. He turns to the Putana myth from Mahabharat, to myth of the golden deer from Ramayana. For Mahapatra the 'laksman rekha' puts an individual into isolation more than it offers security.

Death imagery mainly appears in *Burden of Waves and Fruit* published in 1988 when the poet is nearly sixty. It shows the poet's gradual awareness of age and decrepit body that is not present in the earlier volumes. In *Summer Afternoons* he speaks of his physical decrepitude. The grass that is the symbol of youth and vitality is now only a memory. His presence today 'hardens the trees and their fruit'. The poet has aged now and a touch simple as desire 'stretches' him out and he suffers penance.

In *Waiting* the poet shuts his tired eyes, he thinks back but doesn't remember when his beard had begun to grow. His shoulders are now 'bare and contrite'. That the poet is now but a

'poet's poise, a soiled shirt as though it were empty of its body' (50) calls to mind Yeats' image of 'a tattered coat upon a stick' in *Sailing to Byzantium*. Mahapatra does not sentimentalise with death, nor is he half in love with its easefulness. What worries him is the 'suffering the only thing that's hard to bear.' But there is hope of re-establishing all that has been lost :

And I sit all alone

Waiting for my joys to come back. (Harvest)

Contemplation on death in *Cloak of White* ends up in weighing the opposites of life namely pain and joy, light of suns and distance, and ends in an inconclusive 'cloak of white'. In *Last Night the Poem* ends with the poet's picking up tomorrow and seeing his body lying still in the middle of it. There is no further elucidation of what happens later. In *The Season Of Old Rain* the poet's dwelling on death reveals 'neither sorrow nor hope nor loss'. The poet seems more affected by the unnatural and premature deaths that happen around him. In *Fragments* he speaks on the death of his father. In *March* he turns to murder and rape and concludes that death is provisional.

His attitude to life is equally pragmatic. There is no romantic aura, or lyrical moralizing about life. Life is an endless flux. It 'does not give us a day off '. (A Whiteness of Bone: 42) In *Today*, although this present day is only a small knot, 'can one ignore it?'

the poet asks. *Something Spreading Itself* makes his outlook explicit:

Life is not a precious corner, lyrically hidden,  
 Dreams bobbing up and down on the water line of sleep.  
 It is the potato -peel the teeth won't let go  
 After the core has gone.

Ash images associate death in Mahapatra. The south wind startles 'the ashes of the dead' (Life Signs:21). With another death 'A little pile of ash/Uncurls' (Dispossessed Nests:17). Since all bodies are burnt and finally reduced to ashes, and 'Even the long fame of someone like Christ eventually turns to ashes', (Shadow Space:54) ash stands for the ultimate truth. 'Emptiness echoes from the ashes of the truth.' (Life Signs:6)

Another image that the poet attends to is the mirror image. The mirror does not stand for an inert reflection of an image for Mahapatra. In *Shadow Space* memory is a mirror held from a distance. It is a moment of introspection, it drive 'uncertainties' in his heart. (The False Start:46) It provides the poet with a moment of realization. When introspection is lacking, the mirror grows so small that it is incapable of showing any image. (Life Signs:34) Its reflection is not limited to the peripheral but it captures the internal truth.

In my familiar mirror  
 The eyes peer through a mask  
 That approves of my act  
 A scrutiny we cruelly practice. (Bare Face:76)

Darkness sets early in *A Father's Hours*. (26) Darkness associates ignorance, decay and death. In *Shadow Space* the ruins are darkened by the darkness of our own shadows. Darkness as death appears in *Through the Stone*, *A Certain Refrain*. In *Death* the image of death is compared to 'A handcart you push,/Through a day full of moonlight, of sadness you can't trust.' (The False Start: 78).

In *Dispossessed Nests* Mahapatra exposes horror by using colour imagery. Eyes of 'bright yellow sunflowers' disclose terror, bunches of 'yellow flowers peep out'. The volume is besmeared with 'blood', 'scarlet colours'. 'Vermillion of woman's forehead ripples in the dark.' (21) There are orange coloured masks on the faces of the 'possessed fire dancers'. In the eyes of the masks are a tremulous purple. There is 'golden smoke'. The rainbow with its spectrum of colours chokes, and overall a darkness pervades.

Bruce King says:

The use of recurring motifs and images is a means of giving unity to the volume of poems and bringing the individual lyrics into closer relations so that they seem

continuous meditation on such themes as loneliness and personal relationship. (King 2004: 196.)

Certain images link up the early experimental stage with this later one giving the impression of a unified corpus of work. Such images are the images of house with its associative doors and windows and rooms, images of silence, loneliness, and his concern with poetry.

The house that stood for tangible limitations on the self in the experimental stage of Mahapatra appears again in *The False Start*. In *The House* the door is a symbol of promise of life The house is a place of acceptance and security 'that someone somewhere is always waiting for his dream.' As one grows up the ideal changes and the door assumes a 'false look of tranquility' (*The False Start*:58). House is the place of his growth like his land, a place of refuge that the poet looks for:

In house I figure the possibilities  
of life :could I  
hide again as a child, someplace here?

(A Whiteness of Bone:22)

The 'grey walls of room' (*Life Signs*:4) suggest the periphery of existence. The wall that works as a barrier that separates the past from the present crumples where the memory co-exists with the present. The old brick walls of his house 'goes down into shadows' (*A Whiteness of Bones*:39) as he recalls the past. The door when closed, provides a place of hiding, and when open, brings to view

all that is lay hidden within the confined human existence. In *The Sentence*, 'behind locked door you wait for things' and when the door is opened there remains 'no word to hide in'. In *The Day After My Friends became Godly and Great*, the door is 'like history through which they have gone'. Doors as a link of hours is also present in *In Another Hour's Bell. Tonight I Hear The Water Flowing* that deals with the poet's personal experiences in the tangible as well as the imaginary world, speaks of open doors. (The False Start: 62).

Mahapatra's quest for silence was evident enough in his early volumes. Silence, as we have seen, was the ultimate refuge of Mahapatra's lovers who come together merely in a physical love in a world where no communication is established. Despite all his yearning for silence we have seen that it could bring no relief to the poet. He picks up the thread again in *A Father's Hours* and asks: 'Has silence lost its importance?' The silence that sets in early in the volume includes the natural world, like the 'vine' that 'climbs silently' (Moving), the human world, where old men wait in their silence, and god, whose eyes are silent. 'Silence has gripped my sleeves,' he Mahapatra in *A Rain of Rites*. In *Bare Face* the days meekly graze in the land of their silence. (73)

In many of his poems silence is juxtaposed against words, as in the *Poem For Angela Elson*:

you said: hold me just once, tonight,

before you leave this land.

But then, these were words again,

Pieces of silence people merely tell

Words that communicate nothing are but silence. Similar juxtapositions of words and silence are found in *Voice, The Rain Falling, 1992, Dispossessed Nests*. In *Dawn of a New Year* voices drift in silence about his tired bed. Silence is the outcome of loneliness, of the lonely existence of man. In poems such as *Silence, Last Night the Poem* silence associates loneliness. 'I am afraid of loneliness', Mahapatra says in *Waiting* (55). Loneliness is frozen around his childhood images. In *June* the poet watches his loneliness 'come from the tamarind's shade'. Loneliness engulfs personal relationship: 'We take precautions not to grow apart .Yet we are alone'. (A Father's Hours:22)

The contemplation on end of life has the image of loneliness again:

Sometime somewhere,

perhaps on the shore of some sea,

we shall feel as much alone in the world

as the others who have won their victories. (The False Start :20)

The words are often related to the words in his poetry, the expression he seeks, and silence is the absence of such words. This kind of association is seen in poems like *The Time Afterwards, Last Night the Poem*.

Silence is a word that is repeated so many times in Mahapatra that Inamdar comments that it gets sanctified in Mahapatra.

Mahapatra's concern for poetry and poetic composition remains throughout his poetic career. A poet's concern with the act of composition is a common theme, but Mahapatra deals with it in a personal way, with a desperation that seemed almost an obsession in the early phase. In this experiential stage he is more concerned with the value of poetry than with its construction. The successful poet now counts his youthful experiences by his publication. An 'old poem' now brings in reminiscences of his wild youth. (Life Signs:46) Personally, it is poet's hunger for words that led him to explore the hidden corners of his mind:

My hunger of words covered me with

Walking into the village of my mind. (Shadow Space:69)

Mahapatra sees poetry as a separate living organism that he once found 'at the outskirts of a country' (Bare Face:64), sometimes, 'in the summers of a country'. (74) In *Not In Defense Of A Poem* a poem is personified as a woman standing with folded arms with an expression that the poet has cheated her. Mahapatra does not look at poetry as a means of immortality that we find in Shakespeare, who attempts to immortalize his love in black ink, nor is his the assured imagination of Tagore and Yeats who address a reader hundred years hence. He rather speaks of failure of poetry in today's world. In *Will a Poem of Mine be the Only*

*Answer* he speaks of its failure at the personal level. His very physical responses betray the philosophy his 'poems seemed to profess.' The poet here is 'defeated' by his 'own tactics' that is poetry. Although he tries to believe that as a poet there is something between him and the world (1992), a relationship and a responsibility that makes his mouth turn dry with deaths that should not have affected him because they are not his (*Shadow Space*: 41), he is ultimately powerless to bring any change. Yet he tries to access the power of poetry:

you have to check whether poetry  
really becomes a cry for protecting man.

(*Bare Face*:46)

He turns to the contemporary situation tracing the predicament of frail human lot. The poet has walked to the remote truths 'Poems were supposed to hold', (*Shadow Space*:69) but 'for poetry the world lives far away'. In *The Woman Who Wanted To Be Loved* the dark days of the woman 'cannot be braided into a poem'.

The poets for all their hue and cry are powerless to change the world:

Children will go hungry again  
Poet's will sip their tea in stupid looking cafes,  
. . . .  
Our poems look to the right and to the left ,  
Then turn to torment in meek expectation.  
And always the waiting; a hundred years hence

The poems will still be luxuries, hiding their impotent hatred for the world's unresurrected life.

(Shadow Space:25)

In a final tone of capitulation the value of poetry is assessed:

The world plots on

Poetry stumbles and falls. ( Shadow Space:59)

Mahapatra like most of the Indian English poets, writes in free verse. Although the tone is conversational the images are intricate and the voice that speaks through them can generally be identified with the poet. Mahapatra's world as revealed by his images turns around his own personal self and its problems of loneliness, guilt, his childhood and its associative memories, love and poetry. His concern with the contemporary situation makes the poet focus on the somber aspects of the present day world. He evokes the contemporary situation of India by the images of lepers, beggars, prostitutes, hunger, poverty and violence. His treatment of these images are neither ironical nor satiric and by the sincere voice of concern that we hear through the dismal contemporary representations, the poet comes out as a social critic.

## CHAPTER IV

## The Poet As A Social Critic

And if the heart doesn't overflow with love ,  
will the spirits of poetry stir out  
of the walls of my bone?

(Mahapatra, Life Signs :46)

Jayanta Mahapatra may draw his images from his memories, he may contemplate on philosophical and abstract things like time or death probing into personal relationship of the self with others but he is never blind to the contemporary situation. Although he occasionally makes a journey to the historical and mythical past of Orissa telling us how his ancestors were slaughtered by the Ashokan army on the banks of river Daya and draws our attention to the incessant labour of the artisans who constructed the sun temple of Konaraka under a tyrannical king, he is sentient of and sensitive to the present scenario of Orissa and to that of the whole of India and actively reacts to it. Thus through many of his images the poet comes out as a social critic.

It is true I held up my face to the world  
hoping it would pull me through  
the crowds preying the old worn paths,  
my morals like a scarf pulled over my head,

but each time I found the empty seat beside me  
 dripping with worms and excrement ;each time  
 the demands of a war ,a flood ,a murder or rape  
 startled me with the salt taste of my blood.

(The False Start: 62 )

Matthew Arnold in *The Study Of Poetry* says :

In poetry as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for  
 such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic  
 beauty, the spirit of our race will find ...as time goes on and  
 as other helps fail, its consolation and stay.

(S.R.Littlewood 1960:3)

A true poet is not the one who lives secluded in an ivory tower  
 sheltered away from reality in the halo of a romantic past or a  
 visionary future but one who is sentient of the predicament of the  
 other fellow beings. Mahapatra believes that an artist, who is  
 elevated by us to the ethereal plane as a god-gifted seer, lacks the  
 historical and logical relationship between the self and the world.  
 Such artists tend to write without a sense of community or  
 audience and produce no lasting literature. A writer must be  
 conscious of the present social and political scenario in which he  
 lives. Mahapatra's poems never give us an idealistic view of the  
 world. His is always a depiction of the bleak reality around.  
 Mahapatra's poems speak of poverty, starvation, prostitutes,

cripples, beggars, of 'Leper's mutilated limb' (Life Signs:8), of people who 'grow like tough coarse grass from cracked pavements' (A Father's Hours: 38), 'Fisherman's broken shacks', 'Of nameless slums' (Burden of Waves and Fruit:17) and typical Indian scenes like that of 'a six-month old child's crawling across the dung-washed floor'(Life Signs:2). Poverty is 'huddled in there / If that's what one is looking for' (Waiting:3).

Mahapatra depicts pitiable but realistic pictures like:

A man begs for alms, sitting under an old tree

Holding his paralyzed boy with damp, awkward arms.

(A Rain of Rites:55)

There are numerous instances of literary artists taking up pen against social problems. Many literatures bear testimony of social criticism. George Orwell and Charles Dickens wrote *Animal Farm* and *A Tale of Two Cities* respectively, to express their disillusionment with society and human nature. To Matthew Arnold, poetry was the criticism of life. For Mahapatra, it is important to write with a real sense of community and audience. He himself writes with a sense of belonging to Orissa. For the poet, his native state is the 'altar' of his ancestors. It carries the 'ritual memories' of his youth, his home and his mother. The landscape of the native state forms an essential backdrop for many of his poems that have the suffering Indian lot like beggars and cripples as their

inseparable elements. The town he is born in has its festivities as well as the 'mangled lepers':

the red sun perched on the rickety limbs of the poor,  
the open drains flouting the dread of disease.

The naked children crying of their swollen flesh.

(Waiting: 28)

Images of children provide a means of his identification with the place. The children depicted by Mahapatra are never the healthy or the happy ones inhabiting the imaginary world blissfully unaware of the sufferings of this world. They neither dwell in the world of innocence, nor do the fairies come to tempt them away. They are rather the 'diseased hollow-cheeked children' (Life Signs:9) marked by poverty and negligence, the 'naked children, with 'virus of pox' (A Rain of Rites:43) In *Main Temple Street, Puri*:

Children, brown as earth, continue to laugh  
at cripples and mating mongrels.  
Nobody ever bothers about them.

(A Rain of Rites :16).

The victims of negligence, the children are starved. Fatigued eyes of mothers linger on their children but their faces reflect back their own darkness. (Waiting :3)

Another important image of social reality that Mahapatra attends to is hunger. Like the children many others suffer from

interminable hunger. The hungry children 'stink like wet dogs', the cows are half-starved'. Hunger affects the entire country. Rain that goes on all day reminds the poet of hunger by its incessant quality.

Its rain again. Going on all day.

Like hunger, you would think this country

Has nothing but seven hundred million bellies.

(Burden of Waves and Fruit:29)

The world that Mahapatra portrays is a degenerated, suffering and sick world. There is hunger and reek and decay in the air (Life Signs:30). Darkness 'swells' as a child's belly does hunger (Burden of Waves and Fruit :31). There are also other types of hunger the poet attends to, like the hunger of the women whose passions are not reciprocated as in *The Woman Who Wanted To Be Loved*, or, the poet's own sexual hunger as in *Hunger*. *Hunger* pathetically juxtaposes the hunger for food against the hunger for sexual communion and brings out the unremitting poverty that makes a father ignore all social concerns and so called morals values and offer his fifteen-year-old daughter to the poet.

Like the children the women depicted are also the suffering ones. *These Women* presents a candid picture of the Indian household. Home is where the women toil day and night serving 'need after need' of the other family members, while they themselves have

none to vent out their problems and feelings to. They live with their heavy hearts and with an extended silence that the poet compares to the onions and herbs hung out to dry. The Indian women are quiet sufferers keeping their eyes shut to many things in life making the 'poise of a flower'. (A Rain of Rites:6) He underlines the 'humiliation', 'hunger', and ironically the 'well being of a woman'

...drying herself with her only wet sari

after her bath, and her nameless solitude.

(Life Signs:25)

These suffering women are but living deads. The poet therefore says that they 'find the secret of dying/ without realizing that they are dying'. (Life Signs : 25)*The Temple* with its threefold structure: *The Hall of Dancing*; *The Hall of Offering* and *Sanctum Sanctorum: The Shrine*, suggestive of the three broad stages of a woman's life – girlhood, marriage and motherhood, deals with the plight of women. Chelammal, the protagonist is a poor, suffering and lonely woman. In *The Hall of Offerings* after she is raped and left to fate she finds that 'her father, brothers all move with the sadness of men. / They belong, but not to her'(28). The 'laxman rekha' reinforces her isolation. This isolation, however, is not her alone. For: 'There is no woman/who is not alone.' Each time a girl commits suicide 'she learns to chasten the vision of her own death' (30) she feels all along 'the rough noose of ownership'.

Despite the quiet toil and loneliness there is a quiet resignation and submission about the Indian women.

... she lets her husband bury his head

Between her breaths in the thick knot in her throat.

(A Whiteness of Bone: 51)

In *A Summer Night* Ramlal growls like an animal as he enters his house. Nobody knows where he goes at night, and there is a hint that he visits the wrong places. His wife is a quiet resignation. The 'sleepy wife' remains 'Silent and passive/through the act'. Her face limp loyal is compared to the ruined stone. There is satire when the poet says that after years of guilt and misdeeds, Ramlal will build a temple and gift marbles slabs to Lord Jagganath as a retribution of his sins. (Waiting :28)

Mahapatra exposes the hypocrisy and hollowness of marital relationship in poems like *A Sailboat On Occasions*, *A Postcard From Home*.

In neighboring house a woman hides her impotent hatred for her husband. (Bare Face: 48)

*Poem for Angela Elston* turns on speciousness of love. In a loveless world, the poet himself is no more impervious. He admits that

My love for you is a selfish love

Wings of deception.

(Burden of Waves and Fruit:58)

Mahapatra's world is a place where women toil to make both ends meet. The downtrodden 'soot-hued women' who toil through the day and return home after a days long labour are an invariable part of *Dusk*. A girl runs after her home-bound cow at sunset. The women return carrying their sickle. The poet watches a pregnant woman sweep the litter in the streets. The image turns 'the knot of pain' inside the empathetic poet. (Bare Face:45)

In *The Morning* –I we read of

The sweeper girl walking by  
 The can of human excrement  
 Cradled  
 In her frail arm.

(Waiting:1)

Her arm is 'frail' due to malnutrition. One of the major causes of suffering is poverty, the failure to provide for oneself and one's family even the basic necessities of food and shelter. The poet speaks of starvation due to extreme poverty in poems like *Deaths in Orissa*. In *Bafe Face XIX*:

..the children of Kalahandi breathe in their dreams  
 in their interminable starvation sleep.

(Bare Face:78)

In *Death Of A Nameless Girl In Bhopal, December 1984*, referring to a death by poison gas the poet says that death by poison gas is a

new feature while we are quite acquainted with death by starvation:

there has always been starvation here ,man;  
yes, we are used to it.

(A Whiteness of Bone:45)

In *Requiem XX* the poet attends to the growing poverty and misery that makes it impossible to judge whether we are progressing or actually regressing. Every year we have national holidays. Seething leper colonies seem to grow every year. We generally ignore the thought of what an underprivileged lives for. They are compared to ghosts walking in the villages wearing worn out clothes having lost their children before they are born. (Bare Face :79)

Like his empathy with the poor and downtrodden, the poet's attitude to the prostitutes who recur frequently in his poems is one of compassion and understanding. They are the wronged women who take to the profession out of poverty and hunger. This is a profession by which they earn their pitiable living and therefore these women beg for the darkness of the night.

In *Village Evening*, as Ahalya goes back to bed, there is

A guilty look on her face  
Her promise to feed her son  
Morning milk-curd another faraway dream.

(Shadow Space:31)

A lost cloud is compared to an old whore (The False Start:33) The prostitutes figure as professionals, like 'Kamala, the three-rupee whore from my mother's remote village' (A Father's Hours: 30). They take to their work with professional approach as shown in *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*. *Hunger* shows how the need for food in a starving family undermines all other considerations.

The woman's world is one of misery. Yashoda arranges for her fourteen year old daughter's abortion, (Dispossessed Nests:55) and Draupadi drags her body into the night.(58)

The present world has lost the tenderness of love :

Now a man knows only two ways

For dealing with a stray woman

He rapes her

And he kills her.

(Dispossessed Nests:33)

The poet's was a generation that paid homage to Gandhi and Tagore saw in mother Dostoevsky's shadow but now the war was ended and ushered in 'the new beginning of the curse of beggardom'.(Shadow Space:17) There are 'Homeless beggars' seen everywhere on Indian streets (A Father's Hours :24). *The Beggar Takes It As Solace* is a poem on a beggar's fiddling with a coin and his dream :

he sees people everywhere

the future

getting paid.

(Waiting :48)

It is a world of beggars and cripples and lepers. 'Five faceless lepers move aside' (Waiting:6) and 'A legless cripple/Clutters up the wide temple street.' (Waiting:14) Some of his Indian scenes Mahapatra attends to are typical and have a changeless quality about them:

here sits my man

in the doorway of a dunged street,

beside his ailing mother, (ARain of Rites: 58)

The hour 'will not move'. It holds him now as it held his father. The same tradition, the same blind following of customs goes on generation after generation. Large group of 'stony women' sit through the day in front of a shrine 'waiting to be cured'. (A Rain of Rites:15) Despite all her strict observations, all her meticulous fasting on festival days, not touching fish every Monday and Saturday, and returning from temple with vermilion roaring on her throat, the thirteen-year-old girl dies of tetanus. Mentioning her religious observances the poet comments: 'What superstition!' (Burden of Waves and Fruit:29)

There are premature deaths all around. Here a 'a rickshaw puller/collapses with exhaustion /on the hot edge of the road'

(Waiting:42), a frail girl dies of tuberculosis (60), a 75 year old judge leaps to death (60-61) but the clinging to religious customs continues. It seems a hopeless devotion. For all the prayers and penance men undertake, god remains inaccessible. In his poem, a wasted man stretching out in hospital bed is juxtaposed against five children crying for slices of watermelon which is further set against 'the atrocious innocence of Jagganath /in his sheltered shrine'. (Burden of Waves and Fruit: 40) In *Widow* the widow who is placed in a dreadful surrounding by fate and more by the customs and conventions of the society has in a corner of her tiny room a stone icon 'weary with vermilion/in an exotic drapery of hopes' (Shadow Space:20). The poet uses the epithet 'stone' to emphasize rigid pitiless qualities of the persona we call god.

We all want to find the man who can rise out of his rite

And yet we are the ones who'll never let ourselves out.

(A Rain of Rites:58)

Lessons of justice, fables of good deeds, arcades of peace are 'metallic clicks of words' carrying no meaning. They are chanted through generations represented by the poet's father and his father's father. They are repeated by 'shaven priests', by 'government ministers'. These are words that are 'played', and resound in a country where men commit murder in the name of mercy. (Life Signs:15)

The suffering villages weigh on the poet's mind.

It is not that I do not like to see their lot improved  
that which has taken years of doing of education, medicine.

(A Father's Hours: 23)

But the poet is totally disillusioned. He is sceptical about the country's freedom. In *Freedom* he depicts old widows and dying men cherishing their freedom by bowing to prayers from time to time while the children scream 'With desire for freedom to transform the world /Without even laying the hands on it'. The picture he depicts has nothing to cherish about, not even hope. The poet's is a generation that feels the generation gap increase the unreliability between parents and children.

We are careful to say nothing now

To our children that might displease

Or provoke them (Of Independence Day)

The attitude of the youth have changed considerably. They back away from 'us', that is, from the poet's age group, 'suspicious as shadows', their antagonism has grown 'cruelly with the years.'  
(Father's Hours :28)

Politics and vigilance have entered the personal relationships:

We have become stiff and cautious with each other

As this country is with the US and USSR.

(A Whiteness of Bone:63)

The city images are associated with dust, chaos, darkness and gloom:

the sad voice of the earth is crouched in the city's chaos  
 the fluttering flag doesn't remember anything further than  
 that  
 a light ventured out into the world and was lost  
 and the last hours of memory hold only darkness.

(Bare Face:20 )

Many of his poems speak 'Of the drained silence of starvation'. (Bare Face:30), of the woman and the child in a remote village, who 'never had even a little rice/for their one daily meal these fifty years.' (34) This is what our freedom has given us. The talks of 'social injustice and democracy' has failed:

No believer has given up his life for freedom  
 There is merely caution in those words  
 Weak sentiment and history  
 In which country's leaders like to drown us.

(Shadow Space:17)

The poet is annoyed with the big talks of socialism. Communism does not fascinate him either.

At times in the dark the mongrel of socialism  
 Wails into dreams of sleeping millions,  
 Smoke of useless burning tastes sickly on the tongue  
 And children struggle with their last summers

Like young communists bent with the weight of India  
 A startled sun on the cold embers of their eyes.

(Burden of Waves and Fruit :22)

The images of India that the poet draws are never the cheerful ones. *Freedom* has a powerful image of the country's body floating down somewhere on the river, half sunk. Here women and children go without food. *Saving Ourselves* has grimaces on India's drawn face with pain 'of the shadows from the fallen tree of our conscience' (Shadow Space: 21). Tomorrow is one more day when the country will settle down 'pale' and 'worn' and 'hungry'. (Burden of Waves and Fruit:34). The country is still wavering ,

Moving from plan to plan ,

From government to government,

Unable to make up its mind

To light a lamp or do anything sensible

(Bare Face :48)

Despite all the pain and suffering this is

..the country from which you cannot cut yourself loose;

(Life Signs:15)

Freedom has really given us nothing of the cherished dreams. There is noose in the hand of freedom we have earned (Bare Face :79). The poet speaks of the political corruption as one of the causes of the country's suffering. *Freedom* has the image of

'bloodied light of sunsets' clinging to 'the tall white columns of parliament house.' (Bare Face:34). 'We try to find out where our lives have brought us', says Mahapatra. (Dispossessed Nests:45)

The country's leaders 'wait for a sign/ and a future this present will not enable us/to live in.' The poet's own state of Orissa is littered. The 'malarial lanes' are spattered with excreta and dung. The market place stinks of 'rotting tomatoes', 'fish scales', 'bananas' and 'piss'. The 'hard-eyed' young whores

frequent the empty space behind the local cinema  
by the town hall where corrupt politicians still  
go on delivering their pre-election speeches .

(Life Signs: 23)

Nobody cares of others misfortunes today; the least of all do the political leaders who are our elected representatives. The victims of *Bhopal Gas Tragedy* are drawn out like 'winged insects' pulled out from the earth after rain. Of government inability and political failure '... we must never/ question and must pretend not to know.' (Dispossessed Nests:45)

Political corruption, however, is not the only factor contributing to the misery. There is cruelty inherent in human nature. Gandhi who spoke of non-violence was shot dead and India suffers from his unrealized dreams.

The photograph of Gandhi in the new airport lounge  
is more than forty years old.

Everytime I look into the old man's eyes,  
He calmly hands my promise back to me.

(A Whiteness of Bone: 50).

The poet's land seems unredeemable. In *Pain*, The dark tree that stands over the fields of the poet's blood has failed to leaf and bud. Wrecked by fissures Gandhi's dreams can no longer be realized. Disappointed, the poet laments: 'Land, our land, there is so much land between us now.'

The poet laments that he has been in love with the world a little too much, taking his place for granted, reconstructing a secret mental landscape like the 'redeeming monument of Gandhi' in the India of his 'illusive glass'. He fondly remembers Indira Gandhi who rendered invaluable service to the country but was assassinated like Gandhi. The significance of the past and the sacrifice of our ancestors are lost upon us.

In *30<sup>th</sup> January, 1982: A Story*, the day of Gandhi's assassination has Amarbabu and Shambabu smiling at one another as they choose their 'choice cuts' of meat hanging from hook in marketplace. It brings out the indifference of the average men to major national incidents. It is also ironic that the day of assassination of the father of non-violence should be celebrated by

butchering of innocent goats. We have seen how images of slaughtered goats serve to bring out the brutality of human nature. In *A Monsoon Day Fable*, the eyes of the cows being led for slaughter haunts the poet, for they 'reveal the true nature of man' (Life Signs: 41)

Mahapatra chronicles vicious incidents as the rape and killing of Laxmi (Burden of Waves and Fruit:17), or the burning of a father and his two sons just because they belonged to different faith (Bare Face: 50). In the poem the sunset is likened to an abandoned bloodstain. *Morning Signs* brings out both the brutality of man and the failure of justice. Before the morning paper arrives the poet knows what the headlines will be—that Lata's rapists and killers are set free 'for that's how it has always been.' (Life Signs: 47 )

This is a world where death strides on , yet men are intolerable to one another, viciously killing others. He takes up his pen against many such incidents of violence in the country. *Winds of Spring* is on the brutal massacre of women and children in the paddy fields of Nellie, Assam. *Progress* is triggered by an incident of violence after an Australian missionary and his young sons were burnt alive in Orissa on the night of January 22, 1999. *Temple* is a reworking of the Putana myth set off by the suicide of an octogenarian couple Ramanujam (eighty- five) and Chelammal (eighty). The poem ends

with another news item, that of a twelve-year-old girl being gang raped and murdered implying that suffering continues.

In *Dispossessed Nests* the poet depicts India as a land of lost values crumbling under terrorism. The volume is a wail of a sensitive man tormented by the world shattered by violence. It portrays a world where all the compassion of human heart has dried up. The riverbed is dry. It is wrapped up in a 'shroud of moonlight'. Darkness has descended on the land. It is a night of 'decaying bodies'. The poet employs natural imagery to depict the chaos the country has immersed into. The chief events of the book are the Punjab unrest that killed thousands of innocent people in a fanatic attempt to establish a land of the Sikhs, with the 'Kapurs shouting Long Live Khalistan /alongwith the terrorists', and the gas leakage in Union Carbide factory in Bhopal that took thousands of innocent lives. The poet hopes for something positive, but death's devastation continues:

There is probably something good  
on television tonight.

Another death. (*Dispossessed Nests*:17)

The violence and resulting deaths in Punjab results in '*Bewildered Wheatfields*' the first section of the volume, and the deaths in Bhopal, which form the remaining section, is '*A Dance of Bejeweled Snakes*' where he quotes Pablo Neruda's lines as an epigraph:

'Come and see the blood in the streets.

Come and see

the blood in the streets.

Come and see the blood

in the streets !'

The volume has the image of India as a dark tree grasping for breath in green air. The cruelty and violence around makes the poet articulate that his country makes him more embarrassed than lonely. (Burden of Waves and Fruit:32) Hurt by all that he sees around him, he says, 'its no use talking about my land'.

Sometimes his social concern ignores all geographic boundaries to encompass the entire human lot. *The Lost Children of America, for instance*, depicts the predicament of the young Americans who come to India in search of peace and meander their way into oblivion. Starvation in Somalia disturbs the poet, as does starvation in Kalahandi. In *A Country* the poet's unease embraces the whole of Asia where hunger 'keeps growing from Turkey to Cambodia ' (Life Signs: 29)

Mahapatra not only chronicles desolate scenes, he probes into the characters offering a study of the Indian psyche. *Afternoons* is set in a characteristic Indian ambience where palaces have fallen to ruins and piss dries on deserted walls. We are given a brief analysis of the fat shopkeeper who looks at the 'two big- arsed'

women, who enter his shop for four kilos of rice, with 'nude hunger' in his eyes and fans himself in a stupor of dreams. In *Events* the young Rotarian's speech on American enterprise in the conference room of YMCA and his complementary pride fall unreal against the bleak reality of the 'town's dusty street', the smoke of funeral pyre on riverbank, the hard labour of rickshaw puller, and the rape.

Poets need certain seclusion for his art, but this does not detach Mahapatra from the events occurring around. He actively responds to the events of the world for he is but one of them.

In my room

With the shut barred windows where I work,  
I am one of them, listening to the radio each day.

(Burden of Waves and Fruit: 29)

The poet who has chronicled all the sufferings and sorrows of this world has the fate of his poem 'hanging like an old calendar on a nail on his conscience's walls' (Bare Face: 38)

For sense of right and wrong pinches him when he sees the poverty and suffering around:

The destitutes everywhere are still my sense of guilt.

(A Father's Hours:20)

In an expose the poet elucidates this sense of guilt:

Is this sense of guilt intensely felt, especially for one who lives in a country like ours where almost half the people are hungry and impoverished? Feelings like these, waxing and waning in the blur of the mind, help in focusing on oneself, placing the person at some point of time and meaning. And poetry, the process of writing it, does just that. The reasons are all there. They are there because man is able to think. Or simply because man has this hidden core of a conscience which he finds he cannot entirely subjugate or ignore.

(Panja 2001: 7)

'For poetry, the world lives far away,' says his *The Trail Of Poetry*. 'Let it raise you right where you belong' appeals the poet. He turns our attention to the street, where an old pregnant woman sweeps the litter; to the last laugh of horror of a paralytic who swallows insecticide. 'You have to check whether poetry/really becomes a cry for protecting man' says Mahapatra. (Bare Face: 36) But the truth is that a poet can only helplessly depict. The poem's 'voice is thin' A poem cannot even strongly protest, and the poet cries out: Oh I am a poet who barks like a dog.

(A Whiteness of Bone: 31)

In *For Days Together* the poems are 'blank'. They are compared to his rich friends who move around in expensive cars who are least sensitive to the sufferings around. *The Rage In Those Young Eyes*,

for instance, is on the hanging of African poet - activist Benjamin Moloise that had provoked angry reactions worldwide. Mahapatra feels a deep pain but then he knows that it will serve no ultimate purpose.

Perhaps the rage in those young eyes of yours  
will never serve any purpose, great or small

But, whatever little his contribution may be it cannot be ignored.

In *Someone In My Room* the poet thinks of himself in relation to Jack Mapanje Malawal and is unsure of the force of his poetry. (Shadow Space: 79).

Mahapatra links his poetry to words like ineffectiveness, impotency, futility.

In *The Tame Ending* a poem is like a lost child weeping near a lamp post, not reassured by the coin that a passer-by thrusts into its fists. In *Postcard form Home* the restlessness of the poet is evident when he says that a poet he is wrapped in restless shadows, and hurries through the 'morgue of his words'. The poet cannot bring any change to the society and guilt pursues again:

I shut my eyes and remain in the guilt of sleep.(Waiting:32)

For a poet is not and cannot be a social reformer. But poets must be responsible. They must bring into focus the miseries, the corruption around. In this vein the poet writes:

..if the poets inner voice matters,it seems but natural that he would write about those things which appear unfair to him. It is the poet again who will talk about injustice and cruelty and greed in a society in which he lives, hoping in his heart of hearts that these would be taken care of. Certainly one cannot place the poet in the category of a social reformer; but there can be no denying the fact that he would like to see a just and fair society come in existence, to see the smile appear on the face of every destitute child on the street, on every man, woman and animal on this earth he inhabits. (Panja 2001:17)

Speaking of the poem titled *Deaths in Orissa* he says that it was a result of his periodic visits to the starvation – fields of Kalahandi, “this might not be a good poem. But it came out of my own experience. And was an honest attempt of mine.” (Mahapatra: Sunday, March 18, 2001)

For the poet it is the compassion for others that forms the most essential component of a poem and contributes to the making of a good poetry. The art of crafting or diction, although crucial to a poem, comes later:

Poetry has always been responsible to life. By this, one means that a poet is first of all responsible to his or her own conscience, otherwise he or she cannot be called poet. And

maybe, the other factors necessary to the makings of a good poet, will only come later. These may ordinarily imply the craft, or the language the poet will use with skill in his poems. But somehow, these appear as frills in a poem, that is already full with feeling, because the poem would have already done what it was meant to do ;in other words, touch another human being, before one came to notice the other qualities of the poem. (Panja 2001:7)

Like Nissim Ezekiel, Mahapatra has written many situational poems. Many of these characteristic Indian conditions work out to be ironical observations on contemporary situations. Contemporary reality not only appeals to the poet but it also helps him to explicate and understand life. Mahapatra justifies the poet's concern with the contemporary situation:

What relevance does the archaic art form have to contemporary society? If ours would have been a more tolerant better world than what is today, then poetry would have not need to justify itself beyond the sheer splendour of its existence. (Mahapatra,The Daily Star :Jan 10,2004]

ahapatra's observations on social reality make his heart swell with pity,

love and compassion that are the essential virtues of Christianity.  
His poetry echoes the wailing note of Juno in Sean O' Casey's *Juno  
and the Paycock*:

Sacred heart o' Jesus

take away our hearts o' stone

and give us hearts o' flesh!

Take away this murdherin' hate,

An' give us Thine own eternal love!

## CHAPTER V

## Jayanta Mahapatra Vis-a-vis His Contemporaries:

## A Comparative Approach to Imagery

The poem is like a lost child wailing  
 near a lamp post, uncomforted by the coin  
 thrust into his fist by a passer-by.

(Mahapatra, Bare Face :39)

Although the pre-independent Indian English poets displayed individual differences and occasional flares of original images, but, broadly speaking, the poets were inclined to imitate the style and syntax of the English Romantic poets and sometimes even their themes that made the Indian English poems appear artificial and contrived. Derozio, for instance, wrote in stylized English romantic pattern although his emotion was genuine. Many hold Kashiprashad Ghosh as not even as Indian as Derozio. ( B.K.Das 2001:21)

James H. Cousins as early as 1918 had put in effort to explain the lacuna:

...if they (Indians) are compelled to an alternative to writing in their own mother-tongue, let it be not Anglo-Indian, but Indo-Anglican, Indian in spirit, Indian in thought, Indian in emotion ,Indian in imagery and

English only in words...let their ideal be expressions in themselves ,but they must be quite sure that it is their self, not merely faint echoes and shadows, from others or from transient phases of desire...The more intensely themselves Indian writers are the more intensely Indian they will be...

(B.K. Das 2001:12)

With the attainment of independence there began an era of challenges and changes in India. With the end of colonialism, the Indian writers gained in a self-confidence that helped to broaden their vision. Pre-independence Indian English poetry had seldom focused on contemporary Indian society and its realities. The poets reproduced outdated English poetry sometimes adopting its accompanying attitudes to an Indian scene. Sarojini Naidu's *Village -Song*, for instance, seemed a reworking of Yeats' *Stolen-Child* in the Indian ambience. The forest is replaced here by 'koil -haunted' and fragranced by 'champa buds' and 'lotus lilies' instead of the 'berries', 'cherries' or the 'slumbering trout'.

New Poetry made its appearance in post-colonial India by 1950s. The influence of western literature continued but with the modernist outlook the focus had shifted from the Romantic and Puritan poets to Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas, Allen Tate, Wallace Stevens, Sylvia Plath and other poets of modernist tradition.

Despite of all the influences of British and American poets and movements, the experimental poetry in India now displayed a heightened awareness of the actual Indian experience. The faculty of assessment, both of the self and of the socio-political scenario of the country became acute. The poets now no longer wrote poems like *An Ancient Hymn* of Brajendranath Seal or *A Universal Prayer* of D.L. Roy. The modern poets looked down to reality and their poems grew out of intense moments of encounter with reality:

Your eyes are like mine.

When I last looked in them

I saw my whole country,

A defeated dream

Hiding itself in prayers

A population of corpses...

(Dom Moraes: Letter to my Mother)

Parthasarathy thinks that Indian verse came into existence only after the British withdrew from India. Our poets continued employing English but the language had by now had gained the stature of an Indian language and the experiences they spoke of were purely Indian. Summer was no longer the season of melting snow and blooming flowers. The sun is compared to 'Fire' in Kamala Das' *Summer in Calcutta*. Ezekiel 'In India' speaks of India as 'Always in sun's eye' and Jayanta Mahapatra in *Indian Summer*

speaks of 'Mornings of heated middens/Smoke under the sun'.(B.K. Das2001:12).

Thus with these post- colonial poets Indian English poetry came to be located in India. These recent poets not only focused on the contemporary Indian issues and weaved a tapestry of innovative images. We must remember that the Indian English poets in the colonial era had their set of images too, sometimes innovative, but they were mostly 'absurdly related to our lives' (Iyengar 2002:xxxvi-vii) The modern Indian English poets laced images to describe scenes with which the Indian reader could directly relate. Mahapatra's *Village* illustrates this:

Carefully I cross

the palm-trunk bridge over the irrigation-canal,

and the grave green waters flow on, limping.

Doesn't its laziness deceive your eyes?

The peepul-tree silence on the bleak burning ground?

Beside the low mud walls of a hut,

Radha, in the hurt-filled light

Of an early November sunset,

In sterile sameness

Of grass-lined call of the children. (Rain of Rites :2)

'The palm-trunk bridge over irrigation canal', 'the peepul tree silence on bleak burning ground', the low mud walls, the Indian woman named 'Radha' all set the poem in a characteristic Indian

ambience. This kind of typical Indian ambience is often brought out in a couple of lines like:

The song of a lone Ganga boatman  
 stumbles across lofty silence on the bank of the Ganges.

(A Rain of Rites:32)

Although Mahapatra, who first published in 1971, is said to know nothing of the significant shift of focus in poetry of the early fifties and sixties, however, was not less conscious of the alienation and isolation that we find in two other major Indian English poets of the time, Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan. Mahapatra is known to have evolved poetry of his own in a corner of Orissa without the significant influence of the new experimentalist poets but as far as themes and images are concerned it is interesting to note that Mahapatra demonstrates a strong resemblance with the other Indian poets of his time. This shows that the post-colonial Indian poets shared their sensibility and emotional response to the environs and incidents around.

Despite all the effort of establishing Indian English poetry as an accepted genre the Indian writers in English were haunted by a sense of alienation from the mainstream culture of India. The distress that they felt is not equivalent to the distress of Michael Madhusudan Dutt whose response was that of disillusionment after having abandoned his mother tongue for writing in English that made him eventually go back to his native dialect.

Parthasarathy's *Rough Passage* deals with this identity crisis as its main theme. Anita Seal in *Writer's workshop Miscellany* (number 19) pleads for a bolder and more imaginative use of English language for prose and poetry alike. (Iyanger 2002: 651) Kamala Das professes the language she chooses as a vehicle of her expression as 'half-English half-Indian, the language of the mind'. Parthasarathy wails of his tongue being 'in English chains'. Keki Daruwala in his essay *On Writing in English: an Indian Poet's Perspective* says:

In university one had been brought up on a diet of Shelley and Keats. When you left the campus you faced harsh reality around you -- drought, poverty and communal riots. One needed a harsh language, words with a saw-edge, words which rasped and got into you like the shards of a broken bottle. Slowly, almost unconsciously the poems developed a vocabulary and a soundscape of their own.

(The Daily Star: Aug 21, 2004)

The Indian English poets adopted a diction that was Indian and a variant to the English idiom. Ezekiel's 'Patriot' insists on reading Times of India to improve his English language:

Other day I'm reading newspaper

(Every day I'm reading Times of India

To improve my English Language)

(Nissim Ezekiel :The Patriot)

In *The Professor* we have his weird invitation at the end :

If you are coming again this side by chance,

Visit please my humble residence also.

I am living just on opposite house's backside.

Commenting on the use of Indianized English in Ezekiel's verse

Bruce King comments:

Ezekiel's' poems might be seen as a step towards using local speech in serious verse. Language reveals the speaker's mind and social context;...unintended puns are among the devices used to imply hypocrisy, pretence, limited opportunities and confusion. (King 2004:101).

Ezekiel gives us the nuances of the local speech that modifies the international language in India. Mahapatra uses Indian words in italics in poems such as *Sun Worshipper Bathing* where he says 'His jaw moves/to *mantras*' or in *Thought Of The Future* where he writes: 'making real the circle/which *karma* leaves behind'. Mahapatra does not capture the typical Indian English in the rarely used speech marks when the characters are directly quoted as speaking out the words. For instance, in *Bazaar Scene*, "Where

did you get the mango?" a mother asks her excited three-year-old boy in perfect English. Mahapatra rather excels in depicting/depicts scenes that are characteristically Indian. He is a detached observer of Indian scenes chronicling them in his poetry. The mango the mother speaks of is already rotting and the pulp stains her fingers. She knows exactly where the mango came from.

Indifferently I watched the little pig-tailed girl  
 running down the road with a solitary mango  
 she had stolen from the fruit vendor's basket  
 and given to her crippled brother slumped  
 on the roadside. (Shadow Space:23)

These post-colonial poets were not only dexterous at painting the Indian scene or analysing the Indian attitude, they were themselves imbued with the Indian way of life. Ramanujan speaks of the Indian method of cremation:

they'll cremate  
 me in Sanskrit and sandalwood,  
 have me sterilized  
 to a scatter of ash. (Collected Poems: 136)

Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion* brings out a tender family situation where the poet's mother is stung by a scorpion. This situation helps the poet to bring in at one sweep the world of magic and superstition and maternal affection that subsists at the core of the

Indian way of life and an attitude 'typical of the orient and remotely typical of Hinduism'. (Sirish Chindhade 2001: 37).

May the sins of your previous birth  
 be burned away, they said.  
 May your suffering decrease  
 The misfortunes of your next birth, they said.  
 May the sum of evil balanced in  
 This unreal world against the  
 Sum of good become diminished  
 By your pain, they said...

(Ezekiel: Night of the Scorpion)

The last stanza culminates in a sense of sacrifice and maternal affection that we relate with India:

My mother only said  
 Thank god the scorpion picked on me  
 And spared my children. (ibid)

Ezekiel says: "India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, not by withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India."  
 (Chindhade 2001: 37)

Mahapatra is steeped in Indian attitude and metaphysics and his poems bring out the typical Indian essence of living and philosophy. In *Village Evening* the wind pulls at the clothes around

god's little idol at the foot of the dying banyan. The idol of god placed under a banyan is an image that the Indian readers can readily associate with. Many words and phrases appearing in Mahapatra make his absorption of Indian philosophy of life explicit. Mahapatra speaks of 'primitive purity' of 'afterlife' in *Rain Sense*. In *Thought of the Future* he speaks of the real circle that 'karma leaves behind'. In *Behind* he speaks of bright milk of ritual that nourished the 'linga of rebirth'. In *Saving Ourselves* Mahapatra brings out the urge to be rooted although the past has lost its glory:

It's the root we need, the drums that talk,  
the musky breath of earth that must echo  
the speechless word of a chained vanity ,a hold  
to bless the past that doesn't seem real anymore.

The world that we will pass on to the next generation is no splendid earth but :

The bruise of iron cuffs on the wrists that watch  
The grimaces on India's drawn face, the pain  
Of the shadows from the fallen tree of conscience.

This poem represents how the attitude of the contemporary poets changed considerably during the post-colonial days from a sense of glorious past to a sense of utter disillusionment and their coming

in terms with the reality of the past and that of the present and accepting it with all its consequences.

Daruwalla confesses his own experience as a writer:

Looking back I find that the compulsion to mark out an identity for myself must have been very strong. Since one was writing in English it should be all the more evident' that it was an Indian writing. Just bringing an Indian sensibility to bear on a theme was not enough. The poem had to be securely fastened to an Indian setting; should seek freshly upturned earth under a monsoon downpour. Most, if not all of this, worked unconsciously within me. With hindsight, that is the only way I can explain my almost fierce commitment to place, site, landscape. (The Daily Star :Aug 21,2004)

All the post -colonial Indian English poets express a commitment to their native place. Parthasarathy in *Rough Passage* has shown a yearning for his native country. Ramanujan, an emigrant, yearns for his own country unfavourably comparing life in Chicago with that in India. Ezekiel in *After Reading a Prediction* voices an identification with his native place asserting that the place he was born in is his home. In *Hymn in Darkness* Ezekiel reinforces:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes.

I have become a part of it ...

(Ezekiel : Hymns in Darkness)

And continues later,

I have made my commitments now

This is one: to stay where I am ...

(ibid)

While Ezekiel is gripped by images of the ordinary existence in Bombay, 'dreaming of morning walks', and 'floating on a wave of sand' or turning his mind to 'a clamour close at hand' (Urban) asserting superciliously that he is a 'Bombay city poet', Jayanta Mahapatra identifies himself with Orissa. He feels that his roots are in Orissa and despite years of writing in English he considers himself an Oriya poet. (Panja 2001:26) Many of his poems capture the typical ambience of Orissa. Poems such as *Dawn at Puri*, *Taste for Tomorrow*, *The Temple Road Puri*, *Learning to Flow Free in the Chariot Festival At Puri* to name only a few, are set in Orissa. In *The Faith* 'Puri priest stands in indulgent sunshine.' *Living in Orissa* brings out the poet's sense of rootedness with all its past and current significance:

To live here ...

antlered in sickness and disease ,

in the past of uncomprehended totems

and the split blood of ancestors.

One would wear like an amulet. (Shadow Space:11)

The commitment to one's native place was a prominent feature of post-colonial Indian English poetry. However, if we conclude by Daruwalla's confession that the Indian English poets self-consciously identified themselves with their native land in order to overcome the guilt syndrome that oppressed them for preferring to write in English rather than in their own native tongues we have to turn to Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) who is considered as one of the precursors who introduced modernist poetry to Bengali Literature. The poems in his 'Ruposhi Bangla' [Beautiful Bengal] (written in 1954 and published posthumously in 1957) display a similar sense of rootedness and a similar identification with his native place although he had no culpability of disagreement between his spoken and his poetic idiom.

Banglar mukh ami dekhiachi, tai ami prithivir roop

Khujite jai na aar

[Banglar Mukh Ami Dekhiachi Das : 41]

[I have seen the visage of Bengal that is why I no

longer hunt for the beauties of the world]

In Abar Ashibo Phire [I Will Return Again] Jibanananda Das records a yearning for the return to Bengal beside the Dhansiri river again in his next birth. (Jibanananda Das:43) This quest for linguistic and regional identity had become an essential

characteristic of the poetry of modernist tradition. Ezekiel presents India through his native place Bombay.

Barbaric city sick with slums,  
 Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,  
 Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,  
 Processions led by frantic drums,  
 A million purgatorial lanes,  
 And child like masses , many- tongued,  
 Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

(Collected Poems: 119)

The modern poet is no longer secluded from the common by virtue of his art. He is part of the predicament that embraces the common men and women of his native land. Ramanujan's poetry reflects the cultural dilemma of one who has been brought up in a traditional atmosphere, infused with a traditional heritage but is to compromise with an absolutely different set of morals and principles represented by an alien culture:

Ramanujan shuttles between 'Smalltown, South India'  
 and 'the traffic light.../on 57<sup>th</sup> and Dorchester',  
 between a river in Maduri and Lake Michigan, between  
 slipper and alewife ...(A.K. Meherotra 1995:36)

If the Indian English poets felt alienated by the choice of their language that they made an effort to overcome by being Indian in

their sensibility and diction, Nissim Ezekiel and Jayanta Mahapatra, felt doubly alienated, both by their language and by their religion. Mahapatra feels removed from the ethnic group of his locale by his Christian religion. In *Brothers* he complains of the people around for being formally polite with him, the same as they had first spoken to him. The distance between him and his 'Hindoo' neighbours has never really bridged: 'the carefully kept distance between us/ starts shaking its head.'

Despite all his identification with the land and its ethnicity he still has to confront a question from the bearded saffron-robed priest:

Are you a hindoo? (A Rain of Rites: 22)

Ezekiel in *Background Casually* gives expression to similar cultural alienation that he suffers from. A Muslim sportsman had boxed his ears; the Hindoo boys tormented him in their own ways:

A mugging Jew among the wolves

They told me I had killed the Christ.

(Ezekiel: Background Casually)

The sense of alienation and loneliness beginning in school both for Mahapatra and Ezekiel clung to them throughout as they made best efforts to come to term with the country and its people. Ramanujan too for all his Indian tradition distances himself from some of its uncongenial ways by:

spelling Hindu with double o' s. ... in *The Hindoo: The Only Risk* ...Ramanujan puts it more mildly ,which makes it worse:

At the Bottom of all this bottomless  
enterprise to keep simple the heart's given beat,  
the only risk is heartlessness.

(Mehrotra 1995: 36).

“The Hindu poems seem to expose weakness of a time honoured way of life than glorify it”, says Sirish Chindhade.(74)

His cross-cultural conflicts sometimes result in symptoms of distress at solitariness. “But I, a community of one...” (Collected Poems: 172)

Loneliness consequently emerges as one of the major images with these poets. Mahapatra's first poem of his first volume is *Loneliness*. Loneliness haunts the poet and also intervenes between his intimate relationship:

We take precautions not to grow apart. Yet we are alone.

(A Father's Hours:22)

That the image of loneliness haunts Mahapatra's poetic psyche is evident by its persistent reiteration in the separate volumes of poetry.

Across the void, all day, it is night inside;

In loneliness alone, god takes a different way home.

(Bare Face:17)

Loneliness runs like a thread through his volume of poems till his last published volume *Random Descent*:

Desire and earth move in and out

Of me climbing the old loneliness. (Random Descent: 53)

Mahapatra's is not a lone voice singing of solitude. The sense of loneliness of the modern man, now no more confined within narrow domestic or geographic boundaries, is expressed eloquently in the poem of Leslie de Noronha. In the poem titled *Loneliness* the poet sees a man everywhere, at bullfight, in Cornish beaches, in London fog, in Amsterdam, in Roman streets in Tivoli garden, in Paris Nightclub and finally in a hotel room there is this confrontation:

Can't you guess?

I am loneliness. (Leslie de Noronha: Loneliness)

Despite all the loneliness and alienation the poets remain rooted to their native land with its cultural and social milieu.

Ramanujan expresses the social and ethnic assimilation into his poetic persona in the lines like: 'I must seek and will find / My particular hell only in the Hindu-mind' (Ramanujan: Conventions of Despair). Ramanujan looks at India through his inner vision.

To Ramanujan, Mahapatra and Ezekiel India is their native land with all their childhood memories, its dismal pictures, the typical superstitions, customs and traditions. Mahapatra gives his poetry a strong local colour:

the sacred plant in a Hindoo home,  
 cow and scabbed stone.(Rain of Rites:40)

The picture of a hot and poor India populated by beggars, performing monkeys and crowd surface in the poems of Ezekiel. Ramanujan endeavours to give Indian poetry a unique tradition by breaking away from the blind observance of the English tradition and incorporating the influence of classical Tamil poetic tradition. The genuineness of his images gives his poetry an honest and ingenuous approach that is significantly Indian. Scenes and images peculiar to Indian life abound in his poems:

his[shepherd's]father now blind  
 and sittiing in the sun  
 outside his hut smoking  
 bidis all day (Collected Poems:224)

This is India as the poet captures it. The shepherd's father is a part of the timelessness that characterize Indian scenes like Mahapatra's man in *Tattooed Taste* 'sitting still, thinking of destiny.' Ezekiel captures the timelessness with 'Nothing changes here: not even/ the cliché that nothing changes here.' (Chinhade 1996:45)

Modernist poetry renounced the aesthetic claims that Romantic poetry had professed. It no longer pursued beauty as the highest virtue. With the disavowal of the sublime there was a general turning away from the pastoral settings. Poetry now focused on

urban, mechanical, and industrial settings. In Baudlaire we encounter the modern city and all the obsessions of modern life with its despair, excess, boredom and a sense of meaninglessness. In Eliot, London is the city under brown fog. Both Baudlaire and Eliot focussed on the bleak aspect of the city.

This preoccupation with the dismal aspect of modern city was, however, not limited to these two representative poets but became an important aspect of modern poetry in general. Osbert Sitwell in his *Blind Peddlers* shows his disillusionment with the modern world:

The young men cripples ,old and sad,  
 With faces burnt and torn away;  
 Or those who growing rich and old,  
 Have batted on the slaughter,  
 Whose faces gauged with blood and gold ,  
 Are creased in purple laughter!

(Sitwell:The Blind Peddler)

This was a characteristic that the modern Indian English poetry came to share with the west. Mahapatra, Ezekiel and Ramanujan all show their concern with this bleak aspect of city life and a general concern for downtrodden. There is a shift of focus to the city and its dwellers who struggle under the mounting pressure of modern life. Ezekiel has shown that:

city and its dwellers who struggle under the mounting pressure of modern life. Ezekiel has shown that:

Indian poetry could express the experiences of the educated and the urbanized and need not be obsessed with mythology, peasants and nationalist slogans. With him a post colonial poetry started which reflects the life and identities that an increasing number of educated Indian knew or would seek. (King 2004: 92)

Ezekiel's projection of Bombay as the fallen city and its spiritual bankruptcy is analogous to Eliot's images of London. 'London's a slick place, London's a swell place ...' (Fragment of a Prologue:120)

Ezekiel's poem *In India* brings out similar dismal images:

Here among the beggars ,  
 Hawkers, pavement sleepers,  
 Hutment dwellers, slums,  
 Dead souls of men and gods,  
 Burnt out mothers, frightened  
 Virgins, wasted child  
 And tortured animal,  
 All in noisy silence  
 Suffering the place and time.

(Ezekiel: In India)

Other modern poets in Indian English tradition too drew on images of poverty, beggarmom, to present similar dismal pictures.

Ramanujan in *Element of Composition* presents analogous depiction of beggars. Images of poverty, lepers and immorality give us a picture that we recognize as dismal but factual:

the lepers of Maduri,  
 male, female, married,  
 with children,  
 lion faces, crabs for claws,  
 clotted on their shadows ... (Collected poems: 122)

Mahapatra too is a poet of the city:

This is the town where I was born; here with others,  
 Year after year I celebrate the joyous festivals,  
 In the whine of the cripples and the mangled leper...

(Waiting:27)

The celebrations and the whine of the cripples and beggars co-exist with the poet in the city where Mahapatra was born and still lives. Cripples and beggars and prostitutes, as we have seen, emerge as major images with Mahapatra as inseparable parts of the austere reality around. He speaks of beggars, of 'growing seething leper colonies' (Bare Face: 79), of 'lepers dragging legs' (A Rain of Rites:9), of young prostitutes (A Father's Hours:12) of destitutes (20). Bengali modernist poet Jibanananda Das shows a similar awareness of the downtrodden. He speaks of lepers lapping up

water from hydrant in *Ratri* or in *Laghu Muhurto* concerns himself with the three old beggars sitting with teacups in a circle. The modernist poets exploit the Indian milieu and evoke a typical Indian response but their representation is not confined to physical illustration only. They often probe into typical Indian characters understanding them and treating them with compassion or sarcasm. Ezekiel portrays the superstitious India with all its 'powder, mixture, herb, and hybrid', and the fatalistic India in the views of birth and rebirth (*Night of the Scorpion*). In poems such as *Night of the Scorpion*, *The Patriot*, *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.* and *The Professor* Ezekiel makes fun of the Indianness, its superstitions and gaucheness with no umbrage, so that they become genuine portrayals of Indian culture. His poems are amusing by their use of the present continuous tense and word-to-word translations of Hindi phrases attempting a truthful presentation of the English language as spoken by many English educated in India. Accompanying the portrayal of Indian ethos Ezekiel reveals a deep understanding and compassion in the characters like that of the Railway clerk. Mahapatra's understanding of characters also goes beyond surface representations like in the depiction of the fat storekeeper in *Afternoons* or the subtle irony in the portrayal of the character of Ramlal who after years on misdeeds will gift slabs of white marbles to Lord Jagganath as a reprisal of his sins. (Waiting:27)

Ramanujan, Ezekiel and Mahapatra often attend to the rural images although the main thrust of their poetry following the modernist tradition is urban. Ramanujan juxtaposes the rural Indian images against that of urban America. He sometimes attends to the simple pastoral settings like that of the image of the shepherd driving home a flock of sheep:

turning around I see a flock of sheep

in a tree -filtered slant of sunlight

gliding in the dust

coming towards me, black, white,

walking clouds of wool

with downcast faces

behind them a man in a dirty

red turban and a brown

rough blanket

wielding a stick ...

(Collected poems: 224)

Mahapatra like Ramanujan occasionally shifts his focus to the countryside and attends to rural images. In *May* we come across the image of the farmer but not in all his virtues :

in the rice field a farmer still

lashes out on his bullocks with crude demand.

Mahapatra presents the harsh reality without holding back anything and without faltering. If he shares with Ramanujan and

Ezekiel the common awareness and draws images from the bleak aspect of the modern city he shares their sensibility to the reality around. Mahapatra is not contented with naive depiction of the Indian reality. His authentic depictions sometimes give vent to social criticism. When his backdrop is some village of India he seldom concerns himself with its pastoral elegance but probes into the harsh reality of existence:

Everywhere one looks  
 one is stirred by skies  
 that protect a bourgeois order,  
 ...  
 or sees the child –skeleton from Kalahandi  
 whose neck cannot support  
 the weight of its head.  
 Or death by bullets  
 that any government calls a *natural* death.

(Shadow Space :72)

Even with Ezekiel authentic depiction turns into social criticism. In *The Truth About Floods* the depiction of flood, the distress of the villagers, the mercenary and hardened apathy of the government officials, the unskilled attention of the students at relief work and the poverty stricken villages give vent to social criticism:

I arrived at Arda  
 But the village wouldn't talk to me

Till I told them I wasn't a government official.

(Collected Poems: 187)

The students who undertake relief operation are in a merry holidaying mood. Finally the truth comes out that they want their photographs to appear in the newspapers. The government officials are interested in filling their own wallets with the public money. The villages have to endure everything until they are washed for – ever by another flood.

India is a land of superstitions, of corruption, where apathy of the rich and the sufferings of the poor exist side by side. For all its appalling realities India is the land that fosters the childhood memories of the poets. For Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel and Mahapatra this native land is the land of their forefathers and it associates their boyhood days.

Mahapatra, Ezekiel and Ramanujan, all generate images from the rich fund of memories. Yeats describes memory as a 'dwelling – house of symbols, of images that are living souls' (B.M.Singh 1992:14). The awareness of the past in a present moment is transmitted through strong images both by Ramanujan and Mahapatra. Residing in a different country far from his native land Ramanujan knows that 'the country cannot be reached by/ jet Nor by boat on jungle river' (Chicago Zen). However, it can be reached by walking down the memory lane. Perception in Ramanujan is often obscured by the intrusions of memory:

... something opened  
 in the past and I heard something shut  
 in the future, quietly... (Collected Poems:16)

Ramanujan articulates a sense of being ensnared in the past, bound deterministically by the shaping influence of family and parents:

...I pass from ghost to real  
 and back again in the albums  
 of family rumours. (Collected poems:65)

For Ramanujan the world left behind haunts his memory with guilt and emptiness. He puts forward a rhetorical question in *The Interior Landscape* (56): Do you think, he asks, that home will be sweet for the ones who are left behind by emigration? The world he has migrated to emerges consequential only when it is related to the native world he has migrated from. It forms a nostalgic double vision where the 'naked Chicago bulb' becomes 'a cousin of the Vedic sun'. (69). For Ramanujan the past offers a security of the maternal world, 'as a mother would hold a child in her womb'. (*Hymns* :67)Dr. B. K.Das explains that:

Ramanujan is basically a poet of memories. Of all the memories, the ones that are anchored to his familial,

personal past make his poetry very redolent with the characteristic native element or the Indian experience.

(Das 2003: 63).

Mahapatra speaks of a childhood that never leaves him (A Rain of Rites 22). Memories come to him 'like the wind' (The False Start:15). Memory is something precious, extremely personal and is to be protected:

The tatters of leaves on the roadside trees

Remind me of my last innocence.

Now with what longings

Shall I protect my memory? (A Whiteness Of Bone: 43)

Mahapatra speaks of his 'grandmother's hair', of his grandfather anchored with the stars in the darkness (A Rain of Rites:9). He remembers how as a boy he had learnt to come in by the back door.(47)He takes the road to memory to the hut of his boyhood and confronts his 'grandfather's ghost standing in the rain'. In the poem *Grandfather* the poet records his grandfather's suffering and his conversion into Christianity. (Life Signs:19).Memory weighs heavy on him with all that he has suffered leaving him with a feeling of loneliness never to be overcome.

Ezekiel too draws heavily on autobiographical images : ' I went to Roman catholic school,/ A mugging Jew ...(Collected

Poems:179). Similar lines occur in Mahapatra : 'I studied in the Stewart European, with the ecclesiastics.' (Waiting: 17). Although Ramanujan, Ezekiel and Mahapatra all draw images from past experiences Bruce King's analysis of Ramanujan's private images brings out the individual differences between the contemporary poets' approach to similar image patterns:

The use of private experience, and especially the inner world of memories and the continuities and discontinuities with the past, can be seen as the basis of many of Ramanujan's poems. They are not attempts to intellectualize and make moral choices like Ezekiel's' early work, nor do they have Daruwalla's sense of violent world in which fulfillment is doomed to tragic failures, nor are they Mahapatra's metaphysical meditations on the relationship between creative impulse and the world outside the perceiving self. They are memories of a past which shifts while the self and others change. (King 2004: 215)

In France, as elsewhere, in the post-war years, the dominant philosophy was that of existentialism. Existentialism was a movement of the 1940's and 1950's, literary and artistic as well as philosophical, with Sartre as probably its most famous representative. Sartre distinguished the divine viewpoint of the

world with the much obvious human viewpoint with its assertion that opposed the traditional metaphysics of creation by its 'existence preceded the essence'.

For Existentialists like Sartre and Camus the absence of God has a much larger significance than the metaphysics of creation: for without God there is no purpose, no value, and no meaning in the world. The severe hopelessness of the problem was portrayed in the essay titled *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) by Albert Camus where Sisyphus' punishment becomes a punishment by its endless exercise in futility.

The post- independence poets were disillusioned enough about everything and turned away from romance to satire, from idealism to cynicism. The life they portrayed is the life as it is rather than one coloured by the idealist hue of what it should have been. Modernism infused in them a disjunction of essence and existence. Existentialism placed man in a situation from which there is 'No Exit'. For Mahapatra , 'Every man, every beast/trapped ,deaf in his own sleep...' (A Rain Of Rites:13 ). We have seen how 'cage' emerges as a major image with Mahapatra. This feeling of being trapped is persistent not only with the poet himself but he imparts this predicament to his surroundings:

Words? How strange it seems today  
to have loved a rag doll sometime.  
trapped inside, dreams

build still ,tense into the light.

Earth passes by. (A Whiteness of Bone: 44)

The stars are 'slavish' they appear 'Always to the right'.

Nissim Ezekiel's *Enterprise* turns on a similar philosophy. The pilgrim, symbolic of the journey of life, ends with a sense of futility.

The pilgrims now don't even know the purpose that has taken them there. The journey has in no way been rewarding. They do not in the slightest bit feel accomplished. Their conclusion of home as a place of grace though not compellingly uttered, nonetheless it saves the poem from relapsing into Absurdism:

We hardly knew why we were there,

The trip has darkened every face,

Our deeds were neither great nor rare.

Home is where we have to gather grace.

Stanley F.Rajiva's *Poem for a Nuclear Age* moans the despair of our time when man turns from god and lives on hate. *Poem for a Birthday* is a candid confession of the existential man:

I must explore the landscape

Of those shores, and in the arms of circe

Be a beast in my desire. Like Judas I must

Sell the Christ within me, like Peter

Deny him and barter as Faustus did ... (Iyengar 2002: 665)

The modern Indian poetic voice cries out the hopelessness of the modern mind: 'Oh God, Oh God, Oh misbegotten one!' and further: 'You fool there is no promised land ...' (Leslie de Noronha: Poems)

India is a land of religion. Religious faith here divides men as it binds them. The poets take up religion as one of the characteristic themes and through the images employed convey the dreary truth behind the sacred impressions. Bruce King draws a parallel between Ramanujan's *Prayers to Lord Murugan* with Ezekiel's *Latter Day Psalms* and *Hymns in Darkness*. They poems are:

modern, skeptical secular equivalents of traditional Indian religious literature. Lord Murugan, the ancient Dravidian god who was later usurped by Hindu mythology, is an attractive god from whom the poet asks deliverance from both the weight of history and the abstractions of the modern world. (King 2004: 218)

Nissim Ezekiel questions the traditional religious faith, presenting the changing pattern of postcolonial life:

To tempt God and seek to  
Prove him is sheer folly.  
If that's what our fathers  
Did, I'm sorry for them.

( Collected Poems:258)

He has his speculations:

Your truth

Is too momentous for man

And not always useful

I have stripped off a hundred veils

....

Why are you so elusive? (Collected poems:156)

While Ramanujan speaks of Murugan, for Mahapatra it is Jagganath with charred coconuts of festivals and the Giant chariot, or Shiva the god representing the moment of generation. Mahapatra too portrays god as 'elusive'. Regardless of the believer's fasting and sufferings god offers no relief. Ramanujan voices the wish for freedom from the anxieties that turn men and women to prayers: 'Lord of answers, /cure us at once / of prayers.' (Ramanujan: Prayers to Lord Murugan)

Arun Kolatkar records his impressions of *Jejuri*, the pilgrim center, in a poetic sequence by the same name. The temples he depicts are in ruins, they are ill-lighted and there is a dearth of water supply. There are beggars and gutters and immorality. In that holy place 'every other stone is god or his cousin'. The temple dancer 'owes her prosperity to another skill. /A skill the priest's son would rather not talk about.' (*Between Jejuri and the Railway Station*)

Mahapatra's *Abandoned Temple* is a contemptuous record of a temple in ruins where 'mosquitoes slap shiva linga in ignorant stillness' (Bare Face:26) In *Freedom* 'god hides in the dark like an

alien'. Speaking of mantras the sun worshipper utters in *Sun Worship Bathing* Mahapatra says that they are 'words of ridiculous centuries',

each syllable ,heavy ,blind,  
 rolling ponderously across the water  
 like blocks of fog. (Waiting: 36)

The world is unjust. There is violence and unnatural death. Frail girl dies of tuberculosis, a seventy-five year old judge commits suicide (Waiting: 61), but men continue with 'cool beliefs of sandalwood' (16) and sacred thread (16) and the crowds still throng the temple door (6).

Ezekiel candidly voices his view on Hinduism:

I always veered the hindu view of life which I consider  
 mystically, religiously and metaphorically right though  
 I do not accept its ethics and social code. ( Chinhade  
 2001:52)

Ezekiel who vacillates between despair, doubt, bantering, acceptance and understanding rejoins in anger :

I am absorbed in news  
 of brutal stories brought  
 to my breakfast -table  
 from every corner  
 of the godless world. (Ezekiel:Servant)

What exists is and can be only the real and the real can now no longer be equated with beauty. Why is it necessary to impart a religious aura to everything around? Things ought to be valued for what they are even without their being mystical. Kolatkar in *Chaitanya* makes such an attempt:

come off it  
 said chaitanya to a stone  
 in stone language  
 wipe the red paint off your face  
 i don't think the colour suits your face  
 i mean what's wrong  
 with being just a plain stone  
 i'll still bring you flowers

(Kolatkar:Chaitanya)

Mahapatra reiterates Kolatkar:

Everything is called sacred  
 in my land. Even poems. And children  
 who are sold and brought everyday  
 in the streets of Bombay and Calcutta.(Shadow Space: 60)

Mahapatra too brings out the error of the average populace of viewing everything with a sensation of mysticism. Here everything is explained with metaphysics. Like the poet's father, who in an attempt to explain the world, ended up 'talking about the sublime'

(Shadow Space:35). He was mistaken and the error is exposed in his very life that for him has been one of 'betrayal'

through the faces he encountered

in cruel religious posters

and the nakedness of love. (Shadow Space:60)

Related to this disillusionment with god is the disenchantment with love. The poets unabashedly portray loveless union both in their personal lives as well as in the lives of others in the modern world.

The recurring note in Ezekiel's poems is the harm that the urban civilization has inflicted on modern man, dehumanised him and subjected his viewpoints to devaluation. Consequently, he represents women as a natural seductress and a man as a naturally tainted creature:

On dot she came and shook her breasts

All over us and dropped

The thin transparent skirt she wore.

Was not this for which we came? (Collected Poems: 112)

Ezekiel portrays the image of woman as an indispensable component of this world and her existential utility as the desired object. There is no hesitation in expressing his opinion and we have candid confessions like:

That woman, trees, tables, waves, and birds,

Buildings, stones, steam rollers,

Cats and clocks

Are here to be enjoyed. (Collected Poems:96).

Ezekiel is unabashed about physical intimacy despite the social and the moral codes of the country. A woman lies to be with the poet as the poet lies to himself. Physical love here is a means of quest for 'romantic restfulness'. They finally go back to their 'separate bonds' (Collected Poems: 99). There is nothing to shy away from physical communion for it forms the integral part of basic instincts of life: 'The facts –the mating and the nest/Primeval root of all the rest.' (Collected Poems:104).He does not hide the fact that the naked Cuban dancer is the primary reason for his presence 'At the Hotel.' He openly discusses the highs and lows of marriage. Physical love sometimes becomes a means of spiritual quest for the liberation that we equate with god's name:

After a night of love I dreamt of love  
 Unconfined to threshing thighs and breasts  
 That bear the weight of me with spirit.  
 Light and free I wanted to be bound  
 Within a freedom fresh as God's name  
 Through all the centuries of Godlessness.

(Two Nights of Love)

Thus, he rebels in his own way, against the imposed social and moral code of the country.

Parthasarathy, following the modernist tradition, celebrates his infatuation with the English whore in passionately sensuous and blatant images:

I am all fingers when it comes  
to touching them. Their fullness  
keeps the eyes peeled  
with excitement. A nipple hardens  
on the tongue. Here,  
pleasure is elliptical, wholesome. (Poems :33 )

But in the loveless world disenchantment and suffocation soon sets in and the poet finds coiled around him not the well-known arms but those of an octopus. (41) Parthasarathy's disenchantment is a part of the difficulty of being in exile but the same disenchantment exists in his native land where the present scenario has changed considerably from the past dreams of love. Mahapatra in *Of Independence Day* voices this post-war disillusionment:

We have lost the pain of making love,  
the mist and the darkness and the dance  
that fumbled in its air, and  
in the eyes of our women the dark prayers  
that fluttered like temple banners in the sun.

(A Whiteness Of Bone:54)

Mahapatra speaks of physical love in poems like *When You Need To Play-Act*, *Women in Love*. *Sunburst* celebrates the Hindu erotic energy. Like the other poets, Mahapatra speaks unabashedly of his physical contacts, of 'the old familiar whore' trailing the poet with tired breasts, of 'kamala's brazen breasts' of a girl 'filling a tight dress' whose lax breasts the poet eventually cups. (Close the Sky, Ten by Ten:43). In Ezekiel we come across similar images of 'singing breasts', 'swinging breasts' and 'thresing thighs' (Two Nights of Love) In the poem *Women in Love* Mahapatra hears the footsteps of the women he had loved and of the women whom he could not even tell himself that he loved. (The False Start:28) and he refuses to heed the voice that hides 'the essence of his guilt'. This guilt stems from the social and moral codes of his society. The Indian code is expressed at the end of *The Indian Way* when he says

You know

I will not touch you

like that

until our wedding night.

(Waiting :44)

Thus, the sexual touch is sanctified by marriage. But even marriage cannot promise love. The bride in *Bride* confronts such disillusionment with her predicament being that of 'common harlot's fare' (*Svayamvara and Other Poems*:17).

While Mahapatra confesses his dreams of Kamala's breasts and Ezekiel is corrupted 'by things imagined' (Collected Poems:3), they differ in their treatment of women. To Ezekiel the women are objects of enjoyment for the dehumanized representative man of modern day and for Mahapatra the sufferings of women eclipse men's lust. The women in Mahapatra's world unlike that of Ezekiel's are the suffering and sacrificing lot catering to men's carnal needs. They suffer quietly harnessing their passion. Their unresisting surrender to men's needs and immobility are brought out in the image of lake in *A Country Festival*, where women are said to usually lie like 'unexpected lakes/deep within the wooded hills' (Waiting: 5).

Ramanujan in *Another View of Grace* deals with the conflict that the modern Indian man faces with his traditional upbringing of sin and penance on one hand and desire of flesh on another. He candidly confesses in the very opening, 'I burned and burned'. Then comes the conflict with 'It is too late for sin, even for treason' but finally his desire wins:

Commandments crumbled  
 in my father's past. Her tumbled hair suddenly known  
 as silk in my angry hand, I shook a little  
 and took her behind the laws of my land.

(Ramanujan :Another View of Grace)

This is loveless union that the poet does not hesitate to portray. Kamala Das has her sensibility obsessively preoccupied with love and lust. Her quest for love ends in altercation with lust.:

His limbs like pale and  
Carnivorous plants reaching out for me ...  
(Das: In Love)

While Kamala Das' is a strong feminine voice portraying the sufferings of women in a patriarchal society, Mahapatra and Ramanujan projects images of women as suffering and labouring for survival. He brings out the pitiable condition of lower class working women in poems such as *Poona Train Window*:

Three women with baskets  
on their heads, climbing  
slowly against the slope  
of a hill, one of them  
lop-sided ,balancing  
between the slope and  
the basket on the head  
a late pregnancy. (Collected Poems: 80-81)

In Mahapatra we find similar images of pregnant women under hard labour. Images of women as victims of cruel forces feature most prominently in Mahapatra and in Ramanujan. The humanist attitude of Ramanujan is expressed in *Again One day, Walking By the River* and in Mahapatra in poems such as *A Missing Person*,

*Summer, Dawn*. The image of women as wife is brought out in poems such as *Indian Summer* and *Idyll*. In *Ganga* and in *Night of the Scorpion* Ezekiel represents the facet of women that is not defiled by sex.

Another significant facet of the image of woman that the modern poets attend to is the image of the widow. Through the images of widows Mahapatra brings out the agony and resignation of women to a social code that is hostile to them making it obligatory for them to observe all religious fastings and observations:

white -clad widowed women  
 past the centres of their lines  
 are waiting to enter the Great Temple.

(A Rain of Rites:28)

The image of widow for Ramanujan brings out his memories along with the Indian tradition of grandmothers telling tales of demons and ogres to their grandchildren:

grandmother wearing white  
 day and night in a village  
 mother ,grandmother  
 the fat cook  
 in widow's white  
 who fed me  
 rice and ogres.

( Collected Poems:260)

Like the images of alienation and loneliness, images of the browbeaten, of women and widows, the images of birds and animals, especially the crow is another point where the poets converge. Ezekiel uses the image of a crow to set his poem in the Indian ambience bringing out the typical Indian superstition.

three times the crow has cawed

at the window...

filling my room with voice and presence.

Three times I got the message,

To cope with the visitor.

(Collected Poems:137)

Ezekiel's concern with animal life is seen in *Sparrows*. Unlike Ted Hughes his animals are passive and docile. Like Mahapatra, Ramanujan sometimes employs animal imagery to condemn man's moral or ethical behaviour. In his *Lac into Seal* the crow occurs as an image of evil and crudity and is compared to the politicians who enjoy all civil liberties while the poor populace are like the cows devoured by the crows. In the poem there is the image of the crow 'stooping /its beak on the back of a cow.' Ramanujan identifies birds and animals with men. The salamanders who 'live in the wet' and 'crawl in the slush' are like men who wait 'no less than the three toed for a turn/of the body's season to copulate.' (Collected Poems:202 -3) The exemplary notion of mother as an emblem of

tolerance is envisaged in his image of bird. Her saree is compared to the feathers hanging loose. (61)

In Ezekiel's *Death of a Hen* the event of a hen being run over by a passing car is celebrated by the uncouth crows 'Chance had offered them an early gift.' (Collected Poems: 288). Ezekiel with wonderful use of bird imagery brings out his own alliance with facets of the winged world.

I am like a pelican of the wild-  
erness, like an owl of the de-  
sert, like a sparrow alone  
upon the top of the house.

(Collected Poems:259)

Mahapatra's image of the crow is uncouth, scattering debris, covering the town in a haze of calls, associated with the crafty priests. (A Father's Hours: 19) The pigeons are apathetic symbols of innocence. Mahapatra sometimes uses the animal imagery as an accepted element of the natural scene, for most part they are employed to carry his theme forward.

Like the animal world another common source of imagery is the natural world. The poets draw their images from the natural elements like the river, stone and tree. The early poets had their vista of simple unchanging nature against which man was placed. In modernist poems nature seldom associates innocence and durability.

In *West-Running Brook* Frost's brook symbolizes human existence and human experience amidst the world of flux.

It flows beside us in this water brook,  
 But it flows over us. It flows between us  
 To separate us for a panic moment.  
 It flows between us, over us, and with us.

The myths and legends like that of Bhagirath who conduited Ganga to the earth survive in Indian culture nurturing the importance of the rivers as the very hub of civilization. Ramanujan and Parthasarathy give us images of river as part of the landscape they portray. In the portrayal of rivers the poets display similar presentation of unfaltering stark reality. Parthasarathy river Vaikali is no better than 'a sewer'. In the river the men clean their dirt and wash their backs, the boys play with paper boats and the buffaloes have turned it into a pond. (Collected Poems of Parthasarathy:56) Ezekiel in his *Prophet* compares the earth with the river. With Mahapatra river congeals tradition and a dead river is a dead tradition, as in *Dead River*. River is also an image for renewal and revival. River is sometimes analogous to life that runs into the sea of death. (Life Signs: 38) River, like life, is in a constant flux. Contrary to this flux stands the stone that has been the witness to the ages chronicling history and tradition.

The icons of gods that are worshipped are stones; the stony phallic symbols worshipped represent Lord Shiva. In Ezekiel, stone imagery works out similar implications:

I have learnt to reveal in the stone,  
 Hard, cold, heavy, shapeless, solid stone,  
 To turn away from all that seems to flow  
 Elusively time, water, blood, around the bone.  
(Collected Poems: 40)

In these lines stone stands as something enduring, unyielding to the flux around.

The tree in Mahapatra is a part of the natural scene and is seen to react to human predicament. When the world is full of violence and unrest we hear of 'the leaves of the dark tree of India' (Dispossessed Nests:48). In *Deaths in Orissa* 'faces of tree bark and grief /hang against god's hand...' (A Whiteness Of Bone:31). In the post-war world of changes the poet keeps thinking of 'the wind/ in the trees'. (A Father's Hours:11)

For Ramanujan the tree implies an ever-growing family. Ramanujan's use of the image in different contexts sometimes endows it with multiple connotations. The image of a fig tree in *Looking for a Cousin on a Swing* records the development and transformation that takes the poet's cousin from childhood to adulthood. His tree shares the desperation with men proving that men are not alone with their quandary. In *Anxiety* tree symbolizes

ignorance and in *Christmas* it stands for the paradox of birth and death. Patel's *On Killing a Tree* implies the fact that all forms of life are essentially similar in their desire to live, expand and reproduce and equally share the suffering, pain and aging.

The house is an important image for Mahapatra. It symbolizes the body as the house of the spirit, and the home as the place where he actually belongs. He can reiterate with Eliot, 'Home is where one starts from'(Four Quartets). In *The House* Mahapatra declares 'here is your real life'. A house preserves the memories of the childhood. Most pronounced connotation of the house is the constraint that it enforces on the self. Like Mahapatra, the house image occupies an important place for Ramanujan. King explains that the house for Ramanujan is,

representative of the Indian tradition in its accommodation to disparate myths, ideas, philosophies, gods, its tolerance of eccentricities and failures, its assimilation of the new without producing the transformation which conflict brings to the European mind, is both unchanging and continually changing as the foreign is domesticated. (King 2004:217)

*Small-scale Reflections on a Great House* represents a mind in which new experiences and information that the mind gathers with

passing time becomes absorbed in the past and the reading of the past changes.

Sometimes I think that nothing  
 that ever comes into this house  
 goes out. Things come in everyday  
 to lose themselves among other things  
 lost long ago among  
 other things lost long ago

...

(Ramanujan: Small-scale Reflections on a Great House)

Shirish Chinhade is of the opinion that a with a wider reading it is possible to see the Great House as a national cultural receptacle.(66)

Mahapatra and Ramanujan conjoin again in their concern over poetry writing. Ramanujan believes that a poem cannot be composed in haste like oral songs used to be, but need subtle care and artistry 'like chariot wheel/ made thoughtfully/ over a month/ by a carpenter' (Poems of Love and War: 273). *The Striders* signifies the life and work of the poetic self puzzled by diverse estrangements. Mahapatra's concern for composing poetry is seen early in *The Performance, If I am Wrong, Instant*. In the later stage of his poetic career we have seen this concern embrace the value of poetry.

Like Ramanujan and Ezekiel Mahapatra too uses traditional symbols like day and night associating life and death, or turns to

the image of the body as the garment as in *Waiting*. (Ezekiel's 'I was old as a garment', 259).

Thus we find that since these poets draw their images from the ordinary life and portray the unflinching reality around, their images often correspond with one another, but they are most like each other when they present Indian sensibility either through the identification with their native lands, or through the images of Indian social reality .

While dealing with Mahapatra's images and attempting a comparative reading with the other contemporary poets, we find that in Mahapatra there is an emphasis on indeterminacy of meaning.

all right words of mine drift

Nearing meaning but never finding it.

(The Time Afterwards.)

Among the other syndromes, the post-war era, has also led to disjunction of thought, as Eliot makes explicit in *The Wasteland*:

'...I can connect

Nothing with nothing...'

(Selected Poems:62)

In *The Hollow Mouth* Mahapatra speaks of a morning when 'the poet doesn't know /what his words mean.' (A Whiteness of Bone: 59) In an existential universe the disjunction of thought and expression leads to an indeterminacy of meaning.

This page, what can it be  
 but un-understanding, a mere object  
 Or perhaps nothing.

(A Whiteness Of Bone:44)

Mahapatra is however not the only poet to express the crisis in communication. Ramanujan expresses this widespread episode of misinterpretation in *One, Two, Maybe Three Arguments Against Suicide*:

And there's always the danger  
 you may be understood ,as never  
 before, misconstrued by some  
 casual stranger.

(Chinhade2001:71)

Bruce King gives us a catalogue of the major themes that modern Indian English poetry includes, that of loneliness, the impossibility of expressing the meaningful, the difficulty of people understanding each other, moments of sexual desire, the pregnancy of silence, the mind's imaginings the contrast between private and public world , Indian myth, ritual, dreams and identity.

Among the other themes that King aptly mentions, the 'impossibility of expressing the meaningful', and the 'difficulty of people understanding each other' are much pronounced in

Mahapatra. He brings out this lack of communication infecting today's world through the images of words and silence.

Ezekiel's poetry expresses the modern urban mind attempting to integrate diverse values and experiences. He plays on clichés, idioms and sayings while presenting the Indianized English. His early and continuing themes include urban life, sex, marriage and alienation. While he draws images from his childhood memories, the poet in whom these memories find special treatment is Ramanujan. Ramanujan's memories are specifically located in the society of the Tamil Brahmins. Evading generalizations his poems about India are set in particular situations and the poet reconstructs the south Indian culture with the spirit of Tamil and Kannada verse.

Mahapatra is set off as writing differently. King points out that his poems consider the

awareness of unwilled feelings arising during moments of silence , perceptions of feelings which are seldom articulated and which are normally suppressed for the sake of daily survival. (King 2004:89)

Mahapatra's poetry is a record of an ever surfacing consciousness with all its requirements, culpability, dissatisfaction and contradictions:

a feeling for the soul's substance  
as for the opal neck  
spiraling the inside of a shell.

(Waiting :44)

## Conclusion

The preceding chapters deal with the tapestry of images in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry and also attempt to find the images where he converges with the other poets of his time. Mahapatra himself acknowledges the vital role of imagery in his poetry. His images are thought provoking. The unconventional images that he uses make his poetry appear complex and obscure. Explaining the difficulty that the readers of Mahapatra face B.K.Das says:

one has to take both 'signification' (meaning of words according to linguistic code) and 'value' (meaning of words in their context), as Widdowson would say, into consideration to dive deep into inner resources of his poetry. (Das 2001:37)

The tone of his poetry is almost colloquial and conversational. But the words he chooses are often difficult. They are seldom the words consecrated to poetry. For instance, speaking of the ancient manuscripts on the palm leaves and their lost significance today Mahapatra says,

They have become fragments of consolation,  
The undigested calcium of the ages.

(Bare Face :37)

His words and their associations activate our cerebral faculty rather than our emotions. In this respect he is closer to the metaphysical poets. The use of unusual epithets helps him attain unconventional imagery that makes his style appear intricate. He speaks of 'heart's sack', 'bewildered wheat fields', 'impatient darkness', 'sakuni- skies'.

As far as his themes and imagery are concerned he is a modernist. Mahapatra is acutely conscious of his racial identity, the historical and mythical past of Orissa. There is identification with his native locale, a sense of rootedness that we find in the post-colonial poetry, an undaunted representation of the truth cured of idealism and romanticism and a sharp social concern. Mahapatra's symbols turn around the blind faith of the ordinary people of Orissa, the visual images of the Hindu priests, temples and elusive gods and the auditory images of the temple bells. The poems attempt to bring out the meaninglessness of the religious observances of which he himself remains a detached observer.

Mahapatra draws his images from nature like sky, wind, water, trees and stone. Some of these like wind and water portray the world of flux while the other elements like the sky or stone imply rootedness. The images of social concerns include hunger, poverty, the downtrodden, the children, the

women, the prostitutes. Memory occupies a large portion in his poetry and much of his world is absorbed by personal pain, guilt, remorse, desire and moments of renewal. One of the major concerns of the poet is poetry and the feat of writing it.

The sky watches me turn  
and fall into my grey notebook.

Over virgin stretches of water  
strange geese fly.

(A Whiteness of Bone :61)

Mahapatra personifies poetry as standing with arms folded with an allegation that the poet has cheated her. (Bare Face:24) Like Eliot, Mahapatra believes that poetry has a life of its own distinct from that of the poet. Mahapatra believes that the capability of bringing out the essential experience expressed in a particular poem depends primarily on the poem itself:

Perhaps I begin with an image or a cluster of images or an image leads to another, or perhaps the images belonging to a sort of group...the image starts the movement of the poem...but I do not know where I am proceeding in the poem or how the poem is going to end. It is as though I am entering a region of darkness, a place of the mind which I have never visited before. Or I have visited it, I have not been able to see into all

the corners of that place. Therefore, without conscious reasoning, I grope from one level to another in my mind and try to reach the end ,that's how the end of a poem of mine comes about ,and it is explanatory, no doubt ,because I don't know myself how the poem is going to be.' (Das 2001:26)

For Mahapatra writing poetry is an experience, and with each poem he arrives at the secret corners of his mind:

I stand on the bank of a poem ,  
 even though each word has a price ,  
 even though this poetry appears as a river,  
 a river without water  
 we have to swim across ,  
 and even if its words  
 do not welcome us to its secret country  
 where we live without knowing.

(A Whiteness of Bone: 61)

Although Mahapatra shares with the other poets many features like the identification with his native locale and the social concern 'he focuses on the subliminal private world behind the poem' (King 2004:87) In an interview with Rabindra Swain and Preston Merchant in *Contemporary Poetry Review* (April, 2004) Mahapatra says that with poetry he found for himself an inner world and like a surrealist, " the world I found myself in, this inner world, became

a very real world for me.” Consequently his poetry deals with his inner world of guilt, remorse, renewal, desire, and frustrations and even surrealist experiences.

Poems are efforts to express the inexpressible. Words are the only means by which a poet can convey his inner explorations.

I tried to reach into my cage of words  
 Trying to cut down this little animal  
 Who ridicules me into silence.

(Shadow Space:59)

Mahapatra juxtaposes the opposites in the context of a poem as here we have word against silence. This is a frequent juxtaposition seen in Mahapatra. In *Prologue III* we come across ‘.is that a silence /we mistake for words.’ Das compares him with Yeats who believed that without contraries there is no progression. (Das 2001: 40)

for no one regains the whiteness  
 or the dark, neither these dead nor the living;

(Life Signs :17)

Sometimes the juxtapositions are condensed into oxymoron. In *A Death* we hear of ‘the silenced shout of a child’. Mahapatra’s poems abounds in such figures of speech like, ‘in the dark white,’(False Start:21) or, ‘eyes shut/looking down ...’(Bare Face :50).

Mahapatra has a laborious style of writing. He uses unusual epithets like 'garden's obese flowers', 'crouching silence'. His similes are intricate in the sense we do not come across or think of such likenesses ordinarily. A likeness between the compared objects can be found when the reader stretches his imagination. Bad dreams are like 'frightened mouse' scampering here and there. Thirst breaks like a sudden day. Dream is lost like unending railway tracks. In *Learning For Ourselves* the rape of a young girl shocks us 'like ripe mangoes /dropping from bare trees in winter'. In *Days* the incessant continuation of days is compared to cattle crossing the road. This yoking of apparently disparate objects is found even in his metaphors:

Time is a green mango .

(A Whiteness of Bone :17)

Even when he deals with the traditional poetic themes he chooses uncommon expressions that give an appearance of uniqueness. For instance, in *A Summer Afternoon* to express blooming red flowers of May the poet says:

Bursts of scarlet on bare summer tree.

It is May.

In *A Sound of Flutes* he deals with the traditional images of inspiration, the shepherd and his flute but what he writes appears unique:

Breathe softly into your wooden flute,

Shepherd. Through your notes  
 you would let my death live,  
 a heartbeat of hooves  
 tame sheep leave over devious slopes.

Mahapatra like most of his contemporary Indian English poets writes in free verse. His stanza pattern is irregular. He follows no regular rhyme scheme. "Mahapatra's is an elite art aiming at small discriminating readership", says King. (195) Although Mahapatra is a detached observer there is a sincere voice speaking through the poems. In the interview conducted by Rabindra Swain and Preston Merchant (April,2004), reflecting on the poem titled *Woman* in his first volume, Mahapatra says, that he would not have chosen to write such a poem now because of the absence of voice in the poem. The 'voice' present in his poems is a distinct one portraying reality of the modern world objectively and is, in most cases, identifiable with that of the poet. Poetry for him is a craft that needs chiseling as is evident from the poems dealing with his concern with the technique of composition. In Mahapatra the theme and technique go together as he experiments with language poem after poem trying to express his experiences outward and inward. Mahapatra makes it explicit in the interview:

Suppose poetry can at times be useful in providing answers or responses to questions which bother the

self. It can be a kind of test of our attitudes to the self. And poetry, its form as we all know, is a meeting place between the inward and the outward. It can be extremely intimate too, and my thoughts, when they come into a poem, do not want me to be alone in them. Whether these provide one with answers is difficult to say. But the urge to confess, and unburden oneself, is a jump that can tie the poet's impulses to the community and contribute to a sharing of the human voice. So I sat down to write poetry not knowing about the kind of happiness it sought. (Mahapatra in Contemporary Poetry Review :April,2004)

The richness and the sophistication of expression, the clever arrangement and juxtaposition of the culled words, the authenticity of feeling and experience contribute to the novelty of Mahapatra's poetry. The singular note that he strikes makes King comment, "Mahapatra's poetry is different from the mainstream of Indian verse" (King 2004: 88)

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# Appendix

Correspondences With The Poet  
(Research Scholar & Supervisor)

June 20, 2002

Tinkonia Bagicha, Cuttack 753 001, Orissa

Tel: 0671-617434

Dear Zinia:

Your letter made me happy that you chose to work on my poems. And then put me in a dilemma because I really don't know anything about my own poetry. Perhaps your professor, Dr Benoy Banerjee would be able to say which subject you should work on.

I'm really stupid about poetry criticism. I wrote because I suppose I couldn't do anything else; or, when I did something else, I did not go on with it. It's difficult to say too about the subjects I like to write about. But the world today is a sorry place to live in, and one feels a little out of place.

But, Zinia, have you read my poetry? Critics and readers (here in Orissa) persist in saying my poetry is too complicated to be understood. I say this with a feeling of hurt, because our professors of English comment in the same vein. So, if you still feel you should do research on my poetry, go ahead. But, once again, I wrote poetry because I wanted to, and because it comes out of love.

with affectionate good wishes

Jayanta Mahapatra

I'm sure Prof Benoy Banerjee will agree with me.

# Chandrabhāgā

August 20, 2003

Dear Zinia

Thank you for your letter. I'm sure you will get the help you need and be able to complete your dissertation perceptibly. My good wishes are with you.

I am sending you, by separate registered post, copies of books that should meet your requirements. A copy of my resume is also enclosed in the book packet.

Please excuse me for not being able to provide you an exact record of the price of the books. The books, some of them, were published in the USA and Australia, and are frightfully expensive. Hence I've sent you xerox copies when possible.

I feel "Imagery" will be an apt subject. Your guide, Prof Benroy should be able to guide you. He is an excellent scholar.

with love and good wishes

Jayanta Mahapatra

\* Please let me know when you get the books.

edited by Jayanta Mahapatra

Tinkonia Bagicha, Cuttack 753001, Orissa, India

May 25, 2003

Dear Zinia:

Thank you for your letter. It was also good talking to you, and I hope there will be a time soon when we can meet. Maybe when I come to Darjiling to your university. I do wish to come and shall wait for Binoy to ask me to be there.

The list of publications is given in the resume, which I am using as a notepaper. That should give you the required information. But truly, it will be difficult for you to work on my poetry. This is not my view; but the views of critics and readers who still are afraid to go into what I have written. Believe me, when I started writing, I had no idea I would be studied and my poetry taken to pieces. One writes because one wants to write, not much else. And I hope you agree. I was trained as a physicist and did research for a while on Theoretical Physice. Poetry was far far away from my mind then. But I was an avid reader from my childhood and the years honed my English, so when I started to write, the language came to me instinctively. You know better because you are more at home in English than , perhaps, Bangla. I dont know. But writing keeps me satisfied somewhat, and this happens only when the poem comes to fulfilment; otherwise it's just plain misery.

I list below the books which have been published on my poetry. These are

Jayanta Mahapatra by Devinder Mohan. Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi, 1987.

The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra by Bijay Kumar Das. Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New delhi, 2001.

The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: A Critical Study by Rabindra K Swain. Prestige Books, New Delhi, 2000.

Modern Indian Poet Writing in English. Jayanta Mahapatra by Laxminarayana Bhat P. Mangal Deep Publications, Jaipur, 2000.

The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: Some Critical Considerations edited by Madhusudan Prasad. B.K. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 2000.

Besides the above scholars, there are others who have already got their doctorates or are still working. Maybe your topic is right; its hard for me to say. Some other scholar was working on this identity thing. I just happened to glance through his thesis but did not find it perceptive at all. again, maybe my fault.

September 11, 2003

Tel : 0671-2617434

Dear Zine

Am glad you received all the books.

I don't think ① Selected Poems  
and ② The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra

are necessary, because all the poems  
that are included in the above 2 volumes  
can be found in the books that are with  
you now.

Please remember

Close the Sky, Ten by Ten

is one book.

I am sorry I don't have copies of  
the above book and Srayamvara  
& Other Poems.

• H.O. for Rs 1000/- will cover the  
~~cost of the books.~~ I shall try to send  
you the ~~same~~ copies. •

Close the Sky, Ten by Ten

and Srayamvara & Other Poems

as and when I get hold of them.

with warm good wishes,

JH

Dear Zinia

Thank you for your letter of the 20<sup>th</sup> October. I am sorry I haven't received the M.O. you write about.

I am also sorry I don't know much about the research work that has been done on my poetry. Of course I was aware that some scholars had done their doctorates on my poetry - but as to their specific topics of work, I am in the dark. I don't feel I should know about these things. Perhaps to go on writing is what matters most to me, in the best way I can.

There are certain moments in everyone's life [I say <sup>wish to</sup> everyone, not <sup>only</sup> a poet or a writer] when one doesn't <sup>work</sup> any more, when one suddenly comes to realize the total futility of writing, or of doing something creative. But such times do not stay; these moments pass by.

I'll be away for some time. I trust all goes fine with you. Please do check on the M.O. you wrote you sent. Thanks.  
with best wishes

Sincerely

Jayanta Mahapatra

November 2, 2003

December 17, 2003

Dear Zinia

Thank you for the DD that you sent so kindly.

We are nearing the end of the year and each one of us tends to reflect on the days gone by - Somehow I don't wish to think back; it is safer to live each day as it comes. I don't know if you will agree. I write slowly nowadays. And I believe that when I am through with my life, all my poems can represent a movement of life. If the movement makes some sense of life, I suppose one has done his little bit.

with best wishes for a happy new year, JM



S E A S O N S G R E E T I N G S

Zinia

I thought I'd better write to you what I could about the questions you've posed in your letter. Look, when I started writing<sup>\*</sup>, I wrote in English because I could express myself in that language best of all — not in my native Oriya — and I wanted to talk about myself, what I felt about my needs. And all my needs, or anyone's for that matter, would only relate to the person who is fixed in his/her social construct. So, what can a person speak of, if not of his own family, his society, his community, and his country? You ask about any 'Mahapatra' existing beyond my social and cultural context, and I feel no one does <sup>exist that way,</sup> so why single out a "poet" to discuss identity? It is your own people, and then others who you come in contact, that make you ask questions of your life. In the process of writing poetry one comes to understand a little bit more about the things one human being can do to another, maybe unconsciously. And these things change when your understanding grows with time and writing. Gradually however, the world shrinks and your reason is shaped by the sensibility that makes it — which pushes one back to events further back in your past and which forms your sensibility. So maybe one develops an identity, which is part of a human process, and which is not the identity one started with<sup>\*</sup>.

Jayanta mahapatra

7/2/04

## Jayanta Mahapatra

March 13, 2005

Dear Zinia

I haven't heard from you for some time but I hope you are still continuing your work on my poetry.

My new volume of poetry is appearing soon and I wondered whether you'd be interested in having this new book at a prepublication price.

A circular to this effect is enclosed.

Please let me know, when you write back, whether your guide Prof Biny Bhanerji is still there or has moved to Kolkata. I'd be glad to have his new address.

with best wishes to you,

Sincerely

Jayanta mahapatra

The prepublication circular is enclosed.

February 20, 2006

Tel: 0671- 2417434

Dear Zinia,

Please do not worry if your present circumstances do not allow you to come down to Cuttack. Perhaps it would be best if you finish your dissertation work in consultation with Professor Banerjee, who has a heart of gold. You are fortunate to have a guide like Banaji Kumar Banerjee.

My wife and I haven't been well too, and so we can understand your problems. Hope your parents-in-law are back and that you are back to normal work again.

To my knowledge, two books on my poetry have appeared. These are

The Indian Imagination of Jayanta Mahapatra,

edited by Jaydeep Sarangi & Gauri Shankar Jha  
(Sarup & Sons, New Delhi, 2006)

and a book by Sharma (I don't have full details),  
but it's published by Prestige Books, New Delhi, 2005.

With affectionate good wishes,

Jayanta Mahapatra

Tinkonia Bagicha, Cuttack 753001, Orissa

# Chandrabhāgā

April 30, 2003

my dear Benoy

I realize I am guilty of not answering your earlier letter. And now this more recent one of the 23rd. makes me feel awful. Please do excuse me for my laziness.

In a way, the book-magazine, Chandrabhaga, has been keeping me occupied. One has to look into all the trivial things, including writing down the addresses on the mailing envelopes and taking these to the post office.

I haven't been writing much lately. The events in the country (and outside) are also slowing down my work, and holding back one's will to pursue a seemingly futile need to write poetry.

It will be a privilege to come over and meet you.

You are so good in your letters, so humane and affectionate, that my wish to meet you has intensified. And the added attraction is of course Darjeeling, which I haven't seen till now.

I also look forward to seeing your journal when it is released.

Poina Baisakh has gone, true; but my good wishes are there with you and your loved ones for a happy year ahead.

Sincerely, Jayantada

edited by Jayanta Mahapatra

December 7, 2005 [0671-2617434]

My dear Benoy,

it was a pleasure to hear from you! I presumed you were living in Kolkata; and I couldn't write to you because I didn't have your Kolkata address.

What matters to me, more than pretty perhaps, is the faith and love of friends like you. I am more than touched by your warm words, and your genuine concern. May the years ahead bring you much peace and happiness, even in these troubled times.

Thank you for your good words about my poems in Critical Quarterly.

I am here, almost always, and your student won't face any difficulties regarding the interview she has in mind.

Once again, thank you for your letter; it warmed my ageing heart.

with love & good wishes, Jayantade

PK: 0671-2417434

February 20, 2006

Dear Benoy,

I do not know why I wish to write  
to you, to know you more - and I have  
never met you. Hope you are well and  
that everything good happens to you.  
I received your new year greetings but  
haven't answered; please excuse me.  
I haven't been well, but age does not  
spare anyone. It's only the goodness of some  
friends that keep me going with zest.

Zinia writes sometime back. I hope she is  
doing her work in all seriousness. I don't  
know why both you and your student chose  
to work on a "poet" like me!

with love, Jayantada

May 5, 2006, Cuttack

[Ph: 0671-2417434]

my dear Benoy,

Your loving, affectionate letter arrived when I was away from home, hospitalised at the PGIMS in Lucknow. I am back, but am in for a severe immune problem, which partly incapacitates me. I am sorry to alarm you, but things happen when one least expects them to happen.

I realize I've not met you, but there is a bond I cannot lay my hands on. No wonder you are so close to me. I am a believer in destiny and have lived my life fully and well. I'd like to face myself as bravely as I can at this time.

Thank you, Benoy, for your love and concern. I can only wish you a happy, healthy life when you go back to settle down in Kolkata. May God bless you and all those close to you.

with love and affection

Jayantada

