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# THE POETRY OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: A STUDY OF INDIAN SENSIBILITY

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**Abstract**
In the field of Indian literary discussion and criticism, Indian sensibility, also known as "Indianness," is a popular and hotly debated subject. Many Indian poets are well known for their portrayal of "Indians" in their works. Jayanta Mahapatra is one of them, and his depiction of Indian art, culture, history, and social reality in his poetry has earned him an unique place. His presentation of Indian lexical objects is unique in that they are drawn from his personal experience. They are drawn from the real India, as well as the customs and cultures in which he grew up. Mahapatra's lexicon includes both local and Indian dialects, mindful translations with an Indian flavour, changes, borrowing lexical objects, transgenic formations, and so on.
This paper aims to demonstrate how, despite its youth, Indian English poetry has established itself as genuine and real in its speech and communication. It demonstrates how the Indian environment is an important part of it, especially portraying Jayanta Mahapatra as a master at revealing Indian realities, and drawing the then scenes through suggestive images. It has a focus on the pain, hunger, deprivation of the poor of India.
**Key words:** Indianness, Indian Sensibility, imagery. lexical, culture, reality, women, poverty.

## Introduction

From a socio-cultural and linguistic standpoint, we try to concentrate on the topic of "Indianness" and the Indian lexical objects and imagery used by Jayanta Mahapatra in this report. The question of "Indianness" as expressed in works of Indian English literature is a hotly debated subject among intellectuals. It is frequently observed that Indian authors, whether poets, novelists, or prose writers, are acutely aware of their Indian identity. This is nothing more than a "anxiety of Indianness," according to Meenakshi Mukharjee. “It is easy to slip into thinking that “Indianness” consists of adopting a recognisablyvedantic angle of vision,” Gokak says [1]. However, he argues that Indian literature often presents other worldviews i addition to the vedantic view. These include Marxists, socialists and existentialists, among others. Mysticism is a significant element of Indian literature, according to Gokak, and it is a popular theme in other literatures. “An expression of occult experience is not the exclusive domain of Indo-Anglian or Indian writers,” he says. This, is a characteristic that all good writers in world literature share”.[1]

## Definitions of “Indianness” and Indian sensibility

It is hard to determine a writer's description of "Indians" based on geography, ethnicity, faith, language and other factors. The most important factor to remember is knowledge of Indian

culture and India's glorious past. According to Gokak, the writer's deep understanding of his entire community is what defines "Indianness" in Indian literature [1]. The great Indian heritage, its 5,000-year-old glorious civilization from Kashmir to Cape Camorin, the natural world, and the people should all be included in the writers' works. All of this should be ingrained in the authors' minds.

In terms of the concept of "Indianness," according to Naik, "Indian poetry in English carries the name of being Indian, but it is often Indian and sometimes poetry." The authenticity of a good deal of poetry is also debatable. “Publication in the field of Indo-Anglian poetry has been plentiful and indiscriminate,” Gokak says. I've probably read ten books of Indo-Anglian poems that didn't need to be read at all for every book of recognisable Indo-Anglian poems I've read” [1] In his book "The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra," Archana Kumar discusses this subject. “If an Indian poet chooses an Indian theme or uses an Indian setting, that does not guarantee good writing,” he says. It is insufficient if the poet uses a local colour solely as an external unit. He is not solely influenced by one society. Rather, he bears the weight of a wide range of cultural influences; “Indians” in his works can take many forms” [2] In this regard Naik refers to Mahapatra’s highly intellectual as well as elastic bend of mind.[3].

It was already mentioned that defining the term "Indians" is not easy. We can't easily define it, either in terms of a socio-cultural issue or in terms of art and literature. These aspects of history, literature, and culture have different meaning to different people. An orientalist, a nationalist, or a communalist, for example, have different perspectives on Indian history. Some of them may be drawn to non-modern or ancient Indian spirituality, while others would be drawn to India's Hindu tradition. It should be noted, however, that “Indianness” is not something that can only be practised by Hindu poets or writers.

Numerous prominent non-Hindu writers and poets have also used their writings to illustrate the glory of Indian history, culture and heritage. “The telling has not been easy,” Raja Rao says about an Indian English writer's problems. In an alien language, one must convey various colors and omissions of a certain thought-movement that appears maltreated. Even though I use the term "alien", English is not a foreign language to us. It is the language of our scholarly makeup, similar to Sanskrit or Persian before it, but it is not the language of our emotional makeup. We are naturally bilingual, with many of us writing in both our native tongue and English. We must not do so. We can only write as Indians. We have come to see the rest of the world as a part of ourselves. Our mode of expression must be a dialect that will one day be as distinct and colourful as Irish or American dialects. [4]. When it comes to language, "Indianness" of English can be discovered at various levels of language study, including phonology, lexis, syntax, and semantics.

English ceased to be a foreign language when Indian poets began to write in it. It has been referred to as Indo-Anglian, and Indo-English poetry. These terms refer to English poetry written between 1825 and 1945. However, since then, Indian poetry in English has flourished, rendering these nomenclatures obsolete. Poets writing in English have taken inspiration from "their own

backyard". The imagery echoes of Indianness, and the vocabulary and diction are more modern. It has really matured.

Indian English may be young but it is sincere and true to exhibit Indian spirit. Although the garment is foreign, the blood, flesh and bones are Indian.

Indian English poems are dramatically different from native English in the choice of theme, diction and rhythm. They poets have tuned them in the Indian rhythm. Our poets have learned the value of taking their art seriously from world-renowned poets. They have realised that simple writing does not equal good poetry. Words cannot be made to live or sing themselves out by mere imitation, arbitrary angularity, frantic irrationality, or fabricated obscurity. Poem writing is a sacred art and a demanding discipline. The fact that the "modern poets" are willing to take their vocation seriously is a compliment to them." [5].

**"Indianness" and Jayanta Mahapatra**

Jayanta Mahapatra is truly a "Indian" poet, either from a cultural and social standpoint or in terms of the use of Indian linguistic features or imagery. According to Archana Kumar,

"Mahapatra writes in English because he knows little Oriya, but he prefers to call himself an "Oriya poet" who happens to write in English and wishes that his poems be read as "translation." He acknowledges that it took him a while to master the use of English in his prose. He makes no grand statements about his English writing or Indian English poetry. He is uncertain about Indian English poetry's success." [2].

Jayanta Mahapatra, a poet, bears a great deal of social responsibility, which is expressed in his viewpoints. He claims that the majority of English poetry in this country struggles because our poets are actually ignorant of the culture from which the poetry arises, because they deal with essentially uninspiring matters as "city poets." As a result, their poetry is similarly uninspiring. They write a kind of 'forced' poetry, which disregards the rural psyche and is forced out of their "selves." However, poetry tends toward epic or classic nature only if this human condition is encapsulated in the appropriate language. The poetry is still essentially a dense undergrowth, unable to meet the needs of the earth that bears it. [6]

The treatment of Indian topics in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry reflects the socio-political situation in post-independence India. Hunger, communalism, castes, political leaders' superstition and hypocrisy, and the misery of the citizens of the country are among the topics discussed. Regarding Jayanta Mahapatra's portrayal of social reality in his poetry, Paniker claims that the poet's recent poems show a growing obsession on his part with contemporary reality, with all of its political connotations. He has broadened his horizons beyond timeless myth to include truth, which is still gleaming in the light of reason and has not yet metamorphosed into myth." [7].

Mahapatra considers poetry as a chronicle of new awarnesses that shows all the love, fear, hate and passion. His source of poetry is his memory. Again, poetry to him is indication of his internal world and struggle with the reality. Indian poets write exclusively of their lives and present surroundings. The effort to acclimate indigenous cultures into English is a prominent characteristic of Indian poetry in English. Ramanujan attempts to translate South Indian culture

into English. Parthasarathy discusses Tamil history. Similarly, Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry is about the poet's interaction with his native land's history, past and tradition.

**Cultural background of the poet:**

Mahapatra was born on October 22, 1928 in a Cuttack. His family was Christian. He started to write poetry at the age of 40. His writings and translations were published in many journals and periodicals.

**Central topics discussed**

One of Mahapatra's central themes is social truth. Mahapatra tells us of the evil system of "sati" through modern examples of women being burned for dowry in one of his poems: "...The house On the main street looks insignificant although Its mouth is slack with the piteous screams Of the girl burned to death last August In the room on the landing..." It does not bother the sun or the government that an old woman cannot fall asleep denying emotion about it. (“In the Mahanadi Valley in Autumn”) In the poems "Learning for Ourselves" and "The Lost Children of America," the intense emotional and physical suffering suffered by a rape survivor is depicted quite realistically. “Last year, on the Debi River's bend, the rape of a young girl astounded us like ripe mangoes falling from bare trees in the dead of winter. Her assassination and dismemberment last year helped us understand a little more. Cows' eyes are shaking, as we can see, being meekly followed to the slaughterhouse in town.” “Last night in the Hanuman Temple, the priest's pomaded jean-clad son raped the squint-eyed fourteen-year-old fisher girl on the naked stone platform behind the shrine. Her father discovered her at the police station this morning."

His fame derives from his inability to recognise his Indian heritage in order to avoid feeling a sense of isolation. His "Indianness" are at their best in his poetry about Orissa, where the national and regional merges with the universal. Poverty and malnutrition are at the heart of the lives of the Indian people. They also appear often in Mahapatra's poetry. His themes are discussed from a variety of angles, and life realities are conveyed with authority. Three independent analyses of male sexuality and female abuse are also used in these poems. Since he is mindful of the poverty and deprivation of the Indian poor, and women as victims of male lust in a masculine society, the writer's poetry takes on a tragic-pessimistic tone. Human relationships, which are based on romantic desire, are another major theme in Mahapatra's poetry. Mahapatra's writing, In brief, is the outcome of his deep life experiences.

Indian English poetry rises from the land of India. Poets come from a range of backgrounds to write poems. Orissa is the root of Mahapatra's flouring art, as it is for other English poets. He claims that Orissa is the land of his origins and history, as well as his beginning and end, where the wind howls over the River Daya's sorrow and the Bay of Bengal's waves. [8].

His poetic brilliance is built on the notion of the naked world. The mythological, symbolic, or artistic structures that are profoundly ingrained in his poems, especially in those that feature Orissa and India. Mahapatra was born and bred in Orissa, and he was expected to write in Oriya, but he preferred English as his poetic tongue. [9].

He composed in English, which he learned after being born in a Christian family in a Hindu society. However, his poetry is dominated by themes such as hunger, malnutrition, myths, rites, sexuality, misery, human relationships, faith, self, and eternity, all of which are stark realities in India. Mahapatra's poetry is strong because he knows his surroundings intimately. The stories, loves, values, and superstitions of his native country, Orissa, influenced and shaped his poem. According to Parthasarathy, Orissa is the epicentre of Mahapatra's iconoclastic wanderings. [10].

**Themes**

Hunger, spirituality, human suffering, sex, sensual sordid reality of life in Orissa and Puri, subtle and complex personality, Indian sensibility, human boredom and frustration are all themes in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry. The tragic monologue "Hunger" for example, is based on the trials of a wretched fisherman who drives his daughter into sex labour. As the narrator accepts the fisherman's offer, his hunger for food and lust for women converge. The Kalinga War, which took the lives of thousands in order to fulfil a single man's need for supremacy, is portrayed delicately in 'Dhauli.' "Grandfather" tells the storey of his grandfather, Chintamani Mahapatra, who was compelled to convert to Christianity due to starvation and suffering during the famine.

This poem has many social and socio-political undertones. It is an implied critique of the current socioeconomic condition, in which there are vast disparities between the rich and the disadvantaged, the haves and the have-nots, pervasive violence breeds brutality, and any "voices" criticising current social systems are violently silenced. This poem, "A Country," is also about starvation, which causes civil wars and slaughter. ‘The Exile' is a poem about the miserable state of modern man, who is shattered morally, causing misery and rage to be conveyed.

Mahapatra is out and out an Oriya author, and the Oriya setting is the most important and prominent theme in his work. His poetry takes on a geographical viewpoint thanks to the Oriya landscape, Orissa's cultural past and background, Orissa's social life, and Orissa's people's customs and practises. In these books, he addresses interpersonal relationships, India's social problems, love, sex marriage, morals, the workings of the human spirit, and nature.

In poems like 'Dawn at Puri', 'Taste for Tomorrow', 'Evening Landscape by the River', he tries to invoke an atmosphere of Orissa’s forgotten cultural glory. His viewpoint is unmistakably Indian. His "Indianness" is at its best in his poetry about Orissa. According to K.A. Paniker, Mahapatra's poetry reveals that he really is Oriya to the heart.

Puri serves as a living entity in several of his poetry, including 'Indian Summer'. Puri is portrayed in the poem 'Taste for Tomorrow' with a variety of symbols. In such poetry, the local world becomes a metaphor for India as a whole. Puri is a symbol for India as a whole, as depicted in the poem. S.Viswanathan writes, "The poet's sensibility is both Indian and modern, and his approach to the Indian scene is accurate and credible." In the poem "Village," the author creates a word representation that is both native and highly emotional. In "Summer" there is also an evocation of such a setting, which is typical of a rural scene. The real sense of his poems is the world he encounters in his daily life. While being a Christian, he loves the old Radha and Krishna lyrics. He uses Hindu religious principles in his work. He often expresses a detachment

from his surroundings' traditions in his poems. He is not a part of any of the temple bells, priests' offerings or funeral pyres.

Poetry is the coexistence of the imagined and the actual and the planned and the accidental. It often emerges from a single sensibility, as Eliot puts it. Without a doubt, Mahapatra is a romantic character, who uses what Wordsworth points to as "a certain colouring of imagination" to make familiar things unfamiliar. Sex, sexuality, love and social problems are central themes in Mahapatra's poetry, in addition to the prevalent Orissa landscape.

**Imagist poem**

For the following reasons, all of his poems can be classified as imagist poems:

i) Using common language while also referring to the correct word
ii) Avoiding the use of clichés
iii) Creating new rhythms to convey a different mood
iv) Providing full autonomy in subject selection
v) Displaying concrete, powerful, and definite photographs
vi) Ensuring a steady level of concentration
vii) Making inferences rather than strong assertions.

**Imagery**

The endless crow-noises, a skull lying in the holy sands of the beach, white-clad elderly widows trying to enter the shrine of Lord Jaganath, with their austere eyes looking like those trapped in the net, are all depicted in 'Dawn at Puri'. The first vision in 'Taste for Tomorrow' is of a single broad street lolling like a gigantic tongue. A huge sacred flower dancing in the air, not dancing in the natural wind but fluttering in the air of greater reasons, five lepers standing aside to make room for a priest, the masses buzzing the temple entrance. The fishermen's broken shacks by the water, a temple standing frail and still in the backdrop as if sunk in reverie, and a six-month old infant moving around the dung-washed floor are all featured in 'Evening Landscape by the River'. The time is evening, and there is some soft laughter to be heard. The mysterious light of the moon is descending and resting over the plentiful darkness of water like a familiar and worthless gem. Thus, not only is there vital photography, but there are also some rare but authentic photographs that help to create the scene and mood.

Dusty houses, moonlit rooftops, and a distant tune are among the images in the poem "Events" This is accompanied by images of a lonely pyre burning in the middle of trees and smoke lurking in the background on a riverbank. 'Indian Summer'and 'A Missing Person' also contain imagist poetry. The first picture in 'Indian Summer' is of a ceremonial wind weeping and priests singing holy scriptures so loudly that the whole India seems to have opened its mouth. The next picture is of crocodiles heading through open water.

Finally, there is the sight of a happy wife spending the afternoon in her husband's tent, overwhelmed by the intense sound of funeral wood, and dreaming about it. In the short poem 'A Missing Person', a person stands in front of a mirror, unable to recognise her reflection, holding

an oil-burning lamp in her lap. Her desolate body is her vital being or inner self, and only the oil-drunken lamp's yellow flame knows where it is concealed.

He portrays a woman as a target of cruel powers in many of his poems, as in the poem 'A Hot May Afternoon', females as sex objects. In the poem 'Idyll', not just some other women, but also the wife is depicted as a sexual object. The husband takes advantages of her every night to insert himself inside her. He doesn't seem to care for her feelings. To meet his physical needs, he utilizes her as a sexual object.

**Social reality**

Mahapatra exposes the social truth and voices the utter helplessness by the portrayal of a victim girl who is abused in a lure once again in a police station. In the poem 'The Whorehouse of a Calcutta Street', the images of prostitute are drawn with poetic beauty.

The prostitute image in the first verse of 'The Lost Children of America' is relevant because he equates the slut with officials, because they all deal in the same place. Indian women have a close relationship with nature and eagerly expect what the world has in store for them. These Women depicts the blind, unwavering faith of Women in india in Hinduism once again. The poet mocks the insecurity of women.

Women's blind confidence and passivity are highlighted by Mahapatra. In some of his poetry, he tries to address women's isolation and loneliness. Indians are preoccupied by absence, isolation, loneliness, separation and hollowness.

In 'The Whorehouse of a Calcutta Street', women are depicted as passive tool. She does not want to be a part of the guilt. After that, the sexual encounter occurs. Since she is exhausted and bored, she approaches it mechanically. Her reckless reaction reveals her helplessness and utter disregard for what is going on around her. The poem is an important societal text that highlights the poverty and oppression of the Indian people in order to demonstrate social reality and Indian sensibility.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, Mahapatra's poetic domain has made heavy use of provocative and startling images with the primary purpose of uncovering social reality and expressing Indian sensibility.

Jayanta Mahapatra's poem is often full of changes. A translation is not the same as a transition. In this case, no effort is made to establish formal equivalence in relation to a translation. Shifting Indianness are usually adaptations to an Indian language's underlying formal entity. Mahapatra's poetry includes a significant number of Indianness, which can be categorised as shifts. He borrowed words that often suggest a hybridised formation. A synthetic word is a lexical construction that combines two or more elements, at least one of which originates in an Indian language the other from English.

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