

# Ingenuity and Indianness in the Works of Jayanta Mahapatra and Arun Kolatkar

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India is a land which is deeply religious in belief. Such is the profound faith in God that His presence is felt in every living entity. The unique feature of Indian faith is that God exists in multifold forms and yet He is one. Worship of deities, planets, trees, and even stones is a major part of our Indianness. The “advait” philosophy has inspired not only the artists, writers and poets but also sculptors and musicians. Goodness is inculcated in the children and they are taught to see the positive and the divine in every living being. The soul which inhabits in every living being is a part of the ‘Supreme Being’ is God. This Indianness has influenced poets like Jayant Mahapatra.

Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry is all about India and Indianess. Being born and brought up in Orissa his poems are mostly about the landscape of Orissa. His sensibility is essentially Indian, But he does not create the impression of Indianness by bringing in such traditional items as tigers, snakes, snakes-charmers,

jugglers, crocodiles etc. He is really Indian, because he does not consciously try to be Indianness is seen at its best in his poems about Orissa, where the local and the regional is raised to the level of the universal. ‘Orissa Landscapes’, Evening in an ‘Orissa village’, ‘The Orissa Poems’, ‘Dawn at Puri’, etc., are Oriya first, and therefore, Indian too. Of how many other Indo-English poets could we say something like this with equal validity? In his best work, the language is English, but the sensibility (and not only subject-matter) is Oriya. K.A. Panikar writes, ‘An examination of the recurring images in his poems reveals that he is Oriya to the core. The sun of the eastern coast of India shines through his poems. The eastern sea sends its morning wind through them. He, a child of the sun and the sea, delights in invoking the God of fire and the God of water in poems like ‘Sunburst’, ‘The Beggar Takes It as Solace’. Puri is a living character in several of these poems. The temple, the priest, the beggar, the fisherman, the crow:

these rise before us all their objective reality and concreteness and then slowly transform themselves, almost imperceptibly, into monument-like images and symbols. 'Taste for Tomorrow', for example, is a vignette of Puri with a number of such symbols of reality:

At Puri, the crows  
The one wide street  
Lolls out like a giant tongue.  
Five faceless lepers move aside  
As a priest passes by  
And at the street's end  
The crowds thronging the  
temple door;  
A huge holy flower  
Swaying in the wind of greater  
reasons.

In such poems he is an Oriya poet first at last, but he is Indian too, because by a careful selection of details the local becomes symbolic of India as a whole. What is happening in Puri in the poem quoted above is typical of India as a whole. Similarly, 'Bazar 3 P.M., Orissa', is about Orissa, but it is about India as whole. The "Prostrating Woman", the crawling people, the exhausted Rickshaw Puller, are not merely Oriya, they are Indian also. In the 'Indian way' the woman is idealised in a typically Indian way. The lover buys her a lotus and says that he would not even touch her before marriage, as he would do the other one, the whore. The bringing in

of the lotus romanticizes the beloved, and the double standards of the Indian male are revealed by the fact that he would not hesitate to touch the other woman, but he would not touch his lotus-woman before the wedding night. Hunger and starvation which characterize the life of the Indian poor form the theme of a number of Mahapatra's poems.

S. Viswanathan points out, that Mahapatra's sensibility is both Indian and modern and his response to the scene is authentic and credible. The rendering of Indian Vignettes, whether it is of a village landscape as in "village" or that of a city or town street scene as in "Main Temple street, Puri", "Dawn at Puri", or "Sunburst", is invariably an authentic .

Poverty, hunger and starvation have been chronic in India and they are the most significant facet of the life of the Indian masses. They also constitute a major theme in his poetry. The theme is studied from various angles and points of view, and its varied nuances and poignant realities are brought out with intensity and credibility as in Hunger, The Warehouse in Calcutta Street, and Man of His Night. These poems are also three different studies of male sexuality and the exploitation of women. Consciousness of the poverty and the suffering of the Indian masses. And of women as victims of male lust in a male dominated society, imparts to

his poetry a tragic-pessimistic tone. As K.A. Panikar points out the poet's dominant concern is the vision of grief, loss, dejection, rejection. The tragic consciousness does not seem to operate in the work of any other Indian poet in English as disturbingly as in that of Mahapatra. 'The somber wind', 'The darkened room', 'The intrigues at my finger tips'—these objects and images put their unmistakable emphasis on the somber vision. The recurring portraits of women in his poetry point specifically to this aspect: they are drawn with sympathy and with precision;

The good wife  
Lies in my bed  
Through the long afternoon:  
Dreaming still, unexhausted  
By the deep roar of funeral pyres  
In the darkened room

A woman cannot find her reflection in the mirror.

Commercial exploitation of sex makes woman's one, and she takes it all mechanically, tired, bored and sensitive. She is merely a passionless tool, and she suffers both as a wife and a whore. S. Viswanathan rightly points out that when the poet deals with the themes of trade in flesh, poverty and destitution his finesse does not fail him. He avoids making a tickling poetic opportunity of such themes and scene which practically exploiting the

experience of his response to such and handling them in his poem with a stern, unsentimental compassion. It is perhaps this quality of the true poet's social concern which matches Mahapatra's engagement with the cultural pressures of the Indian, especially those caused by the generational compulsions and constraints, that lends real substance to the body of his verse and elevates it to major status.

Jayant Mahapatra's poetry demonstrates a continual rehearsal of dramatizing a human longing for the possible alternatives of the dying process of the Hindu myth, "The Dance of Shiva" or the myth of origins. The myth is predominantly incarnated in the Hindu way of life over which Orissa temple were originally founded. Mahapatra confronts its dying process in the life of common men and women in Orissa. Considering the works through the progressive intentionality of poetic language, rather than the chronology of publications of his poetry, there is a marked intensity and range of themes—temple, warehouses, nature, and love which diffuse into the poet's consciousness of the dying process in history in history. This process refers specifically to the shattered myth of Hindu India, although it does not earn a continuity or a development of thought from his mind's hiding places to generative redemption both of his own and of the

reader. But this is not his shortcoming, this is his sense of belonging to the modern condition of human loss. In this context, he is the most intense of Indian poets writing in English and perhaps at par with those European poets who are obsessed with modernistic impulse for man's finitude: his physiology, economics and culture, myth, and thought, to a universal human predicament. His poems, *Hunger*, *Myth*, *India*, and *The Accusation* are flawless examples.

The alternatives of dying process refer to the possibilities of escape, like Robert Frost's *Birches* which offers heavenly fight against the dark design in nature. But these possibilities are never realized, for a poetic mediation, for an experienced salvation of soul. The alternatives thus remain unexplored, unexperienced, unnamed. The longing for them remains a distant enchantment of an escapist's dream, against the consuming sorrow in human history.

According to a critic, many Indian poets writing in English deal with political realities in roundabout or indirect ways, some do not like to touch them with a barge-pole. The challenge of simplicity and honesty is often evaded by the Indo-Anglo poet. The main criticism against Indo-Anglian poetry is not that its diction is out of date, or that it employs rhythms of uncertain quality, but that it has either

failed to face this challenge or faced it with the bravado of Don Quixote. This critic feels that Mahapatra is earnest in his attempt to face the challenge in poems like "The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Of A Republic." He may not have achieved complete success in this respect but the situation is likely to improve. The opening of this poem is not unimpressive; an authenticity of statement has been achieved without sacrificing aesthetic goals—

The new postage stamp gleams in  
silver and grey

It's such a thing that brings a faint  
flush on cheeks,

Like a sudden wind that slips under  
the door and stir the

Silent paper on the dust and other  
objects,

That have learnt to live without their  
knowing,

Do we want to feel the ground give  
way beneath us?

This is a barren world that has been  
Prowling round my room,  
epidemics in the poisoned air,  
Dusty streets stretching away like  
disgruntled socialists.

Here the Indian writer in English begins to sound relevant. Even the policemen will read him now, and he will be classed not with the academics but with the practicing poets in Indian languages;

The plumes of rice have  
glassy, furious eyes

That sway aggressively in the  
sleepless wind ‘

Such are 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.

Without worrying for a moment about  
using a borrowed language, the persona  
asks himself and others, not when his next  
tour abroad would take place, but

What is wrong with my country?

The jungle have become gentle,  
and women restless

And history reposes between the  
college girl’s breasts

The exploits of warrior-queens, the  
pride pieced together

From a God’s tainted amours. Is  
this where the advantage lay?

Meena, my pretty neighbour,  
flashes round and round

The gilded stage, hiding jungles in  
her purse,

Holding on to her divorce, and a  
lonely Ph.D.

Meera Alexander explains the significance  
of stone in his poetry. “Stone”, she says,  
“is crucial to his cosmogony. It was there  
at the beginning. It is the penetrable  
permanent. He inhabits an earth where  
monuments of stone crumble and crack,  
yet survive in the same realm as human  
beings, the glory of stone glimpsed  
momentarily by consciousness”. Meena  
Alexander is right in her view that stone is  
central to the cosmogony of Mahapatra’s  
vision, and is the symbol of self here.  
Stone is a mute witness to the experience  
of the multitudes of generations and  
silently participates in the creative and  
destructive cycles of time;

I look through the swollen glass of  
noon and in the

heart of gray clouds and cutting  
rains

the autumns of a thousand years  
spread out like;

what can save us now but the miracle  
we have been waiting for?

Autumns of a thousand years carry the  
blood forward with its guilt of the blood-  
bath at the river Daya. The same  
destructive element flow in the blood not  
because of a lack of desire for perfection  
and refinement in the human soul but  
because man is trapped in mortality and  
imperfection as

The cock stabbing in a cobra’s  
tongue across the air,

an unknown bird brushing past with  
a flap of wings

like the unseen wind scalloping the  
silence out

there in the bleak cremation ground.

In the constant inter-play of images of sleep and waking, death and bird, the poet finds fulfillment by identifying himself with the stone which becomes a symbol of unbroken continuity and of the future. As the stone becomes a symbol of unbroken continuity and of the future. As the stone becomes a mute witness to mortal time, the poet too accepts his passive role in the flow of time and the tread of generations, the poet finds fulfillment by losing his personal, egoistic identity, and placing himself in the racial consciousness. In this aspect Mahapatra is genuinely Indian and in the world he has created, the nature, the historic past, and the inner world of consciousness are fused into an organic whole.

Arun Kolatkar a Maharashtrian poet, born in Kohlapur received his education in Bombay where he worked professionally as a commercial artist. His poetry is about the region in which he has been brought up. "Jejuri", a collection of poems mainly depicting the very essence of rural India specially Maharashtra. He speaks at length of the temples, Indian God Khandoba (i.e. Lord Vishnu), Streets of Bombay, urchins, pilgrimages to Khandoba's

temple, myths, legends, bus-stops, priest, importance of sun in Hindu religion etc. "Jejuri" is a long in thirty-one sections. Kolatkar expresses what he sees with the eye of a competent reporter in a language that is colloquial and spare. The result is a poem of unexpected beauty and power. The main subject for his poetry is the nature and involvement in the Indian context celebration of difference and the exploitation of ethnicity. Its structure is as much symbolic as mythological and naturalistic.

He especially speaks of Indian faith in religion. Indians believe that God exists in many forms hence even stones are worshipped. The poet has personified stones as some God in his poem "A Scratch", which is based on a legend that there is one huge rock portion, of the size of a bedroom. This portion of the rock is Khandoba's wife who had been turned into a stone figure by Khandoba when he had struck her down with his sword in his fit of fury. The crack, which runs across that portion of the rock, is the scar of the wound which the wife received from her husband's sword which had a broad blade. Thus a very important event in the life of Khandoba and in the life of his wife has been imprinted on this portion of the rock. The rock bears witness to Khandoba's murder of his wife in a fit of anger. Thus Arun Kolatkar through this poem not only

projects Indianness but also Indian philosophy and belief that every living and non-living thing has God in them.

Another poem “An Old Woman” speaks of a beggar woman who sits outside the temple asking for fifty- paisa coin as alms. Projecting the typical scene of India where beggars cling to people and harass them for alms. Here the old woman is asking for fifty –paisa coin as she is desperate and wants to survive on the alms as it is her only way of earning and survival. But the pilgrims are unwilling even to part with a fifty-paisa coin from their pockets. But suddenly something happens, he looks at the sky and finds that the sky has fallen down to the earth with a loud sound, shattering everything except the withered old woman who alone stands before him. At this, the pilgrim thinks that he has been reduced to a non entity ( or a person of no significance at all). The pilgrim feels as unimportant as the small coins which the old woman has collected from other pilgrims and which she is holding in her hands. The poet here wants to show that in Indian culture and according to Hindu philosophy if some needy asks for something that he needs or wants one must immediately give away what he wants willingly. Otherwise something untoward may happen to him.

Arun Kolatkar in his poem “Makarand” speaks of honey which is supposed to be

sacred to Hindus as it is used as a offering to God Khandoba. This is used as a ritual in bathing the God but here in the poem the protagonist refuses to offer honey as he does not believe in rituals. Another poem called “Chaitanaya” meaning energy speaks of a saint called chaitanaya in Jejuri district and also that every stone in Jejuri is capable of producing some energy and is almost a God in it

Thus their similarities between these two poets that they are very much Indian at heart and their poetry is all about India. Mahapatra’s speaks of Lord Jagganath whereas Kolatkar speaks of Khandoba they one and the same Lord Vishnu the ruler of the universe. He also talks of the old woman, and a prostitute in his poems as Mahapatra speaks of the prostitute houses of Calcutta in his poems. These are some of the dominant issues of their regions, which could not be ignored by them. Their poetry is Indian it speaks about ingenuity. Thus this paper points out the elements and different aspects of Indianness and Ingenuity in their poetry.

To conclude it, can be safely said that despite all the world wide travels and experiences Jayanta Mahapatra has remained Indian at heart and has made a name for himself in this globalised world. He has retained the unique Indian imagery,

symbolism and diction and yet he has a global perspective

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