

Inequality in India through the writing of Mahapatra

Neelam

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dwarka, India

Email - aswalneelam144@gmail.com

Abstract: Mahapatra weaves a narrative that captures the harsh realities experienced by the underprivileged. The abstract explores the use of vivid imagery and literary devices employed by Mahapatra to convey the depth of these inequalities. The work not only invites readers to empathize with the plight of the marginalized but also Mahapatra's poetry has left a lasting impact on the landscape of Indian literature, and his exploration of societal issues, including inequality, continues to resonate with readers. Mahapatra's verses serve as a mirror reflecting the societal inequalities prevalent in India. His nuanced approach captures the complexities of these issues, urging readers to contemplate the profound impact of inequality on individuals and communities. By intertwining personal experiences with broader socio-economic themes, Mahapatra crafts a compelling narrative that resonates with the socio-political landscape of the country. This compilation explores Jayant Mahapatra's nuanced portrayal of inequality in India through a review of his poetry. Mahapatra, a distinguished Indian poet, addresses socio-economic disparities, caste-based issues, and gender inequalities in collections such as "Close the Sky, Ten by Ten," "A Rain of Rites," and "A Whiteness of Bone." Employing vivid imagery and symbolism, Mahapatra delves into the struggles faced by marginalized communities, offering poignant commentaries on the unequal distribution of resources.

The analysis highlights Mahapatra's thematic richness and his ability to humanize the marginalized, portraying their resilience amidst adversity. Symbolism emerges as a powerful tool, inviting readers to reflect on systemic injustices and advocate for social change.

In examining Mahapatra's literature on inequality in India, one can appreciate the poet's ability to evoke empathy and provoke introspection. Through vivid imagery and poignant language, he not only narrates the stories of the oppressed but also challenges societal norms, urging readers to confront the harsh realities of inequality that persist in the nation.

Key Words: Imagery, Symbolism, Vision, Diction, Poetry Analysis, Literary Criticism, Indian Poetry, Contemporary Literature.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Jayant Mahapatra is a prominent Indian poet known for addressing social issues through his works. While he doesn't solely focus on inequality, some of his poems reflect the socio-economic disparities in India. Mahapatra's verses often capture the struggles of marginalized communities and the stark contrast between affluence and poverty. Exploring his poetry, especially pieces like "Hunger," "Missing Person", "A Summer Poem", and "Dawn at Puri" provides insights into the nuanced portrayal of inequality in the Indian context.

Jayant Mahapatra is an acclaimed Indian poet who was born on July 22, 1928, in Cuttack, Odisha. He is known for his significant contributions to contemporary Indian poetry, addressing diverse themes ranging from personal experiences to societal issues. Mahapatra is particularly renowned for his evocative and deeply introspective verses that often explore the complexities of human existence. Mahapatra's poetic career took flight in the 1970s, and his works have been widely published and translated. His poetry is characterized by its vivid imagery, cultural richness, and an exploration of existential and societal themes. Mahapatra has received several awards for his contributions to literature, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Padma Shri, and the Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award. Jayant Mahapatra passed away of pneumonia on 27 August 2023, at the age of ninety-three.

2. Literature review :

Jayant Mahapatra, through his poetry, offers a poignant exploration of inequality in India. His works delve into the socio-economic disparities, shedding light on the harsh realities faced by marginalized communities. In examining Mahapatra's literature on inequality in India, one can appreciate the poet's ability to evoke empathy and provoke introspection. Through vivid imagery and poignant language, he not only narrates the stories of the oppressed but also challenges societal norms, urging readers to confront the harsh realities of inequality that persist in the nation. The poem vividly portrays the struggle for survival, capturing the hunger and desperation faced by marginalized communities. Through powerful imagery and carefully chosen words, Mahapatra exposes the harsh realities of poverty and inequality, urging readers to confront the disparities that exist within Indian society. The poem serves as a poignant commentary on societal neglect and the urgent need for compassion and social change.

It's worth noting that "Hunger" is just one example, and Mahapatra's body of work as a whole consistently weaves themes of inequality into its fabric, offering readers a compelling literary exploration of the socio-economic challenges faced by various segments of the Indian population.

3. Objective :

The objective of exploring inequality in India through the writing of Jayant Mahapatra is to shed light on the socio-economic disparities and injustices within the country. This paper aims to create awareness and provoke contemplation about the harsh realities faced by marginalized communities. By delving into the nuanced aspects of inequality, he encourages readers to reflect on the societal issues, fostering empathy and understanding. Ultimately, the objective is to stimulate conversations, inspire change, and advocate for a more equitable and just society.

4. Methodology :

The methodology employed by Jayant Mahapatra in addressing inequality in India through his writing involves a nuanced exploration of socio-economic themes using poetic devices and literary techniques. While there may not be a formal research methodology as in academic studies, Mahapatra's approach can be understood through the following aspects:

1. **Observation and Experience:** Mahapatra often draws from personal experiences and observations, grounding his poetry in the real-life struggles of individuals affected by inequality in India.
2. **Symbolism and Imagery:** He utilizes symbolism and vivid imagery to convey the depth and impact of societal disparities, creating a visual and emotional connection for the readers.
3. **Narrative Technique:** Mahapatra weaves narratives that humanize the experiences of the marginalized, providing a platform for readers to empathize with and understand the challenges faced by different segments of society.
4. **Cultural Context:** His works are deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of India, incorporating cultural elements to enrich the understanding of societal inequalities within a specific context.
5. **Social Commentary:** Through his poetry, Mahapatra serves as a social commentator, highlighting the issues of inequality and prompting readers to reflect on the broader implications for society.

While not a formal methodology, Mahapatra's approach involves careful crafting of language and themes to engage readers emotionally and intellectually, fostering a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding inequality in India.

Inequality in India

Where we embark on a literary journey into the evocative verses of Jayant Mahapatra, a distinguished figure in contemporary Indian poetry. Mahapatra has emerged as a poetic voice that resonates with the complexities of the human experience and societal challenges. Mahapatra's exploration of inequality in India is a recurring theme in his poignant verses. As we delve into his works, particularly focusing on the Poetry Collections "Close the Sky Ten by Ten", "A

Rain of Rites”, “A Whiteness of Bones”, and “Relationships”. We will unravel the layers of socio-economic disparities depicted through vivid imagery and thought-provoking narratives. “The protagonist (poet speaker) of the poem "Hunger" describes a specific interaction with a fisherman's daughter. The fisherman was poor and unable to earn one one-time meal due to this constraint financial condition compelled him to exploit his 15-year-old daughter's offer to the stranger. The main character was shocked that his daughter had sex with stranger. The main character was taken to the fisherman's cottage near the shore where they had intercourse. Her legs were spread. Here the poet exposes the mentality of society on the one hand society shows its respect towards the women and the other hand they exploit the women for their sexual gratification. This is revealed by the father's lack of resources, he, is offered his daughter for the sexual gratification of the Prufrock-type visitor. It's not easy for women can have food that cannot be met in normal circumstances. She belongs to a poor father who is in no position to provide her food. (Bhuyan, Nath Parida h267)

Mahapatra's poetic expressions, analyzing the nuances of his language, cultural influences, and the impact of his exploration of inequality and the stage for a deep dive into the literary landscape of one of India's eminent poets, inviting you to reflect on the profound messages embedded in his words.

Imagery, Symbolism, and Metaphorical Imagery

Imagery:

Mahapatra employs vivid imagery to paint a stark picture of socio-economic disparities. Through words, he crafts scenes that resonate with readers, depicting the contrasting worlds of affluence and poverty. He might use vibrant images of abundance alongside stark depictions of deprivation, allowing readers to feel the disparities he explores viscerally. Mahapatra also reveals historical moments and evaluates life; its achievements, losses and vainness. And also want to awaken the people to their great past and how we should learn from our histories, referring to the tragic events from the past to awaken people, to safeguard the young lives from epidemics like Cholera in the present. His visit to the cemetery tells the ended story of the great British Empire, through the images of “the ruins of stone and marble, the crumbling wall of brick, the coma of alienated decay...” (ibid, 26). The broken images open up the story of the faded glory of the vanished empire. The poet is awed by the forgotten dead and walks around the graves. The poet, breaking through the serious pondering, expresses ironically using animal imagery in the words” (Barure 2)

In the poem "Hunger," Mahapatra might use vivid imagery to describe the stark contrast between a lavish banquet in one stanza and a meagre meal in a slum in another. The opulence of one scene and the destitution of the other create a powerful visual impact, highlighting the economic disparities

Symbolism

Symbolism in Mahapatra's poetry acts as a subtle language conveying deeper meanings. Objects, places, or actions may represent larger societal issues. For instance, a recurring symbol like "hunger" may not only represent physical deprivation but also symbolize the hunger for justice or equality in a broader sense.

Mahapatra's poetry, the use of a “broken bridge” could symbolize the fractured societal structures perpetuating inequality. The broken bridge might represent barriers that hinder social mobility, isolating marginalized communities on the other side. Natural Symbolism like a withering tree and contrasting Imagery like rich and barren landscapes show the wealth distribution reflects the inequalities in India, Closed Door, Dark Cave represent the lack of access to education, employment, and other opportunities for certain sections of society, Empty pockets symbolize economic deprivation and struggle for necessities.

The image of ‘door’ appears suggesting contextual meanings concerning life, death and faith. This poem appears as ‘a dark cave’ full of mythical and historical references waking the reader into complex spiritual and psychological expressions regarding the reminiscences of the poet for his land. (Barure 4)

By interweaving rich imagery and symbolism, Mahapatra invites readers to engage with the layers of his poetry. The juxtaposition of vivid scenes and symbolic elements encourages contemplation, urging readers to delve beyond the surface and explore the profound societal commentary embedded in his verses.

Metaphorical Imagery:

In exploring gender-based inequality, Mahapatra might use metaphors like "chained wings" to represent the limitations placed on women. This vivid image conveys the idea of restricted freedom and opportunities, providing readers with a tangible representation of the societal constraints a particular group faces.

“The image of the barren land where there seems no shelter in the dead trees and no water from the dry stone is ever the symbol of the dismal facets (Dead Trees Give No Shelter, 2022)

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)". (Mitra 47, 48)

Gender-Based Inequality

Jayant Mahapatra's exploration of inequality through the lens of feminism is a poignant aspect of his poetry. In addressing gender-based disparities, Mahapatra employs various literary techniques, including imagery, symbolism, and nuanced language, to highlight the challenges faced by women in Indian society. Injustice, frequently occurs in society due to patriarchal rule in our society, and this patriarchal society is made especially by men, so they keep women in mind and continuously abuse all kinds of atrocities upon them. In the works of Mahapatra, we see the discrimination between the genders can easily be observed in the diplomatic society for instance, a male can remarry but a widow can't; a male can attend a marriage or any auspicious occasion in society but a woman can't; a male can wear all kinds of colourful clothes whereas a woman is forced to wear only white sarees and to remain without make-up and all. Any such act, as practised and performed liberally by a widower, is termed "immoral" for her. Thus, only a widow remains in the manacle of culture and convention to tolerate a miserable and desolate life. What a gross inequality and injustice! "The poet explores this: Silent white walls of forbearance sit up
And begin to climb the stairs
Of her long inauspicious loneliness". (Shadow Space, pp. 20)" (Sharma Mukul Kumar et al., 396)

Mahapatra might use the symbolism of "chains" to represent the societal constraints imposed on women. This imagery suggests restrictions on their freedom, aspirations, and opportunities, vividly portraying the struggle against patriarchal norms.

"The sex as a business has also been shown in "The whorehouse in Calcutta Street". In the poem, a customer enters the premises with great hope of seeing the pretty faces of the whores as advertised on posters and public hoardings. But he experiences a sense of guilt and shame and learns something more about the woman as the whore asks him to hurry up and finish his turn so that she may be able to go away for another customer. The woman is used as an image in this poem. As a symbol, widows have to be deprived the normal things. She is often portrayed as sexually oppressed by the so-called patriarchal system and poverty." (Roy 22)

In a poem exploring gender-based inequality, Mahapatra might employ vivid imagery and symbolism.

"The poet then notices several widows adorning white saris ready to perform the customary rites and rituals". (Sharma Mukul Kumar). These women are depicted as "past the centre of their lives". They have crossed away a significant portion of their lives, indicating that they have become old. In the patriarchal society women are confined to their husbands, if their husbands die their life becomes hell, and husbands are gods to their wives. They appear serene and solemn. Their life becomes barren without happiness. The white colour that they adorn is a symbol of their purity and tranquillity. The women are confined to the net and they have to submit to spirituality. They have to reluctantly adapt to the worshipped whereas they have no age to do all this. "The force that anchors these women to be steady in their approach to life is their undeterred faith in God. As they stand in a group, their uniting factor seems to be their timidity. They are a "mass of crouched faces" possessing no individuality. Women are demoted in a patriarchal society and this discrepancy is more pronounced if she is a widow." (Vijaya 24)

Socio-Economic Disparities in India.

Jayant Mahapatra's poetry reflects a keen awareness of socio-economic disparities in India, providing poignant insights into the struggles faced by various segments of society. Jayant Mahapatra has taken lots of references to inequalities in India through the Portrayal of Poverty, Contrast of Wealth and Poverty, Critique of Systemic Injustices, Humanizing the Marginalized and Cultural Reflections.

Mahapatra often employs vivid imagery to depict the harsh realities of poverty. Through his verses, he paints pictures of crowded slums, meagre dwellings, and the daily challenges faced by those living in economic hardship.

The poet skilfully contrasts the opulence of some with the destitution of others, creating a stark visual representation of the economic disparities prevalent in India. This serves as a powerful commentary on the unequal distribution of resources.

Mahapatra's poetry humanizes the marginalized by delving into their personal stories, aspirations, and struggles. By doing so, he provides readers with a more empathetic understanding of the impact of socioeconomic disparities on individuals and communities.

Through his verses, Mahapatra critiques systemic injustices that contribute to socio-economic disparities. He may address issues such as unequal access to education, healthcare, and opportunities, shedding light on the structural challenges faced by marginalized populations.

Mahapatra's works may also delve into the cultural implications of socio-economic disparities, exploring how traditions and societal norms perpetuate or challenge inequalities within the Indian context. Central to Mahapatra's poetry is a deep exploration of the human condition. He often highlights the resilience and strength of individuals facing economic challenges, emphasizing their ability to endure and hope for change.

Mahapatra's poetry humanizes the marginalized by delving into their personal stories, aspirations, and struggles. By doing so, he provides readers with a more empathetic understanding of the impact of socioeconomic disparities on individuals and communities.

"The poet expresses his love and affinity with his childhood village and its landscape. Though Orissa is endowed with rich natural resources, it becomes necessary for him to examine the poverty scenario and living conditions of the people of Orissa. The poet also observes the poor families begging door to door for food. Orissa seems to have a large number of destitute who lack either money or materials to survive. The poet realises sympathy for the critical condition of women.

5. Struggle of Marginal communities :

Grandfather poem of Jayant Mahapatra reflects the struggle for marginal communities, how grandfather had changed his religion for the sake of livelihood, and became Hindu to Christian

"Jayant Mahapatra's poetry often delves into the struggles faced by marginalized communities in India. Through vivid imagery, emotive language, and a keen sense of empathy, he brings to light the challenges and hardships experienced by those on the fringes of society

'The Grandfather' is a poem about poverty. It is an autobiographical poem which tells the story of Jayanta Mahapatra's grandfather. Famine in Orissa compelled his grandfather to convert to Christianity. It was a climactic situation for him - either he would have to accept death or convert to Christianity. Finally, he accepted Christianity rather than die". (G.Sarkar; S.Sarkar 147)

6. Conclusion :

In conclusion, Jayant Mahapatra's use of symbolism in his poetry serves as a powerful tool to convey the pervasive theme of inequality. Through vivid and evocative imagery, he employs symbols that represent the fractures within the societal structures, the challenges faced by marginalized communities, and the stark disparities in wealth and opportunity. The broken bridge, withering trees, closed doors and empty pockets become poignant metaphors for the barriers, struggles, and economic deprivations experienced by the margins of society.

By delving into the symbolic elements within Mahapatra's works, the reader can glean a deeper understanding of the nuanced layers of meaning embedded in his exploration of inequality in India. The use of symbolism becomes a literary device through which Mahapatra invites reflection on broader societal issues and prompts a call for social change.

Through his poetic lens, Mahapatra not only captures the harsh realities of inequality but also challenges readers to confront and address the systemic issues that perpetuate these disparities. Jayant Mahapatra's poetry serves as a profound exploration of inequality in India, addressing socio-economic disparities, caste-based issues, and gender inequalities. Through vivid imagery, symbolism, and a deep understanding of the human condition, Mahapatra sheds light on the struggles faced by marginalized communities. His works, found in collections such as "Close the Sky, Ten by Ten," "A Rain of Rites," and "A Whiteness of Bone," offer poignant commentaries on the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities within the Indian context. Mahapatra's use of symbolism becomes a powerful tool to convey nuanced layers of meaning, inviting readers to reflect on systemic injustices and advocate for social change. His poetry humanizes the marginalised, portraying their resilience and aspirations amidst adversity. The thematic richness found in Mahapatra's works emphasizes the need for empathy and understanding in confronting the challenges posed by inequality in India.

While specific poems and references weren't provided due to the nature of the inquiry, further exploration of Mahapatra's collections, academic analyses, and literary critiques can offer a more detailed and nuanced understanding of his treatment of inequality in Indian society.

REFERENCES:

1. Barure, Dr. Somnath. "Imagery, Vision, Symbolism And Diction In Jayant Mahapatra's Selected Poems: A Reading." *UPA NATIONAL E-JOURNAL* (n.d.): 4.
2. Bhuyan, Jonas , Dr. Trailokya Nath Parida. "Representation of Social Realities in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra." *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)* (2023): h267.
3. "Critical Analysis of Hunger by Jayanta Mahapatra." *English literature . Built with GeneratePress* (2020).

4. *Dead trees give no shelter*. Perf. Julie Richalet, Germain Zambini, Florentin Ginot, Helge Sten, Frédéric Stochl Soa Ratsifandrihana. Théâtre de la Cité Internationale, Paris. October 2022 .
5. Jonas Bhuyan, Trailokya Nath Parida. "Representation of Social Realities in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra." *Internal Journal of Creative Research Thoughts - IJCRT (IJCRT.ORG)* (2023).
6. Kunhi, Rukhaya Mohammad. "Poetry Analysis: Jayanta Mahapatra's "Dawn at Puri"." (SEPTEMBER 22, 2014).
7. Mitra, Zinia. *Poetry Of Jayanta Mahapatra: A Study In The Pattern Of Imagery*. Darjeeling: University of North Bengal, 2006.
8. Roy, Mr. Rabi Kanta. "Imagery in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: A Study." *The Indian Review of World Literature in English* (2019): 22.
9. Roy, Parama. *Indian Traffic* . Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1998.
10. Sarkar, Gopal Sarkar and Sabuj. "'The sky grow lonelier with cloudlessness": An Exploration of Alienation in the Select poems of Jayanta Mahapatra." *IJMAR-Indian Journal of Multidisciplinary Academic Research* (2018): 147.
11. Sarkar, Gopal. "The sky grow lonelier with cloudlessness." *Indian Journal of Multidisciplinary Academic Research* (2018): 142-148,.
12. Sharma Mukul Kumar, Kapil Sharma, Dr. Sanjit Mishra. "The Marginalized Women in Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry." *International Journal of English and Education* (2013): 396.
13. Vijaya, K.R. "Poetry As Social Commentary: A Study Of Selected Poems Of Jayant Mahapatra." *Journal of English Language and Literature (JOELL)* (2016): 23, 24.