

THEMES OF MYTH, TEMPLE & STONE IN THE POETRY OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

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Abstract

JayantaMahapatra is the most prolific poet in the history of Indian English Poetry, he belongs to poor and middle class family, despite being a scholar from science background he established himself in the arena of English literature, he is the first poet to receive Sabitya Akademi Award in the Indian English Poetry, he is a poet who commands more respect overseas than at home, and last but not least, profundity of images and symbols in his poetry. This paper attempts to present the themes of myth, temple & stone in the poetry of JayantaMahapatra

Keywords: *myth, temple, stone, mahapatra, jayantamahapatra*

JayantaMahapatra speaks volumes of significance of myth, temple and stone in his poetry as well as his own life. Orissa is the province of temples which are made of stones. The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra is inundated with myth, culture, tradition, root, soil, sensibility and sufferings of Orissa. So the role of stone is indispensable in his poetry:

“My existence lies in the stones
Which carry my footsteps from one day into another
Down to the infinite distances.” (Relationship, Page-10)

His relationship with stone is further corroborated and authenticated by following lines:

The stone were my very own
Waiting as mother or goddess or witch,
As my birth feed on them
As though on the empty dugs of sorceress thought. (Relationship, Page-10)

In the following lines, stone signifies silence:

When darkness falls
The stones come closer toward us. (Life Signs, Page-08)

In the following passage, Mahapatra has used image of stone as a generative power. It makes one filled with enthusiasm, zeal and zest. It alleviates fear, pain and anxiety. It brings dawn where darkness is pervaded:

Once again one must sit back and bury the face,
In this earth of forbidden myth,
The phallus of the enormous stone. (Relationship, Page-09)

Mahapatra hold the stone eyewitnesses for his chronic ailment which put him more often than not, on the brink of death as he sums up:

In your dance is my elusive birth, my sleep
That swallows the green hills of the land
And the crows that quicken the sunlight in the veins,
And the stone that watches my sadness fly in and out
Of my death, a spiritless soul of memory. (Relationship, Page-31)

Mahapatra is deeply shattered and hurt at the predicaments of beggars and lepers who cry and groan for petty alms in monstrous and scorching afternoon whereas

materialistic temple's priests are indulged in amassing disproportionate wealth. Their humanitarian soul remains dormant even at the pathetic plight of beggars and lepers. So he launched a bitter assault of words on the temple's priests and compares them with ghosts of old stone:

While priests,
Like ghosts of old stone, confound
The perfumed afternoons of the rich and challenge
The red sun perched on the rickety limbs of the poor.

(Waiting, Page 27-28)

Mahapatra emphasizes a man is known by where his ancestors were and where he is born. None remains happy who desert his motherland and adopts alien tradition and cultures as such pleasures are of transient nature only. There is indispensable and reversible relation between man and place:

A man does not mean anything
But the place
Sitting on the riverbank throwing pebbles
Into the muddy current,
A man becomes the place.

(A Rain of Rites, Page-42)

Man is withered without root and identity like a tree. None can achieve success and win laurels at the cost of looking down upon his motherland. Mahapatra owes his success to his land of birth and to the landscape of his state. To his own confession, he acknowledged it while receiving the National Akademi of Letters Award in the following gestures:

“To Orissa, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which lies my beginning and my end, where the wind knees over the grief of the River Daya and where the waves of Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Konarka, I acknowledge my debt and my relationship.”

Mahapatra considers stone as an image and symbol of permissivity. He owes allegiance and pays his obeisance to his father and grandfather with symbol of stone. He derives spiritual existence in it:

Only those which shut out the wind
And lay them in the dark crevices of stone
For births to merge into darker births
That look for age-old grass of my death.

(Relationship, Page-14)

Mahapatra finds eternity in stone. It possesses in itself past, present and future. The man passed and his blood and deeds carry forward:

The ruined stone, standing here awake,
Will go past me,
Though I walk the earth

(Shadow Space, Page-64)

As the priests, who seem resplendent in dazzling and gleaming light, cheat and swindle devotees in the garb of superstition and in the name of God. So are the politicians who misguide and befool the common people with their glib and crafty tongues. They erect statues made of marble and stone in a tribute and memory of their predecessors who reap the crop of evil seeds when inauspicious crows spit, urinate and purge their bowels sitting on the statue of them. Mahapatra warns us that one has to pay the price of his evil acts sooner or later:

The coarse crows perch upon the shoulders of bronze
And stone

Like crafty priests looking handsome and mysterious
In the counterfeit glow of light. (A Father's Hours, Page-19)

Mahapatra compared barbarous and cold blooded killing of innocent men, women and child by terrorist in Punjab as hard as stone. Here he has used the symbol of stone in degenerative mode when he says:

Rain falls heavy, hard as stones.

I am so far away from these falls. (Dispossessed Nests, Page-20)

Mahapatra's amiable relation with his land, myth, tradition and culture is further revealed and corroborated by the fact that he seeks all happiness and solace in stone, of Orissa is made of. Though Orissa is one of the poorest states of India yet his affinity and affection with his soil never diminished and dithered. He finds all pleasure in the ashes and stones of his soil. Mahapatra in his nineties, ideal wife departed and survived by sole son, who is presently dwelling in Singapore, yet his love for his land and place remained unaltered and solid as a rock. He reveals unbreakable and unfaltering relation between himself and Konarka, the temple of the sun and ruined stones. It allows him to compose numerous poems with arresting theme, quaint images and symbols. He extracts and salvages his root and identity; and the pride of his ancestors from these ruined stones:

It is my own life

That has cornered me beneath the stones

Of this temple in ruins, in a blaze of sun. (Relationship, Page 22)

Mahapatra compares blind faith of women in religion, God and superstition with stone when he points out:

A large group of stony women in front of shrine

Silently sit out the whole day waiting to be cured,

Of their own will their supernatural eye,

To see the sad nature of themselves

Return their stares of dry, drab weeds. (A Rain of Rites, Page-15)

Mahapatra expresses predicament over the present plight of Konarka which built in the thirteenth century, the temple is known for its erotic and spectacular sculptures when he writes:

There I stand close to stone

Trying to smear it with blood

To give it life.

(Relationship, Page-25).

By virtue of stone Mahapatra travels journey from past to future via present. It establishes his relationship with Orissa of yesterday, today and tomorrow as it is summed up by him in the following lines:

As I forget easily

My old village's pelt, glistening with rain

And the stillness of my gentle daughter's skin

Forget the desire

Oozing out of the hewn stones of Konarka. (A Rain of Rites, Page-42)

In his award winning book of poetry, 'Relationship' he describes Konarka in following terms:

Is marooned on the stone,
 On the dark chariot of the sun
 Whose fevered granite wheels claw desperately
 At the strangled earth in our lives. (Relationship, Page-22)

The stone has been recurring theme and favourite image of the poetry Jayanta Mahapatra right from his beginning of poetry carrier and till now. As even in the most recent book of his poetry, "Random Descent" he goes on to write a poem entitled, "The Stones" in which he is found in sheer frustration and astonishment and makes an indirect allusion and verbal attack on the emperor Ashoka who was responsible for atrocious and bloodthirsty killing of countless martyrs of Orissa:

Beneath the bloodied walls of history
 Nothing can happen more dreadful
 Than stones turned to gods through prayers
 Stones, whose eyes have had no expression in them
 Stones, like governments, who have no honour at all
 Stones, whose long arms easily batter and kill
 A young woman accused of adultery. (Random Descent, Page-47)

Mahapatra uses the image 'the age old proud stones' for ruthless and brutal king Ashoka. The great Kalinga War of 261 B.C. when emperor Ashoka won a victory after a war full of bloodshed and large scale killings before he turned on the path of peace and redemption. He then carved 'peaceful edicts on blood-red rock'. The river Daya is witnessed the heroic effort of the ancestors of Orissa which has become a sort of myth for successors. The group who were once heroic and valiant is now no more than ahistory and memory as its successors proved to be unworthy of keeping up their glory and pride.

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