

Eco-critical Elements in the Selected Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra

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Abstract

Jayanta Mahapatra is a well-known, distinguished, Indo-Anglican writer whose poems and short stories are acknowledged worldwide. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his work *Relationship* in 1981, which enabled him to gain the name of one of the doyens of Indian English Poetry. His major themes are all linked with his native place Orissa. His poems mentions Puri, Konarka, Chilika lake, Bhubaneswar recurrently and each of them are pictured in detail. An Ecocritical study on his poems is worth probing as it deserves more attention and

consideration in the current state of environmental crisis. His sole inspiration is his interaction with the nature and his intimate relationship to it. As ecocriticism rightly perceives it as the study of the relationship between human and nature, deserves a detailed study with his poems. River daya in his poem takes the role of a bearer of history and is the memory of the past valor and glory of Orissa. The study here focuses on the elements of ecocriticism in his selected poems.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Regionalism, Environmental Crisis, Sustainable resources, Nativity, Myth, history, Tradition, suffering.

Introduction

The identity of people is determined by their place. In order to know people and their identity, it is necessary to know where they belong. It is what plays a key role in shaping one's nature and character. Environment's role thus cannot be denied in shaping a person's physical, emotional and spiritual aspects. The place of a person develops a sense of love and affinity and moulds a person's conscience. It is one's source of inspiration to develop a particular thought process and the experience that one gains from them reflects their psyche. It is this sense of home that initiates the influence in people to feel for the nation whom they belong to and comes the role of nostalgia if they are away from their respective home lands. Studies show that people are more affected by the environment to develop the boundaries of their birthplace experiences.

Ecocriticism in Literary Analysis

Eco-criticism covers the relationship between the human beings and the environment. It is always aware that human beings are connected continuously with nature irrespective of their ethnicity. It also takes up various issues related to interior and exterior of the human

experiences. As always the human connection with the nature is lauded, the interaction with it also asserts concern over the environmental issues. Eco-criticism is an inter-disciplinary connection, raises various issues related to environmental crisis. The recent academic fraternity questions the western discourse of duality thinking as the separated notion of human being with the environs. It is by this, eco-criticism gains more importance in the recent years. It is appreciated that the academic world is dedicated and probing their concerns in the environmental literature. There are various disciplines of eco-criticism like deep-ecology, eco-feminism, social ecology, and environmental justice that plays a parallel role.

Ecocriticism deals with a variety of actions that they undergo to substantiate their interdisciplinary existence. It testifies the notion of ecological thinking in the process of development of a work of art. It gives a clear picture of its growth and support. It is also conscious of the slow growth of the work of art which contribute to the more genuine sense to the life. It also verifies the ecological content by reflective irony in the acute idea of environmental crisis and danger. Eco-critical reading doesn't stick to a single issue but is widespread and eclectic. It shares a diverse biosphere that it never pictures the abstruse symbolism. The aspect re-reads the works of art in the ecological perspective and concentrates on the relevance and representation of the natural world.

Ecocriticism covers wide range of aspects such as energy, balance, mutuality, imbalance, sustainable use of resources. It gives preference to people who explains and deconstructs nature. It explores the areas of regional literature, travelogues, and essays and its critical practices. It never appreciates the social constructivism as the nature is prioritized. It shifts the thoughts to connections beyond human world and emphasizes the eco-centric values and cultural responsibilities.

As Donelle Dresse rightly says that, "Understanding the self requires an understanding of what the self is not" (Dresse 2). The understanding of a self is characterized by what it is not.

The birth place creates the self or identity of a person's experience. It initiates the impact on people even they are unaware of it. The unconscious response of people with related to the birthplace gradually connects them when they grow up. The sense of a region also affects negatively if they had bad experiences in their past. Regionalism is a very sensual aspect in a human being that the smell, hear and feel of the place will have a lasting effect in them. It complements highly emotional and mental situations when considering the people who neglect their birthplace while they grow, but when they are away from it, the feeling of nostalgia creeps in drastically and it maintains the sense of regionalism until it is quenched by any emotional experience. People are after the connection among human beings and finds it disastrous when they fail in its attempt. The sense of regionalism is one that quench the idea of connection in its basic level that it connects one's self to one's own. Thus the connection to ourselves makes man more expressive to one's own surrounding which is more relevant in a sociological way of living.

The derivation of regionalism is essential in the study through post-colonial and eco-critical aspects as it stresses on the inherent nature of place in shaping one's self and consciousness. For a writer this sense is intrinsic to the concept of self and a few questions are asked related to this. How an author presents the land and what is his innate idea about it? How a place affects the sociological, political and ethical connections? How are the interaction of the characters with the environments that they are in? How they conflict with the present during the interaction? Wendell Berry in his *Home Economics* rightly says that:

“When we propose that humans should learn to behave properly with respect to nature so as to place their domestic economy harmoniously upon and within the sustaining and surrounding, wilderness, then we make possible a sort of landscape criticism.”(Berry, 151)

The mutual respect of human beings with the nature is the basic tenets of Ecocriticism. The literary academia overlooked this aspect of respect for nature previously and scrutinized the issues and concerns that affects the landscape. The pioneer among them was Cheryl Glotfelty. In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, she explains that, “nature per se is not the only focus of eco-critical studies of representation. Other topics include the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains, deserts, Indians, technology, garbage, and the body.”(Glotfelty, xxiii)

Jayanta Mahapatra and Ecocritical Analysis

Jayanta Mahapatra is the first Indian writer to win the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981 for his well acknowledged work *Relationship*. He has a collection of sixteen volumes of poetry, which is the highest of any other Indian English writer. He is having the largest number of poems in India. He has made English language regionalized and imbibed all the native fervor in his writings. His *Relationship* deals with the themes of History, myth and vision. It covers the lives of the people of Odisha in the present, Kalinga warriors who fought bravely, thousand two hundred artisans who engaged in the grand design of the temple at the emperor's order, the blood of the warriors that made the river Daya red. He highlights the lost vigor in the sons of the past heroes and urges them to regain the lost courage, glory and nationalism. Mainly, his poems stick to the landscapes and rustic beauty of the regional effervescence. The soil of Odisha is his favorite food for thought and all the themes are in and around his native place. The sense of place has immensely affected and influenced the writer which is the typical nature of the post-colonial writers of the age. All these references are bound to be analyzed under ecocriticism.

Mahapatra's poetic career started with a volume of forty nine poems *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*. It was an experimental work dealing with the themes of earth, language and Life. He

was a novice then and the language structure and the flow of emotions were fragmented. It was considered as an initial struggle to keep the emotional pace intact. The poems dealt with varied themes like sexuality, despair, family relationships, love, fear and alienation from the society. Mahapatra draws the myth as an alienation from the dominant Hindu society in which he was a neighbor. He was often disturbed by the questions from the priest that if he was a Hindu or not.

The next two volumes showed some maturity than the previous one. Poetic genius was further more evident in the next four volumes entitled *A Rain of Rites*, *Waiting*, *The False Start and Relationship*. In this, his poetic skills are seen shaped gradually which concentrated on the search for identity within the Hindu neighborhood and the sense of nativity. He continually dealt with the growing disrespect against woman in this volume. In his *A Rain of Rites*, the poem *Dawn* is a typical example of the sufferings of Indian woman and the role of patriarchy in her disintegration as a family woman which is parallel to the suffering of nature inflicted by human.

The post-colonial writers focuses on the indigenous culture and tradition by highlighting the rustic beauty, nationality and the tolerance of the people of the country. Jayanta Mahapatra seems to be in despair thinking about the present day atrocities and celebrates the past glory and harmony. He often remembers Mahatma Gandhi, which is a testimony of his despair to revoke the past glory and unanimity.

Mahapatra has raised Indian English poetry to the international status through his masterpiece *Relationship*. It is a realistic picture of his native land Odisha. He laments the architectural wonders like Konark, Puri and Bhubaneswar. The vivid description of his state's past glory and honour is its highlight. It is associated with a dreadful myth that the current situation is shown against the past. His description on these elements are the representations of

the natural world of his perception. While receiving Sahitya Akademi award, he remembered his homeland and stated:

“To Odisha, to this land in which my roots lie and lies by past and in which lies my beginning and my end, where the wind knees over the grief of river Daya and where the waves of Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Konark. I acknowledge my debt and my relationship.” (Samal 60).

The first part of his work *Relationship* deals with river Mahanadi, which is a major influence in his writings, Konark temple- which he explains the marvel rendered by his ancestors and the old harbors like Chilika and Chandipur. He feels nostalgia very often and is intertwined in this poem. He presents the current plight of Odisha and remembers the glorious heritage which he bemoans now of its inability to revoke now. He traces the vague grandeur tradition of the Odisha culture and feels sympathetic of the marvelous past.

“Time
and the boat
and the initiation into the mystery of peace;
the sailing ships of those maritime ancestors
who have vanished in the black Bay without a trace,
that only live in the sound of the waves
flinging themselves onto the dark fringes
of this land from Chilika to Chandipur”. (Mahapatra 60)

The warriors of the past are remembered who fought with the Mauryan Emperor, Ashoka. The war was fought near the river Daya, which turns into red because of the blood of the warriors. The river represents bearer of the past truths and history of the people of Orissa. It truly portrays the military superiority that they once had. The poem reveals the intensity of

war inflicted on the state of Orissa and later the enlightenment of the emperor Ashoka acquired by becoming the follower of Lord Buddha. Mahapatra shows his despair in the people who fail to regain the lost bravery and glory. The natural process of the migration of the birds to Chilika Lake is pictured carefully. The intervention of the natural phenomenon indicates the glory of the past is more natural and grandeur than the exhaustive present. It is an intentional inclusion to the awareness of the Odisha people that the birds and animals have not forgotten their ancestral habits. It also lights up that current lives of the people are different and need to reinstate that past glory as they are eternally deferred from the heroics of their ancestors. Myths of Rama and Sita is alluded in his poem as well as the myths of Konark temple- known for its splendid architecture. The story of the construction of the Konark temple is highly commendable.

The poet compares the life of two generations where the first toiled under the order of King Narasimha Deva and the second fails to remember their hardships and efforts to make the country unique. He ignites the thought of resurrection from the present state of lethargy and inspires the people of their ancestral history. The spreading of Buddhism is also mentioned as a path breaking event in their state. In his *Bare Face*, the village life is exemplified with vivid postures and daily chores of the common people. The people were then close to nature and coexisted peacefully. It pictures the woman taking a bath releasing her hairs in the pond which all becomes a representation of his perception of natural world. The images of the landscapes and natural bounties shows the reverence of the people of the past towards the ecosystem and sustainable resources.

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