



JayantaMahapatra's Indian Summer: An Exclusive Emblem of Imagist Poetry

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Stepping into the world of muse was a sort of life changing phenomena for an intellectual, erudite Physicist like JayantaMahapatra (b. 1928), who tried his hand also at photography and Novel writing before delivering Twenty-Seven precious volumes of poetry. His verse reflects boundless ideas and experiences garnered from his own environs and life events. He was born in an Oriya Rice Christian Family during a period of ill-fortunes, passed a turbulent phase when India was regaining its identity, observed Twentieth century's greatest catastrophic events, and lived throughout the aftermath of Independence struggle and World War II. Massive macabre massacre is ingrained deeply in him. He detected effects of atrocities on the human psyche; he noticed ruthlessness; he sensed women's plight; he gave voice to their pitiful condition; he realized loneliness in relations; he observed individual as well as social concerns; he felt drastic changes in tradition; he chose colour of suffering for expression which helped him in transcending the boundaries and finally achieving universal significance.

His poetry is the outcome of his reminiscences, his Inner Voice, and his hope for betterment of humanity. His love for Imagist style to express his feelings provide his poetry utmost uniqueness. He is against flat statements and paraphraseability, so he uses concrete, compressed, and precise images drawn from surroundings to convey his implicit ideas and messages. He avoids excessive verbiage. The best example of his Image poetry is *Indian Summer* published in the volume *A Rain of Rites*¹, 1976, which is deemed as a marvelous Indian English classic poem. This small poem with sundry segments flows in just eleven lines of uneven length. Popular Shakespearean proverb "Brevity is the soul of wit"², which is very true about Francis Bacon's essays, can be rightly applied to the images carved in this poem also. It brings into limelight JayantaMahapatra, the **Image Coiner**, as his images are captivating enough to force one to analyze these thoroughly.

The title, *Indian Summer*³ itself suggests that the poem is about a particular summer in India. Characters, creatures, scenes are all typical Indians. Mahapatra has implemented free verse and ordinary language for chosen images to limn caliginous atmosphere of a summer which occurred after long period of devastation. Though the images are not interconnected, yet show off the same level of grimness in personas as well as in happenings. All the images used show gravity of some tenebrous days. Mahapatra has done really marvelous job in incorporating highly enriched compact images.

“Over the sougning of the somber wind”⁴(p.60,1)

Poem opens with this audio-visual image of the personified wind highlighting moaning, mournful milieu of the period, with complete **dismal in the airs**. There is something depressing, something gloomy, which is killing all inside, killing their basic identity. Poet has intensified the effect by the use of onomatopoeic word ‘sougning’, and with repetition of the ‘o’ sound he tries to induce particular sensation in the minds. Wind is shown sighing, deeply longing for something or someone beyond description. Use of the word ‘Over’ conveys the idea that in spite of this sadness, decay, there is something more powerful, more potent, more enthralling which is casting its magic and that Super Power is pointed in the next pious image of priests:

“Priests are chanting louder than ever.”⁵(p.60,2)

This religious Image suggests, faith is spreading its roots gracefully than decay which is occupying the humanity. Amidst all the bad happenings priests are expressing their deepest trust in the grace of Almighty, their faith is unshaken. Their chanting is getting louder and louder with growing challenges; they are showing their extreme firmness. Both images are enlivened with audio -visual effects, image of Wind provides the backdrop of the times and image of priests exhibit overpowering of faith.

The succeeding image:

“The mouth of India opens.”⁶(p.60,3)

seems to be quite small and simple, but carries deeper connotations. On the realistic front, it can be mouth of Indian masses which is opened because of awe, terror and tragedies. On the mystical side, it can be redolent of the mouth of the Supreme Being Krishna which is opened to guide, to preach, to encourage. It can be suggestive of little Krishna’s mouth also which He opens to show that the whole humanity is part of Him. Basically, it’s a mythical reference, when Mata Yashoda asks Krishna to open His mouth and she sees the whole universe revolving in it. This image indicates every living or non-living thing is part of Him and finally has to merge in Him. All good, all evil is part of life, whatever happens, happens with His wishes or consent.

After this spiritual image, next image in line, which seems to be central to the poem, is that of crocodiles:

“Crocodiles moving into deeper waters.”⁷(p.60,4)

Crocodiles most beastly, ferocious, gigantic creatures are chosen by Mahapatra to represent humanity. They come to the surface for short span, but their real place is in deeper waters and finally return there. The Poet has used a kinesthetic image to show homeward movement. Metaphorically, it indicates that these beastly creatures (human beings) after performing their roles here on the earth are finally moving towards their roots, towards their provenance, towards their Supreme Father. Mahapatra has beautifully designed, this image with unfathomable, vast, mystic, deeper waters, representing the Supreme Being, Who is the ultimate destination of all.

Afterwards Mahapatra has randomly chosen image of the middens:

“Morning of heated middens

smoke under the sun.”⁸(p.60,5-6)

It speaks of a morning with heaps of mounting garbage, burning in the broad daylight. It is must to burn these rubbish mounds as with the passing time it is getting difficult to bear the stink and to stand by it. Middens here, point out darkness, drabness, corruption, immorality, materialism and evils prevailing in the society which are crossing boundaries, so the time has come to take control of all these before this could take hold of humanity. Optimistically speaking, it is an hour of moral

upliftment, to sanctify the souls and to move on the spiritual path. With the help of this thermo- visual image poet has indirectly urged for purification of the whole humanity.

And lastly Mahapatra has taken a very traditional image... of a Good Wife:

“The good wife
lies in my bed,
through the long afternoon;
dreaming still, unexhausted
by the deep roar of funeral pyres.”⁹(p.60,7-11)

In the image of a good wife, Mahapatra has presented his own wife as a pronoun ‘my’ is used here. The image of Good wife lying in the bed with her husband is evocative of conjugal bliss, of love making. Maybe the poet calls her good as she is satisfying him and she is wholeheartedly devoted towards his needs, as it is demanded in the conventional Indian society. She is still dreaming of physical union, how to make her husband happy and doesn’t seem to be tired in any way. Though there is violence, decay, and death like situation outside yet she is totally dedicated and completely focused on her duties. Outward disturbances are not able to affect her in any way. This very powerful image suggests, as a good wife is showing her fidelity, fondness, and commitment well amidst all the disturbances, in the same manner, everyone should show dedication and love towards the Supreme Being despite all failures, hopelessness, and despair. Eventually, He has to drench humans with true solace. The poem ends with this unique audio-visual image of an Indian good wife and funeral pyres. Basic emphasis emerging from almost all the images is on (Indian) Quietism.

Mahapatra has used really a deft hand in randomly choosing images and weaving these in a complete whole. It is like a collage in which different images suggest single significant theme. On the surface level, this catalogue of diverse images seems to present some tragic vision, some phenomenal reality, but deeper analyses show some ray of hope for redemption, some spiritual feature. Here in this poem through various images different types of gloom are presented which finally persuade to merge into the Supreme Being or to take shelter in Him. All in all, it is an incredibly meaningful and thought provoking poem with images frozen into particular moments. The poet has conveyed actually a wonderful message through vivid images.

References:

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9. Ibid., 60.