

CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

Mahapatra's three verse collection, viz., Relationship (1980), Life signs (1983) and Dispossessed Nests (1986) are studied here from the thematic point of view. The aim of this dissertation was to study various themes depicted in these collections and the vision of life emerging from them.

The themes have been studied and interpreted in all their details. An attempt also is made to see the development of various themes and to search for the frame-work of philosophy governing Mahapatra's poetry. The Chapters III, IV and V are devoted to the study of the themes of the poems included in these collections.

In chapter number three, the twelve part epic poem Relationship is analysed and the attempt is made to study experience of the past and the sense of rootedness, alienation, loneliness, guilt accompanied with it. The poet is very much conscious of the sense of the past and is confronted with a quest "Why am I?". The involvement with 'the self' and 'the society' is the root of Mahapatra's Relationship. The epigraph of this poem is derived from Walt Whitman's title Song of My self. Mahapatra may not openly claim, as Walt

Whatman does, that he is 'large' and that he 'contains multitudes'. But the underlying current of this claim, the poet's profound concern with the community, the society to which he belongs is basic to Mahapatra's quest. This sense of past is further clear when he says "the cry of a whole clan of people is on my back".¹ This search for roots and the relationship with the past is the core of Relationship.

Here, his concern is not for the contemporary scene but for an indefinite travel into the past to search for roots. At the same time we find evolution of the present through the past. It seems that his is a search for timeless existence. We find his 'Relationship' with his rich culture, religion, rituals, traditions and myths of Orissa. All this is achieved through his dialogue with Konarka temple which is now in ruinous state. He finds centuries-old stones stir with life, and the living 'marooned on the stone'. This is realised when he says:

Once again one must sit back and bury the face
in this earth of forbidding myth
the phallus of the enormous stone²

The sense of the past gets keener and we find the poet trying to locate his roots firmly in the primeval stones, out of which have evolved the topsoil of modern Orissa with all kinds of organic life on it.

His discourse is with his cultural, historical and personal past. When he explores into the past his mind is filled with guilt, loneliness and alienation. Though he submits himself to the past and finds his own roots in it, his altogether painful experience. When we study the kind working behind this process, we find the element of biculturalism accompanying it. Mahapatra is oddly Christian. He is converted Christian but the rituals of Hindu culture no doubt have made a deep impress on his mind and this seems to provide impetus to biculturalistic confrontation. His rationalist mind rejects the Hindu God behind the myth and people following myths. He finds myth as an evilsome element associated with Hindu God. The search for "Who am I?" is complete after many confrontations and questions. Hence in Relationship, the sense of alienation and the sense of rootedness develop side by side. Mahapatra says:

I know I can never come alive
If I refuse to consecrate at the
altar of my origin³

The sense of isolation makes him aware that this crumbled and cracked stones are the real essence of his origin. Mahapatra says that existence is inseparable from the roots in the past. He agrees that **life force is** shaped by culture, tradition, myths and symbols of

past. He re-apprehends his relationship with the past, though the past is sorrowful and bitter.

We find that the sense of biculturalism makes Mahapatra insider as well as outsider and his rationalist mind also on the other hand operates to shape his consciousness.

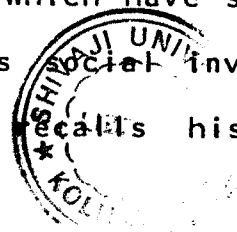
Some say that Mahapatra's Christian and rationalist mind confronts with Hindu myth, tradition and culture. Some Indian critics say, 'Relationship' is product of non-linear and fragmented experiences. There is no new realisation as such in it'. But this is not true. Though there are non-linear and fragmented experiences, there is a sort of unity of vision working behind. The poem is an attempt of the poet's sustained effort at an integrated experience. Experiences are more authentic and bring to notice that man's psyche gets shape only because of the influences of the past. And when the roots in the past are confirmed one can proceed further. To search for roots is nothing but the search for existence of the self matters and Mahapatra's Relationship must be read in this light. The poem is a psychic reliving of one's imagined origins.

Relationship has many epic-like characteristics such as 'sublime' manner of speech, heightened diction and long sentences, an introductory announcement of its theme, an invocation of the muse, and its division

like most epics in twelve parts. It is a modern long poem concerned with the self's relationship to kinds of historical materials which have in the past been the basis and culture of the epic. The epic traditionally is objective in the sense that the artist is at a distance from the material. In Relationship, however, such distinctions collapse as the narrative is the poet's attempt to regain the materials of an epic culture through a dream like pilgrimage. There are a few linking narrative connections.

In chapter number four the poems from Life Signs are studied to enlist the various themes. After the spiritual quest in the past, the poet moves towards the present - the present scene of the Cuttack land. The different situations in life are depicted in Life Signs. Every poem is a sign of life and lists the suffering of man on the level of sex, hunger, starvation, drought, religion and intellect. When he deals with social reality, he is more ironic and points out the truth behind it. The poet records every life sign in Cuttack and the sufferings of the man located as the centre of it.

The poet is not only conscious about the contemporary life signs but also the life signs which have shaped his own life. On the one hand there is social involvement and on the other personal. He recalls his own



ancestors and finds his roots, the sense of ageing, the sense of death and his love. This search on personal level creates the sense of isolation, fear, guilt and rootedness. The reaction to his personal past is well evinced in the poems - "The captive Air of Chindipur - on sea", "Life signs", "Of that love", "Firefly", "June", "Iron". Alongwith this personal quest, he also reacts against social sphere and marks the human condition in it. He is conscious all the time of the suffering of man and his ironical reaction to it indirectly pointed towards the contemporary socio-political set up. The social aspect is brought to notice in the poems, such as "Morning signs", "An Impotent Poem", "A Monsoon day Fable", "The vase", "A country", "The lost children of America", "Total solar Eclipse", "Man of his Nights" and in "Dead River". Some other poems in the collection also concentrate on the social aspect. The issues like sex, hunger, starvation, poverty, drought, and religion are dealt with to point out human suffering. The realisation of the utter suffering leads one to think of the hopeless economy of India, lawlessness, meaningless religious activities, showiness of life etc.

The analysis of the poems in this chapter brings to notice poet's ironical reactions to social scenes. It also makes us aware of the poet's attempt to understand the huge suffering on the various planes. He records

the suffering and finds its roots in socio-economic set up. The poet is also conscious about the moral crisis in contemporary life. The very shades of life in Cuttack are presented here in bold strokes. The poet is not happy to find his own self in such a "Suffering lot" influenced by socio-economic and religious set up. His rationalist mind rejects this and makes a search for betterment in life. The poems in Life Signs in a way are 'Criticism of life'.

The poet's personal world is also recorded ironically. His dwelling in the past is to make a search for his ancestors and thus to find his own roots, his sense of love, the sense of death. Mahapatra stands apart from other Indian English poets as far as the treatment of love is concerned. His love poems are never loaded with overwhelming passions and gross sensuousness. His treatment of love is basically human, rational. His love poems are mixture of the two: ecstasy in love and the imminent fear of being separated. His recall of childhood, his ancestors, is an attempt to search his self and with it the reactions like loneliness, despair, guilt and rootedness develop one after the other. The life felt in the past and the life felt now is the concern of the poem.

In the *fifth* chapter, the poems in 'Dispossessed Nests' are studied. The major themes here are violence,



disintegration, betrayal of political leaders, hijacking, human destruction. The book-I entitled as 'Bewildered Wheatfields' deals with Punjab Turmoil and the second entitled as 'A dance of Bejewelled Snakes' is about Bhopal gas-tragedy. The poems under these two titles do not suck their energy from the veins of real life, but they explore the theoretical contexts of the Punjab and Bhopal events. The idea of terrorism and how it has brought violence and fear in the life of common man in Punjab is a dazzling account. The world of terrorism is the world of bomb-blast, killing, death, curfew and this is the lot of the common man. And the poems one after another underline this social violence and destruction. The various layers of terrorism and its unknowable fear is noticeable in the poems - 1,2,4,5,6,7,8, 9,10. The very 'possession' of man is threatened by terrorism and heinous killings. Human destruction confirms the dispossession of nests as in:

This is the last explosion
We hope
and await

How we wonder
in the mind's expanding nova
the dispossessed nests⁴

The humanity suffers the threat of 'Multi-National' companies, the betrayal of political leaders and meets

its tragic destination. This is the central concern of Mahapatra in these poems. The Bhopal gas-tragedy and the victims of it is the subject of some poems. Some poems are about corrupt political leaders, and socio-political crisis in the country. The concern for the Bhopal gas-tragedy is to point out the attitude of the multinational companies towards the lives of common man. When this mishap occurred thousands were gasping for breath - small, young and old met the same fate - the death. The tone of the poems in general is morose and elegiac. Mahapatra reflects upon the corrupt political leaders here. He is talking about the 'Sinister shadow' of the 'minister', with the 'dark power' in the 'merciful sun' such is the country and political world is left behind for young generation (Poem 28). The corrupt political leaders image forth as 'the tall dark mountain' (Poem 20) and their attitude 'with India our India, barely worth raping' (Poem 20). This political decay, negligence makes Mahapatra weary. Their very tendency, he catches as 'The taste that comes of our leaders/shirking and questions of peoples existences' (Poem 20).

The analysis of the poems in this chapter brings to notice Mahapatra's immediate concern for the social reality and violence. He is not talking about the Punjab problem or not giving any journalistic information

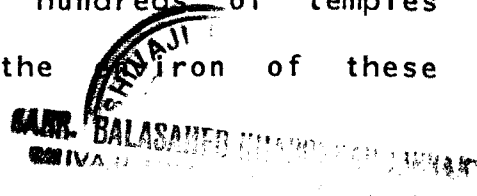
about Bhopal gas-tragedy. But his is a concern for human suffering imposed by anti-social elements. His inner-self shapes the outer reality, and brings out the human predicament effectively. The terrorism has turned the land of Punjab into the 'The Waste Land' where man has lost his possession and dignity. Every poem in a serious tone, depicts the large, unabating violence on the one hand and the meak submission and helpless acceptance of it by the common man on the other. The horror of supreme knives and bomb-blasts leads to disintegration of humanity. The very Wheatfield which has flourished the mind and body of the Punjab is now habitated by dead bodies of people, and the endless cries. The poems one after the other record the inflicted fear of terrorism in the mind of people. The very existence and possession of man is challenged. Though there is no direct reference to Punjab problem in some poems there is a slight reference to 'the concept of 'Khalistan'', 'an enormous pathological dream of 'Dharma''. These poems can be studied in the context of Punjab problem or the predicament of man in the socio-political set up.

The poems about Bhopal gas-tragedy are concerned with human suffering and how man is alone in his struggle with social elements, accepting his lot without any excuse. Mahapatra records the pains of gast-victimised

people in the most poignant way. The man behind the gas, gasping for breath is the anguish of Mahapatra. He finds human relationship with it. Mahapatra underlines the mute suffering of humanity in the hands of social elements - setting up such plants and showing the least concern for the victimised and the utmost concern for the commercial profits.

Mahapatra also probes into the world of politics to point out how it is degraded and stranger to the well being of the people. Mahapatra's is a very harsh tone about political leaders and to describe them he uses the image of 'dark', 'dark power', 'dark mountain'. He is very ironical about political leaders and the fate of the country. He underlines the evil fate of politics and political leaders and with it the endless suffering of community. His satirical and ironical reflection points out the values of politicised region and commercialised politics. The 'Dispossessed Nests' is the cry of humanity at the sight of destruction, violence, and suffering.

Some other themes emerging from its poetry need to be examined. His major bulk of poetry has religious background - the background of temples, priests, myths, rituals and rites. His Relationship and Life Signs have this background. There are hundreds of temples in Orissa. Mahapatra lives in the iron of these



temples. Then the question arises whether he is a religious person or what? The answer to this question can be had in his interview with Norman Simms, where he clearly explains, "I don't think, I am a religious person in the way most Indians are. Frankly, I am not".⁵ Hence though Indian philosophy may have coloured and shaped his inwardness he is far away from being religious. His poems do not deliver any religious philosophy. His rationalist mind confronts with religious rituals. When he sees the funeral rites, traditional customs in the area of temples and rivers he questions himself 'what inner needs provide religion?'. The colourful religious practices, rituals contrasted with our indifference to human suffering and misery makes Mahapatra uneasy. He finds that religion has not provided any effective and adequate antidote to human suffering. In a letter of Kazuka Shiraish in Tokyo he writes 'our gods must seem as indifferent and amorphous as the winds to human misery and sorrow though we are known to be the most spiritual of nations in the world'.⁶ His is a rationalist approach towards life.

Irony is the major device in the poetry of Mahapatra. His mediative mind shapes the ideas through irony. There is a built-in irony in his poetry but it is mute, subtle and spread over a long passage so that it never really develops a sting. The use of irony

is to point out the hidden truth and Mahapatra is the poet of 'truth'.

The ironical treatment of subject matter of poems evinces that Mahapatra is in a search of unity in life. His is a search for betterment in life, for dignity of man in society, for human relationship. Human dignity and rationalistic approach are the 'basics' of Mahapatra's poetry. He wants to free the man from spiritual and intellectual fear. His is a healthy approach towards life. He has empathy for suffering. Suffering is the master current in his poetry and it comes vibrantly alive in Relationship, Life Signs, and Dispossessed Nests. More than any other Indian English poet, Mahapatra depends upon resources of the unconscious and his unconscious would seem to connect more than most with collective unconscious of India.

Mahapatra's poetry has some lapses. His poems deliver images one after another and it becomes difficult for the reader to draw proper meaning. Frequently, we come across similar themes. He often jumbles up numerous ideas in a poem whose structure defies them. He frequently gets bemused by the language and this results in his failure to create the proper perspective.

His is a poetry of non-comment. Images shape the subject matter. It is on the readers to draw the meaning out of the content. In a sense it is a modern

poetry.

Mahapatra's poetry is over-loaded with images. The subject unfolds through images. He draws images from nature, body and inanimate things. A skilful practitioner of the montage technique, he paints image "highly evocative and hunting",⁷ through the ingenious collections of familiar words which help him to achieve a remarkable effectiveness not possible otherwise. He uses symbols to express his 'inexpressible'. His symbols could be classified as: silence, sunlight, dawn, water, sky, moon, rain, temple, beggar, priest, fisherman, crow etc.

It profits a little to divide Mahapatra's poetry according to the conventional 'form' of sonnet, lyric, ballad etc. As almost all his poems are simply vivid scenes, there is impressive number of poems which cannot conform to any particular 'form'. So far as the metrical form is concerned, Mahapatra writes mostly iambic and trochaic forms and rarely in anapaestic form. Though rhyme-scheme is there in his poetry it is blank verse which is predominant throughout. He like most of the Indian English poets writes in free verse. Mahapatra himself acknowledges that "I'd like to write free verse, if that is verse at all, and I realise academics do not think so".⁸ In his Relationship and Life Signs we find the use of free flowing of lines.

Mahapatra handles his craft with an unusual care, sincerity and dexterity. He evinces a deep aesthetic concern for both structure as well as linguistic versatility revealing maturity and originality of remarkably high order.

His is a distinctively unsentimental voice, now conversational, now dramatic, now lyrical, now prosaic, now questioning, now searching but always strikingly unpretentious and powerful - as his poems are vivid pictures, scenes of reality.

Mahapatra's Indian sensibility is more vital than any other Indian English poet. He is the only poet in Indian writing in English whose poetic stuff is wedded with Indian tradition, myth, culture and symbols. He lives in the environ of temples and it seems that his sensibility is shaped and coloured by the multitudes of temples. In his poems, there are the sounds of temple bells, the prayers of priests, the funeral pyres, whores and crows constituted by the land of Orissa. Thus the Oriyan ethos is the soul of his poetry and the sensibility. K.A. Panikar observes it as 'The sun of the eastern coast of India shines through his poems'.⁹ His Indianness is seen at its best in his poem about Orissa, where local and regional is raised to the level of the universal. His Relationship is a hymn on Konarka temple. Here we find Mahapatra's

'Relationship' with his rich culture, myth and tradition. In Life Signs, the Cuttack scene comes vibrantly alive. The social milieu of Cuttack is the concern of Mahapatra. Indian sensibility gets realised in the poems such as: "The Captive Air of Chandipur - on - sea", "Evening Landscape by the River", "Autumn", "Life Signs", "Total Solar Eclipse", "The Lost Children of America", "A Country", "June", etc.. Thus the smell of Oriyan landscape scatters in his poems. The poems in Dispossessed Nests are the direct reference to socio-political scene and reality in 1984. Indian sensibility is vital and authentic in his poems.

To conclude, Mahapatra is a great poet of Indian writing in English today. The themes depicted in his poetry define the Indian mind and culture and present the image of India on the one hand and the superb handling of them in words and phrases of rare value and sense speaks of Mahapatra's rich mind and his wider Indian sensibility on the other. His poetry is sharp cry at the vision of life. Its subject is human suffering and predicament. Its aim is to study human existence in relation to suffering and to make a search for a possibility of its betterment.

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- 1 "The Quality of Ruins", Life Signs, p. 15.
- 2 Relationship, p. 9.
- 3 Ibid. P. 16
- 4 Dispossessed Nests, p. 25.
- 5 "A conversation with Jayanta Mahapatra" The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: A Critical Study (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1986), p. 292.
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