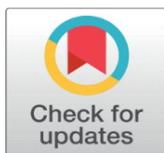
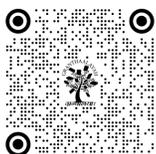


# UNHEARD PSYCHE: EXPLORING VARIOUS FACETS OF WOMEN IN THE POETRY OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

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## ABSTRACT

Jayanta Mahapatra's poetic world surrounds the vivid images of women as wives, whores, adolescent girls, rural women, and metropolitan women which echoes the plight of women to a great extent. Mahapatra has tragically explored the pains and tribulations of women, especially in a male-dominated society. Imbibing his obsessions towards loss, suffering, quest for self, grief, death, and sexuality, he introduces various facets of women in the chaotic world. The portrayal of women in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra explores an alienated world with an over-mounted confession. He expresses the harsh realities and struggles of women in establishing their own identity. His poetry deals with some prominent themes such as hunger, sexual assault, and starvation which lead women to live miserable lives. By depicting the world of women, Mahapatra's reverence and hospitality towards women are quite mesmerizing and he considers them as an epitome of love and sacrifice.

**Keywords:** Hunger, Starvation, Obsession, Confession, Metropolitan

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A woman has always been considered a mere object within the patriarchal structures and ideologies. Therefore, Mahapatra tries to create a significant position for women in society breaks the shackles of baseless perceptions regarding women, and transcends beyond the various conceptualizations of patriarchal hierarchy. He has created a space for women by sharing their pains and sufferings amid boundaries created by male chauvinism. He has also channeled the role of a woman as a mother, grandmother, wife, and daughter and their influence on society. Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the renowned Indo-Anglian poets of postmodernism. The vital aspect of post-modern poetry is to deal with perceptions in mind in correlation to

the outer or external world. With the arrival of budding writers after post-independence, a creative form of art took place in English literature to mirror various aspects prevalent in society. Mahapatra is a poet of Indian sensibility and his poems mostly deal with the themes of social relationships, cultural values, alienation, and quest for self. Mahapatra's poetry incorporates the concept of imagery and symbols in the depiction of temples, streets, and the various treasures of Orissa. Mahapatra simply describes what is near and dear to him and tries to relate it to a visionary world. Being an academic poet, his poems are ample warrant that they are completely personal and ironical, full of allusions, and maintain secrecy. Jayanta Mahapatra as an Indo-Anglican modern poet, established a remarkable footprint in the poetic world through his poetic consciousness. His staunch affinity towards authenticity in the portrayal of harsh realities of life distinguishes him from other contemporaries of the modern era. Most of his poetry deals with the themes of alienation, the quest for self, self-exploration, insecurities, pains, agonies, and the most prominent one silence which leaves an indelible imprint on the minds of the readers. He synchronizes an external world of freedom with the internal world of the past and tries to explore the hidden self through poetic consciousness. As a prophet, he embraces the harsh realities of life and imperfections by escaping the world of artificiality and creates a scope for a new world of liberation and self-discovery. Jayanta Mahapatra born in the soil of Orissa started writing poems very late as compared to his contemporaries and awarded with Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award in 1975. Among many writers, he was the one who received the Central Sahitya Academy Award for his poem 'Relationship' in 1981. Childhood memories had an indelible imprint on Jayanta Mahapatra through which he could transcend from internal to external voyage of life. Moreover, his versatility in language and expertise in tackling life complexities makes his poems unique and far-flung. He depicts his own culture and heritage to explore the self-constructed inner world and highlights it with his Indian sensibility. He writes what surrounds him, he writes what he feels because the harsh realities of his surroundings deeply affect his consciousness. Most of his poems deal with stark themes such as poverty, hunger, alienation, and the quest for identity which shows the existence of socio-cultural aspects in Orissa. In the poems of Mahapatra, womanhood has been portrayed as a curse and the pessimism of women has been highlighted in a male-dominated society. Since a woman is entrapped within the confinements of male chauvinism, she has been considered an object in society and boycotted at its inception. The psyche of men never allows women to be treated as human beings rather they are being subjugated in the hands of the male-dominated culture which sets limitations for women and never allows them to be their counterparts in certain fields.

A woman can never be represented, a woman is that force who always transcends nomenclatures and ideologies (Sarangi and Jha 131). In such orthodox perceptions and boundaries, an approach forming the socio-cultural identity of women does not persist. Eminent poets such as Jayanta Mahapatra, Mayadhar, and Fakir Mohan Senapati toiled hard to grab a space for women in a patriarchal society and looked forward to creating a scope for women to explore the conflicts of their inner world. To comprehend the various facets of women, Mahapatra with his Indian sensibility and consciousness tries to go beyond the psyche of a man, especially in Orissa. His poetry explores an inner world of hidden emotions, pains, and agonies causing disturbances in facing the various socio-cultural challenges in life. The portrayal of social realities has always been marvelous in the works of Mahapatra which amalgamates social and cultural expressions. A woman has always been considered as an epitome of suffering at all stages of life and is presented as

helpless, neglected, and marginalized. Most of his poems deal with the pathetic or muted state of a woman who struggles to form her own identity. To get rid of male chauvinism, a woman needs to realize her own identity and acquire a space amidst the male-dominated culture. The image of Orissa resists an individual to go beyond the socio-cultural context. Recognition of roles in society is the main concern in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. He put his efforts into depicting a subjugating picture of a woman and transcending the massive patriarchal hierarchy. In his poems, an essence of symbols and imagery marks a great transition in the portrayal of the state of women.

For ages, women have been treated as a token of sacrifice and suffering. In his mythical viewpoint, he asserts, that God dwells there where women are revered. He pens down his painful attitude towards women. He is successful in deploring how a woman is an object of passivity and a mute swan. In the poem 'Dawn at Puri' he describes the desire of a woman.

Her last wish to be cremated here  
Twisting uncertainly like light  
On the shifting sands (16-18)

In various phases of life, a woman has been performing identical roles since immemorial times whether it is concerned with performing rituals or traditions, upbringing of children, or maintaining a household but society fails to give her due privilege, roles, and identity. Despite she has been criticized as a wife, mother, daughter, and grandmother in the hands of ruthless patriarchy. For example, prostitutes are considered as the most ostracized community and are ill-treated accordingly but Mahapatra imparts romantic sensibility to the prostitutes in creating a social space in society. In his popular poem 'Whorehouse in Calcutta Street' he explores the pains and sufferings of the prostitutes facing the dogmas of cultured civilization. Mahapatra is not only concerned with the plight of prostitutes but also depicts the images of women who are exiled within the four walls of the house and their lost identity. Mahapatra tries to discover their identity and gives a weapon to their thought through the medium of poetry. The male-dominated society has always depreciated the value and existence of women irrespective of their roles and responsibilities. They have been depicted as sufferers in society and victims of toxic male domination which leads to the exploitation and marginalization of womanhood. It shows how a woman loses her connection with the process of self-realization and how she is bound to face emotional traumas and ultimately embraces psychological loneliness. Jayanta Mahapatra never failed to describe the pathetic and melancholy state of women. He presented the image of solitude in a very simple and authentic manner.

On most nights there is a woman  
Who just lies in her bed, open  
Like any old thing in the house she lives in  
Like time, that pours over her  
The walls keep their close watch  
Over her loneliness and not even that  
Can go wrong here. (On Most Nights)

The above lines have been taken from the poem 'On Most Nights' in which the loneliness of a woman has been depicted and further, the melancholy of a woman is being romanticized. The poet considers that the loneliness of a woman exists not only at the socio-cultural level but also at the psychological also. The poet focuses

on the status of a woman, especially after marriage, and how she is confined to the four walls of the house. Her deprivation of freedom shows her deep agony born out of loneliness. A woman is defined only through certain aspects in a patriarchal society such as marriage, household chores, childbearing, etc. To maintain such responsibilities and dictums cast by society, her pathos is overlooked for the sake of traditions and ideologies. It is very common practice that in fulfillment of patriarchal desires, a woman sacrifices her dreams and ambitions and becomes a slave. Therefore, Mahapatra tries hard to bring the plight of a woman into the light of his poetic consciousness and is successful in portraying various facets of women in society.

An Englishman, Roger Iredele observed Jayanta Mahapatra as a modern Indian poet in English, an eminent poet with worldwide standards and comments. Belong to a lower-middle-class family from Orissa, his poems gained worldwide immense recognition and reputation. Mahapatra never negotiated in depicting the culture-oriented state of Orissa because his affinity towards Orissa and its culture shows an ample warrant of his poetic consciousness. Mahapatra's poetry describes various complexities dealing with real-life situations highlighted through the matrix of Orissa. His visualizations and perspectives regarding his heritage can be better gauged by his language and imagination. His poetic consciousness is incorporated with an Indian sensibility and further leads through his imagination. There is sadness in the tone in expressing socio-cultural ethos which can be felt in his poetic creations. Although a great transformation can be seen in the province of cultural aesthetics. Orissa is said to be a state where women were being entrapped in the boundaries of the staunch patriarchal system which firmly believed that the roles and responsibilities of women could only be emancipated within the male-dominated structures. The male tendency never to treat a woman as a human being, especially the patriarchal structure in Orissa can't imagine women as a counterpart with the same instincts. This conception leads to the presence of women being perished or demolished in a society. In this regard, Madhusudan Prasad has sarcastically noticed that women have a bruised presence surrounded by the four walls of male confinements. Therefore, a woman falls prey to such a patriarchal structure. It hits hard that a woman feels insecure in developing her own socio-cultural identity in such orthodox surroundings. Mahapatra's poetry proved successful in highlighting the pathos of women and trying to impart a significant space for women in a male-dominated society. The effort is to break the confinements of abstract ideas of a woman who is considered a mere object of sexual embarrassment.

The social concerns in Mahapatra's poetry revolve around love and sex which are directly connected to poverty. Orissa, a state which is known for its poverty leads to form social aspects in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra. He shows how poverty affects the various aspects of life which compels one to indulge in illegal professions. For example, Mahapatra depicts the life of prostitutes. It shows the helplessness of prostitutes having no alternative and unwillingly preferring brothels as a profession to earn their daily bread. The poem 'Whorehouse in Calcutta Street' describes the manners and standards of a prostitute. It shows the compelling life of a woman being in the profession of prostitution. Therefore, Mahapatra's portrayal of poverty is quite realistic and unambiguous. One of the finest examples of poverty can be seen in the poem 'Hunger' in which a fifteen-year-old girl, the daughter of a fisherman indulged in the profession of prostitution. Due to financial constraints, the teenage girl is forced to impress her customers to fend for her family. Woman is merely considered as a sexual object from a chauvinistic point of view. A woman is represented in society just as a "place for man" which bitterly signifies that a woman

is nothing but considered as an object whether she acts as a mother, daughter, or wife. In a patriarchal framework, the picture of women is constructed in such a manner that shows the various conflicts, struggles, and constraints that women confront in day-to-day life. The loss of self-identity and space, non-recognition of rights and liberty exhibits the psyche of the male ideologies. Jayanta Mahapatra accepts the conflicts of women and transcends beyond the ambivalence of the patriarchy. He employs the concept of cultural sensibility to go beyond the pseudo-notions of man. Women are considered as things and the things can never be taken into consideration according to the male psyche. According to this notion, Mahapatra tries to probe into the social realities by giving voice to the voiceless and pouring out the hidden feelings and emotions of women, who are extremely deep inside. It is only possible through the medium of the poetic process that the pain or agony of women can be traced or well expressed. However, Mahapatra never fails to exhibit the social realities in a realistic, sensible, and significant manner. He talks of various cultural dispersions prevalent in society. Due to the sensible insights of Jayanta Mahapatra, one can transcend beyond the obstructions confronted by women under a patriarchal hierarchy. By amalgamating imagination and symbols which are quite ironic in nature, he tries to evoke the frustration and enunciation of male chauvinism. Undoubtedly, the poetic consciousness of Mahapatra surrounds particularly with the images of women as a whore, beloved, teenage girls, wives, and city women in exploring the tragic incidents with metaphoric evocations. For long women have been portrayed as a token of sacrifice which further leads to pain and suffering. However, Mahapatra renders a sort of reverence and hostility towards the primordial treatment of women in society. His mythical point of view provokes 'Where women are revered there dwells gods'.

A prostitute who is considered an ostracized human, an outcast in society is blasphemy. Being not part of a civilized or well-cultured society, Mahapatra still tries to give them a romantic identity in his poems and convinces a decent space for them. For instance, the poem 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' shows a clear picture of Prostitution in India where the activities of whores and their customers have been appropriately depicted.

Dream children, dark, superfluous;  
You miss them in a house's dark spaces, how can't you?  
Even the women don't wear them  
like jewels or precious stones  
the faint feeling deep at the woman's centre  
that brings back the discarded things  
the little turnings of blood  
at the far edge of the rainbow. (20-27)

The above lines have been taken from the poem 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' where Mahapatra has poured out his experience dealing with a whore and her customer. It depicts the picture of a whorehouse open to any visitor in search of sexual pleasures. It also seems that the delighted whorehouse smiling amid a lighting street where whores are deliberately waiting for the customers. The poem has its base at the psychological surface which doesn't show any pornographic pictures. Mahapatra tries to show the behavior of the whores towards the customers in a very natural way with a very sad tone. Therefore, the poem depicts the day-to-day obstructions faced by the prostitutes in so-called well-cultured society. It is cacophonous to think that the world belongs to those who loaf around the prostitutes longing for sexual gratification. Moreover, it is much prevalent in culture

like Orissa but Mahapatra gracefully explores the plight of women and tries to establish their own identity in so-called cultured society and he especially focuses on those who fall prey to the carnal pleasure of the inevitable materialism.

Mahapatra not only highlights the plight of ostracized women but he also talks about women who are confined within the four walls under patriarchal structure. In a very sensitive and serene tone, he gives voice to the voiceless. However, they are found victims in relationships acting as a mother, wife, or a daughter. With the help of speculative irony, the role of a wife is being highlighted especially in a state like Orissa where male power disapproves of the very existence of a woman and promotes the subjugation over the liberty and power of survival. A wife is devoid of that freedom that she used to enjoy before marriage. She feels disappointed and insecure and tries to overcome the psychological altitudes of loneliness. Mahapatra never fails to signify an expression of solitude with deep concern and meaning. According to the world, the identity of a woman relies on the man's desire. The solitude faced by a woman is further given a romantic identity by Mahapatra. A woman has to undergo a solemn falsity created by patriarchy. She has to suffer loneliness and is compelled to become a sufferer at the hands of male domination. Therefore, she suffers not only on social and cultural grounds but undergoes emotional trauma too. If it is concerned with the four walls, her existence becomes a matter of mockery which restricts her freedom and space. It becomes quite natural that the patriarchal authority overpowers the parameters of women who are confined within the four walls. In one of the finest poems of Jayanta Mahapatra, *A Missing Person* a woman seeks to come out of darkness because she is unable to share her pains and agonies and is ultimately reluctant to reach the point of satiety. She has no choice and opts for narcissism as her icon.

In the darkened room  
a woman  
cannot find her reflection in the mirror  
waiting as usual  
at the edge of sleep  
In her hands she holds  
the oil lamp  
whose drunken yellow flames  
known where her lonely body hides. (1-9)

In the above lines, a comparison has been made simultaneously with double meaning. A woman who is unable to search for her image in the dark room likewise, India also failed to find its reflection during the British rule because it was physically, culturally, traditionally, and economically shattered due to colonization. The term 'darkened' denotes the dogmas of an orthodox society where a woman is placed. She is humiliated by the nuances of poverty and ultimately she finds herself lonely. The only choice she is left with is sleep where she can dream of her ambitions in loneliness. To eradicate the darkness in the room, she holds an oil lamp to bring light into her life. She is in search of her own identity and realizes the fact that she will not get the social and cultural identity that she deserves. Being a lonely soul, she has to live with her own shadow and is bound to love herself. To get rid of darkness, she seeks an oil lamp to feel the light of her life and finally embraces alienation being her companion. A woman who is on the verge of sleep signifies that the flames of the oil lamp remind her of loneliness and, loss of her own identity in the absence of her partner. There are elements of fear, expectations, imagination reality, and the pain of separation which keep the readers captivated. In this way, it can be said that the

poem, 'A Missing Person' shows the unheard pathos of a woman and her lost identity. In this regard, Mahapatra tries to explore the socio-cultural identity of women through the poems such as 'Hunger' and 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' where they are striving hard in quest of their identity. In the hands of patriarchal structures, they act like puppets in this mean world. He also tries to break the illusion of expectations of a woman from pseudo pseudo-loving husband but all her dreams reach an extent where she feels absolute loneliness in her room. The only choice she left is her funeral pyre to meet her desires.

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

A woman has no one to share her feelings and emotions and therefore, she starts talking to herself. The world is an enigma that a woman is being thrown into and considers her husband everything. She leaves her fate, hopes, and aspirations entirely on the patriarchal authority which leads to the traumatic disturbances and hindrances in her life and fails to recognize her self-identity. A woman is tormented not only mentally but physically too. Ultimately she is reluctant to ponder over the life that she used to enjoy before her marriage. She incessantly tries to maintain a perfect balance between her hopes and a traumatized life. It is a bare fact that she must be revered by the patriarchy equally but she is bound to follow the dictums of an orthodox society which expects her to follow the customs without any allegation. Mahapatra as a poet, breaks the silence over the serious notions of society where women are considered as objects and not revered accordingly. The question arises what enfolds the dictums that define a woman in a male-dominated society? These include marriage, childbearing and rearing, and performing the dogmatic traditions and customs of societal values. In the name of customs and traditions, a male-dominated society overlooks the agonies or pathos that a woman undergoes. Amid all the responsibilities, she neglects her dreams and hopes and falls prey to these conventional ideologies created by the male-dominated society. However, this trend is not prevalent not only in Orissa but also in most parts of north India. A woman is well-defined in terms of sacrificing her dreams and ambitions. It has been a long tradition that a woman is considered only as an object but Mahapatra's poetry seems promising that a golden phantom will rise out of the graves to break such dogmas of male chauvinism. Mahapatra has also portrayed voyeurism which is more vulnerable than the sexual connotation. Being an emotional or whimsical poet, Mahapatra highlights his psychological level while exploring the psychological consciousness of women. Imaginatively, he heightens the voyage of a woman from lost identity to self-realization. Mahapatra even tries to highlight day-to-day frequent happenings that occur in a society. It is a sort of harassment that a woman faces at the hands of a chauvinist man who roves around only to gain a sense of pleasure. In Orissa, harassment can be seen as a very common practice where the male power thinks that they have the authority to harass women in every way. It shows the superiority of males over women in terms of derogatory encounters. The superiority of such power compels women to lose their personal and social space which makes women not only emotionally insecure but physically also. Such conceptions of harassment have been shown very clearly in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra. Mahapatra tries to confront real-life situations by depicting suffering prostitutes, and the exploitation of wives, making them insecure and captive for their lust. Therefore, Mahapatra successfully portrays a controversial picture of

women as a mother, wives, and daughters in a male-dominated society. Mahapatra has depicted father-daughter love as an emotional bond where the daughter completely relies on her father and forge a feeling of security but sometimes she falls victim in the hands of patriarchy too. Somewhere she has to suffer emotional trauma. At a very tender age, she has to go through subtle ignorance and negligence.

A mother depicted in the poems of Mahapatra has some romantic echoes despite of orthodox ideas and values. But the fact that a coin has two sides and a woman has to show self-pity to get attention of the others. It becomes more pathetic when a mother becomes a widow. The plight of widows in India could be well imagined in how they are mistreated and exploited in a patriarchal society. In India, such practices are done where religion is given the utmost importance. However, the process of tormenting widows in India is a very old tradition.

Her skin breaks into fickle shadows  
that trail her to the corner of the little room  
where a stone icon stands, weary with vermilion  
in an exotic drapery of hope. (Widow)

In India where widows are considered outcasts and the way they are treated is very inappropriate and somewhat humiliating. She is exempted from performing rituals which seems very discriminating and humiliating. These circumstances lead to affect the psychological and emotional turbulences in the mind of a woman. For instance, it is considered as a bad omen on seeing the face of a widow early morning. Although she is not allowed to eat meals with the family members and insists only to eat vegetarian. In such a case, she has to lead a miserable life without complaining. She confronts the social and economic constraints and ultimately she stoops to beg to live her struggling life. Throughout their life span, they are treated as marginalized and helpless by the male-dominated society. They feel insecure about the treatment they get in the form of psychological abhorrence, especially in Orissa.

Being an experimental poet, Mahapatra has depicted the role of women, enthusiastically participating in various festivals. Although he didn't experiment much about women in this context but never failed to depict a woman who is entrapped in the shackles of male dominion. Moreover, Mahapatra witnesses the social and cultural pathos of women being neglected by the male-dominated culture. Despite all these discriminations and hatred, a woman gracefully maintains the decorum of traditions and customs with perfection. Self-love, respect, and quest for self or identity would better describe the role of a woman but unfortunately, she is more committed to involve in rituals, and through only this, she tries to establish her social identity.

In this context, Mahapatra has penned about those voices that were never heard and felt called unvoiced pathos that only exists in silence. He ceaselessly put an effort to give them a due social and cultural identity in Orissa. He also tries to break those obstructions which bring hindrances in the way of women created by an orthodox patriarchal culture. His consciousness can penetrate the core of a woman's heart. The concept of identity plays a vital role and acts as an underlying principle in the poetry of Mahapatra which results in excellence in creative poetic art. Mahapatra has contrasted a man and a woman in a very successful manner. It is the ideologies and sophisticated thoughts of men that make women captive. In the words of Bruce King, 'Since golden times, the Shakti cult dwells in India in the form of Durga'.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

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None.

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