



QUEST FOR ROOTS THROUGH MYTHS: RITUAL UNCOVERING CULTURE AND SOCIAL REALISM IN JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POETRY

Arindam Ghosh

M.A. English. Presently pursuing research under Visva-Bharati with the topic Ecocriticism and Post-modern British Poetry. - corresponding Author

ABSTRACT Myths embody universal knowledge of human civilization, unspecified by time and history; they are generally accepted as the outcome of the ancient seasonal rituals. Many modernist writers held the myths in great esteem and explored them as providing fruitful knowledge of some ancient culture and tradition. In Jayanta Mahapatra's case, born and brought up in a Christian family, myths become his very medium for establishing connection with the cultural values of the land surrounding him. Sometimes myth works as 'defense mechanism' for him providing relief and consolation from the pervasive inner world of loneliness and isolation. Amidst its difficulty, obscurity and allusiveness myth operates at different levels in his poetry: primarily, myth articulates his internal cravings for identity; then myth confirms his rootedness to the Orissan tradition; through myths he travels through time past, present and future; rites and rituals objectify his vision of a surreal and metaphysical world; aboveall myths are deeply concerned with contemporary social reality. His mythic world ranges from allusion to Virgil to Lord Rama's illusion of golden deer; from the eternal conflict of body and spirit (integrated with this is the myth of Kali and tantric rituals) to Hindu religious cults associated with Lord Jagannath; from the recurring 'phallus' to the revelation of child Krishna. However, the domineering presence in his mythic world is that of the almost ruined temple of Konarka and the mythic images depicted on its wall. Mahapatra's poetry explores the multiple strands of a local culture but the mythic associations give his poetry a universal dimension. Although on many occasions the poet develops a personal kind of myth, overall they become his vehicle for interpreting and imposing meaning over the existing world order.

KEYWORDS : Myth, culture, tradition, local space, defense mechanism, identity, rootedness, consciousness, social reality

Myths are the vehicle of universal knowledge of human civilization, unspecified by time and history; they are generally accepted as the outcome of the ancient rituals concerned with deities and demi-gods (legends and folk tales) and consequently justified as untrue, fictitious and far removed from reality. Naturally there is a shallow tendency of dismissing them as 'an archaic and pre-scientific form' (Waugh 120). Yet the Modernists held them in great esteem as reflecting traditional historical knowledge and also forming an integral part of man's life; they have taken recourse to 'mythopoeia' or 'myth-making', thereby establishing a cultural connection between myth and literature. As a life form myth represents the relation of the individual self with the cosmic world and captures the reflection of a whole culture ('Collective Consciousness') within the paradigms of archaic unity. Northrop Frye relying upon the mythic structures tried to evaluate literary works in respect to a 'timeless order'. Carl Jung relates myths and archetypes with the unconsciousness and finds a universal source of wisdom in them. The structuralists, however, bear on their mind 'anthropological relativity' while analyzing mythic imaginative literature and thus laying bare the underlying social customs, embedded in them. Again, as we have seen that the mythic structures represent 'a timeless order', hence they can analogically link the present human condition with the eternal and the universal; and thus myths can be employed to convey and inculcate moral, religious and socio-cultural values; for they can present before us the models of virtue, sacrifice and idealism. Michael Bell concludes: "Yet myth is also the mode in which the text is created; man remains a mythopoeic animal, and the trick is to live with this ambivalent recognition" (Waugh 128).

In the context of Indian poetic art myths play an integral and pivotal role for promoting 'a symbolical truth with higher degree of reality'. Myths and archetypes have been significantly related with human psychology and society and are enforced to preach the doctrines of theology and philosophy and thereby promote peace and morality. The Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata are basically myths depicting the everlasting struggle between God and evil. If we go by the Vedic interpretation – *pura api navam* – that is, 'though old ever new'. We can discover in them immense possibilities for expressing meaning for the contemporary life. D. Maya observes in a different context: "Issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past which lend new meanings and insights through analogy, reinforcing the theme" (68). As for Jayanta Mahapatra, rooted in Orissa he identifies himself with the tradition surrounding him and as a result, he was deeply influenced by the sensitive, mythic past and the cultural values of the land. Expressing his views on culture and tradition, R. Shankar quotes Mahapatra's own comments: "Tradition might represent many things such as history and myth, the

suffering of others . . . it could be related to the grief of others, the struggle to find out life in another way. And poetry, for me, does try to redefine tradition" (qtd. in Shankar 37). We should keep in mind that he is a Christian, growing up in a city of temples which always indulges itself in celebrating Hindu festivals and in performing religious rituals. On rational and religious grounds, he could not participate or involve himself in those activities. Here myth provides him the scope for vicarious identification with Orissan culture; he explores myths, legends and history, prevailing over the place and thus aims to find solace and comfort and thereby restore the chinks and fissures that exist between him and the whole spark of the local life. He himself explains the matter:

Orissa is a religious place . . . these things (myth, symbols and religious motifs) come about on their own. I don't have to strive or do these things deliberately. Myth is there, history is there, and myth, history and rituals do become the stuff of poetry. Because that's the way of life in Orissa and poetry is a way of life for me.

(qtd. in Shankar 37)

Mahapatra explores the relationship of the individual self with the outer world and this lays bare the inner world of loneliness, silence, memory and sexuality; but always there runs a consciousness about the mythic environment around the ruins of Konarka. Amid its difficulty, obscurity and allusiveness myth operates at different levels: primarily myth articulates his internal cravings for identity; then myth confirms his rootedness to the Orissan Tradition; through myth he travels through time past, present and future; rites and rituals objectify his vision of a surreal and metaphysical world; aboveall myths are deeply concerned with contemporary social reality. The volume *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* encompasses his vision of the world of his own which juxtaposes both the imagined and the real; and the allusion ranges from Virgil to Lord Rama's illusion of the golden deer. A *Rain of Rites* creates a surrealistic perception, along with presenting the eternal conflicts of body and spirit or mortality and death, integrated with this is the myth of Kali, tantric rituals and Hindu religious cults associated with Jagannath. The *False Start* has some poems that point out the poet's realization of the eternal reality and associated with this is the persistent analogy between woman and earth. Relationship involves the epic motifs of journey, death, regeneration along with the mythical exploration and narration of Konarka. Orissa becomes the place of 'forbidding myth' and the images recount – 'the phallus', pilgrimage, the symbol of Dharma, allusion to child Krishna's revelation and 'the seated Buddha' etc. The mythical ambience is further emboldened by the poet's evocation of the images and figures depicted on the walls of Konarka temple which has almost become like totems. Life Signs, however, coming out of the mythic past creates a

personal physical world which confirms the inner world of the individual and thereby falling back to a kind of personal myth. The poem Temple treats the body of a woman as temple and through it represents the Hindu mythological conception which conceives woman as 'divine force', Shakti. Thus we find that the poet is exploring the sources of myth, rituals, legends and thereby attempting to establish cultural relationship with the mores of the land. Madhusudan Prasad observes regarding this: "Mahapatra is eager to learn the 'miracle of living' which is possible in a perpetual dream-like state, not in confronting contemporary realities" (qtd. in Shankar 49).

Now, we shall separately treat various issues which the poet took recourse to in his treatment of myth and archetypes. First of all, myths mark the poet's search for his roots, his identity. Orissa is a state preeminently enmeshed in Hindu religion and spiritual ideas, regarding which Mahapatra's Christian pedigree makes him to feel like a natural outsider. But instead of getting bogged down into a claustrophobic identity he opts out for the healing powers of myth. Myth in his hands becomes the transcendental medium which will help him to overcome the religio-cultural constraints, and thence guide him towards self-realization. In Relationship he declares: "Only that the stones were my very own./ Waiting as mother or goddess or witch,/ as my birth feeds on them" (10). Here the very stones of the temple provide him with the soothing and nurturing aspects of a mother; the pristine stones with their defying universal qualities enlighten him about his true origin, that is, the matriyoni, which is at the bottom of all creations. His probe and drive towards the unraveling of the secret goes on ['whether the earth/ Would let me find finally its mouth (ibid.)], and the poet wakes up into a different spiritual reality. The structured patterns of the Sun temple stand before his eyes as the memento of ancient creation and yet he is shaken by the guilt-ridden past, the insensitive brutality of which the ruins of the temple bear marks to. Now, he falls back to the memories which enable him to make out 'the real origin of spirit (soul) from flesh' (Shankar 41); and as a result he identifies himself with his soul; this is the height of self-knowledge. Life Signs includes priests, temples, devotees, ruins, life, river, sea, depiction from all sites and situations of life with which he has shared a mental affinity through the years of his maturity. In the poem "Dead River" reference is made to the dead tradition and to the loss of the common cultural past. The river (allusively Chandrabhaga at the feet of Konarka temple) with its meandering motion suggests the course of the poet's life: "Absently I turn and stare toward the east,/ toward which a river flows, deep in the hills/ Of my blood" (LS 33). Again and again the poet feels that he cannot reach the state of self-awareness unless he gains liberation from the physical dimension of his existence. He must feel the pulse and spirit of the place. In "Dance of Shiva" it is distinct when the poet remarks: "I know I can never come alive/ If I refuse to consecrate at the alters of my origins". The poet realizes that self-realization is permanent which can only be gained by heeding the inner voice yet the dwindling is clear in the poem "The Secret": 'Is it all/ If I refuse to heed that voice'. The same thought is carried forward in the poem "The Rain Falling": 'Was I merely a drunken man who needed/ His morals like intoxication to bring/ The real and the imagined worlds together'. This dilemma created a void and loneliness in the shifting consciousness of the poet and he is founded by his own memories. However, myth, historical past and the bearings of the tradition saves the poet from anonymity and from the scathing pain of the transitory reality. M. Prasad again asserts:

The poet creates through numerous striking symbols and metaphors a rich 'latticework' of historical truths, religious myths and legends intermingled with the present – all sharpening his questioning consciousness. (In the opening section), the poet endeavours to evaluate the historical past juxtaposing it with the present. (q t d . i n Shankar 40)

The poet's thrust towards creating an identity of his own only betrays his rootedness to the Orissan soil. The poet carries the cursed heritage of his father yet cannot escape the harsh realities that he is fated to endure. He feels socially marginalized and separated, and is forced to live through exploring and evoking the childhood memories regarding that place. And in that also the ruins of the temple come to haunt him again. He believes in death and regeneration and finds the affirmation of these natural processes in the 'stones' which earlier we have seen, became the means for voicing his own identity. Even while asserting his identity he cannot disentangle himself from the myths of death and future birth: "for births to merge into darker births/ that look for age-old grass of my death" (Relationship 14). The poet somewhat

obsessively broods over the oppressive past of which remains of the temple stand as the image of mass destruction. He is also disturbed by the rowdiness of the present state of existence. Again he seeks salvation by completely surrendering himself at the will of the supreme God ('Father'): "That is exactly what you wished for us./ didn't you father" (13)? Often there is a conscious attempt on the part of poet to recreate an authentic indigenous space marked by its spontaneous indulgence on Orissan culture and history. As we find in the poem "Dawn at Puri" in which 'puri' is not just the holy spot obsessed with religious fanaticism, rather it synecdochically becomes the symbol of whole Orissan tradition. He presents before us not a universalized image of the town with the Jagannath temple as cynosure but he localizes the setting with: "Endless crow noises./ A skull on the holysands/ tills its empty country towards hunger". Mahapatra here adumbrates the almost mythical nature of Indian poverty and associates it with crow-cawing which according to the Hindu mythology forecasts premonition. Then the 'white clad' widows waiting at the entrance of the temple in order to perform their daily rites also reinforces the same image of the same cultural heritage. Ashes Gupta comments regarding this:

These attributes carefully chosen by Mahapatra from Hindu philosophy and metaphysics, religion and faith, the concept of karma and moksha, enables him to situate his poem in an authentic local space of Hindu culture, metaphysics and philosophy flavoured all the more strongly by the dominant presence of Orissa and Puri at the centre (Sarangi & Jha 74)

Along with this is present the pervasive brooding over loneliness and isolation, the poet expresses his poetic ideas through native mythology. However, like the Romantic poets he does not choose an escapist mean, rather he attempted to gain peace through embracing all the vicissitudes of life. There is sometimes a spiritual tendency in him to achieve transcendence and thus achieve the visionary state of consciousness in which his own identity fuses with the past history, with the sensuous world and with the ruins of the Sun Temple. Alan Kennedy offers significant commentary regarding this matter:

One can be tempted by other mythologies, when one's own no longer seems to answer. Then one can find oneself exiled from that exile and turning for a mythological relationship closer to home once again. (qtd. in Shankar 45)

It is noticeable that Mahapatra's conscience is overburdened with the memories of the past; but he is not trapped by the ensnaring memories. Rather in his case past coalesces with and becomes existent in time present. Through myths he travels through past, present and future; which evokes in him a sense of 'eternity'. The changing nature of the contemporary world pains him a lot; he engages himself in the trivial activities and in ruminating complex memories of the past; as a result dialectic is established between the present and the past. In this process his personal memories of childhood (such as, regarding his father – 'my body becomes to share his curse'; or looking at his mother's grave – 'the grave that is my mother's'; or simply 'as a member of some magician's audience') mingle with the overshadowing presence of the destruction of the Konarka temple. Often the poet tries to find shelter in such a time milieu that has the dreamlike quality, helping the poet in confronting contemporary realities. As in Relationship the poet declares: "So I shall seek the sleep-habit/ Of the golden deer, temper of the tastes". This myth of sleep works as the defense mechanism for the perplexed mind of the poet. He transcends the time consciousness and reaches the state of supra-consciousness. He 'wearing the dreams away of the forgotten Ganga kings' craves for the vast infinitesimal cosmic world which will offer him liberation. He has given himself to sensuous activities for he knew that this orgasmic bliss will help him to reach the ultimate moment of self-realization. In his sojourn through time he senses that the past-stones of the temple, the hard granites are the symbolic presenter of the dominant 'rasa', featuring 'purusha' ('Linga') and 'prakriti' ('yoni') or shiva and shakti. The myths associated with the sun-lions, the fruits, the flowers, the women, carved into the walls of the temple made him feel that even his own life is preserved in those timeless stones: 'It is my own life/ that has cornered me beneath the stones/ of this temple in ruins'.

Upto this point we have seen that myth has become a source of consolation for the poet but now we shall discuss that myth is also his tool for exploring the unreal and the irrational; in sort, myths preoccupied with memories, rites and rituals of the local people of

distant past articulates the poet's attempt of creating a surreal world. The intermingling of the real as well as the metaphysical is evident in the poet's use of images from variegated fields. The very act of rain falling on earth becomes the very metaphor of the phenomenal world for Mahapatra. In *A Rain of Rites* rain happens to become the central metaphor which symbolizes our life blurring the distinctions of mind and matter: 'what still stale air sits on an angel's wings?/ what holds my rain so it's hard to overcome?' Merging the apparently contrasting inner and outer worlds, the poems create an impression of vastness and expanse. The recurring images happen to be that of 'rain', 'desert', 'earth', 'stone', 'flesh', 'submerged sun', 'ash', 'bone', 'stale air' which serve to dissolve all categorical distinctions between the inner and the outer space. In "Four Rain Poems" past memory/death becomes the matter of concern which has been depicted through grass growing on graves. The poet trying to come to any resolution regarding the inherent mystery of human nature takes recourse to rain/water; this gives him the feelings of the world of the spirit. Along with this is associated the mythic world of temples, priests, stones and darkness. In the poem "Dawn" the body images are mixed with mysterious, baffling images related to creation: 'travels alone/ without the effort of creation, without puzzle'. The poet in order to induce unity into the poem places side by side the two worlds – the mundane and the surreal. Even when the poet depicts a traditional world, spiritual considerations and the dominating presence of the Puri temple with its presiding deity makes the situation a harmonizing whole, based upon spirituality, myth and history.

Now, it is worthwhile to explore how deeply the myths concerned with contemporary social reality are. Mahapatra's awareness for the society, his search for his own identity through myths also provide him the scope to deal with such issues of the contemporary world, like poverty, greed, violence, cruelty, sexuality etc. The poet's urge to frolic with the myth and his desire to maintain continuum of the past with the present manage to capture the heritage of a continuously declining culture. The loss of the vitality and spirit of the young generation has been beautifully captured in the poem "Unreal Country" where youth is depicted as 'a strange map drawn by life'. The poet minutely observes the barrenness and hopeless state of Indian life. The inability of the authority of the country to provide basic needs to the poor people annoys the poet which he expresses allusively with the connotations of the killing famine of distant past. With the association of draught and the 'fear of rain' India virtually becomes a wasteland. He gives starvation and 'hunger' of people a mythic dimension in the context of a country India, and the poet stands a silent spectator, witnessing and enduring the troubles and devastations of life. In *Burden of Waves and Fruits*, the poet utters: 'I am one of them, listening to the radio each day/ and learning more about the fertilizers and democracy' (qtd. in Shankar 108). The poet in uncompromising words voices his concerns for a multitude of people who suffer due to whims of nature, unarresting growth rate, child-labour, insufficiency of hospital and medical service, growing tendency of legitimized abortion. And again there is a general tendency of the poet to identify himself with his milieu; for this he cannot miss the hungry faces even amidst glorious national celebrations: 'this is a barren world that has been/ prowling round my room' (qtd. in Shankar 109). Although a few powerful men are reveling in money and wealth they gradually turn spiritually truncated. In the poem "The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of a Republic", the poet deliberately satirizes the politicians and the present state of hollowness in politics: 'There are new statues on the crossroads, newer dead,/ that are visible from far and wide' (qtd. in Shankar 110). He revisits the glorious past of the country and tries to rebuild that image objectively with the appreciation of hope and regeneration: 'This country lives on its image'. The present state that the poet objectifies is one of Yeatsian anarchy. The condition is one of pervasive darkness – 'A new mist chokes the trees./ A sky of silence,/ meaningless as man's hatred'. The existence of people merges into insignificance and nothingness. In order to reveal the true nature of atrocity and crime, the poet speaks of various anti-national activities. Yet he didn't take refuge into escapism, instead his world is reverberated with humanitarian endeavours. The poet is grief-stricken due to mass murdering and takes an antagonistic approach to heinous contemporary politics. 'Rain' which symbolizes the spirit of regeneration and elanvital, here is associated with destruction: 'Rain falls heavy, hard as stones./ I am so far away from these falls'; rain and hailstorm terrorizes human survival and alludes to the mythic abuse of humanity when King Ashoka carried on ruthless destruction of man and his glorious creations like sculpture and temples. Even nowadays the spirit of nihilism persists in many regions: religious fanaticism, provincialism, sectarianism have been

forecasting dooms for Indian civilization and culture. The poet gives these incidents mythic dimensions in order to convey to the people the evils associated with this and thereby enlighten them so that violence and atrocity are minimized. In *Dispossessed Nests* the poet laments: 'too full as we are of mythic battles, angry gods,/ and the heroism of Hanuman'. However, the poet's aim was to re-enliven a distressed nation through ruminating and creating an impression of the glorious past. He deftly deals with the issue of terrorism, their blood-thirstiness, their meaningless sense of freedom and liberty and castigates them through associations and proverbs from *The Gita*. "The poet sees the self-centered dance of the multinational companies, a dance more demonic than the Tandava of Shiva... A living hell of the crying, dying people gasping for breath" (Shankar 124). The poet again identifies himself with the poor and shares their problems: in many case the beggar, the poor become the victims of circumstances. In the Poem "Hunger" we have seen that father pimps his own daughter; due to fulfilling the hunger of the stomach the father exploits her daughter forcing her to become a victim of sexual hunger. Then the poet takes a dig at the general licentiousness and immorality of people in the poem "Man of his Nights". Pricking the bubbles of the hypocrisy and apparent morality of people the poet compares the body of man as a 'votive shrine/ of a body ancient as stone'; but the poet feels that that image is now tarnished and maligned beyond salvation. After that again in an attempt to promote the cult of non-violence and thereby mollify social and moral degeneracy the poet refers to Mahatma Gandhi in the poem "Second October". Thus through myths and archetypes Mahapatra beautifully sketches the painful picture of the downgraded dogging anguish of a multitude of people.

R. Shankar observes that like W. B. Yeats, Mahapatra's poetry also works as the harbinger of new civilization. His humanistic approach to myths, his attempt to recreate the environment of the Orissan tradition, his views on myth as a source of relief lead us to believe that the sculptures and architectures of Konarka temple have some healing effects. R. Shankar again observes regarding Mahapatra's conception of myths:

Mahapatra abruptly falls in a reverie about the myth and poses a question what it is. He answers his own question. He explains that the myth of the colossal temple which crumbled in the past seems to cast a magic spell on his imagination. The temple has a sway over the culture and tradition of Orissa. He expresses wonder at the impact of the myth: 'what was this myth? It was like a leaf/ whose trembling held my hand'.(61)

The recurring pattern of the myths would be clear to us if we go by some detailed analysis of some of his volumes. In that case, comes first Relationship which has its setting or locale of Cuttack or more precisely Konarka temple. In fact, the form of the poem is mythic and epic. The poet's self encounters the reality of the place while his mind is rooted in the ancient Indian convictions. Various complex images evolve around the worship of Shiva 'phallus', along with the association of the landscape, and 'the stone of the land'. The engulfing presence of the stones reminds us about the myth of Dharma, who saved the life of the artisans of the temple; he becomes for the poet the symbol for the spirit of sacrifice and selflessness. Parallel to this runs the constant effort of the poet's self-realization and this further goad him to uncover the mysteries of the earth and the origin of creation; and even within loneliness and psychic burden the poet manages to wonder: 'the swords of forgotten kings/ rust slowly in the museum of our guilt'; the spectrum of the past memory haunts him and he concerns himself with the eternal cycle of birth and death. He labours hard to reach resolution through prayer and thus aims to revive 'the earth's lost amplitudes'. The recurrent image of 'the sleep-habit of the golden deer' alludes to the illusion that evaded Sri Ram Chandra, and the poet's attempt is to fuse himself with the mysterious illusion of the world (and sleep is his evasive tool). Again the poet refers to the image of Lord Shiva, and interprets that as the symbol of fecundity, enchantment and grandeur. Now, 'sleep' itself is made use of and turned into a mythic symbol ('the myth of sleep and action'); the myth of sleep alternates between the consciousness and self-realization of the poet and his futile attempt to evade the harsh realities of the world; shutting off the world also enables the poet to reach a hypersensitive state that has visionary effects. In the context of the poem Relationship, M.L. Raina comments: "Konarka to an Oriya poet symbolizes the peculiar mythical ambience with which he must come to terms in order to be able to write" (qtd. in Swain 100). Mahapatra bearing that on mind seeks poetic fulfillment through myths reigning on his psyche

and also myths physically and aesthetically depicted as sculpture. The engravings on the walls reveal before our eyes a mythic world stricken by love, lust, sex which in turn corresponds to the myth of fertility and regeneration. Side by side with this is present the myth of Savitri, the faithful wife who brings back her husband from the clutches of Yama. She is Mahapatra's symbol for bringing back the glories of the past years. After that the poet distinctly points out local festivals, rituals of fastings, fair associated with the auspicious occasion of Dussera but all these experiences are rooted in Cuttack 'from whose clay/ the goddesses take their sacred shapes'. The poet's assimilation of Hindu ethos even within a Christian family again marks his attempt to fuse with the myth of the land.

In *Life Signs* the poet examines the external world and confronts it with his subjective inner emotions. As a result the distant allusiveness is dispelled in favour of a self-centric personal world but the dominant images bring back concerns for darkness, death and the bleakness of the phenomenal world. John Bernie observes here: "The life signs in Jayanta Mahapatra's book [*Life Signs*] are the expected ones, the archetypal symbols of religion and art, but given a somber power by the bleakness and compassion of the poet's view" (qtd. in Swain 107). The world of superstition, the external world of seas and rivers, the inherited and cultured religion offers him the opportunity to break free of the 'captive air'. The 'Dead River', 'the infinite skies', 'tamed temple God' are made to suit images from tradition and memory and they take an archetypal pattern. The reiterated image of the river sometimes becomes the 'river of life', sometimes river of death; although it is dead, 'swallowed up' still it does not fail to convey the associations of birth and life and regeneration. However, the prevalent image of 'darkness' depicts the anxiety, futility and existential problems of living and the images of 'hunger', 'death', disease ('malaria'), poverty, corruption become so heightened that they cumulatively have the effects of 'Miltonic similes' (Uma Parameswaran's terms).

The traditional mythic world again forcefully comes back in the poem *Temple*; the poet's concern was to present the sad journey of a woman throughout her life. In the context of a Hindu mythological ambience, a woman's life has been made to enact from girlhood to motherhood. Amid the ruins of the temple and the ruined fate of woman, womanhood itself becomes the symbol of suffering and plight. The protagonist, Chelammal suffers alone and commits suicide, and her victimization is parallel to that of the doomed fate of the temple itself. Yet she has not been subdued by the torturous actions of a patriarchal society. She instead chooses an aggressive, self-assertive way of living; and she deliberately forsakes the myth of docile woman (Sita, Savitri) and is equated with Putna, an ogress. She is raped and the poet allusively debunks the myth associated with Draupadi: 'the woman/ who couldnot be disrobed/ was a myth'; and associations with Putna, symbolically suggests of woman's assertive existence and independence and active participation into life (in another way an image of archetypal image (negative) shakti). The connotation is further carried forward:

And now the ogress
transformed into a lovely woman
her poisoned nipples

the moksha-centre of her own martyrdom.

Putna gave poisoned breasts to child Krishna, but here Chelammal's stretching breasts become symbols for 'the cosmic mother'. The episode ends with something that the poet somewhat desired for himself, that is, to reach a state of supra-consciousness which will provide resolution for all world crises and the temple becomes the appropriate place which can salvage Chelammal and her creator as well.

Now, to conclude: in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry a local place has been evoked along with all its ethos of culture and traditional beliefs. Naturally in his poetry we find the decorous temples, the crowded streets, the sea-shore, the famished street children, the woman in distress corresponding with the poet's personal and subjective inner experiences. But the poet was never trapped within the sentimental complexities of human emotions. Rather he attempts to transcend the claustrophobic local space in order to reach a universal dimension; and myth becomes his medium for attaining global span, even within the contours of ordinary sights, experiences and observations. Mahapatra may have suffered from the symptoms of heterogeneity had he not

attempted to identify himself with the century-old tradition of Orissa and its people, centering on temples and Hindu rituals. The brooding presence of the landscape, amidst the interplay of heavy bodily passion and different agonizing strands of human existence offer him the vital space that would lead him to oneness with the automated city life. Most of his poems verge on becoming strongly autobiographical mingling with his vigorous search for identities with the haunting childhood memories and uncertainty of a wistful generation. The poet's existential dilemmas in front of negative socio-moral forces drive to seek consolation and relief in the enmeshing myth of the temple-land. From these spring out the cultivated myth of the poet's imagination and thereby the poet has managed to evolve a new kind of personal myth. The poet in his attempt to come out of the degeneration and drabness of the generation wanted to stimulate the moral forces and creative energy that would lead them to shake off indifference and inertia. Sometimes the myths are overt symbols and metaphors, sometimes they serve as the 'objective correlative' of the poet's personal emotions, sometimes they are some exotic setting coalescing with the present geographical landscapes of Orissa; aboveall they ultimately become the poet's vehicle for interpreting and imposing meaning to the existing world order.

REFERENCES

1. The conception of the theory relating to myths and archetypes are taken from Michael Bell's article on Waugh's volume which has been cited.
2. The introduction to the myth in Indian context I took from one of my own article titled – "Ritual, Reality and Drama": Pro-social Myths as Vehicle for Social Reality".
3. For this part and many other references to this article I am indebted to R. Shankar's article on Myth in Mahapatra's poetry.
4. The concept I have taken from R. Shankar.
5. Again R. Shankar's article on social reality in Mahapatra's poetry came to be very helpful. I explored the article and tried to add mythic dimension to that.
6. The analogy I got from R. K. Swain, P.91.