



RESEARCH ARTICLE



STUDY OF HUMAN SUFFERING THROUGH THE LENS OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

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ABSTRACT



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Jayanta Mahapatra occupies a significant position in Indian English poetry. This paper attempts to show the Human sufferings in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra. His poetry deeply reflects the pain, loneliness, and the Harsh realities of life. His poetry shows suffering as something real and experienced in everyday life, not just an idea. He writes about problems like poverty, hunger, loss of faith, loneliness, death, and emotional pain. Mahapatra's poems are strongly connected to the land of Odisha, especially Puri. In his poems, we often see both faith and sadness coexist. This study examines how Jayanta Mahapatra depicts different forms of suffering in his selected poems. He writes about physical pain, mental pain, social problems, and feelings of loneliness and confusion about life. His poems often describe the quiet suffering of people living in harsh social conditions. At the same time, his poetry reflects his doubts, inner struggles, and feelings of emptiness. So, in his poems, suffering is not only a social problem but also a very personal experience. The dissertation also examines the poetic techniques, symbols, and images Mahapatra employs to depict suffering. He writes realistically and expresses deep emotions, making his poems easy to understand and connect with. This research, through close readings of his poems, shows how Mahapatra speaks for people who cannot express their pain and draws attention to human suffering that is often ignored.

Keywords: *Human Sufferings, Social Issues, Pain, Loneliness, Physical Sufferings, Psychological Sufferings.*

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INTRODUCTION

(A) Indian English Poetry

Indian English poetry plays an important role in the history of Indian literature. It refers to poems produced in English by Indian poets. Although English was once seen as a foreign language during the colonial period, Indian writers eventually adopted it. They made it into a powerful medium for expressing their cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and emotional experiences. Initially, Indian poets followed British models and literary methods. However, over time, they acquired their own distinct voice. They merged Indian themes and sensibilities into English-language poetry, writing about Indian mythology, nationalism, spirituality, poverty, identity, and human suffering. The development of Indian English poetry can be understood in different phases. The early phase in the nineteenth century was largely influenced by English Romantic poetry. Poets of this period imitated Western forms but focused on Indian subjects. Writers like Henry Louis Vivian Derozio expressed patriotism and reformist ideas, encouraging social awareness among Indians. Toru Dutt brought Indian mythological stories into English poetry with emotional depth and lyrical beauty. Sri Aurobindo added a philosophical and spiritual dimension, especially through his epic vision of human evolution and divine consciousness. These early poets laid the foundation of Indian English poetry by introducing Indian themes into the English literary tradition.

(B) Odia English Poetry

Within this broader framework of Indian English poetry, regional voices began to emerge strongly,

enriching the tradition with local experience and cultural specificity. Among these regional contributions, Odia English poetry holds a significant position. Odisha, with its deep spiritual heritage, temples, culture, coastal landscape, and socio-economic challenges, has provided rich material for poetic expression. Odia English poetry represents the life, traditions, and struggles of the people of Odisha while remaining part of the larger Indian English literary tradition. It strengthens Indian English poetry by adding regional authenticity and emotional depth.

The most prominent and internationally acclaimed poet from Odisha is Jayanta Mahapatra. He is regarded as the pioneer of Indian English poetry from Odisha and one of the most important modern Indian poets. His poetry reflects the social realities of Odisha, especially poverty, hunger, religious faith, guilt, loneliness, and existential suffering. Unlike earlier poets who focused mainly on romantic beauty or nationalism, Mahapatra presents life in a quiet, realistic, and often painful manner. The temple town of Puri, the image of Lord Jagannath, and the suffering of ordinary people appear repeatedly in his poems. He does not glorify religion blindly; rather, he shows how faith and suffering coexist. Through simple yet powerful imagery, he connects regional experience with universal human emotion. His poetry demonstrates how local realities can achieve global significance. His well-known poems, such as *Hunger* and *Dawn at Puri*, clearly reflect the social and cultural life of Odisha. These poems show how the poet connects personal emotions to society's suffering.

**(C) RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- I. To analyze Jayanta Mahapatra's portrayal of personal, social, and cultural factors influencing suffering in his poems.
- II. To critically study selected poems in order to understand different dimensions of suffering in the Indian context.
- III. To evaluate Mahapatra's contribution to Indian English poetry through his understanding of human psychology.

(D) Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach to examine the theme of human suffering in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. The primary method used is textual analysis, in which selected poems are closely read and interpreted to identify themes, symbols, imagery, and emotional expressions related to suffering. A descriptive method is also used to explain the poet's style, language, and use of imagery in a simple, clear manner. Through these methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Mahapatra portrays human suffering in his poetry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jena (2024), in her research, "Jayanta Mahapatra's Poems on Odisha - Poetry that Embellishes Pain," examines how Jayanta Mahapatra conveys pain and emotion through his poetry. This article highlights that his poems are deeply connected with the reality of Odisha and reflect both personal experiences and social suffering. This article argues that poetry often serves as a medium for emotional release for the poet, where Mahapatra transforms his inner feelings into artistic expression. It also suggests that while his

poems are meaningful and rich in emotion, their impact on readers may sometimes be temporary.

Das (2024), in her research work "Social issues and human conditions in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra", examines how Jayanta Mahapatra, through his poems, highlights the deep concern for the marginalized and oppressed peoples. His works are strongly linked to the Indian ethos, myths, landscapes, rural life, and the cultural background of Odisha. This article shows that Mahapatra feels deep sympathy for the poor and helpless. She also explains how Mahapatra combines social issues with strong emotions in his poems. However, the article talks about suffering in general and does not clearly address it from Mahapatra's viewpoint in detail.

Kalita (2023), in his research work "Jayanta Mahapatra: The Progressive Poetic Voice of Modern India," examines the life and work of Jayanta Mahapatra and considers him a major voice in Modern Indian poetry. His works focus on themes such as existentialism, spirituality, and social issues like poverty, corruption, and gender inequality. This article highlights Mahapatra's use of simple yet powerful language, rich imagery, and symbolic style. This article also emphasizes his post-colonial perspective and his departure from traditional poetic forms.

Similarly, Bhuyan and Parida (2023), in their research work "Representation of social realities in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra," focus on how Mahapatra depicts Indian life and society in his poems. They explain how he writes about real social problems and how strongly his poetry is connected to Indian culture and traditions, especially those of Odisha. In this article, the authors show that



Mahapatra uses vivid imagery to depict sadness, hunger, loneliness, and social inequality. They also point out his deep love for the land and culture of Odisha.

Pakhmode (2022), in his research work "Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetic Art: A Brief Study," examines Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry in relation to social reality, trauma, and human life. It highlights how his poems reflect social injustice, inequality, and emotional suffering. The study examines how Mahapatra presents society's harsh truths through his personal vision and experiences. It also emphasizes that his poetry explores themes such as trauma, revelation, and the complexities of human existence, reflecting a deep concern for both individual and collective life.

Kumar and Pathak (2022), in their research work "Depiction of Poverty and the Plight of Women in Jayanta Mahapatra's Temple," examine the intersection of poverty and gender oppression in Mahapatra's poetry. In their article, they argue that literature functions as a mirror of society and, in the South Asian context, vividly captures the issues of women's marginalization and suffering. Focusing on Mahapatra's collection "Temple", this paper highlights themes such as loneliness, violence, and gender-based discrimination.

RESEARCH GAP

From previous studies, we can see that most scholars discuss Mahapatra's poetry in terms of social realism, poverty, women's oppression, identity, humanism, pain, and cultural rootedness. However, most of the studies focus on individual themes in isolation, such as poverty, women's plight, or identity, without

offering a comprehensive and integrated analysis of human suffering as a multidimensional concept in Mahapatra's poetry. While suffering is frequently mentioned, it is often treated in general terms rather than systematically categorized across social, psychological, emotional, cultural, and existential dimensions. Very few studies attempt to examine how these layers of suffering intersect and shape the human condition in his poetic vision. Therefore, this paper aims to fill these gaps. It provides a comprehensive analysis of human suffering in selected poems by Jayanta Mahapatra. It studies suffering not only as a social problem but also as an inner and spiritual experience shown through his images, symbols, and silence.

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA AS A POET

Jayanta Mahapatra, born on October 22, 1928, in Cuttack, Odisha, is a key figure in Indian English poetry, recognized for his unique and authentic voice. He made a significant contribution to the shaping of Indian English poetry, capturing Indian life and experiences rather than merely emulating Western influences. An intriguing aspect of his journey is that he began writing poetry relatively late in life, after many years in another career. Despite his late start, he quickly achieved acclaim and emerged as one of the most respected and impactful poets in contemporary Indian literature. Jayanta Mahapatra has made a significant contribution to Indian English poetry through his extensive body of work. Over the years, he has written more than 27 books of poetry, many in English and several in his native language, Odia. His first publication of 'Relationship' made a turning point in his career, which gained a wide range of fame and appreciation. In 1981, this work earned



him the Sahitya Akademi Award, making him the first Indian English poet to receive this prestigious honor. This achievement brought him national recognition and secured his position as a leading poet. His first collection of poems, *Svayamvara and Other Poems*, was published in 1971, marking the beginning of his recognition as a poet. Another collection soon followed *this, Close the Sky, Ten by Ten*, which helped him gain further attention in literary circles. In the following years, he published several important poetry collections, such as *Bare Face* and *Shadow Space*, which further strengthened his reputation. Alongside poetry, he published books of prose, including *Green Gardener*, an anthology of short stories, and *Door of Paper: Essays and Memoirs*. Moreover, his poems have appeared in prestigious poetry anthologies, such as *The Dance of the Peacock: An Anthology of English Poetry from India*, published by Hidden Brook Press in Canada.

DISCUSSION

(A) HUMAN SUFFERING IN JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POEMS

Poetry has always served as a mirror of human life, reflecting not only moments of joy and beauty but also pain, struggle, and silent endurance. Indian English poetry has emerged as a significant literary form that reflects the complexities of Indian life, culture, and society. Over time, it has developed its own unique voice rather than following Western tradition. Modern Indian English poetry has shown a deep concern for the lived experience of India, especially which is shaped by social inequality, poverty, and culture. Their poetry often serves as a powerful medium for expressing the unspoken struggles and silent suffering of people across

different sections of society. Human suffering occupies a central theme in the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra, one of the significant voices in Indian English poetry. This suffering is not only confined to physical hardship but extends to emotional distress, social marginalization, and existential uncertainty. The varied social and economic conditions in India enable poets to describe the harsh realities of life. Through their works, poets attempt to show how suffering becomes an inseparable part of human existence, especially for those who are deprived, neglected, or silenced by society.

1) "Hunger"

Jayanta Mahapatra's poem "Hunger" is a powerful exploration of the harsh realities of poverty, human exploitation, and moral decline. The poem is written in free verse and consists of four irregular stanzas, with no fixed rhyme scheme. This loose structure reflects the disorder and instability of the life portrayed in the poem. This famous poem of Mahapatra was published in 1980 as a part of his poetry collection titled "Relationship". The poem is set against the backdrop of a poor fishing community on the eastern coast of India. It follows a poor fisherman who, driven by extreme poverty, is forced to offer his daughter in exchange for money to a wealthy stranger. The fisherman, who has not been able to catch fish for a long time, represents extreme economic hardship. His physical condition is vividly described through images like "I saw his white bone thrash his eyes" (Mahapatra: 5), which suggests starvation and suffering.

The fisherman then shockingly offers his young daughter to the speaker, saying, "My daughter, she has just turned fifteen... Feel her" (Mahapatra 16-17).



This moment reveals the depth of his desperation, where starvation can destroy human dignity and relationships. As the speaker follows the fisherman to his hut, the setting becomes increasingly dark and oppressive. The hut is described as opening "like a wound" (Mahapatra 11), symbolizing pain, decay, and emotional suffering. The atmosphere inside is suffocating, filled with silence and tension. The girl remains passive and silent, indicating her helplessness and the normalization of exploitation in such conditions. The speaker is not merely an observer but becomes involved in the situation. He feels a disturbing attraction, which he himself recognizes as "the other hunger." This refers not only to physical hunger for food but also to sexual desire. The line "I felt the hunger there, the other one" (Mahapatra:20-21) highlights this dual meaning of hunger. At the end, the speaker experiences a moment of realization, expressed in the line "the sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted will" (Mahapatra 18), which suggests guilt and emotional burden. The poem explores several important themes. The most prominent theme is poverty and survival, showing how extreme conditions force people to lose their moral values. It also deals with sexual exploitation, where the young girl becomes a victim of her circumstances. Another key theme is moral conflict, as the speaker becomes complicit in the act and later feels guilt. The poem also highlights silence and helplessness, especially through the girl's character, who does not resist her fate. Overall, "Hunger" is a deeply unsettling poem that reveals how extreme poverty can destroy human dignity and blur moral boundaries. It forces the reader to confront uncomfortable truths about human nature and survival.

ii) "Indian Summer"

"Indian Summer" is a significant and popular poem by Jayanta Mahapatra, one of the major voices of Indian English poetry. The poem reflects his typical concern with Indian reality, combining natural imagery with social and existential undertones. The poem consists of twelve lines and is written in free verse, which means it does not follow any fixed rhyme scheme or metrical pattern. There is no regular rhyme scheme, and the structure is irregular, allowing the poet to express thoughts in a natural, flowing manner. The language is simple but highly symbolic and suggestive. The poem was originally a part of the same poetry collection "Relationship".

"Indian Summer" by Jayanta Mahapatra is a vivid and symbolic poem that presents a disturbing yet realistic picture of India during a harsh summer. The poem moves beyond the physical season, using summer as a metaphor for spiritual emptiness, social decay, and human suffering. Through strong and unusual images, Mahapatra captures the contradictions of Indian life, religion, and poverty, nature and death, desire and despair. The poem opens with the lines, "Over the soughing of the somber wind / priests chant louder than ever; / the mouth of India opens" (Mahapatra 1-3). These lines create a serious and mysterious atmosphere. The image of priests chanting suggests religious rituals, but the phrase "the mouth of India opens" symbolizes the nation revealing its deeper truths—its pain, hunger, and hidden realities. Religion appears loud and visible, yet beneath it lies suffering. Mahapatra then shifts to natural and social imagery: "Crocodiles move into deeper waters" and "Mornings of heated middens / smoke under the sun"



(Mahapatra 4-6) These lines suggest danger, discomfort, and decay. The crocodiles symbolize lurking threats, while the "heated middens" (garbage heaps) reflect poverty and neglected spaces. The intense summer heat exposes both physical and social ugliness. "The good wife / lies in my bed / through the long afternoon; / dreaming still, unexhausted / by the deep roar of funeral pyres" (Mahapatra 7-11). Here, domestic life exists side by side with death. The "funeral pyres" remind readers of mortality, while the wife's dreaming suggests human detachment or endurance amid suffering. This contrast highlights how ordinary life continues even in the presence of death and sorrow. The poem highlights themes such as the harshness of nature, human suffering and endurance, silence and stagnation in life, and the close relationship between human beings and the natural world. However, Jayanta Mahapatra's poem "Indian Summer" is a powerful depiction of both physical and emotional landscapes. Mahapatra uses sharp imagery and symbolic contrasts to depict a world where beauty and despair coexist. The poem leaves the reader with a haunting sense of reality, making it both deeply personal and socially meaningful.

iii) "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta"

"The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" is a short lyric poem written in free verse, consisting of about twenty-five lines arranged in two irregular stanzas without any fixed rhyme scheme. The poem's loose structure, conversational tone, and use of enjambment reflect the fragmented and uneasy reality of urban life, while also allowing the poet to speak directly to the reader in a personal and almost confrontational manner. This poem was published in

his collection "Relationship" which was released in 1980. The poem opens with a striking invitation, "Walk right in. It is yours" (Mahapatra 1), which immediately draws the reader into the brothel's space and makes them a participant rather than a distant observer. This direct address creates a sense of moral involvement, suggesting that such places exist not in isolation but as part of the same society to which the reader belongs. The house is described as one that "smiles wryly," an image that conveys irony and hidden meanings, indicating that beneath its outward appearance lies a deeper, more complex truth. The speaker then shifts attention to the women inside, urging the reader to "think of the women / You wished to know and have not" (Mahapatra 3-4), which reflects both curiosity and social hesitation. These women are not presented merely as objects but as individuals whose lives are often ignored or misunderstood. At the same time, the poem criticizes the artificiality of public representation through references to "the faces in the posters" and "the public hoardings" (Mahapatra 5-6). These images symbolize the superficial, commercialized world outside, which contrasts sharply with the harsh, hidden realities within the brothel. Mahapatra suggests that society prefers illusion over truth, choosing to engage with idealized images while turning away from uncomfortable realities. This contrast deepens the poem's exploration of social hypocrisy and moral blindness.

As the poem progresses, the tone becomes more reflective and layered. The brothel is described as "the sacred hollow courtyard / That harbors the promise of a great conspiracy" (Mahapatra 11-12), a paradoxical image that blends the sacred with the



profane. By using the word “sacred,” Mahapatra challenges conventional moral judgments, suggesting that even within a stigmatized space, there exists a deeper human significance. The “conspiracy” may refer to the unspoken truths and shared silence surrounding the lives of these women and the society that sustains such institutions. The speaker further questions the reader directly “Are you ashamed to believe you are in this?” (Mahapatra -15) thereby confronting their sense of guilt and complicity. The poem then moves towards a more emotional and humanized portrayal of the women, imagining their inner lives and past connections. The reference to “the secret moonlight of the women” (Mahapatra 16) and their memories “Of looked-after children and of home” (Mahapatra 19) evokes a sense of loss, longing, and displacement. These lines suggest that the women were once part of ordinary domestic lives and still carry those memories within them. The image of “and shooting stars in the eager darkness of their return” (Mahapatra 20) adds a fleeting, almost fragile hope, yet the reality of their present condition overshadows it. The phrase “Dream children, dark, superfluous” (Mahapatra 21) further intensifies this emotional depth, suggesting that their desires and attachments have grown distant, almost unnecessary in their current lives.

The poem concludes with a powerful emotional appeal: “You miss them in the house's dark spaces, / How can't you?” (Mahapatra 22-23) This ending reinforces the idea that the reader cannot remain detached or indifferent. It insists on recognizing the humanity of these women and acknowledging the emotional void and suffering embedded within such spaces. Throughout the poem, Mahapatra skillfully

blends social reality with psychological insight, exposing the marginalization of women, the hypocrisy of society, and the moral ambiguity that surrounds such institutions. At the same time, he brings out themes of memory, loss, and the coexistence of the sacred and the profane, ultimately transforming the brothel into a powerful symbol of human vulnerability and silent endurance.

iv) “A Missing Person”

“A Missing Person,” a short free verse lyric by Jayanta Mahapatra, is written in simple diction without any fixed rhyme scheme. The poem consists of brief, fragmented lines and relies on suggestive imagery rather than narrative development. It reflects Mahapatra's characteristic introspective style and his focus on inner human conditions. This poem of Mahapatra was published in his 1980 collection, “Relationship”. The poem depicts the nameless, identity-less life of a rural within a patriarchal, impoverished setting. The poem opens in a dim, enclosed space where “a woman / cannot find her reflection in the mirror” (Mahapatra 2-3), suggesting a loss of self-recognition. The mirror, which usually confirms identity, here fails to do so, symbolizing her lost identity. The woman is depicted in a suspended state, “waiting as usual / at the edge of sleep” (Mahapatra 4-5), creating a sense of stillness and uncertainty. This condition places her between consciousness and unconsciousness, reinforcing her detachment from reality and her surroundings. She seems to exist in a quiet, passive state rather than actively engaging with the world.

The imagery of the oil lamp introduces a subtle contrast between light and darkness. She holds “the oil lamp / whose drunken yellow flames” (Mahapatra



7-8) and the line "know where her lonely body hides" (Mahapatra 9) suggests that while her physical presence remains, something within her is concealed. The flickering flame becomes a silent witness to her condition, emphasizing the gap between outer existence and inner awareness. The central theme of the poem is loss of identity, as reflected in the woman's inability to recognize herself in the mirror. Another theme is inner emptiness and detachment, shown through her passive waiting "at the edge of sleep." The poem also explores invisibility within ordinary existence, where a person may be present yet unnoticed or undefined. The contrast between light and darkness highlights a theme of partial awareness, in which external elements perceive what the individual cannot fully grasp about herself.

V) "Dawn at Puri"

"Dawn at Puri" by Jayanta Mahapatra is a significant poem from his collection "Relationship" (1980), which deeply explores themes of Indian culture, spirituality, and human suffering. The poem is written in free verse, without a fixed rhyme scheme or regular meter, allowing the poet to express his thoughts in a natural, reflective manner. It consists of irregular stanzas, and the imagery flows in a fragmented yet meaningful way, reflecting the complexity of the scene. The poem presents a realistic picture of an early-morning scene in Puri, but instead of depicting its peace and spirituality, Mahapatra highlights the harsh realities of life. Mahapatra begins the poem with disturbing images, "Endless crow noises" (Mahapatra 1) and "A skull in the holy sands" (Mahapatra 2), which create a dark and unsettling atmosphere. The "skull" becomes a powerful symbol of death and decay, suggesting that

even a sacred place is connected to death and suffering. The poet then describes the "white-clad widowed Women" (Mahapatra 4) who are waiting to enter the temple, showing their loneliness, social isolation, and marginal existence in society. Their suffering is further emphasized by the striking simile, "Their austere eyes / stare like those caught in a net" (Mahapatra 7-8), which suggests they are trapped and lack freedom. The depiction of "a mass of crouched faces without names" (Mahapatra 12) presents a disturbing picture of poverty and loss of identity among the people gathered there. The poem then becomes personal when the poet connects the scene to his own life, mentioning "my aging mother" (Mahapatra 15) and her "last wish to be cremated here" (Mahapatra 16), which shows how people hold fast to religious traditions even in the face of death. However, the poem starkly contrasts the spiritual significance of Puri with the harsh realities of human suffering. It explores themes of death, poverty, faith, and existential anxiety, showing how religious spaces are also not free from pain and human struggle.

vi) "Grandfather"

"Grandfather" by Jayanta Mahapatra is a reflective and deeply personal poem that explores memory, generational distance, and the harsh realities of life and death. The poem is written in free verse, without a fixed rhyme scheme or regular meter, allowing the poet to move freely between past and present. The structure is irregular, with long flowing lines and shifting images that reflect the fragmented nature of memory and thought. The poem was published in his 1980 collection "Relationship". The poem presents a recollection of the poet's grandfather, whose life is imagined through memory and emotional distance.



The opening lines, "The yellowed diary's notes whisper in vernacular" and "They sound the forgotten posture" (Mahapatra 1-2), suggest that the past is fading and can only be partially recovered. The grandfather's life appears marked by struggle and fear, as seen in the lines, "Hunted, you turned coward and ran" and "the real animal in you plunging through your bone" (Mahapatra 17-18), which reveal human weakness and vulnerability. The poem also reflects on the questions of faith and tradition, especially in the lines, "What did faith matter? / What Hindu world so ancient and true for you to hold?" (Mahapatra 22-23). Here, the poet reflects on the meaning of inherited beliefs in the face of suffering and death. The relationship between generations becomes important when the poet brings the present into the poem, saying, "My son and I speak of that famine nameless as snow" (Mahapatra 28), showing how the past continues to affect the present, even if it is not fully understood. In the final part, the poet addresses his grandfather directly: "There is a dawn waiting beside us... a hundred odd years away from you, Grandfather" (Mahapatra 33). This highlights the gap between generations and the inability to know the past fully. The poem ends with a feeling of quiet reflection and unanswered questions about life, dignity, and death. However, "Grandfather" explores themes of memory and the past, showing how it survives only in fragments. It also highlights the generational gap, where the present cannot fully understand the experiences of the past. Another important theme is fear and human vulnerability, seen in the grandfather's life. Finally, it reflects on faith and existential uncertainty, questioning traditional beliefs in the face of suffering.

(B) HUMAN SUFFERING IN JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S SELECTED POEMS.

Human suffering is one of the central concerns of Odia English poetry. Many Odia poets use their works to portray the harsh realities of life, such as poverty, hunger, loneliness, exploitation, and emotional pain. Through vivid imagery and realistic narration, these poets give voice to marginalized people whose struggles often remain unseen in society. Their poetry does not merely describe suffering, but it also exposes the social systems and human attitudes that create and sustain such pain.

In Odia English poetry, suffering is often presented in multiple dimensions, such as physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and existential. Physical suffering appears through hunger, illness, and bodily hardship. Social suffering is reflected in class inequality, exploitation, and neglect of vulnerable communities. Psychological suffering emerges through inner conflict, shame, helplessness, and emotional trauma. Spiritual suffering is expressed through the loss of faith, inner emptiness, and the search for meaning in the face of pain. Existential suffering arises from loneliness, uncertainty, and the questioning of life's purpose. Among Odia English poets, Jayanta Mahapatra is especially remarkable in portraying these varied dimensions of suffering with honesty and depth. His poetry gives voice to the poor, the neglected, and the emotionally wounded, presenting their struggles in a realistic yet deeply sensitive manner. His ability to connect external realities, such as poverty and exploitation, with inner experiences, such as guilt, silence, and despair, makes his writing unique. Through simple but powerful imagery, he transforms



ordinary incidents into profound reflections on human pain, making suffering not just a social issue but a universal human experience. The poem "Hunger" stands as one of the most striking portrayals of human suffering. The poem presents a picture of poverty and exploitation in a coastal village. Through the story of a starving fisherman and his daughter, the poet reveals how hunger reduces human dignity and forces people into desperate situations.

A significant line from the poem is "My daughter, she has just turned fifteen... Feel her. I will be back soon" (Mahapatra 16-17). This shocking line captures the depth of the poem's physical and social suffering. The fisherman's words reveal the unbearable pressure of poverty and hunger. His desperation is so intense that he offers his young daughter to a stranger in exchange for survival. This reflects physical suffering, as hunger has pushed him beyond moral boundaries. The body's need for food outweighs all social values. The poem also highlights social suffering. The family belongs to a marginalized, impoverished community that society has abandoned. Their suffering is not merely personal but rooted in systemic inequality. Poverty, lack of opportunity, and social neglect create the conditions that force such tragic decisions. The girl becomes a victim not only of her father's desperation but also of a society that has failed to protect her.

"Indian Summer" by Jayanta Mahapatra can be understood through the lens of physical and emotional suffering. Instead of showing various kinds of suffering simultaneously, the poem concentrates on the harshness of the external world and the inner exhaustion of human life. Through vivid seasonal

imagery, Mahapatra uses the Indian summer as a metaphor for pain, weariness, and emotional emptiness. The poem strongly reflects physical suffering through its oppressive climate and barren surroundings. The opening lines, "Over the souging of the somber wind/priests chant louder than ever" (Mahapatra 1-2), immediately create an atmosphere of discomfort and heaviness. The "somber wind" suggests a dry and restless environment, while the heat of summer remains implied throughout the poem. This harsh natural setting represents bodily exhaustion and the struggle to endure difficult living conditions. The long, suffocating afternoon in the poem further emphasizes the strain of the season, making physical suffering a dominant presence.

At the same time, the poem also reveals emotional suffering. Beneath the physical heat lies a deeper sense of emptiness and weariness. The line "The good wife/lies in my bed / through the long afternoon" (Mahapatra 7-9) suggests emotional stillness and a lack of vitality. The image conveys not comfort, but silence and detachment. This reflects the inner loneliness and emotional fatigue of individuals trapped in repetitive, exhausting realities.

Mahapatra's poetic excellence lies in his ability to connect outer landscapes with inner states of mind. He does not directly state suffering; instead, he allows the season itself to carry emotional meaning. The oppressive summer becomes a symbol of psychological burden. In this way, physical discomfort transforms into emotional desolation, showing how closely the body and mind are linked in experiences of suffering. The poem's imagery also deepens this emotional dimension. The movement of rituals and processions contrasts with the stillness of human



feeling, creating a sense of emptiness beneath outward activity. This suggests that even amid life's visible motions, there remains an unspoken sadness. Such subtle treatment of emotional suffering is one of Mahapatra's most distinctive strengths.

"A Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" by Jayanta Mahapatra is a powerful poem that exposes the painful realities of women living in exploitation and poverty. The poem is set in a red-light district of Calcutta and reflects on lives that society often ignores. Mahapatra portrays the whorehouse not simply as a physical location, but as a social institution shaped by exploitation, inequality, and moral hypocrisy. At the same time, he uncovers the women's mental and emotional burdens, making the poem a layered study of suffering in both society and the human mind. The poem powerfully reflects social suffering, exposing how society creates and sustains the conditions of exploitation. The women are not responsible for their situation; rather, they are victims of economic hardship, patriarchal control, and public indifference. Mahapatra points toward this collective responsibility in the lines: "Those who put the house there, / For the startled eye to fall upon" (Mahapatra 7-8). These words suggest that the existence of the whorehouse is the result of social structures and deliberate choices, not individual failure. Society condemns these women while simultaneously enabling the very system that marginalizes them. The poem also conveys psychological suffering, revealing the hidden mental conflict of the woman. Beneath their outward "false chatter" lies a world of suppressed memory, longing, and fractured identity. Mahapatra writes of "Then thinks of the secret moonlight of the women / Left

behind their false chatter" (Mahapatra 16-17), suggesting an inner life buried beneath performance and survival. Their thoughts return to "children and of home," indicating unresolved attachment, guilt, and loss. This suffering is psychological because it exists within the mind through memory, regret, and the painful awareness of separation from their pasts.

In the poem "A Missing Person", Jayanta Mahapatra presents suffering through the themes of existential suffering and psychological suffering. The poem explores the loss of identity, the emptiness of existence, and the silent mental burden carried by an isolated individual. Through the image of a woman in a darkened room, Mahapatra creates a deeply introspective atmosphere in which suffering is not loud or visible but hidden in silence and absence. The poem becomes a meditation on what it means to exist when one's sense of self begins to disappear.

In Odia English poetry, suffering often extends into philosophical and psychological dimensions, exploring identity, memory, and alienation. Jayanta Mahapatra is especially effective in expressing such suffering through minimal language and symbolic imagery. Rather than describing pain openly, he allows it to surface through objects like the mirror, the lamp, and the darkness. His poetry invites readers to experience suffering as a condition of both mind and existence. Thus, "A Missing Person" becomes a profound exploration of existential and psychological suffering. Through the woman's lost reflection and her lonely waiting, Mahapatra portrays the fragile nature of identity and the hidden struggles of the human mind. The poem reminds readers that suffering can exist not only in visible hardship but also in the silent disappearance of the self.



"Dawn at Puri" by Jayanta Mahapatra is a deeply reflective poem that moves beyond a simple description of a holy place. The poem is set in the sacred town of Puri; the poem presents a morning landscape filled with unsettling images that reveal the hidden pain of human life. Through this contrast between the spiritual setting and the harsh realities it contains, Mahapatra explores both psychological suffering and spiritual suffering in a subtle yet powerful manner. The poem opens with a striking image: "Endless crow noises / A skull on the holy sands" (Mahapatra 1-2). These lines immediately create a disturbing atmosphere. The crows symbolize unrest, decay, and the repetitive burden of existence, while the skull represents mortality and the inevitability of death. Instead of peace, the sacred landscape is filled with reminders of life's fragility. This creates a sense of inner unease, reflecting the psychological suffering that arises from confronting death and impermanence.

Psychological suffering in the poem is also evident in the widows' emotional state. Mahapatra describes them as "White-clad widowed Women / past the centers of their lives" (Mahapatra 4-5). This phrase suggests more than aging; it points to a life emptied of purpose and emotional connection. These women exist in silence, carrying memories of loss and loneliness. Their suffering is inward and deeply personal, marked by resignation and the weight of unspoken sorrow. The poet captures the mental exhaustion that comes from a life defined by absence and waiting. The poem also profoundly presents spiritual suffering. Puri, as a sacred religious center, is expected to offer peace, redemption, and divine comfort. The holy city is not shown as a place of

spiritual fulfillment, but as one where suffering continues despite rituals and faith. The presence of death, emptiness, and despair in such a sacred space creates a contradiction that calls into question the effectiveness of external devotion.

In "Grandfather," Jayanta Mahapatra portrays inner pain, fear, and emotional conflict. The poem revisits the life and death of the speaker's grandfather, using memory to understand the suffering hidden within family history. From the opening line, "The yellowed diary's notes whisper in vernacular" (Mahapatra 1), the past appears fragile and haunting, as if old memories still carry unresolved emotions. The poem strongly reflects psychological suffering because it explores fear, anxiety, helplessness, and emotional disturbance. The grandfather is shown not as a heroic figure, but as a vulnerable human being struggling internally. The lines "Did you see your own death?" and "Watch it tear at your cries, / break them into fits of unnatural laughter?" (Mahapatra 14-16) suggest deep mental anguish. The phrase "unnatural laughter" symbolizes emotional breakdown and the disturbing effect of fear on the human mind. The poem also captures confusion and restless thought. Mahapatra writes, "Uneasily you dreamed toward the center of your web" (Mahapatra 24). This image suggests a troubled mental state, where the grandfather is caught in his own thoughts and anxieties. The "web" becomes a symbol of psychological entrapment, reflecting the mind's complexity in suffering. Overall, "Grandfather" is best understood as a poem of psychological suffering, where fear, anxiety, and emotional unrest dominate the portrayal of the grandfather's final struggles.



Beneath this lies an existential search for dignity and meaning, making the poem both intimate and universal.

CONCLUSION

This research work has attempted to understand and analyze the various dimensions of suffering as reflected in the poet's selected works. The study has shown that suffering is not treated as a single emotional response in Mahapatra's poetry, but as a broad and deeply layered human experience. His poems reveal that suffering takes different forms, including physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and existential. The study also confirms that social suffering occupies an important place in Mahapatra's poetic world. His poems often bring neglected people, forgotten histories, and lives shaped by inequality to the forefront. Through such depictions, he critiques society's indifference and highlights the suffering caused by social divisions. The poor, the abandoned, and the silenced are not treated merely as subjects of sympathy but as symbols of a larger social truth. Mahapatra's poetry, therefore, functions as a form of ethical witnessing, in which literature becomes a medium for revealing uncomfortable realities. His social awareness strengthens the emotional and intellectual power of his poems. At the same time, the research demonstrates that Mahapatra's engagement with suffering extends beyond the social sphere into spiritual and existential questions. His poems frequently reflect uncertainty about faith, the fragility of human life, and the search for meaning in a world marked by loss and impermanence. His language is restrained yet powerful, simple yet suggestive. He often relies on imagery, symbolism, and fragmented narrative

structures to create emotional resonance. Rather than describing suffering directly, he allows it to emerge through atmosphere, memory, and silence. This study further establishes that suffering in Mahapatra's poetry is not only an expression of despair but also a pathway toward awareness. Pain becomes a medium for understanding oneself, others, and the world all at once. His poems suggest that suffering can lead to empathy, reflection, and a deeper recognition of shared humanity. In conclusion, the selected poems of Jayanta Mahapatra present suffering as a complex and unavoidable aspect of human life. Through his sensitive and layered portrayal of physical hardship, emotional conflict, social injustice, and existential questioning, Mahapatra offers a profound understanding of what it means to be human.

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