

Spanning Beyond the Boundaries Through Comparative Study: Parallelism of Ideas and Concepts in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra and Rajendra Bhandari

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Abstract

Comparative Literature is a genre which gives ample opportunities to readers and critics to investigate the different spectrums of the making of literature all around the world. Human sensibilities do get depicted in the literary texts of different parts of the world which provide an insight into the living conditions, social composition and individual efforts at establishing identity. India is a land of multicultural milieu. Jayanta Mahapatra from Orissa and Rajendra Bhandari, the regional poets have much in common in the treatment and approach towards the subjects they have dealt with in their poems. Mahapatra represents the whole of India in general and Orissa in particular whereas Bhandari represents the northeastern sensibilities. But, overall, these two poets try to execute the portrayal of humanity from different perspectives. This paper aims to examine the issues of united receptivity from these two poets.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, Struggle, Poverty, Humanity, Identity

According to Rene Wellek, Comparative literature is still a controversial discipline which has not yet been able to establish a distinct subject matter and specific methodology (*Discriminations*, p.1.14 1974). In the Indian context, comparative literature is a very new entrant; however, it is fast gaining popularity among students and scholars of literature. India always had a massive scope for translation and translated literature, which is the main source for comparative literature. Just as almost every community, big or small, boasts of a unique culture; so, do they have a unique literary tradition. The Northeastern part of India specially is a big conglomeration of literary colours which is gradually getting recognition in the mainstream literary arena of India. Comparative literature promotes the ideal of one world by appreciation of various literatures from different parts beyond boundaries. It is said that Literature studied in isolation does not grow.

When one compares literature between two regions, one compares the whole culture, the growth and development from the social and the mental perspectives as well. Comparative literature brings into focus the similarity along with the differences in the manner of expression of two different poets or writers hailing from two completely different social as well as mental makeup. This paper is going to focus on the similarities in thoughts and the treatment of themes as seen between two poets coming from two totally diverse cultural, social and geographical backgrounds. One very pertinent aspect that comes out when one compares the poetry of Bhandari and Mahapatra is the similarity in the line of thought to a very great extent. Here, it becomes interesting to note that both the poets hail from totally different topographical, social, financial, psychological, and religious backgrounds.

Jayanta Mahapatra is a poet who needs no introduction and whose poetry is internationally acknowledged. Rajendra Bhandari is a regional poet and writes in Nepali. His poetry has been translated into English by his close literary friends and some poems have been self translated. His poetry has gained popularity in the international arena in the regional category.

Jayanta Mahapatra is the voice of Orissa. His poetry expresses like no other can, the deep pain, the poverty, the namelessness and the facelessness of the common man who form the larger mass of Orissa. He has put Orissa in

the international map because of his marvelous word power in expressing the angst and the malaise of his people. Bhandari, on the other hand writes from the high solemn mountains of Sikkim. His poetry also expresses the deep resentment of the people of the hills, and it can be said to be the voice of most of the Northeastern states of India. The identity crisis, the corruption in every step in life, the mechanical life led by the people, the loss of faith and the hopelessness that prevails among the people of this part of India finds expression in his works. His poetry expresses along with the political as well as physical unrest as seen in various parts of the Northeastern part of India, the unrest of the mind, the mind which longs for peace, the mind that desires Nirvana.

As one brings about a comparison between these two poets, one finds several similar themes and a lot of contemporary issues being handled with the sensibilities that only a poet can express. Some of the similarities are in the treatment of the social surroundings, the contemporary society, the degradation of the society as can be seen in the expression when the poet talks about the various factors in society. Corruption, unemployment, loss of moral values, loss of culture and tradition that normally bound people and in a way stop humans from doing drastic evils are some of the common concerns in the poems of these two poets. Loss of faith does not only signify loss of faith in God or in some divine power but also the loss of faith in fellow humans. There is distrust among every individual towards every other individual, which is a very pertinent aspect of this post-modern society. In the works of both the poets, one finds a unique way of expressing themselves.

Literature has always been the mirror of society; this makes comparative literature a genre worth exploring. Mahapatra's poem, 'Hunger', is one of the finest examples of poetry where not in too many lines, the poet beautifully depicts a contemporary society that has eroded itself from all goodness. It is a delineation of a society where hunger rules and moves the thoughts, moves the arms, and moves the heart and mind of the people. The incident in the poem is disturbingly true. It expresses the dearth of morality; it expresses the ultimate that a man can do when he needs to fill his belly. In the same manner, Bhandari in his poem 'Andhyaro Gallima' (Bhandari: *Pwaankhharu rah Aakash*. 2010) (In the Dark Alley), talks about a girl who plunges herself into prostitution to save her family from extreme poverty. The mother knows about this, but she is so helpless.

Puri is to Mahapatra what Wessex was for Hardy and Malgudi was for Narayan. However, Mahapatra's Puri is not an imaginary land, his Puri is throbbing with real life people, nothing fictional about the pilgrims, the beggars, the prostitutes and the drying up rivers, like the dying humanity. Puri is Mahapatra's Wasteland. He can feel fearsome and the extremely cruel and dried up emotions of the people. He expresses the wasted extremities. Some of the striking similarities in the line of thought in some of the poems of these two poets are: In the poetry of both Jayanta Mahapatra and Rajendra Bhandari, one finds a deep resentment towards the psychological and physical unrest, very mechanical and routine way of life that has become the order of the day, the nostalgia for the past, the good old days spent within the arms of loving innocence and the undemanding affection of their parents.

Social degradation is one of the most prominent and glaring themes in the works of Jayanta Mahapatra and Rajendra Bhandari. Mahapatra expresses social degradation with a host of images as can be seen in most of the poems like Dawn at Puri, Hunger etc. The slow but inevitable erosion of human sympathies and human emotions, the intolerance of one human towards another and the extreme injustice that man can inflict upon another human being are some of the themes found in his poetry. In his poem 'Dawn at Puri' he describes the degradation of a religious place like Puri through a host of images...

"Endless crow noises

A skull in the holy sands

tilts its empty country towards hunger.

White-clad widowed Women

past the centers of their lives

are waiting to enter the Great Temple." (Dawn at Puri: Mahapatra Jayanta *The Lie of Dawns* 1995)

The noise of the crow symbolises the starvation of nature, the sordidness and the squalor, the clamour, the poverty and the irony of this is that all this is happening in a Holy place. The widows symbolise the marginalized of the marginalized who have no existence anywhere, who have ceased to exist in the mind and heart of the society after they become widows, are waiting for their final destination. The white clad widows are waiting to enter The Great Temple as they have been forced to believe that henceforth they have, and they should only ask for solace, peace, and fulfillment of all desires inside the house of God. The contrast in the use of colour, the crows black, dark menacing waiting to pounce on any dead body for survival and the widows clad in white waiting to enter the temple for survival. There is a skull that symbolizes death which never got the respect that a dead should get. The skull can be of anything, but it attracts the crows that are the harbingers of death. Similarly, Bhandari's poem 'Mero Kavita' (Bhandari R. *Pwaankhharu rah Aakash* 2010) (My Poem) expresses the social degradation that has made men into a mechanical, robotic beast. The routine life led by men devoid of emotions, the loss of faith and the identity crisis faced by an individual are the focus of attention in this beautiful poem.

In another poem titled 'Dyer's Jallianwala', Bhandari exposes the harsh reality of the modern man and the modern society. He lashes out at the immoral politicians and the men in power, he highlights the hidden agenda, he gives impetus to the hypocritical man whether or not in the garb of Dyer.

"In daylight

Dyer Vows integrity and confidentiality.

In darkness

Dyer uses his office as a shield to strip the confidence." (Dyer's Jallianwala.Bhandari: *Pwaankhharu rah Aakash* 2010)

Dyer the mastermind behind the Jallianwala Massacre symbolises the cruelest and the most inhuman side of a human being and Bhandari reiterates that there is a rise in the number of Dyers in our society. Our society has degraded so much and has gone down so much on the moral frame that in one form or the other people like Dyer play a significant role.

Women are the subject of most of Mahapatra's poem. He exposes the worst kind of situation faced by a woman, whether as a college going girl in the poem, or as a widow in the poem 'Dawn at Puri' or as a women searching for her identity as in the poem 'A Missing Person'. His poem. 'Hunger' has been discussed in length to describe social degradation by any critic, however this poem also tells us about the silent, quiet daughter who seems to offer no resistance to what her father proposes to the tourist.

I heard him say; my daughter she's just turned fifteen...

The wind was I, and the days and nights before. (Hunger: Mahapatra Jayanta *The Lie of Dawns*.1995)

The quiet daughter, the silent widow and the tolerant wife are some of the different faces of a women as seen in Mahapatra's poems.

Bhandari's poems also express the anguish, the stifling and the suffocated females in his society. He expresses the unconditional love of a mother, and the love of a beloved and again the sacrifice given by a daughter to save her family from extreme poverty. Bhandari hardly expresses his physical desires or his longing for a physical union with a lover in his poetry. His poems are spiritual, and his women are treated also as one of the aspects of Nature. The female beings in his poems are as vulnerable and as lacking in identity and lacking in a proper expression as any other individual from the Northeastern part of India. In his poem 'Day's Footprint', Bhandari says,

The Times of India gave me a country

Floundering to be a nation,

A blood-stained earth

Crying out to become a mother. (Bhandari: *Pwaankhharu rah Aakash*. 2010)

As the paper was being prepared, it was found that comparing and bringing about a similarity in themes in the works of both these two poets is exhaustive and it is indeed difficult to do justice to their works. There does exist a lot of similarity in the themes and treatment in various aspects in the works of both the poets. Right from the treatment of Nature by both the poets to the treatment of mind thoughts both Bhandari and Mahapatra have a lot in common. Through this comparative analysis it is found that the basic concept that every human being in this society is facing and living is the same. One cannot imagine two different poets living in two different parts of India could have so much in common. Therefore, comparative Literature or comparative analysis of literature does not only help to bring out these basic similarities to light, but it also helps to understand both the poets compared from a broader perspective. Literature holds a mirror to society and by comparing literature one also compares the whole customs, traditions, religion, basic aspects of day-to-day life. If literature is compared, it grows not only academically but socially and practically also. For a regional poet to be compared along the same line with an internationally renowned mainstream poet, it does highlight the regional poet internationally and gives more room to the mainstream poet on the regional stage. Therefore, it can be reiterated that it is indeed necessary to compare literary works if one wants to bridge the gap in our society that seems to be widening more and more.

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