**Grandfather**

-Jayanta Mahapatra

The yellowed diary's notes whisper in vernacular.

They sound the forgotten posture,

the cramped cry that forces me to hear that voice.

Now I stumble back in your black-paged wake.

No uneasy stir of cloud

darkened the white skies of your day; the silence

of dust grazed in the long afterniin sun, ruling

the cracked fallow earth, ate into the laughter of your flesh.

For you it was the hardest question of all.

Dead, empty tress stood by the dragging river,

past your weakened body, flailing against your sleep.

You thought of the way the jackals moved, to move.

Did you hear the young tamarind leaves rustle

in the cold mean nights of your belly? Did you see

your own death? Watch it tear at your cries,

break them into fits of unnatural laughter?

How old were you? Hunted, you turned coward and ran,

the real animal in you plunigng through your bone.

You left your family behind, the buried things,

the precious clod that praised the quality of a god.

The impersihable that swung your broken body,

turned it inside out? What did faith matter?

What Hindu world so ancient and true for you to hold?

Uneasily you dreamed toward the center of your web.

The separate life let you survive, while perhaps

the one you left wept in the blur of your heart.

Now in a night of sleep and taunting rain

My son and I speak of that famine nameless as snow.

A conscience of years is between us. He is young.

The whirls of glory are breaking down for him before me.

Does he think of the past as a loss we have lived, our own?

Out of silence we look back now at what we do not know.

There is a dawn waiting beside us, whose signs

are a hundred odd years away from you, Grandfather.

You are an invisible piece on a board

Whose move has made our children grow, to know us,

carrying us deep where our voices lapse into silence.

We wish we knew you more.

We wish we knew what it was to be, against dying,

to know the dignity

that had to be earned dangerously,

your last chance that was blindly terrifying, so unfair.

We wish we had not to wake up with our smiles

in the middle of some social order.

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Jayanta Mahapatra (born 22 October 1928) is a major Indian English poet. He is

the first Indian poet to win Sahitya Akademi award for English poetry. He is the

author of popular poems such as Indian summer and Hunger, which are regarded as

classics in modern Indian English literature. Jayanta Mahapatra was awarded Padma

Shri, the fourth highest civilian honour in India in 2009. However, he returned the

Padma award in 2015 to protest against the rising intolerance in India.

Grandfather is a poem reflecting nostalgia. The poet is bursting with questions as to

why his grandfather embraced Christianity and to seek answers he turns to his long

dead grandfather and his diary; diary which is stained yellow by the dye of time. In

this poem Jayanta Mahapatra reveals the struggle of his wounded psyche to come out

of its cocoon. The speaker is haunted by the invisible spirit of his grandfather he calls

his grandfather a board that has helped him and his children to grow and move

ahead. He asks his grandfather what were his conditions at that time how afraid and

hungry was he; how coward was he to leave his own family behind who stayed in the

blurred part of his heart. He asks about the nature the rivers the trees the wind the

animals and compares how all those images were empty just like his own stomach.

Mahapatra seems to have grasped the intensity and dimensions of the terrible crisis

faced by grandfather. The poem questions validity of religion. Is religion more

necessary than food? Is religion or god more important than life of a living being?

The poet reconstructs this imaginary debate in the mind of the grandfather and the

reader. Poem is critique to some state imposed social order which feeds people but at

the cost of their lives.

‘A country’ is one of Mahapatra’s overtly political poems in which he suggests that

suffering is universal, no matter what the social or political order may be. Poet says

that even if the countries are separated by boundaries the economic and sociopolitical conditions can be similar. In the very first stanza the poets sounds like he is

mocking the ritual of spreading ashes because they are just polluting the air and it’s

like a burden. He mocks the boundaries because the people of one country can be a

mirror image to the people of other country beside the geographical distance. He sees

the country dying and its sons vanishing because of baseless and meaningless wars.

He gives example of 1972; the extreme leftist naxalite movement which was

violently crushed in west Bengal. He says that it will be no use trying to change

minds by forcing and provoking but we should understand ourselves and not

continue the old age myths and practices of rituals that don’t do anybody any good.

Mahapatra’s poetry continuously engages with the past and its loss through a

sensitive recounting of events and episodes from the history of Orissa and through

the multiple references to local myths, legends, rituals, traditional practices and sites

of religious and social significance. He uses images and symbols drawn from nature;

numerous temples and their ruins surround the towns in Orissa. Mahapatra’s poetry

is suggestive rather than national; to him his Oriya identity is most important and he

reflects it in his poetry.