

- Understanding Jayanta Mahapatra's Dawn at Puri

Jayanta Mahapatra's 'Dawn at Puri' portrays a collage of bleak pictures observed by the poet himself in and around the famous Jagannatha Temple at Puri. The poem paints beautifully a morning landscape of the sandy beach at Puri.

The opening line of the poem marks the harsh cawing of the crows that announce the break of the day.

The image of the crow suggests the existence of a wasteland full of stinking refuse, corps and carcasses.

The light of dawn unfolds a second image which is that of a skull on the 'holy sands'. The sight of the

skull speaks of the presence of a cremating ground. Symbolically, however, it alludes to the abject

poverty of the people living in the area. This area, in turn, may be said to represent in miniature the entire

country. The image of the skull may also signify the hollowness of the glorified rites and rituals that feed

the thoughts of the ardent devotees.

The poet then catches sight of a good number of 'widowed women' in white garments waiting eagerly to

step into the Great Temple. The use of the term 'widowed women,' instead of the usual word 'widows,'

is noteworthy. It is society that reduces a woman to a widow - not that she becomes a widow only

because her husband is dead. The state of being a widow means much more than the passing away of her

husband. It enjoins her to observe strict rigour in her food habit, dress and life-style.

The Great Temple is an image of stability and permanence amid changeability. For the widows, it is a

symbol of hope, faith and spiritual salvation. By the side of the glowing eyes of the austere widows, there

lies the picture of a group of lepers. These lepers throng the place everyday to seek alms from the

devotees. They are the humble and lowly people so much so that they have almost lost their identity as

human beings.

The poet cannot alienate himself from the pervading milieu/ ambience/ environs of decadence.

A funeral

pyre on the beach puts him in mind his mother's last wish. His mother wished to be cremated at this

'Swargadwara', that is the gateway to heaven. His mother's longing might have no practical logic. But, a

deep sense of faith underpins her last wish in life.