

15 January 1997



Sahitya Akademi

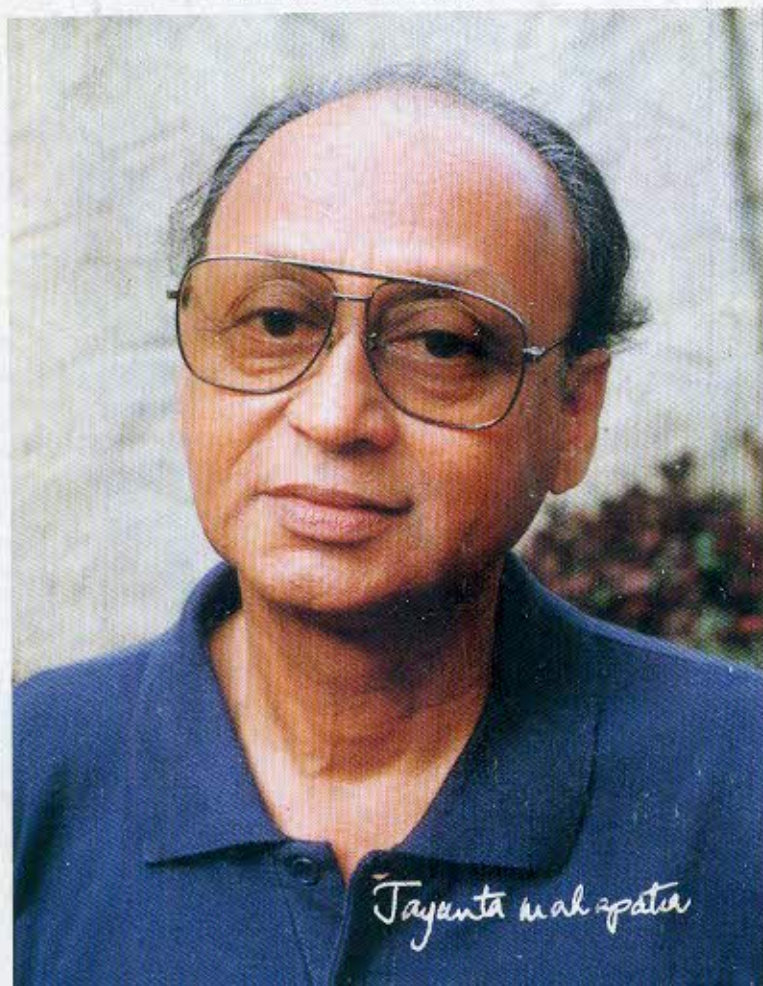


India International Centre

invite you to

**meet the author**

**Jayanta Mahapatra**



**T**he manner of apprehension in his wonderful, sensate poems inevitably brings to the tongue the word, 'sophistication'. His psychology is at once more historical, more anxious, more involuted than that of any Chinese poet, old or modern, known to me. Evident in every cadence is the long over-ripening of a sardonic wisdom... These poems should inveigle anyone who professes a passion for the music of English. Few contemporary poems in our world impress me more than these."

So wrote the critic Vernon Young, reviewing Jayanta Mahapatra's fourth collection of poetry, *A Rain of Rites* in the Winter 1977 issue of *The Hudson Review* (New York). And then too, the poet and critic, K. Ayyappa Paniker maintained that "there is a remarkable poise about the way he organises things: the dominant concern is the vision of grief, loss, dejection, rejection. The tragic consciousness does not seem operate in the work of any Indian poet in English as disturbingly as in that of Jayanta Mahapatra."

A poet and scientist, an Oriya who writes mainly in English, a city dweller whose

subjects are often ancient and rural, Jayanta Mahapatra indeed lives in two worlds. The divisions of his life, however, do not necessarily account for the melancholy, subjective, and reflective nature of his poetry, but they may account for the uniqueness of his voice as a poet. Madhusudan Prasad, who collected a series of essays on him in *The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: A Critical Study*, finds him "authentically Indian... rooted deeply in Indian socio-cultural heritage."

Jayanta Mahapatra has always contended that his is an Oriya poet, who, by accident, wrote in English. He was born in the city of Cuttack in Orissa, where he still makes his home. Jayanta was educated at Stewart School and Ravenshaw College in Cuttack. He took a first class Master's degree in Physics from Patna University in 1949. In 1951 he married Jyotsna Das; they have one son. After a short stint as a sub-editor of newspaper in his hometown, he began teaching Physics, working in different colleges in Orissa till his retirement in 1986. Jayanta was forty-three when he pub-



With Mulk Raj Anand at the writer's house in Cuttack, 1982



With Nepali poet Banira Giri and others at Asian Poets Meet, Bhopal, 1985

lished his first volume of poetry. Since then, however, he has written prolifically. In addition to poetry, he writes short stories and literary essays, and has translated extensively from Oriya and Bangla poetry into English.

His long poem, *Relationship*, was published in New York in 1980. And in 1981, it won the Sahitya Akademi Award for "its story awareness of the Indian heritage, evocative description, significant reflection and linking of personal reminiscences with race memory." Books and awards followed in quick succession. In 1975 he had already received the Jacob Glatstein Memorial Prize from the Modern Poetry Association, Chicago for a group of eleven poems he had published in *Poetry* that year. The year 1989 saw the publication of his second long poem, *Temple* from Sydney and Coventry. *Temple* "fuses the mythic with the socio-political, eternity with history, the unconscious with the conscious" (Vilas Sarang). Reviewing the book in *World Literature Today*, John O. Perry wrote: "Drowning in the waves of sometimes dimly, often brilliantly suggestive imagery of light into landscape, of sound and syntax in

insecure syntheses, we are drawn into encountering the eighty-year-old suicide who occasioned this ultimate cry for the silent suppressed suffering of our humanity."

Invited to read his poetry at festivals, colleges and universities around the world, Jayanta Mahapatra remains one of the country's leading poets. He has won world-wide prominence for his powerful, haunting and visionary work. Personal and meditative, it is infused with a deep sense of suffering. His later poems deal with a nation of hunger, injustice, violence and fanaticism. Charles R. Larson, in *World Literature Today*, said that he



With Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Ambalapura, 1996

writes so fluently and vividly, "that many of his poems give the impression of having been animated by some private muse which exists solely to inspire him."

Widely anthologised, accounts on him and his work appear in such respected encyclopaedic publications as *Contemporary Poets* (London) and *World Authors* (New York).

## A Select Bibliography

### In English

#### Poetry

*Close the Sky, Ten by Ten*, Dialogue Publication, 1971

*Svayamvara & Other Poems*, Calcutta : Writers Workshop, 1971

*A Father's Hours*, Calcutta : Writers Workshop, 1976

*A Rain of Rites*, Athens : University of Georgia, 1976

*Waiting*, New Delhi : Samkaleen Prakashan, 1979

*The False Start*, Bombay : Clearing House, 1980

*Relationship*, New York : 1980

*Life Signs*, Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1983

*Dispossessed Nests*, Ed. Yuyutsu R.D., Ramanand Rathi : New Delhi, Nirala, 1986

*Selected Poems*, Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1987

*Burden of Waves and Fruit*, Washington, D.C. : Continent Press, 1988

*Temple*, 1989

*A Whiteness of Bone*, New Delhi : Viking, 1992

*The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra*, 1995

#### Others

*Orissa*, 1987



With poets Vinaychandran, Ayyappa Paniker, Bansidhar Sarangi at Kottayam, 1996



With his non-violent cousins, Khandagiri, Orissa, 1984

### In Oriya

*Bali* (The Victim), 1993

*Kahibi Gotte Katha* (I'll Tell a Story), 1995

### Translations

*Countermeasures* (Poems), Dialogue Publication, 1973

*I Can But Why Should I Go* (Poems), New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1994

*Wings of the Past* (Poems), Calcutta, 1976

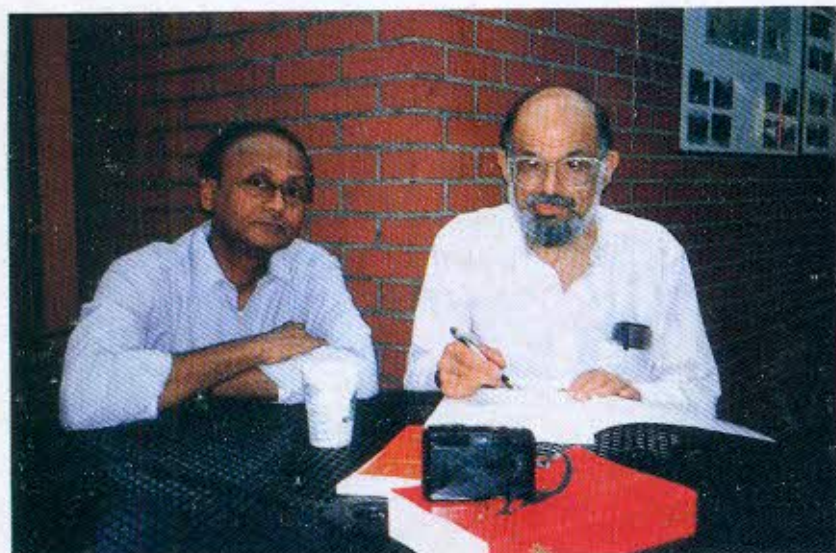
*Verticals of Life* (Poems), New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1995

*Song of Kubja & Other Poems*, New Delhi, 1981

### Critical Studies on Jayanta Mahapatra

*Jayanta Mahapatra* by Devinder Mohan, New Delhi, Arnold Heinemann, 1987

*The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra - A critical Study*, New Delhi, Sterling 1986



With US poet Allen Ginsberg, The Naropa Institute, Boulder, USA, 1994

## A Chronology

- 1928 Born, 22 October
- 1970 Second Prize, International *Who's Who in Poetry*, London
- 1975 Jacob Glatstein Memorial Prize, *Poetry Magazine*, Chicago
- 1976 Visiting Writer, International Writing Program, Iowa City, USA
- 1978 Cultural Award Visitor, Australia
- 1980 Japan Foundation Visitor's Award, Tokyo, Japan
- 1981 Sahitya Akademi Award, New Delhi
- 1984 Asian Poets Conference, Tokyo, Japan
- 1985 Indo-Soviet Cultural Exchange Writer
- 1986 Poet-in-Residence, Centro Culturale della Fondazione Rockefeller, Bellagio, Italy
- 1988 Singapore Festival of Arts Visiting Writer, Malaysia, Indonesia & Philippines
- 1989 Invited Poet, Justus-Liebig-Universitat, Giessen, West Germany
- Invited Poet, ACLALS Silver Jubilee Conference, Canterbury, England
- 1992 Invited Poet, Cuirt International Poetry Festival, Galway, Ireland
- Invited Poet, Poetry International, The South Bank Centre, London, England
- 1994 Invited Poet, El Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, Mexico & Mingei International Museum of World Folk Art, La Jolla, USA
- Gangadhar National Award for Poetry, Sambalpur University, Orissa
- 1995 Poetry Readings at various colleges and universities in the USA
- 1996 Vaikom Mohammed Basheer Chair, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam



With Irish writers, Sligo, Ireland, 1992