

FORUM ON CONTEMPORARY THEORY, BARODA, INDIA

(Member of the Consortium of Humanities Centers & Institutes)

In collaboration with The Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University (MSCB University), formerly North Orissa University (NOU), Baripada, Mayurbhanj

Organize a  
**National Seminar**

**Dates: 11-13 February 2023**

**Seminar Venue: The Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University (MSCB University), formerly North Orissa University (NOU)**

**Seminar Theme: “Autobiography as Affective Archaeology: Exploring Jayanta Mahapatra's Creative Oeuvre”**



#### Concept Note

The two-day National Seminar is intended to celebrate the bi-lingual writer Jayanta Mahapatra's creative engagement through a critical reflection of his work spanning over half a century. It is difficult to find a bilingual writer in India who is equally fluent in both the local language and English and produced in equal measure, works in both languages. His “Autobiography,” recently completed in Odia, could be considered as an apotheosis of his creative journey. It is a superb attempt, to sum up in flashback his life in words lived with passion and intensity. We have

called his poetic journey as “affective archaeology” to suggest that like a contemporary archaeologist trying to make sense of the life around from the scattered fragments of the ruins not easily deciphered, the poet here is not perhaps interested in creating structures in his imagination but in acutely observing the dynamic fluidity of images crisscrossing with each other from the collage of time. However, such disjunctive images emerge sporadically from his creative palimpsest, which is largely the state of Odisha, and closely the city of Cuttack where he lives. In the last part of his Autobiography these images, almost like a musical movement, come together in a crescendo-like epiphany in which moments of joy and grief blend contrapuntally to celebrate life's ultimate fulfilment.

Jayanta Mohapatra is both a summation and a continuation of the life situations he has experienced, thought about, felt and committed to, through his writings which include poetry, essays, stories, autobiography and translations. This is very much evident in his award-winning book *Relationship* where he grapples with his relationship with Odisha with its culture, history, myth, and tradition. The intensity of his longing to delve into the intricate and mysterious realms of his country and his being makes one feel as if the moment of

experiencing the contingent is also the moment of the timeless and the moment of painful rupture is also the moment of ecstatic epiphany.

But even when his creative spring has its origin in the specificities of Odia culture and history, his empathy and concern with the common suffering lot of people are deep and expansive, cutting across countries and cultures. As is evident from his writings, he has written poems for children who were massacred in Peshawar on December 16, 2014; on the lost children of America; on the death of a nameless girl in Bhopal; and on the brutal murder of women and children in the paddy fields of Nellie, Assam. Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Angela Elston or Benjamin Moloise, the black South African poet, who was executed in apartheid Africa, are all drawn into the ambit of his poems. The violence and bloodshed in Punjab, the Bhopal Gas Tragedy at the Union Carbide Plant Site, and the self-immolation by young men and women against the Mandal Commission Report - all come under his discerning gaze comprising a polyphony of voices and visions.

Instead of making an attempt to understand this reality through the Cartesian prisms of binaries, Mahapatra calls for a collapsing of boundaries and digs deep into the vast oceanic reservoir of our past so as to widen and deepen his sensibility. In fact, this attempt to navigate through the subconscious is just one node within a larger discursive project that attempts to understand the complex interwoven texts shaping the reality of the experience. He believes that by exploring the untapped reservoir of poetic plenitude that awaits the artist, and by realising, like the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, that “the sea is history” one may visualize, in pristine and unsuspected lights, a different apprehension of reality that is dynamic, fluid and constantly evolving. Instead of succumbing to a frozen stasis, to the enclosures of fear caused by dissension and hatred, he attempts to erect a new architecture of sensibility between diverse cultures, with the help of love and tolerance, and an appreciation for a diversity of cultures, and perspectives into the art of his imagination.

Professor P. P. Raveendran, academic, critic, editor and translator and Professor of English, School of Letters, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala has agreed to deliver the keynote address at the seminar.

The seminar will include opportunities to interact with the poet formally during the sessions and informally during the journey through the Similipal National Forest, which is planned for 14<sup>th</sup> February; but this is optional and would cost additional expenses to be decided on the spot and to be shared by those who opt for this experience.

### **Abstract Submission Deadline**

An abstract or proposal not exceeding 300 words is due by January 20, 2023. The abstract should have a title along with the name and institutional affiliation of the presenter. Please send the abstract as an email attachment to Kalidas Misra (kalidasmisra@yahoo.com). The language of the abstract can be English or Odia.

### **Registration Deadline**

The last date for receiving the registration fee is January 25, 2023. All participants need to register online directly with our bank, the details of which will be provided on request. The registration fee is non-refundable.

**Registration Fee**

(1) Outstation Participant from India with accommodation: ₹ 3000 (Three thousand Indian rupees)

(2) Participant from India without accommodation: ₹1500 (One thousand five hundred Indian rupees)

**For further information please contact:****1. Prafulla C. Kar**

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Professor Pramod Kumar Satapathy, Chairman, P. G. Council of the host University, who currently is the In-Charge Vice Chancellor, will act as facilitator and Patron of the event.