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DEPICTION OF SURVIVAL SEX IN JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S POEM "HUNGER"

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ABSTRACT

During the ancient period women enjoyed high status and played a significant role in society and a feminine term "Shakti" literally means "power and strength". Literary evidence suggests that kings and towns were destroyed because the rulers troubled a single woman. Ilango Adigal's Sillapathigaram teaches us Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas was burnt because Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan mistakenly did harm to Kannaki. But the status and role of woman discriminated in the later periods and they were considered to be the weaker sex, food giver and sex object. Her status and dignity as a woman is not accepted in society as well as at home. Our history reveals many instances how she is meted out injustice, deprived of her basic needs and even fundamental rights. From the position of a deity she is degraded into a prostitute who sells her body for money due to miserable living condition, poverty and starvation. Such survival sex can be vividly seen in Jayanta Mahapatra's poem "Hunger". The poem presents a sentimental touching story of a fifteen year old girl who becomes a whore to keep starvation at bay with the consent of her father- a poor fisher man. Here her father himself acts as a pimp because hunger reigns over the father-daughter relationship. The poem is an unapologetic commentary on our society, i.e., how a girl of fifteen, who should be given a safe environment to live, is used for satiates the hunger of so-called moralistic and upright civilized society. The poem also throws light on the emerging survival sex and child prostitution in India due to poverty and hunger.

**Key words:** Shakthi; weaker sex; Prostitute; survival sex; Child Prostitution; sex object.

Introduction

Women occupied a very important position, in the ancient India, in fact far superior position to the men of the time. "Shakti" a feminine term means "power" and "strength. In Vedic times women and men were equal in many aspects. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, widow burning, the purdah and polygamy further worsened the women's position. The epics and Puranas equated women with property. Apart

from child marriage and sati, prostitution and Devadasi system became widespread in the later periods.

From time immemorial women are considered as the weaker sex, food giver, pleasure maker; but never have her status and dignity of being a woman respected in the society and at home. Though woman has always been considered to be "part and parcel of life", history is full of instances where she is meted out injustice, deprived of her basic needs and fundamental rights. Jayanta Mahapatra the famous Indian English poet throws light on the status of women in Orissa and expresses

the plight of those 'unvoiced beings' in his poems. He encounters every day realities with the insight of a scientist and portrays it with the objectivity of an artist. His universally acclaimed poem "Hunger" throws light on the emerging survival sex and child prostitution in India. In India, prostitution (the exchange of sexual services for money) is legal, but a number of related activities, including soliciting in a public place, owning or managing a brothel, prostitution in hotel, child prostitution, pimping and pandering, are crimes. Prostitution is legal only if carried out in private residence of a prostitute or others. Generational prostitution occurs at almost every brothel. But many women go for prostitution for their survival and many agents employ children to satiate carnal crave of the hungry society. The poem explores the themes of the sex trade, poverty, and emotional vacuum.

Any discussion on Indian English Poetry is incomplete without reference to the poetical works of Jayanta Mahapatra. Physicist, bilingual poet and essayist, the poet holds the distinction of being the first Indian English poet to have received the Sahitya Akademi Award (1981) for *Relationship*. In 2009 he was awarded by Government of India with "Padmashree Award", country's most prestigious award for civilian citizen for his outstanding contribution to the field of literature. "Hunger" by Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the darkest, dreadful, and daring poems published in 1976 as the part of the poem collection, *A Rain of Rites*. The poem established Mahapatra as one of the superstar poets in the Indian English literature world. In Mahapatra's own words, "In "Hunger" I was writing from experience." But, he never commented, whether the protagonist was he, himself, or somebody else. The poem is an expression of the poet's loneliness as a youth, as Mahapatra had a disturbed childhood.

Mahapatra focuses on the theme of discrimination of female sex in his poetry. He is unhappy to observe the overwhelming decline of human values in his time. Mahapatra is deeply mortified at the sufferings of women in India. He shows their plight and predicament through multiple images. The sense of presenting the realities of woman's life has always been sensible and significant in the Indian scenario, so the pathetic

conditions of women form a part and parcel of his poetry. Mahapatra's 'Hunger' poem shows his distress over poverty and the discrimination of women which are undoubtedly the greatest problem in our country. He obviously feels much perturbed by poverty and destitution of the Indian people. 'Hunger' is brimmed with an integrated, specific content, quite exceptional in Mahapatra's canon.

The poem 'Hunger' by Jayanta Mahapatra, a well-known poet from Orissa, India, depicts two kinds of hunger. One is the hunger of food and another is the hunger for sexual gratification. The poem explores the informal child sex trade lurking in the social fabric, and is unique in its bold treatment of sexuality unlike a typical poem by him. The poem presents a sentimental touching story of a fifteen year old girl who is enslaved in the social fabric of prostitution in order to keep starvation at bay with the consent of her own father –a poor fisherman. Her father himself acts as a pimp here because hunger reigns over all other relationships. The poet also throws light towards the society like a hungry wolf swallows the pathetic condition of a young girl in one gulp. In a country like India, renowned for hospitality, it is our moral responsibility to give a secure environment for our children to live peacefully. Instead the society utilizes the deprived state of a young girl and compels her to indulge in prostitution in order to satisfy the sexual urge of so called upright and moral society.

#### **Background**

It is usually seen that men who are not satisfied with their married life or are not married or are divorced, go to brothels and give money for their own pleasure. It has become a business now, especially in India. Saying India a poor country will be an understatement. India now is not just poor by money, but poor by morals. The basic moral of a human being to realize that women are responsible for the creation of a new generation is wiped off our minds. It is a shame that we have forgotten women are not toys meant for sexual gratification or satisfaction of men. They are the creator of the entire human race. Rapes, prostitution, household tortures, are these the only aspects women are meant to go through now. The women, in the world

of Mahapatra live in penury, hunger and starvation. They are the most important facet of the life of the Indian masses. In Mahapatra's work, the discriminated are the women who live a meaningless and futile life. They struggle for their own identity and they survive amidst sorrows and hardships. They were allowed to live in darkness and left with nothing except vacuum filling their lives which is nothing but a hell. This paper throws light on those deprived women through the eyes of Jayanta Mahapatra.

#### Setting of the poem

Mahapatra skillfully portrays the landscape of Orissa in his poems. Orissa, one of the poorest States of the country, is endowed with a treasure of tourists' attraction, which is varied catering to every facet of tourism - be it religious, cultural, heritage, leisure or eco-tourism. The poet proudly proclaims that the landscape of Gopalapur chose him in his poem. Gopalpur is a town and a Notified Area Council on the Bay of Bengal coast in Ganjam district in the southern part of Odisha, India. The story takes place in a shack of a poor fisherman near the sea shore. The roof of his shack was thatched with palm leaves. There was dark inside except a lamp with a flickering flame and the walls are covered with soot, collected for a long time.

The three main characters in this poem are a tourist, fisherman and fisherman's daughter. The tourist came to the tourist spot to enjoy the beautiful sight of Gopalpur sea shore. He is the protagonist of the poem. The poem begins with the sudden spurt of lust for the protagonist.

The tumescent protagonist encounters a poor fisherman who offers him his daughter. The fisherman said: will you have her carelessly. Starvation overpowers the inhibitions of a father pimping for his own daughter. It becomes a convenient pretext for the fisherman to fish customers for his daughter. The fisherman is nervous. He has to compel himself to make the proposition. The fisherman tells the tourist that his daughter is only fifteen. Prostitution is a perfectly competitive business with simple logic. The younger the merchandise the higher the profits the pimp can draw.

In the poem we can see the fifteen year old daughter of fisherman indulges in sex with the tourist in order to keep her hunger at bay. Survival sex is when the prostitute is driven to prostitution by a need for basic necessities such as food or shelter. This type of prostitution is common among the homeless and in refugee camps. The term is used in the sex trade and by aid workers, although some practitioners do not regard the act as exploitative. The fisherman, the father who pimps his daughter, is careless in his offer of the girl as though his words sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself. The poet craftily pushes the reader to question the very ideas of sanctity here. The utter hopelessness in the life of the fisherman and his daughter is too much that they could only see it as a means of livelihood.

The poet describes the undernourished state of the fisherman and his daughter. The fisherman's white bones and his daughter's long and lean and wormy legs are testimonials to their penury. The daughter of fisherman lies silently in the shack and indulges in sex without any passion. The goal of sex can be defined in one word: fulfillment. True sexual fulfillment is when physical pleasure occurs within the context of an intimate and loving relationship. In this way, fulfilling sex transforms what could be a pleasurable and merely mechanical event into an expression of intimacy and love. Here it is not a spiritual bond but a business for transaction of sexual pleasures. It is perceived only as a means to keep poverty at bay. The fate of a child to become a whore is much worse than that of death.

Here poet also leads our attention to the emerging child prostitution in India. Child prostitution is prostitution involving a child, and it is a form of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The term normally refers to prostitution of a minor, or person under the legal age of consent. Children are often forced by social structures and individual agents into situations in which adults take advantage of their vulnerability and sexually exploit and abuse them by selling them or selling their bodies. According to Vladimir Putin Prostitution is a serious ugly social phenomenon. Young women do

this because they have no other way and that is the problem of society.

His poem "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" seemed to deal with the pains and agonies that these prostitutes suffer in their everyday life. In the poem a customer enters the premises with a great hope of seeing pretty faces of the whores as advertised on posters and public hoardings. But he experiences a sense of guilt and shame and learns something more about the women as the whore asks him to hurry up and finish his turn so that she may be able to go away for another customer. Love does not have any existence in today's life. Only burning passion is involved. The woman becomes the victim of the commercial, passionate instinct of exploitation.

But the poverty stricken girl had no other way but to subjugate to her fate. She lies silently in the dark room without any complaints. The only light present there is the flickering beam of an oil lamp. The dark room symbolizes the life of the girl. Like her life that room is dark and wrap with soot. Prostitution in such a shack will be an open secret for many. The economic and social inferiority of women is responsible for prostitution. Prostitutes are looked down upon the society, treated like mere objects by men and considered as the dirt of every city. These women cannot expect anything good in their life but to suffer everything in silence. 'Silence' plays important role in this poem and the success of the poem lies in its effective use of silence.

The sexual passion makes the protagonist makes the protagonist follow the fisherman. The sexual hunger of the young man and the physical hunger of the fisherman and his daughter meet in a mutually satisfying union. The conception of considering a prostitute woman as a part of the civic society is a blasphemy. But Mahapatra gave them a transcended romantic identity. Manu himself wrote, "Where women are honored, there the Gods are pleased. Where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards," and "Strike not even with a blossom a woman guilty of a hundred faults." Valmiki Ramayana teaches us that Ravana and his entire kingdom were wiped out because he abducted Sita. Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata teaches us that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated

Draupadi in public. Karl Marx once said the social progress of a nation can be measured by the social position of the female sex.

### **Conclusion**

The poem is an unapologetic commentary on our society, i.e., how a girl of fifteen, who should be given a safe environment to live, is used for satiate the hunger of so-called moralistic, upright, civilized society. Through this poem Mahapatra exemplify the brutality of our society towards poor people. When agony and suffering become intolerable, weak spirited poor people tend to surrendered to inhumanity. The ethical and moral values have no place in such utterly degraded human plight. These offences are spreading like wild fire in our society. 'Hunger' brings out the role of poverty in brutalizing the sexual relationship. The article deals with how food insecurity has led to an increase in commercial sex work, especially for young women. It also reveals the emergence of survival sex and child prostitution in India due to poverty. Sex-for-food prostitution remains prevalent even in our country where women enjoyed a very high position in the society.

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