

Q. 3. Write a Critical Apperiation of 'Hunger.'

Ans.

Introduction

The poem Hunger narrates a sordid episode in the life of the poet. In a moment away from his town, when he was tormented by the sexual impulse, he expressed his desire for a woman to a poor fisherman at a beach. The fisherman guessed that the poet had hunger for sex. Being poor, starved and indignant, the fisherman decided to offer his own

daughter to the poet. He did not feel any sense of guilt and led the poet to his poor, dark cottage where his fifteen-year old daughter, racked with poverty, had little choice but to submit willingly to any man who could pay for the satisfaction of his sexual passion. The poet felt inhibited for a while but satisfied his sex.

Development of Thought

The poet was away from his town and on a beach. He was tormented by sexual lust and wanted a woman to satisfy his passion. A poor, starved fisherman offered to provide him a female. The poet followed the fisherman across the sands of the beach. The fisherman led him to his own poor cottage. The fisherman offered to the poet his own fifteen-year old daughter. For a moment the poet was stunned. But soon he became a victim of sex. He approached the girl in the dark, who offered herself to the poet and the poet satisfied his urge.

Theme of the poem 'Hunger'

The theme in the poem 'Hunger' is poverty, starvation and hunger which drive the poor to lose their human dignity and morality. The fisherman is the victim of poverty and hunger. He is a lean and thin figure with bones sticking out of his skin, his claw-like hands dragging his nets out of the sea. Stricken by his poverty, he gets ready to offer the speaker his own daughter for the gratification of his sexual desire. He silently leads the speaker to his poor, dark cottage and offer his own own daughter to him saying: **'My daughter, she's just turned fifteen'**. The fisherman turns himself away from the sight. He asks the speaker to feel the girl all over and hurry with the things. It is stark poverty and hunger which force the father, to prostitute his daughter. As the girl surrenders her-self, the poet feels "the hunger there."

Use of images and Symbols

The use of images and symbols in the poem are all related to idea of hunger. The speaker, seized by sexual passion, is symbolic of blind sexual instinct working in a male. The fisherman is a symbol of the basic human appetite, feelings of hunger. The fisherman sets aside all feelings of conscience and offers his own daughter for prostitution. The fisherman's daughter is also symbolic of hunger. While she surrenders herself to the speaker's lust, her body is as cold as rubber and she slithers like a fish. Between her wide open legs the speaker discovers only 'hunger'.

Hunger : Two Senses

The poem deals with the theme of sex, sexuality and the naked poverty. Hunger has a double meaning here: it is hunger in the belly as

well as hunger below the belly. The poem portrays both the hunger of the protagonist and the hunger of the fisherman and his daughter. The protagonist is beset with the sex-hunger. So he sets out in search of a female to satisfy his sex hunger. The fisherman and his daughter, too, suffer from hunger, the hunger that results from poverty. To earn something to keep their body and soul together, the fisherman offers his daughter to the man. The daughter, a mere girl of fifteen, trades her body to him. As she opens her 'wormy legs', the man finds hunger there.

An Indian poem

The poem portrays the dismal conditions prevalent in our country. Poverty and hunger here are so acute that many families are forced to sell their women, just to keep alive. The fact is shocking, indeed! When the fisherman offers his own daughter to the protagonist, the customer feels that "the sky fell on me." He can perceive that the fisherman has exhausted all his tricks to trap the customers for his daughter. Selling his daughter's body has become a routine for him.

Tragic Consciousness

The poem exhibits a tragic consciousness which is the hallmark of Mahapatra's poetry. The dismal world of starvation and deprivation is tellingly conveyed through the description of the fisherman's shack.

"In the flickering dark his lean-to opened like a wound."

The word 'wound' in the above line conveys the hapless, painful, anguished conditions of the inmates of the slum. 'Wound', however, also symbolizes the female genital which, when opened, looks like a wound.

Quietude in the Poem

R. Parthasarthy points out there is an unexpected quietude in Mahapatra's poetry. But this quietude is more eloquent than words. The three characters in the poem hardly speak. Indeed it is only the fisherman who utters a few plain, blunt words. The protagonist can perceive 'a father's exhausted wife'. Yet this quietude pervading the poem conveys the whole seething anguish of the drama most tellingly. We, too, like the protagonist, feel the sky fall on us.

Poetic Style

The diction of the poem is simple yet it is over-loaded with symbolic imagery. Thus maximum message is conveyed through minimum words. Sex-starvation of the protagonist is conveyed through the symbolic image. '*the flesh was heavy on my back*'. The emaciated look of the fisherman is expressed in the symbolic words. '*I saw his white bone thrash his eyes*'. Other examples of the symbolic imagery are: '*my*

mind thumping in the flesh's sling', 'Hope lay in burying the house I lived in.' 'Silence gripped my sleeves', 'the fisherman's shack' opened like a wound'.

Conclusion

According to K.A. Panikar, '**Hunger is one of the great peaks of Indian poetry in English**'. The poem is a profoundly human document; its power depends on the authenticity of the experience established by the words and their arrangement. The poem achieves a happy blending of the literal and the metaphorical