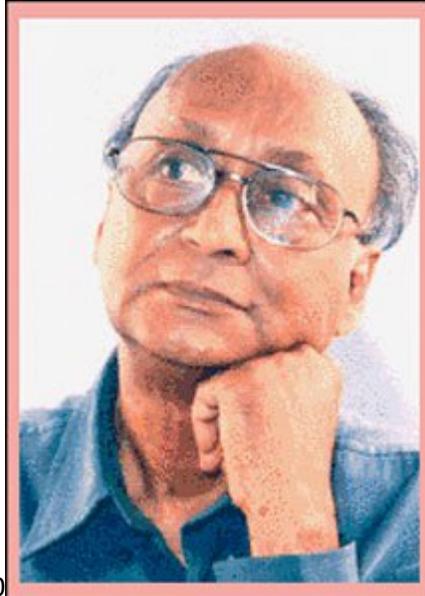


## HUNGER

-JayantMahapatra



It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back.  
The fisherman said: Will you have her, carelessly,  
trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words  
sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself.  
I saw his white bone thrash his eyes.

I followed him across the sprawling sands,  
my mind thumping in the flesh's sling.  
Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in.  
Silence gripped my sleeves; his body clawed at the froth  
his old nets had only dragged up from the seas.

In the flickering dark his lean-to opened like a wound.  
The wind was I, and the days and nights before.

Palm fronds scratched my skin. Inside the shack  
an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to those walls.

Over and over the sticky soot crossed the space of my mind.  
I heard him say: My daughter, she's just turned fifteen...  
Feel her. I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.  
The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wife.  
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.  
She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,  
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside

**Introduction:** JayantMahapatra's poems explore the influence of local realities in creating the depth of one's feeling and sensitivity. 'Hunger' is a poem about the degraded condition of people who live below the poverty line. The poem explores the degradation of humanity in poverty, when the next meal is doubtful. Hunger can make one compromise on moral values, human relationships and companionship. This is the underlying lesson of the poem.

**Summary:** The speaker was not able to believe when the fisherman offers his daughter to him. He seems to be careless and inhuman. The speaker is having physical hunger. Fisherman is in need of money, due to which he invites the young man to make the use of his daughter. He was taking back his net. He also seemed to be very lean and weak.

The speaker followed the fisherman across the sprawling sand. He was eager to satisfy his physical hunger. He was full of hopes. The fisherman moved forward dragging his old nets. The shack of the fisherman was very small with a sloping roof. It rested on the wall of

another building. The shack seemed like a wound, filthy and hurting. As the speaker entered the shack he was shocked to see the poor condition of the fisherman and his daughter. A small oil lamp was lighted. It showed the inner wall.

The filthy interior of the shack disturbed his mind. While he was observing the realities of their life, he heard the fisherman saying that she is just fifteen years old, use her. He will come back after sometime. He reminded the speaker that his bus was at 9 O'clock. The poet wants to tell that the father of the girl is caring for him but not for his daughter. The speaker felt as if sky fell on him and the father has lost his sense.

The girl was long and lean. She was as if lifeless and senseless. The hunger of the speaker went away after observing the pitiful condition of the girl, the shack and their life. She was like a fish caught in the net and about to die.

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### Exercise

***Que.1. Where does the speaker meet the fisherman at the beginning of the poem?***

***Ans. The speaker met the fisherman at the seashore. The speaker could not believe when the fisherman carelessly offered his daughter. He spoke as if he was not at all wrong; he took the speaker to the shack where he lived with his daughter. The shack brought forward their poverty.***

**Que.2. Picturise the fisherman and his daily life, as evident in the poem. Take the help of the phrases and words from the poem.**

Ans. The fisherman in the poem 'Hunger' is a very poor man. He makes both the ends meet with much difficulty. He goes to the sea daily and catches fishes for his livelihood. But he is not able to fulfill the needs of his family. Everyday he drags his old net and lives a very miserable life. His body was so weak that his white bones thrash his eyes. His body clawed the old nets with much difficulty. The poet found his shack in a very bad condition. It was the symbol of his poverty.

**Que.3. Describe the setting and background of the poem.**

Ans. The setting and the background of the poem is sea-shore. The poet meets the fisherman on this sea-shore. Then the poet follows the fisherman across the sprawling sands. The fisherman has just come out of the sea and he could hardly find any fish. His physical appearance shows his utter poverty. He takes the poet toward his shack. The poet has very well described the shack which symbolizes the poverty of the fisherman, which compelled him to sell his daughter.

**Que.4. Why is the daughter compared to rubber? Is she compared to anything else in the poem? Why?**

Ans. The daughter in the poem is that of a very poor fisherman. Poverty has made her father stone hearted. So he compels her to the tragedy. Whatever she does in the poem is just under compulsion. She is only fifteen years old. Therefore the poet has compared her to rubber. The cold rubber denotes lifelessness and senselessness. She follows the instructions of her father, but without any emotions. In the poem the girl

is also compared to a fish. Her condition is like a fish caught in the net and she could only slide unsteadily.

***Que.5. What has compelled the fisherman to make his daughter sell her body? Does the title of the poem have any relevance to this? If so, what is the relevance?***

Ans. The fisherman is a very poor man. He is so poor that his next meal is doubtful. He could not fulfill the needs of his family. These all conditions compelled the fisherman to make his daughter to sell her body. This is very tragic. No father could act in this way. He has lost all his moral values.

The title of the poem is very suitable. The cause of the tragedy is 'Hunger'. The 'Hunger' is both of stomach and body. This hunger compels to compromise our values and ethos. The speaker is compelled by his hunger of body and the fisherman and his daughter are compelled by hunger of their stomach.

### EXTRA QUESTIONS

**LAQ.1 What is the theme of the poem "hunger"? Discuss in detail.**

**(8 marks)**

Ans: Jayant Mahapatra's poems explore the influence of local realities in creating the depth of one's feeling and sensitivity. 'Hunger' is a poem about the degraded condition of people who live below the poverty line. The poem explores the degradation of humanity in poverty, when the next meal is doubtful. Hunger can make one compromise on moral

values, human relationships and companionship. This is the underlying lesson of the poem.

The fisherman in the poem 'Hunger' is a very poor man. He makes both the ends meet with much difficulty. He goes to the sea daily and catches fishes for his livelihood. But he is not able to fulfill the needs of his family. Everyday he drags his old net and lives a very miserable life. His body was so weak that his white bones thrash his eyes. These all conditions compelled the fisherman to make his daughter to sell her body. This is very tragic. No father could act in this way. He has lost all his moral values.

The title of the poem is very suitable. The cause of the tragedy is 'Hunger'. The 'Hunger' is both of stomach and body. This hunger compels to compromise our values and ethos. The speaker is compelled by his hunger of body and the fisherman and his daughter are compelled by hunger of their stomach.

**SAQ. Write a short note on the dialogue between the Fisherman and the Speaker.(4 marks)**

Ans. The speaker met the fisherman at the seashore. The speaker could not believe when the fisherman carelessly offered his daughter. He spoke as if he was not at all wrong. His words, as if, sanctified his poverty ridden life. He took the speaker to the shack where he lived with his daughter. The shack brought forward their poverty. As they entered the shack the speaker heard him saying that his daughter is just fifteen. He carelessly told him to use her, as if his heart has turned to stone. He said that he will be back soon and reminded the speaker that his bus leaves at nine. The poet has brought forth the bitter reality that the father is not

concerned with the agony of his daughter. He is concerned about the bus of the speaker.