

# Interactions of Human Slavery in Mahasweta Devi *Aajir*

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*Aajir* by Mahasweta Devi is the narrative of a slave in rural India, where the barbarous system of bonded labor, which originated with the Varna System, is entrenched. Devi's viewpoint on humanity's suffering as a social worker and writer focused on poor areas in West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa offers a new perspective on the hardships these communities experience. The drama investigates tragic situations that have not been represented in modern texts, offering a new viewpoint on the problems that these people endure.

Mahasweta Devi, a drama based on a slave bond performed by a slave, depicts the darkest sides of a family's past in which descendants of slaves experience unjust torment and subhuman status, depriving them of the opportunity to love and marry. Mahasweta Devi plays Paatan in *Aajir*, a figure seeking an identity in a society that oppresses his kind. He must deal with society's expectations and is doomed to undertake employment he despises. Paatan, unlike his forefathers, violates tradition by striving for independence. His attempts to escape slavery and live a dignified life, however, are hampered by brutal treatment. The house Mistress flirts with him while pretending to aid him, and the pull of freedom from bondage leads Paatan to agree to the mistress's proposition of elopement.

When Paatan, a slave, informs her husband that no bond offers him a grasp, he feels tricked. He does not believe her and murders her. The master of the home admits he was ignorant of the connection, and Paatan has suffered through no fault of his own. He enters jail with no remorse and regal majesty, raising his head and holding out his hands.

*Aajir* is a realistic drama about the dehumanizing depiction of slavery in agrarian West Bengal, emphasizing the exploitation of rural people. Paatan, the protagonist, is a bondservant descendent of a slave family that lived in the Bengali period of 1101, which corresponds to the Hijra era of 1072. Paatan, unlike his forefathers, longs for a free existence and a family, fleeing into a world without a Master.

Paatan is torn between a world that despises him and a will that fights for his identity. Paatan, like Sujata Chatterjee in *Mother of 1084*, is a quiet protester who is humiliated by his master, Maatang Shunri. There is no uprising until the opening scene, which recounts his ancestor's terrible sale to slavery.

Paatan, conscious of his social standing, follows in the footsteps of his predecessors, Golak Kura. Born in a famine-torn region, his family was fated to be *aajirs*. Paatan loses his independence and human attributes as a result, resembling a bird captured and confined for the enjoyment of its owner. Mulk Raj Anand's Munoo and Mahasweta Devi's Paatan are both poor people looking for work and escaping bondage. Paatan, unlike Munoo, stands firm in the face of adversity.

Paatan, a feudal warrior, confronts severe difficulties and unfairness at the hands of his lord, Maatang Shunri. Despite his primal power, he bows to his unbeatable master. Maatang Shunri, Paatan's master, is a strong force, but he is overcome by dread and uncertainty, as is normal in a society that violates fundamental human rights. His teacher, Maatang Shunri, is famed for his power and drive, but he is also overcome by fear and isolation, underlining the difficulties that Paatan faces in his fight for justice.

Mahasweta Devi describes her life through a system of contrasts and parallels, with Paatan serving as a joyful contrast to her teacher, Maatang Shunri. Maatang is both an exploitative master and a henpecked spouse. He fails to please his wife, the Mistress, who secretly yearns for Paatan's companionship because of his virility. Despite her inner turmoil, the Mistress maintains mute, even praising Paatan when he is chastised.

Maatang Shunri brutally crushes Paatan's insurrection, fearful that Paatan may uncover his bondage. Under the guise of independence, he beats Paatan, demonstrating the oppressor's inhumanity. Paatan is pitied and unable to fulfill his commitments because he wants to marry to appease the souls of his deceased ancestors. He says:

I am an aajir, nobody'd marry  
me. My forefathers denied  
the offering of water from their  
descendants would burn in  
hell forever.

Paatan's knowledge of familial obligation leads him to explore marriage at first, suggesting a revolt against customary restraints and the recognition of one's inherent right to happiness. This shift in viewpoint exemplifies Paatan's journey from ordinary man hero to rebel.

The Mistress of the House is sympathetic toward Paatan, exhibiting womanly compassion and making him feel confident, which adds irony to the drama. This personal touch sets her apart from Maatang and makes her a likable character. Despite her luxurious upbringing, the Mistress is sad and pitied, revealing her inner anguish. She resists her spouse and expresses her inner anguish on stage, making her a beloved character.

The Mistress, who is wedded to Maatang, is filled with a blazing sensual passion. When Maatang realizes she cannot satisfy her sexual need, she goes to Paatan and gives him a fresh lease of life. She vows to

steal your aajir's bond for you and give it  
back to you.

This scene in the drama highlights the similarity and unity of Aajir's and the woman's causes.

Paatan is compelled by the Mistress' pledge to follow a gypsy lady who sells potions to anybody he wishes. He begs her to marry him but is turned down. Enraged by his yearning for a new life, the Mistress releases her men on him, viciously beating him. The realism of the punishment serves as a vivid reminder of the repercussions of his behavior.

Aajir is a drama with a significant emphasis on poetry, including songs and sequences highlighting the poet's voice. In scene 3, a prostitute is victimized by the high-handedness of feudal agents, culminating in her nude trek to appease the rain god. The crowd that apprehended Paatan becomes lyrical as they recreate the scenario of his sentencing. The dramatist used songs to elicit audience reactions to the sufferings of the characters on stage.

At last, the play comes to an end with Paatan realizes that,

Like everyone else in the world, I  
was a free man (stating a fact),  
and I alone didn't know. (Look at  
the dead woman. ...) This

luscious woman was for me, I  
didn't know."

This maintains the situation's great irony in all its intensity. As a result, Aajir is unquestionably a social drama in which Mahasweta Devi strives to give a creative voice to the plight of the disadvantaged in their fight with the powerful exploitative system through her characters.

Work cited:

- [1] Devi, Mahasweta. *Aajir Five Plays*. Trans. Samil Bandyopadhyay. Calcutta: Seagulla, 1999.