



SACRIFICE OF MOTHER'S LOVE: A STUDY ON J. M. SYNGE'S "RIDERS TO THE SEA" AND BERTOLT BRECHT'S "MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN"

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Abstract: A mother's love for her child is pure, perpetual, and unconditional; this is the universal notion about the love of a mother. However, an obligation of earning money sometimes brings a slight change in this conception, and this unconventional form of mother's love is shown by two of the greatest playwrights of all ages, J.M. Synge and Bertolt Brecht in their creations "*Riders to the Sea*"; and "*Mother Courage and Her Children*" respectively. In "*Riders to the Sea*", Synge expertly portrays the sacrifice of Maurya who loses her motherhood with the death of her six sons. Maurya knows that the sea is the symbol of demise and it causes the death of her husband, father-in-law, and five sons; therefore, she endeavours to protect Bartley, her last son, from going to the sea for earning. However, ultimately Bartley goes with compulsion and Maurya eventually comprehends the upcoming danger in Bartley's life. Similarly, in his play "*Mother Courage and Her Children*", Brecht proficiently draws the character of Anna Fierling who sacrifices her two sons and a daughter to the war from which she makes a profit. The present paper mirrors these two mothers' non-traditional love for their children and their win over death.

Key Words: Mother, Love, Sacrifice, Death, Sea, War.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Mother's love can be considered as the purest love among all forms of love and this love creates an eternal bond between a mother and a child. There is no replacement for this form of love as this is totally unconditional. It is a conventional conception of a mother's love; but when earning livelihood becomes the priority to a mother, then an alteration can be found in this traditional notion of a mother's eternal love. John Millington Synge, an Irish poet, and playwright, portrays the contradictory character of a mother in his magnum opus "*Riders to the Sea*". Desire of living with peasants and learning their language inspires Synge to visit the Aran Islands. Several experiences gathered by Synge in these islands are shared in his different literary creations like "The Playboy of the Western World", "The Shadow of the Glen", and "Riders to the Sea".

Maurya, the central character of "*Riders to the Sea*", makes the reader think of a mother's unconventional care for her children. The death of her children caused by the sea originates an unfathomable void in the heart of Maurya. The utmost agony of losing sons has killed the inner feelings of Maurya. When Bartley, the remaining son of Maurya, is not restricted from going to the sea as he is the last earning member of the family, it gives rise to a thought that Maurya can prevent Bartley from his upcoming fatal situation. But this forlorn old woman lets her son go in spite of knowing that he would never return.

Same tone related to the unorthodox love of a mother is found in another masterpiece named "*Mother Courage and Her Children*" written by Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright and theatre practitioner. The main character, Anna Fierling who is referred to as "Mother Courage" in the play concentrates on making profit from war. Though she loves her children, she does not have enough gallantry to save the life of her children from the devastating result of the war. Hence, in this play, the use of the word "courage" is antithetical. The malignity of the war causes Swiss Cheese's death and this is the tragedy that Anna Fierling denies the body of Swiss Cheese, her son, to protect herself and her daughter. Her other son and daughter also die as a consequence of war. But after the death of her children and her motherhood,



Mother Courage continues her canteen business and profits from the war that causes her children's death. The hunger of earning and living perish the love in the mother and makes her just a hollow woman who breathes but does not live.

The present paper highlights the sacrifice of both Maurya and Anna Fierling's love due to their fight with difficult situations. Both of these women suffer from the pathetic situation of losing their children, but none of them has the bravery to secure the life of their children from the upcoming appalling future.

2. DISCUSSION:

Representing Maurya's unusual love for Bartley and rest of her children

J. M. Synge's "*Riders to the Sea*" portrays the lifestyle and persistent suffering of a family living on an island off the west of Ireland. In the past, Maurya had a big family of her six sons and two daughters; however, the sea which is the symbol of both life and death devours her five sons, her father-in-law, and husband. The play starts when Maurya's one son and two daughters named Bartley, Nora, and Cathleen respectively are left. It is easy to comprehend a mother's condition when she has already lost her five children, but Maurya's enigmatic dialogues compel the readers to think of the quantity of love that she has for her children. The word quantity is uncomfortable in the context of a mother's love because the love of a mother is unending and unconditional as previously mentioned. But Maurya's dialogue related to Michael's death creates a question in everyone's mind. Michael, the elder brother of Bartley, drowned in the sea; consequently, it is expected from Maurya to be broken down by deep pain. However, she says – **"I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up tomorrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week; for it's a deep grave we'll make him"** (Synge 23). This dialogue indicates how much Maurya is certain about Michael's death. In these words of Maurya, there is no sign of pain; rather death, the constant in Maurya's life, has converted her into a living object who is emotionless and painless.

In this play, it is seen that in spite of knowing the death of Michael, Bartley, the youngest and last surviving son of Maurya, gets ready to earn livelihood for her family. He knows that he would be the last rider to the sea; however, the compulsion of earning impels him to involve himself in an unknown darkness that demolishes his elder brothers. At this juncture, Maurya is the only person who can stave off the fatality that is coming into Bartley's life. Unfortunately, she utters the death of Bartley before his departure; Maurya says – **"It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drowned with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave?"** (Synge 24-25). These sentences pronounced by Maurya are distressing as Bartley makes himself ready for doing his responsibilities and at this point, his mother's blessing is the only thing that can save him from the consternation, and dependency caused by the demise of his brothers.

Spoken words by the mother create the negation of life within Bartley; the heart of him which is already full of misery is overpoured with extra torment given by his mother. Maurya's dialogue raises a question about the love she has for her children. But it is important to see the entire situation from Maurya's side; a mother who has already lost her five children has transcended the boundary of pain. Maurya knows that she has sacrificed her five children to the sea and predicted that Bartley would also drown in the sea. At first, the scared soul of the mother repeatedly says – **"he won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely"** (Synge 21). However, the required livelihood for a living makes Maurya accept the leaving of Bartley. An economic burden pressurizes Bartley to start his journey towards Galway for selling the horses. Though an unknown fear covers his mind, he becomes ready "sadly and quietly" to encounter his upcoming fate with an unavoidable compulsion. On the other hand, Maurya's conscience bothers herself for not blessing her son before departing the house and hence, she goes to bless her son and provide him with some bread. At this point, she sees the dreadful scene that Bartley was being followed by Michael who is already dead. This scene makes Maurya comprehend that her last son who has completed her identity is going to die. With the death of her last son, Maurya feels that her soul has also died and therefore, she remarks – **"May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn...may He have mercy on my soul"** (Synge 45). Now, Maurya has nothing to give to the sea that symbolizes death here; her inner self is full of the void like an "empty cup". The unfamiliar love of Maurya for her children astounds every reader and, in the end, the mother who has nothing to lose now accepts her inescapable fate. For this reason, she says – **"No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied"** (Synge 45). This sentence pronounced by Maurya reflects that nothing but only these words can console her inner soul which is filled with eternal melancholy. **"Despite her tragic condition, Maurya is able to see beams of hope in her dark situation, her anxiety is relieved and peace prevails after she resignedly perceives the death of her men folk as a blessing that will bring them all together"** (Al-Ghoreibi, 19). The sea has indeed snatched all loved ones of Maurya, but the death mirrored by the sea has not the power to destroy the nest of love that has been built in Maurya's heart; this love is eternal and imperishable. Tough sacrifice of Maurya's love has been efficiently penned down by J. M. Synge in every dialogue of Maurya.



Portraying unconventional courage of Anna Fierling and her sacrifice of love

Bertolt Brecht's one of the greatest literary works named "Mother Courage and Her Children" written in 1939 is considered an anti-war play because, through this play, the playwright responds to the attack on Poland by the army of Hitler in the year 1939. This play sets during the "Thirty Year's War" in Europe from the year 1624 to 1636. Besides an anti-war play, this literary creation showcases a mother's struggle, and courage to profit from war to feed her children. Anna Fierling who is named the "Mother Courage", the central character of the play, has two sons named Eilif, Swiss Cheese, and a daughter, Katrin. Anna Fierling is a businesswoman who makes money from war to provide for her family. In this play, a continuous oscillation can be noticed in Anna Fierling to play her role as a mother and as a valiant capitalist. A persistent competition remains between her courage to earn money from war and her consistent struggle to save her motherhood.

The word "courage" seems to be positive; however, in this play, the courage of Anna Fierling brings negativity into her family. Though it is true that as a single mother, she has adequate robustness to look after her children by making money from war, to some extent she has not enough strength to secure the life of her sons and daughter. **"Courage's life decisions are framed at all times by the larger context of their devastating effects on the lives of her three children"** (Vork, 31). Anna Fierling's eldest son, a brave and clever soldier, is murdered as a peasant is killed by him at the time of snatching livestock. On the other hand, Courage's younger son, Swiss Cheese, dies just because of the endurance of a sense of integrity and responsibility.

Katrin, the dumb daughter of Anna Fierling, who serves customers in her mother's canteen dies because of warning the town of an instant invasion. Hence, it is clear that Anna Fierling, sarcastically whose nickname is Mother Courage, becomes a failure in protecting her three children from the catastrophic situations that originated during the war. The most tragic thing is that after the death of Mother Courage's children, she just focuses on pursuing her business to earn livelihood from the war that kills her identity as a mother. She sacrifices her children in that war from which she would again continue to earn money. As a mother she fails to play the role, but in the battle of life, she has won. Her courage is seen when she says – **"I hope I can pull the wagon by myself. Yes, I'll manage, there's not much in it now. I must start up again in business"** (Brecht 81). Like Maurya, she also accepts her inevitable fate and Anna Fierling ultimately returns to her business to sail her lifeboat lonely.

The word, "Courage", will be appropriate in case it is placed after the name of Anna Fierling; but Brecht proficiently highlights the contradiction of courage by placing it after the word "mother". As a mother, Anna Fierling is not courageous as she has not been able to resist her children from the upcoming catastrophe. At a certain point, she also refuses the body of Swiss Cheese to be protected; this is immensely plaintive that a mother refuses her child of the trepidation caused by war. At the end of the play, by losing all her motherhood and identity, she becomes just a machine who makes money for living.

Representation of the mingled sacrifice of both Maurya and Anna Fierling's love

In **"Riders to the Sea"**, Maurya sacrifices her six sons to the sea as her sons were not able to cross the obstacles caused by the sea in the way of earning livelihood for the family. Eventually, she loses her identity with the death of her six sons; she can restrict her last son Bartley from going to make money. But, Maurya not only becomes a failure in protecting Bartley from impending danger but also fails to give her blessing to Bartley at the time of his departure. Pathetically, Maurya pronounces her son's death in front of him; the time when Bartley mostly needs his mother's blessing gets only an unfathomable pain from her mother. However, a close reading of the text aids to comprehend that Maurya again and again tries to restrict Bartley as she says **"what is the price of thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?"** (Synge 24). This sentence uttered by Maurya reflects the melancholic situation through which she is going. Her love, her five sons, has already been sacrificed to the sea; and Maurya cannot prepare her mind to sacrifice her last son Bartley to this symbol of death. However, at last, Bartley starts his voyage to the sea and Maurya has understood that the sea would perish her identity as a mother. However, after seeing Michael's ghost behind Bartley, Maurya becomes sure about the death of Bartley.

Anna Fierling, like Maurya, also loses her motherly identity with the death of all three children. To some extent, like Maurya, earning livelihood from the war becomes her first choice and unfortunately, in this war, her motherhood is demolished. She also unconditionally loved her children as Maurya did, but war creates a barrier to "Mother Courage" who refuses the recognition of her son's body to save her and Katrin's lives. In Maurya's life, the obstacles are built by the sea in which her every son is drowned. Many readers can question the actual love of Maurya and Anna Fierling for their children as a mother tries her best to protect her children from the odds. However, a close reading of both of these plays shows that both Maurya and Anna Fierling had no option left. The unavoidable fate compels both of them to accept the situations that completely destroy their motherhood.



3. CONCLUSION:

Discussion of the entire paper reflects that at the end of both plays, Maurya and Anna Fierling have been converted into mere puppets by their inevitable fate. Many scenes of the two plays mirror the immeasurable love of two mothers for their children; but here, the death plays the key role of a protagonist and controls the love and motherly identity of Maurya and "Mother Courage". Human life is full of uncertainties; no one knows while death comes to the life of a person and knocks down the entire world of that individual. In the present case, though Maurya and Anna Fierling had an idea about the precariousness of life in the profession to which their children were attached; two mothers had no way to fight with this unpredictable situation. In spite of encountering the ceaseless demise of children, both of these mothers have not lost hope of life. A tone of optimism though that is full of affliction can be found in Maurya and Anna Fierling as Maurya accepts the tough truth that no human being can live forever and she must be satisfied with the offerings of life. Similarly, in the end, the deprivation of motherhood is accepted by Anna Fierling and she concentrates on her business to continue the movement of the wagon of life. These women do not bend their heads to death; rather by overcoming the pain of the demise of motherhood, they finally overcome the death and become valiant.

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