

**EXPLORING IMPENDING DYNAMICS OF MOTHERHOOD: A CLOSE READING OF J.M. SYNGE' S
'RIDERS TO THE SEA' FROM A SOCIO FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

The whole encompassing and driving force of motherhood and motherly sacrifice is a prominent theme which is being depicted in literature right from the middle ages. The shackles which a mother breaks in order for the mere existence for her offspring's knows no boundaries. Not only the desire for survival alone that keeps motherly sacrifices intact. Women's innate biological nature is being designed to thrive excruciating hardships and pains. By demarcating all established rigid notions on the passive nature of femininity, this concept of motherhood makes it's way in the literary world. In the case of single mothers, who strive to exist with their children, the impending sacrifices crosses limits. By voicing the sacrifices which single mother's takes up in life, many so called gender stereotypes which are prevalent are also being deconstructed. This research paper aims to do a detailed study on the life of a motherly character named Maurya who is being presented in J.M. Synge's famous one-act tragedy "*Riders to the sea*". By taking into account the concept from social feminism, a close critical study is done on the female protagonist. Also it tries to analyse the different psychological states that an unemployed single mother undergoes for survival. The female readers can connect with the character Maurya in all aspects of their life.

Keywords : Irish coastal life, survival, single motherhood, existence, family ties, stoicism, acceptance

Introduction

The deep trenched notion of motherhood has various facets being explored by academics right from the ancient times. Apart from biological sacrifices put upon for an existential means there are other psychological or mental sacrifices which gets expressed by an evolving mother. The famous one-act tragedy 'Riders to the sea' by J.M. Synge portrays a typical struggling mother character named as Maurya. This plot mainly focuses upon inherent family relations and the sacrifices of poor Irish coastal families. The life of all the characters in the play revolves around poverty, hardships and mental dilemmas. Intricate scenes and nuanced dialogue renderings within the play underscores the prominent theme of deep family ties in troubled societies. Each character especially the motherly character of Maurya undergoes deep psychological trauma as they face the inevitable hardships that life throws upon them. The protagonist Maurya depicts a figure of sacrifice, bravery and acceptance

which was cultivated over time upon experiencing extreme tragedy. She survives her old days with her three living children. All other members of the family are dead and Maurya has encountered each of the deaths with pain. Tragic happenings in the nature led to the death of her last two sons Maurya faced with a neutral state of mind.

By employing or taking ideas from the theories of socio feminism the character Maurya gets established as an Archetypal motherly figure. As socio feminism mainly focuses on female values , the theory aids in completely focusing on the female characters. The main aim of socio feminist theory is to expand the role of women beyond the private sphere which culminates in mother's being social figures. The character Maurya who is being analysed here is a feminine mystique who becomes a role model for life of each individual that crosses her path. The main focus of the research paper is to study the different dimensions of Maurya thereby giving less Importance to all the male characters. J.M. Synge presents a devastating state for Maurya and her family. Rather than focusing on the emotional side of Maurya's motherly life, here other less explored elements are being studied. This establishes Maurya as the symbol of a perfect mother who becomes the prime soul of the family.

Maurya's motherly sacrifices and unique personality traits

The play begins with the mourning and desperate Maurya who sends her only last surviving son to the sea for their basic lively needs. Even though Maurya foresees danger, here we can see a lady who is even ready to sacrifice her own blood for mere survival. Maurya predicts danger but she accepts it as an obligation to fate. If one takes a closer look at the scenes one can decipher how foresighted this character of Maurya is. The play can be considered as Maurya's deep visionary approach to life. Her biological limitations doesn't impede her psychological power which she remarkably puts forth. Maurya embodies an archetypal motherly figure in the whole story.

When we closely analyse the major themes of fate and tragedy of the play, natural factors like sea, fire, air etc. gets interconnected with the story settings. The archetypal figure character of Maurya symbolises strength, courage, determinism and perseverance that can't be equated with these natural forces. She embodies a typical feminine energy that sustains and prolongs life. The prominent emotion with which she connects all the people in her life is love and sympathy. Through the years Maurya becomes more spiritual that based her in withstanding further tragic instances. Her insights with regard to life makes her accept any fate that she was destined for. When we slightly take up the emotional appeal of this character, she in a way balances her emotions of grief, sadness and despair. By keeping a cohort between her emotions and instincts and also through persistence prayers her mental equilibrium got restored.

Maurya is a perfect symbol of mourning motherhood whose forbearance endured even the most dire circumstances that life presents with. Equally painful deaths which came along with painful births is indicated by Maurya in the play which depicts how she became a misfortunate victim of hardcore trials. As she innately had deep maternal instincts she became more receptive to such sufferings. Her griefs over witnessing the tragic fate of Michael and Bartley in the end was the resolution of her deep psychological torment. At this point the protagonist experienced complete

purgation of sufferings which troubled her for years. With a strong sense of willingness for tragic affirmation, Maurya could eventually reach a state of proper climax. By offering deep prayers for the clean burials for the dead bodies of her departed sons, Maurya becomes prepared for her own approaching death. The final phase of Maurya's suffering reveals a transition from misery to a profound tragic transcendence (Uddin, 5). The play reaches its climax in the confirmation of Bartley's death. Synge presents a contemplating protagonist and also exposes the spiritual side of Maurya in the beginning. The news of Michael's tragic fate made her into a prolonged state of prayer and solitude for some time as she sat locked inside the room meditating about the departed soul. She wholeheartedly desired for the proper purgation for the souls of her last two sons. This shows her nature which is deeply ready for oblation of her own bloods to the ultimate divine power. Apart from showing physical lamentations she opted for a prophetic and intuitive way to overcome the sorrows.

Maurya's relation with each of her offspring is deeply intertwined with passionate sentiments. Not only does she become a real mother to her sons, but also becomes a model of survival for her only two daughters Cathleen and Nora. Even Maurya's minute acts of tolerance was a spark for the two daughters to thrive who see life in simple terms. Intricate blood ties resulted with divine maternal instincts. Although being a single mother for the most part of her life Maurya carried both masculine and feminine energy in a stabilized way. Maurya's response with tragic instances are way prognostic. As Nora gives a hint about Michael's death, Maurya slightly responds by giving a prophetic saying as if they'll be making a deep grave by the grace of god.

MAURYA [as before] You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards.
[Bartley takes the rope]. It will be wanting in this place, 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 by the grace of God. (Synge, 60)

Stoicism is another trait that this feminine energy employs in several instances from the play. As her phases get excruciatingly painful, she plunges upon to stoic resignation as a form of relief. *A concise companion to British and Irish drama* edited by Nadine Holsworth and Mary Buckhurst they illustrated that the stoic acceptance of fate in Maurya's character is par excellence and no other dramatist can portray a character with such sublimity of psyche and organization. (Malik, 2). The frequent deaths made her to receive this kind of a neutral stance. This shows her innate skill to acquire deep hidden wisdom about life. Her continuous deep spiritual prayers made her mind stable and succulent in a prolonged way. It was a form of mild escapism with which she explored the other world. Spirituality was an inevitable part in her life. Both this stoic resignation and spiritual tribulations is revealed in many instances from the play. Strong stoic tribulations can be deciphered from various instances

MAURYA [raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her]. They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf

is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other.(Synge, 300)

Stoic resignation can also be considered as a result of proper psychological balance. This trait of a poised mother is enough to maintain equilibrium within a struggling family. The interplay of life and death gets revealed to Maurya as she had proper discernment of events. Her visions in life accumulated with deep intuitions and keen observation in life made her alert to both natural and human conditions. Long exposure to spirituality made her well aware of the natural deaths of which the threat from the sea stands prominent. Her life has become a saintly realisation which she obtained through steady spiritual practice. It is a fact that only through enriching spirituality that one could live one's old age in moderation. By keenly focusing on her intuitive power she is able to respond aptly to situations thereby not being over dramatic. Maurya's physical limitations doesn't come as a hindrance for her mental and spiritual growth.

Considering the distinct traits of Maurya as an universal mother, one can equally compare her to the traditional figure of Mother Ireland. One can metaphorize this motherly figure with the physical Irish land. Just as native lands consumes everything, so do Maurya surrenders to life forces without dismay. Mother Maurya is a metaphorical symbol of mother Ireland. She typically represents a nation that has suffered from a long history of violence and bloodshed. One can also consider Maurya's constant mourning as a reflection of Ireland's long forgotten history of loss and grief. As everything ends up in land, so do all the tragedy which god bestowed upon that family got dissolved in her. Feminine traits such as dependence, submissiveness, passivity and self-denial exemplified by the females in Riders, especially Maurya, are sometimes ascribed to the Irish as a result of their colonialisation experience.(Jabar, 32). The maternal survival instincts gets equally paired with the Irish nations struggle for freedom and justice. As motherly sacrifices becomes the base for family sustenance, so do the Irish nations fights and wars becomes the pathway for the natives existence. By metaphorizing Maurya with the Irish land, her deep inherent attributes of freedom, sacrifice and justice gets revealed. Unstoppable forces guide this nurturing symbol of hope and destiny. The sufferings and hardships that come along the way to freedom is nothing when compared to the ultimate victory that this feminine figure achieves.

Even though Maurya's life was in shackles with malice, in the end one can decipher her as a true winning figure. Through her the characters of Nora and Cathleen embraces life. In the end we can see a Maurya whose mind gets brimmed with satisfaction as she always followed her path of intuition. At this point the power of Maurya surpasses the pathetic natural forces which the elements sea, water and air puts forth. Maurya's deep special pre-modern knowledge of the natural Irish world made her overcome it's limitations and perils which she feared previously. In the closing part of the play Maurya speaks with the full possession of the knowledge of the sublime natural forces and about life and death.

Maurya [*puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on BARTLEY'S feet.*] They're all together this time, and the end is come. 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 [*bending her head*]and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of everyone is left living in the world. [*She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away. Continuing*]. Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.(Synge, 335)

Conclusion

Motherly sacrifice is a driving force in nature which pertains the long journey of life with strength and courage. This energy has the power to nurture every other divine creation. JM Synge's motherly figure Maurya is a perfect embodiment of motherly figure that faces these good and bad forces with maturity and balance. Synge perfectly embodies Maurya as an epitome of sacrifice with nuanced detailing of her emotions and renderings. It contains a form of feminine mystique that in any way can't be suppressed with the masculine power. This archetypal motherly figure of Maurya proves to be a rigid symbolic surviving being that oddly defies natural laws and orders. She transforms from an individual mother to a universal mother with her long enduring patience and self effacement. An ever evolving motherly spirit that gets connected with the web of life. As sacrifice and love are the main traits of a mother, the character of Maurya in no way becomes devoid of it. Throughout the play one can understand Maurya as a mother whose balanced practice in both emotional and spiritual side made her thrive the last phase. The persistent and unwavering faith in god further stabilised her equanimity in mind which is not frequently seen in old aged people. With this Maurya proves to be an exceptional old aged figure. Her pangs of desperation for all the male sons of her family finally gets erased with her last prayers and this will become a mark for her own soul's eternal salvation. So we can finalize by saying that Maurya is an epitome of motherly sacrifice who succeeds to restore solace and mental equilibrium among the utter chaos of life.

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