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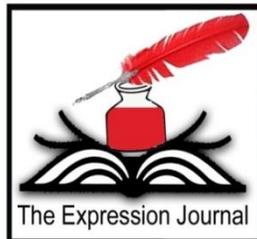
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FROM STOIC TO UNIVERSAL: JOURNEY OF MAURYA IN J.M SYNGE'S *RIDERS TO THE SEA*

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Abstract

Edmund John Millington Synge is a legend of Irish drama. He was an Irish playwright, prose writer, travel writer and collector of folklore. *Riders to the Sea* is basically a tragedy (an one act play) with the spirit of classical tragedy. In this play the simple life of some people is described in a universal manner. Aristotle defined tragic hero as belonging to superior class. In this play the characters belong to working class. Two new things in *Riders to the Sea* are Synge has based his play in a remote corner of Ireland where he could describe the original and basic struggle of life. Though the title promises a struggle between a fisher man and the sea, the play focuses on the struggle of women who suffer intensely at the loss human lives. Bartley's death gives a new insight in Maurya. She realizes the futility of our desire. She had cried and prayed but her desire ends in this satisfaction and sorrow. Almighty God did not protect her last son Bartley. But she has no grief or regret in life. She has realized the truth that she must accept the reality- death is inhabitable. Hence she is beyond the desire and fear. Michael's burial in Donegal or Bartley's burial with new coffin boards does not matter her now. She is pleased life without any desire.

Key-Words

Tragedy, Universal, Fisher Man, Struggle, Sea, Death, Burial.

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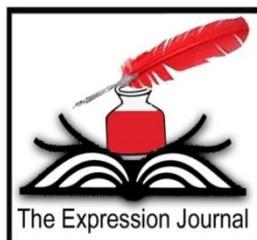
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Edmund John Millington Synge is a legend of Irish drama. He was an Irish playwright, prose writer, travel writer and collector of folklore. He was a main protagonist of Irish Literary Revival and one of the co founders of Abbey Theatre. His chief exponent lies in his creation like *The Playboy of the Western World*, *Riders to the Sea*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, *Deirdre of the Sorrow*, *The Well of the Saints*, *The Tinker's Wedding*.

Riders to the Sea is basically a tragedy (a one act play) with the spirit of classical tragedy. In this play the simple life of some people is described in a universal manner. Aristotle defined tragic hero as belonging to superior class. In this play the characters belong to working class. Aristotle defined 'hamartia; or 'fatal flaw' as the Cause of destruction of tragic protagonist. But in this play the characters suffer from extreme poverty. They have no fatal flaw. Their mind only focuses on life and death. Hegel commented on the moral conflict in tragedy. A tragic hero has a moral conflict between two rights. In this play Bartley, Cathleen has the same moral conflict. They are torn between starvation but safe life at their homes and the danger of the sea. Two new things in *Riders to the Sea* are Synge has based his play in a remote corner of Ireland where he could describe the original and basic struggle of life. Though the title promises a struggle between a fisherman and the sea, the play focuses on the struggle of women who suffer intensely at the loss of human lives. Basically the source of *Riders to the Sea* is Synge's *Dairy Notes on Aran Island*. The opening is symbolic and suggestive. The words like cottage means remote world, net symbolizes fisherman and helpless captive state of poor people, spring wheel signifies human process from birth to death and wheel of Karma, new boards recurs coffin boards. Symbolically kitchen and coffin boards reflect the key note of the play. The objects like 'plane stocking', 'clean burial' indicates the simple life of them. Plane stocking refers to a stocking without any identity mark. Generally the stockings are stitched in such a manner that there is an identity of man who wears it. 'Clean Burial' means proper Christian burial. It also refers to deep dug burial. These people have the belief that the deeper the grave is the more the spirit will find the comfort and peace. Young Priest is a character who never appears in stage. As a priest he symbolizes his Christianity. He is called

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young with a definite purpose. He is young or inferior in experience. He has no knowledge of the mighty of sea. More over Christianity becomes powerless before poverty and need of survival. He is young in both the senses. In this play Bartley the only living male character who is going to Galway fair to sell the horses. Cathleen the elder daughter of Maurya who is about twenty in age is looking after the house hold. They got a bundle from the priest and they are about to judge it whether it belongs to Michel or not. Nora the younger daughter informs that the sea is bad on 'white rocks'. It is one of the geographical locations of this place. White rocks are the rocks of lime stone. The people know by experience that if the sea is violent in near white rocks, it suggests a risky voyage. The first speech of Maurya "Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?" (Synge1) show the problematic life. Maurya's speech "It's a hard thing they'll be saying bellow if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin" reveals his stoic identity. Her almost all sons is died in the sea, Michael is also missing and Bartley is also going to sea. The motherly affection is shown here. Ikbal Ansary (229) stated:

"the meaning of motherhood and motherhood practices vary from different historical, political, and socio cultural contexts, it is very challenging to conclude the concept with a unifying idea"

She knows that Bartley is going to die so if the body of his is found there will be no one to make the coffin. The number symbol also describes the stoic identity of her. Literary Synge associated nine with the death of Michel because Michel is missing for nine days. But the number has another religious connection. By New Testament, Mark, it is said that "now It was the third hour and the crucified Him...And at the 9th hour Jesus cried out 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me'. Thus in the play the recurring number, carries ominous note whenever it is uttered. Maurya's in her speech "If it isn't found itself.....what is the price of a thousand horses against a son when there is only one son" tries to prevent Bartley from a voyage. She thinks that a storm is impending. Bartley however thinks that he must go because he will get a good price by selling the horses. Maurya has learned by hard experiences that the movement of star against the moon suggests stormy weather. So, she is anxious for Bartley's journey. Moreover she thinks that the price of a son, particularly only one son is invaluable. It cannot be equated with the price of hundred or thousand horses. But "Bartley is not interested in custom. Practicality and logic, rather than custom" (Leder 210), are the bases for his decision: Synge says, "I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses, I heard them saying below".(Synge 2) The statement by Maurya "I an old woman looking for the grave" is also thought provoking. These words of Maurya can be interpreted into two ways. Firstly, she may mean that she has become old and so, she is waiting for her own death and grave. But it is also true that she has been looking after the clean burials of her male members whose dead bodies would be found. In this statement the stoic mentality is expressed. Cathleen's remark "It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea" (Synge 3) suggests the destiny of those people. In her young age she knows that the male have to go and take risk for money. It is the duty and destiny of young male members of this place to go to sea. Sea is the main source for the survival of the family. Maurya is an old woman. She has past the age of work. When Bartley is about to leave Maurya's

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gesture is remarkable. "Putting her shawl over her head" is a custom in that part that whenever a woman hears sad news or confronts with a dead body she covers her head. When Bartley prepares to leave Maurya unconsciously puts her shawl over her head. It is an indirect preparation for Bartley's death. At the time of Bartley's departure Maurya's statement "I'll have no son left me in the world" (Synge 4) suggest that she will not see him again and she will lose all her sons.

Symbols always plays and dominates the situation. Bartley's forgetting of bread is vital symbol that signifies the impending death of Bartley. Nora informs that Bartley took nothing since sunrise. Both incidents predict a fatal consequence. Bread symbolizes Life. Again it is the belief among these people that a man should either eat or take food from his house when he undertakes a long journey. Bartley has missed both. Before her departure for delivering the cake, her comment is significant. She quoted: "In this big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children that do be old" (Synge 5). This speech of Maurya suggests the tragic identity of the play. Cathleen and Nora forgot to deliver cake to Bartley. They tell Maurya to deliver this and also her blessings to Bartley. Nora is given a stick bought by Michael to her steps. Maurya takes this but she also reflects on a profound irony of life. She remembers the big world where old people follow the natural order of life and die peacefully. They leave behind them things, the articles for their young ones to enjoy. But in their small world a reverse is taking place. The young men leave the world before the old ones. The old people enjoy things with the hopelessness and pain because there is none to enjoy their things after their death. After Maurya went to deliver the cake Cathleen and Nora inspect the bundle and they come to the end that it belongs to Michael. The futility of these people has been stated by Nora "And isn't it a pitiful thing where there is nothing left of.....a plane stocking". Nora felt sad because they could not see the funeral of their dead brother Michael. She recollected the great qualities of Michael. He was a great rower and fisher. Unfortunately sea took his life. Now they had nothing left. Nora lamented that they only retained a bit of his shirt and a plane stocking as a memorial. The glory of Michael fades out even his heroic death for survival is ridiculed by sea. A critic commented:

Synge "brings to the audience's mind the glory of the Irish peasantry, their hopes, dreams, despairs and joys by means of the language of their daily lives" (Michener 11)

After inspecting the bundle they put it into the chimney corner. The whole of chimney corner contain ashes. The burial of Michael is associated with ash. The funeral prayer is "from earth to earth, from ash to ash, from dust to dust". (The Book of Common Prayer). Suddenly Maurya comes back with a terrible vision. "My heart's broken from this day" or "I seen the fearfulest thing" symbolizes the hallucination of Maurya. Cathleen's remark "It is destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed surely." (Synge 6) suggests that all the hope is destroyed. Maurya's speech " Its little the like.....but they're gone now the lot of them" is like an aside. In this speech she describes her all tragic history. After her terrible vision of dead Michael following living Bartley, Maurya becomes stoic. Though Cathleen tales her that Michael got a clean burial, Maurya hold the idea that Bartley will be drowned and lost like Michael. She withdraws her belief in Christianity and young priest. She knows that both of them have little knowledge about the power of sea. She knows that in spite of a consolation of young priest she will be sonless. She

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wants her own death and a clean burial by coffin boards bought for Michael. She knows that the hungry sea has taken all the male members of her family. She does not want to live after the loss. Synge has set the play in the remote world only to prove the futility of Christianity. Christianity is a civilized structured religion. It feeds the soul whose body is not hungry. But these people struggle every minute against a malicious sea. The fate they know that the doctrine about merciful God is value less here. This drama is a contrast between Christianity and paganism. Maurya's remarks when Bartley's body brings back to home "There was Sheamus and his father It was a dry day, Nora—and leaving a track to the door" (Synge 7) shows the hardship of her life and her stoic mentality. She recollects her past when the male members were lost in the sea one after another. Synge has presented a pathetic scene only to present that sea has permitted no change in their life. She becomes stronger more defiant. She throws a challenge to the sea. Since she has no son to offer, the sea can do no harm to her life. Maurya knows it very well that she had to suffer from anxiety and fear. She tried consolation from young priest; she cried and prayed when ever her son risked a stormy weather. But now she has lost everything but gained a calm mind. The full stoicism and universal motherhood revealed through:

"They are all together this time, and the end is coming. 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; and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of everyone is living in the world" (Synge 8)

After Bartley's death Maurya realizes the true purpose of religion. She has go long prayer to almighty God for safety and life of her son. She has spent sleepless nights, days of labor to collect holly water. But now she realizes that religion can be her spiritual guide, not a protector. She gives her blessings not only to her dead sons but also to everyone left living the world. She becomes a universal mother. Her status is elevated. Prolonged suffering teaches her only to embrace suffering calmly. The concluding speech of Maurya is the supreme achievement as a universal mother:

"Michael has a clean burial in the far northWhat can we want than that?
No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied."

Bartley's death brings a new insight in Maurya. She realizes the futility of our desire. She had cried and prayed but her desire ends in this satisfaction and sorrow. Almighty God did not protect her last son Bartley. But she has no grief or regret in life. She has realized the truth that she must accept the reality- death is inhabitable. Hence she is beyond the desire and fear. Michael's burial in Donegal or Bartley's burial with new coffin boards does not matter her now. She is pleased life without any desire. Maurya's last words are actually taken from the phrase used by an Aran islander Martin MC Donogh. In this letter to Synge he wrote "..... But at the same time we have to be satisfied because a person cannot live all ways". Hartmann (101) focuses between the connection of patriarchy and capitalism and states that "patriarchy links all men to each other irrespective of their class, and "[a] woman's work benefits both capital and her husband".

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Bio Note:

Santanu Panda graduated from Barjora College under Burdwan University with honours in 2016 and now is a Master Degree student of Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal, India. His areas of interest include Indian English Literature, Gothic Literature and British Literature. He has presented papers on National and International seminars and his papers have been published in several International Journals.