

Riders to the Sea as a Final Impression and Regional Play by Synge

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Abstract- Riders to the sea were a regional play but it deals with human nature which is the same everywhere. So it has a universal appeal. Riders to the Sea are based on Synge's observations of the life people of Aran Islands. Synge went to these islands, at the proposal of W.B.Yeats. He paid several visits to these islands, stayed with the people and observed their manners, habits, beliefs and mode of life. This is the life presented in the play. At the same time the play has a universal implication. It describes the anguish of the people caused by cruel fate. In this play the agent of destiny is the sea. Elsewhere he agent may be the hatred of the gods or the cruel laws of society. The suffering of a mother is the same whether she is a peasant woman or a queen, whether she belongs to Ireland or to Newfoundland, whether her sons die in drowning accidents or in war or in famines, or in an air crash or even by the unintentional leakage of poison gas. Riders to the sea, therefore, have a universal appeal.

Index Terms- regional, famines, Aran Islands, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Riders to the sea reflect the life of the people of Aran Islands. The characters speak the language such as was heard by Synge from the natives in these islands. Maurya, the chief character, belongs to a family of peasants- cum-fisherman. The soil is stony and with great difficulty the people grow crops like rye. They severe animals such as horses and pigs. They catch fish for their food and collect sea-weeds for their fuel and kelp for manuring the fields. The men have to go the sea very frequently for fishing and for going the mainland to sell their produce and to purchase their essential supplies. The seas around these islands are very common. The sea is the giver and taker of their lives. There is a life-long contest between the islanders and the sea. The bread-winners of all families are the common victims. Maurya lost her

father-in-law, her husband and four of her sons within a span of about twenty years. Her fifth son, Michael, was drowned nine days back and the play is concerned with the way in which her last surviving son, Bartley, is drowned. Synge noticed that the islanders live under a judgement of death.

Maurya is a poor, old women belonging to a primitive community living in an isolated island. But her case is not a exclusive one. In fact, the maurya family stands for all the families in the island. All the people there must have gone through similar experiences. Maurya is a type of a bereaved mother. Bartley is a typical victim of the tragedy. The sea represents destiny which causes the tragedy. Maurya's a characteristic tragedy human tragedy. Maurya's family is any family randomly selected by destiny for punishment. They have not committed any fault, but they are made to suffer. The characters are only puppets in the hands of fate. Thus Riders to the sea comes very close to classical tragedy.

Synge has chosen to make the sea the architect of Maurya's cruel fate. The sea is a typical symbol and has a universal significance. The hostility between man and the sea has gone on since times immemorial. The sea is no respecter of ranks. Maurya's menfolk are poor fishermen. But people of all ranks and classes are drowned in the sea. The hungry sea devours the rich and the poor, kings and nobles, as well as poor fishermen and sailors. The poet Shelley was drowned in the sea. The anguish of the mother would be the same whether Bartley is a poor fishermen or a rich prince. Thus the suffering caused by the sea is a common experienced of mankind.

Maurya suffers for no fault of hers. She is the victim of Fate. Her case is not a unique one. People in all circumstances and condition of life, the rich and the poor, the rulers and the ruled, all suffer in the same way. The means and agencies which cause the

suffering may be different but the feeling of suffering is the same because the human heart is the same everywhere. In *Riders to the Sea* we see a family of poor and prehistoric people suffering due to the vagaries of Fate. But Fate treats all people alike. Fate does not respect rank or status. Things which have happened to Maurya and her family may happen to people of high status, rank and position. Synge knows human nature well and person nature is the same everywhere. A queen will have the same feelings as Maurya if the dead body of her existing son is brought before her. So Maurya's tragedy has a universal significance.

Riders to the Sea is a dark tragedy. The play is surcharged with the atmosphere of pity and fear. It disheartens and depresses us. Sorrows are piled up, one over the other, on poor Maurya. But the play does not end in a mood of black despair. The calamities do not crush Maurya's spirit. At the end she displays tremendous courage and power of endurance. She is beaten but unbowed. The result is that the mood of the reader and the spectator also changes. We admire the human spirit which is not shattered by disasters, and we close the play in a mood of stoic resignation and calm settlement. The play opens on a very sad note. There is a gloom in Maurya's cottage because the elder of her two existing sons, Michael, was reported to have been drowned nine days back. All these days Maurya has been lamenting and looking for Michael's body to be washed ashore. A body of a drowned man has been found in Donegal and the young priest has brought the clothes taken off from that body and he wants the girls to identify whether these clothes belonged to Michael.

Within the few minutes of the opening of the play we have a feeling that Michael's death is not going to be the last sorrow of poor Maurya. As Nora comes in, the door is blown open by a gust of wind. The strong wind makes Cathlean anxious because their last surviving brother, Bartley, is planning to go to the mainland across the sea and the priest has refused to stop him from going. Cathlean asks Nora to see whether the sea is uneven near the White Rocks. Nora replies that it is "middling bad". Maurya is explicating that Bartley must not go to the sea that day because the wind was rising from the south and the west and so her idea was that the sea would become very rough. We have an uneasy emotion that

another tragedy is impending. Then Bartley comes. He is in a hurry to go. Maurya tells him that the previous night she had seen a star near the moon. That was a bad omen and so he should not go that day. Bartley says that he has to go because he wants to sell two horses at the Galway Fair. Maurya replies that the price even of a thousand horses would be nothing as compared to the life of a son when there is only one son living. Bartley does not listen to her and goes. As he goes Maurya says, "He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world." We now feel that the Bartley is fated and we shudder to think what would happen to the poor mother when her last son also dies.

The gloom thickens further at the following remark of Maurya when she is given the stick that Michael had bought. "In the big world the people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old." When Maurya goes towards the mechanism well to give the bread and her blessings to Bartley, the girls open the bundle of clothes. They identify Michael's stocking and so they are now certain that Michael is dead. They start weeping very resentfully. We share their sorrow. When Maurya returns she is terribly frightened. She had seen a horrible sight. She saw Bartley riding on his red mare and the ghost of Michael riding behind him on the grey pony. This horrifies the girls also and Cathlean says that they are going to be utterly "destroyed". At this stage we are really in a state of terror. Maurya is now certain that Bartley will be lost. She recalls the earlier deaths of her father-in-law, her husband and four of her sons. As she is describing the way in which the dead body of Patch was brought to the cottage, her vision merges into the present grim reality and nine women-mourners come to the house and the men bring Bartley's dead body wrapped in a sail with water drenched out of it. One of the women explains that the grey pony had knocked him into the sea and the waves had dashed him against the white rocks. If the play had ended here we would have been in a state of utter depression and miserable despair. But the play does not end there. The scene brightens a little when Maurya resigns herself to her cruel fate and utters her great elegy for the dead and her prayer for the souls of all the dead and living people of the

world. There is thus a catharsis of our feeling of pity and panic.

CONCLUSION

The final effect of *Riders to the Sea* is not one of gloominess or bleak despair. It does not leave us in a devastated condition. On the other hand, it raises our spirits. We admire the invisible spirit of man which faces all storms and is not shattered by them. We feel that if a unfortunate old woman is capable of such powers of endurance, there is no need for bleak despair.

REFERENCE

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