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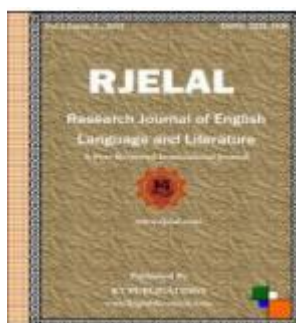
ANTI WAR SENTIMENT IN BERTOLT BRECHT'S MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Bertolt Brecht is one of the most peace-loving playwrights of the world for all ages. His *Mother Courage and Her Children* is entirely an anti war play. Every moment of the action, mood and passion of this play are tremendously influenced by the incidents of a war and through the representation of these incidents he has summoned the mankind to establish a warless peaceable world. In order to aware the world people of the war he has described the destruction and devastation of the 'Thirty Years War' of Europe that commenced between the Catholic and the Protestant in 1616-1648 as an exemplification. This article aims at presenting the miserable and distressed conditions as well as the misfortunes of *Mother Courage* and her children, representative of the simple men that they experienced during the time of the Thirty Years War and arousing an antagonistic feeling among the people to war.

KEYWORDS: Thirty Years War, Protestantism, Catholicism and Common People
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INTRODUCTION

Bertolt Brecht was an ideal socialist (Chattergy (1997, xxx). Observing the 'class struggle between the proletariat and the capitalist, he followed the views of 'Karl Marks' and brought up an intention in his mind to change the social scenario (Ibid, xxv) through his writings. Moreover, having experienced the terrible devastation and destruction of the world and the mankind during the First World War that commenced from 1914 to 1920 and involved all the great powers of the world: that were assembled in two opposing alliances: the Allies (based on the Triple Entente of the United Kingdom, France and Russia) and the Central Powers (originally centered around the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy; but, as Austria-

Hungary had taken the offensive against the agreement, Italy did not enter into the war) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II, retrieved on 10.07.2014), Brecht was suspicious of the future of the world.

The world and the people of the world were suffering from the restlessness before the First World War due to different social and political reasons, but the restlessness did not end after its accomplishment. In order to solve the existing problems and to establish peace, the world leaders imposed the 'Treaty of Versailles' on Germany and established the League of Nations in 1920. But the situation remained unchanged. Meanwhile, the Nazis Party took the power of Germany and Adolf Hitler became the chancellor of

Germany in 1933. Becoming the chancellor of Germany, Hitler challenged different crucial economic, geographical as well as colonial losses imposed by the 'Treaty of Versailles' on his country. Moreover, for the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Japanese invasion of China in 1937, Japanese invasion of the Soviet Union and Mongolia in 1938(Ibid) and for other political issues the world experienced an unstable situation. This is for the reason; the world people as well as the world leaders felt the emergence of another world war. In this situation Bertolt Brecht wrote his famous drama *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1938 and 1939(Leach, 1994) on the background of the Thirty Years War of Europe (1618-1648), a play denouncing war which was meant to serve as a warning but turned out to be a prophecy Chattergy (1997, xxxii). Through this play he has showed, 'how the common people suffer from a war, how the proletariat people are tortured by the capitalists, how a war ruins a family and its member(Ibid,xxv) like the family of Mother Courage (Anna Fierling), how a war snaps the children likely Swiss Cheese and Elief as well as Katrin away from the loving care of their mother and compels them to face the immature death and Brecht has showed the world people how a war ruins a sweet dream of a mother like Mother Courage. At last he warns his audiences and the people of the world that the world is very near to another world war and he has urged the world people to be careful so that the professed world war could not be commenced.

DISCUSSION

The political situation of Europe during the seventeenth century works as the grounding of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. The emergence of the Thirty Years War, a war between the Catholicism and the Protestantism, (also known as War of Religion) that continued from 1618 to 1648 Chattergy (1997, xxxiii) was the most significant issue of this century. Although the duration of this war is thirty years, Brecht has used only 12(twelve) years that continued from 1624 to 1636 for the action of the play *Mother Courage and Her Children*. In this play he has presented the social scenario of Germany of his own time as well as social and political condition of Germany during the period of the Thirty Years War (Ibid). He wrote the play in such a time whenever the world was at the stage of experiencing another world war.

When the curtain of the play *Mother Courage and Her Children* opens, it is found that an anti war sentiment prevails among the common people who are not interested to become soldiers or do not encourage their children to be enlisted as a soldier. As a result the recruitment officer and the sergeant are very much frustrated as they are trying to recruit soldiers for the Swedish campaign in Poland, but have failed. Finding no way, they propose Mother Courage for her eldest son Eilif Noyocki in order to recruit him as a soldier. But she refuses their proposal vehemently and in a state of anger she says,

A soldier's life is not for sons of mine. [Scene-1, Line-158-159]

Rather as an owner of a canteen she calls upon the recruitment officer and the sergeant to have food indicating the premature death of a soldier,

So fill the hole up in your belly.

Before you fill one underground. [Scene-1, Line-67-68]

Through the above lines she indicates a soldier's life is very short on earth. In fact, there is no mother who loves her children. This is for the reason; she does not want her son to be recruited as a soldier.

But in spite of her utmost trying, Eilif decides to be a soldier. In the course of time Eilif proves himself as a competent soldier in the battle fields. But unfortunately, he is executed on the accusation of attacking a peasant family by which a woman of the family had fallen into death although he has done it what a soldier does during a war time. So it is clear from Eilif's tragedy that a war always compels the young fellows like Eilif to face death whose bravery can be compared to that of Julius Caesar who was a Roman general and statesman in 45 BC.

The death of Swiss Cheese, the second son of Mother Courage, is one of the most pathetic and heart-rending incidents of the play *Mother Courage and Her Children*. He was very honest that he inherited from his Hungarian father. Like his elder brother he also joined the army as a pay master. As a pay master he showed his honesty in the regiment. But a sudden Catholic attack ruined his and his mother's dream. At the time of Catholic invasion he tried to flee with the cash box of his regiment in order to save it, but failed and was arrested by a Catholic surgeon. By a military trial he was executed at the firing squad. His mother tried to save him by any means. Even she wanted to pay two hundred guilders to a Catholic colonel as a bribe, but all

efforts turned into failure. So the tragic life of Swiss Cheese can be compared to the tragedy of the classical Greek philosopher Socrates who had to suffer tremendously for his honesty.

The misfortune of Kattrin Haupt, the only daughter of Mother Courage, also shocks the audiences. She is dumb, but a very soft hearted girl. Chattergy (1997, iv) says about her character, 'from the very beginning we learn of her kindness which her mother regards as a dangerous quality'. Her kindness becomes clear when she saves a child of a peasant family from a ruined farm house that is damaged by the Catholic attack. Even she is humming a lullaby to it having rocked it in her arms. Moreover, she has sacrificed her own life for the safety of the inhabitants and children of the people of the protestant town Hale. While she was beating a drum in order to wake up the town people climbing on the roof of a house, a Catholic captain fires at her and ultimately she embraces the death. Even Kattrin's dumbness is the result of the war. During her childhood a soldier threw something on her mouth and consequently, she lost her power of speech. Before her death, Kattrin also embraced a terrible experience. She was assaulted by a drunken soldier and was seriously wounded and for a scar created by the soldier on her forehead she looked ugly. For this reason her mother felt worried about her future and she said,

She's all but finished now; she'll never get a husband. [Scene-V1, Line-145-146]

So a war destroys those people who want to serve the people. In this respect Chattergi (Ibid, liv) says, 'Kattrin performs the life-saving human miracle at the cost of her own life.' This is how a war snaps the children away from the loving care of their mother. For this reason Mother Courage says,

Curse the war. [Scene-V1, Line-150]

A war always causes a disaster, destruction, and devastation. It not only kills the soldiers and the common people but also destroys a village, a town, a country or a civilization and even the earth as well. Besides, during a war time discipline breaks down entirely. In 1631 the Catholic force conquered Magdeburg under the leadership of General Tilly. As a result discipline experienced an unhealthy atmosphere by the adhoc nature of the 17th century financing. Armies were expected to be largely self-funding from the loot where they operated and it created lawlessness and disorder severely. Consequently, his

followers and subordinate soldiers started to plunder the wealth of the common people and destroyed the city. The commander also instigated his soldiers to continue such activities. In this connection the first soldiers says to Mother Courage,

The chief allowed me one hour to plunder the town, it's a swindle. [Scene-V, Line-4-5]

When the Catholic soldiers launched an attack at Magdeburg, a farm house was entirely ruined. As a result a number of persons were wounded. Even a baby was crying in pain which fell in a trap for the aggression. So the play also makes it clear that the children are also victim of the war.

A war also creates starvation and feminine. The farmers can not plough their lands and consequently, they can not grow food and the ultimate result of this situation is feminine which compels the people to face death. In the very play Mother Courage and Her Children it is found that Mother Courage is a canteen woman and she sells foods. But in spite of being a supplier of food, she has to suffer from starvation. She along with her daughter Catherine and the Cook remain hungry for a long time and become very weak for want of food. As a result they beg alms at the personage. The Cook also sings 'The Song of the Wise and Good' in order to attract the attention and sympathy of the inhabitants of it.

Please help us now: our need is dire. [Scene-IX, Line-150]

Besides, during a war time people become merciless. Due to starvation and want of food they do not hesitate to commit any crime and illegal activity. It is clear when Mother Courage says to the Cook,

I hear the villagers are eating their younger children. Nuns have been caught committed robbery. [Scene-IX, Line-22-24]

This is why, the Cook observing the inhuman activities says,

The world's dying out. [Scene-IX, Line-25]

A war never solves any problem. It creates tension in the human life. If the history of the human civilization is observed, it is found that a number of wars have commenced in the world, such as, the great War of Troy (which almost destroyed the Greek civilization), the Thirty Years War between the Catholic and the Protestant (continued from 1616 to 1648), the Seventeen Years War from 1756 to 1763, the Napoleon War between England and France from 1803 to 1815,

the First World War from 1914 to 1920, the Second World War from 1939 to 1945, the Independence War of Bangladesh in 1971, the War between the USA(United States of America) and Vietnam(also known as the Second Indochina War) from 1955 to 1975 , the war between Iraq and Iran from 1980 to 1988 and so on.

Every war destroys the life of the common people. The common people lose their wealth, children, relatives and power to live on as a whole. The soldiers or the war participants are not only affected by the war but also the civil people are affected. The destruction and the devastation of different wars likely the Thirty Years War, the First World War as well as the Second World War can be taken into consideration to prove this speech.

The Thirty Years War was a destructive war. It was one in which religion and politics became inextricably and confusingly intertwined(Willett,1978,157-158) and Germany was the most affected country of this war that is clear in the very play *Mother Courage and Her Children*,

Germany has lost half its inhabitants [Scene-IX, Introduction, Line-2]

Even the business, commerce and industry as well as agriculture of this country were totally startled. Famine and pestilence broke out severely throughout the whole country. Wolves roamed on the streets. The destruction and devastation of Germany during the war period were so high that Wedgwood (2005, 526) regrettably comments, 'Its effects, both immediate and indirect, were either negative or disastrous. Morally subversive, economically destructive, socially degrading, confused in its causes, devious in its course, futile in its result, it is the outstanding example in European history of meaningless conflict.

The First World War and the Second World War are two most devastating and destructive wars in the history of the human civilization. During the First World War some 8,500,000 died as a result of wounds and /or disease (Encyclopedia, 1992, 987).It has been estimated that the number of civilian deaths attributable to the war was higher than military casualties or around 13,000,000.These civilians deaths were largely caused by starvation, exposure, disease military encounters and massacres (Ibid).

The emergence of the Second World War that continued from 1939 to 1945 is a tragedy for the

human civilization that caused a large number of people to face death. Estimates of total died in World War II vary from 35,000,000 to 60,000,000-a statistical difference of no small import (Ibid). Besides, the world people also experienced the use of the atomic bomb in this war for the first time which entirely damaged Nagasaki and Hiroshima, two important Japanese cities at that time.

CONCLUSION

Brecht was an extreme communist. He believed in Marxism wholeheartedly. This is for the reason; he deliberately capitalized his Marxist ideology in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. The fundamental concept of the play, its overall design characterization, action, dialogue, and structural devices like the juxtaposition of scenes and insertion of songs, as also its attitude to life and values, is determined by this vision (Chattergy, 1987,xlvi-xlvii).Brecht's motive of writing this drama was to awaken the mankind describing the ghastly scenes of a war and the miserable conditions of the mankind that they experience in a war period through the representation of the characters likely *Mother Courage* as well as her family members and other general public such as Yvette Pottier ,the Chaplain, the Cook, and so on in order that they can comprehend the condition of their society where they live, what their duty is in the social crisis and if they want to reform the social status, and what they should do in their transformed social condition. Even, in order to remodel the society Brecht has urged the general people through his literary activities to rebel against the prevalent system of the society through the Character of Katrin if the existing social system does not maintain any justice .So Leach (1994) correctly says, 'Brecht wanted his theatre to intervene in the process of shaping society'. Having presented the horror, destruction and devastation of the Thirty Years War in the play *Mother Courage and Her Children*, he has called upon all the people of the world to avoid the occurring of another war. Here Brecht professes the beginning of the Second World War.

The defiance of the 'Treaty of Versailles' by German chancellor Adolf Hitler as well as other social and political issues made the world people frustrated. Though the First World War caused a heavy damage and destruction for the world, the world leaders did not learn anything. Similarly, *Mother Courage* did not learn anything although she lost her children subsequently in

the war. Even she followed the Protestant soldiers spontaneously to leave the Halle city to carry on her business

Truly speaking, Brecht started to write *Mother Courage and Her Children* with an intention to protest the rise of Nazism and Fascism. Meanwhile, Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II, retrieved on 17.07.2014) and in response to this invasion Brecht completed the writing of this drama in the same year in order to aware his audiences and readers so that they can take proper initiatives to avoid the breaking out of the Second World War. It should be mentioned that the Second World War began by the German invasion of Poland which can be considered to be the most destructive war in the world history. The commencement of this global war indicates the people of the world have failed to follow the advice of the writer. So the very play *Mother Courage and Her Children* can be regarded to be a play that contains anti war sentiment exuberantly. It is also considered by some as the greatest play of the 20th century and perhaps the greatest anti-war play of all time (Hinton, 2009-2010, 2).

NOTES

All the textual references have been quoted from *Mother Courage and Her Children*, translated by Eric Bentley from the original text MUTTER COURAGE UND IHRE KINDER, 1962.

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