



THE FINAL CONSUMMATION: A STRUCTURALIST STUDY OF MOTHERHOOD IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S "MOTHER OF 1084" AND SYNGE'S "RIDERS TO THE SEA"

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ABSTRACT

This world is highly incredible but immensely mysterious too with its many colour happenings never to be entirely deciphered by any human being. As the green leaves to a tree so is the mother to a child. Hence, the untimely passing away of their beloved child collapses the mothers from within like a falling star. Overran by endless agony, they always visualise a dying bonfire all throughout their lives. This wave of emotion never restricts itself to any narrow domestic boundary, and deconstructs all the fences ever created to prove someone's superiority and other's inferiority, and thus formulates a more general structure of love and suffering. The two exclusively selected plays in this paper, i.e. Mahasweta Devi's Mother of 1084 and John Millington Synge's Rides to the Sea, make an arduous attempt to prove a universal notion of motherhood by empirically studying the pattern of emotion common to all bereaved mothers. How the two mothers after losing their child before them, consummate themselves with their bitter-sweet experiences, and how they develop a stubborn self by analysing that every cloud has a silver lining, is what this paper actually aims at. Moreover, it also unearths the narrow perceptions of multiple theories and projects a wider outlook towards humanity by intertextualising two strangely related texts.

Key words: Consummation, motherhood, love and agony, deconstruction, structure, experience, stubborn self, universality, intertextuality.

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The prolonged discourses about what constitutes the concept of "ideal" mothering or who should be or should not be mother continue to exist as a long intervening question that attracts attentions of many researchers from time immemorial. As the meanings 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. The feministic concept of motherhood is highlighted by Ann Taylor Allen in her book "Feminism and Motherhood" where she traces the

development of motherhood from a biological reproductive machine in the 1880s to a role in the pre war and wartime period, and finally to a choice by claiming their demands during the high peak of feminism during 1970s. She focuses on the "mother dilemma", "one of the most intractable problems facing women in the West" (Allen, 1) to present her argument. The sociological concept of motherhood engrosses its attention on the social expectations and multiple happenings associated with the life of a mother. The book, *Mothering: ideology, experience and agency* is centred its ideas on how motherhood

is constructed to bearing and rearing the child at home, and how they are not useful to any work outside home. Dismantling any sociological concept of motherhood or the feministic ideas of development of ideal mother or psychological explanation by Sigmund Freud about different complexes related to mother child relationship, there is a more wide and prodigious aspect of motherhood which focuses on the universal principle of emotions where all the mothers bemoan the death of their child from the same bereaved heart. It is a fact universally acknowledged that no forlorn mother in the world celebrate the death of her child. They can never remain calm at the untimely passing away of their children because it is the soul of a mother that bewails for ever unlike the neighbours who lament for one day or the relatives who weep for few days or the family members who express their sorrows for some days. Thus, emotion of mothers crosses all the fences and narrow domestic walls we employ to distinct our culture and ideologies; it disturbs all the oriental-occidental differences, all our distinctive perceptions for which we blame one another; it disrespects Forster's presentation of the East and West's inability to become two good friends; it deconstructs all the binary opposition that we create to prove someone's superiority and other's inferiority. It paves the way to bring out the shared system of meaning by demystifying the self reliance of a single text. The two different plays exclusively selected from two totally distinctive cultural and social backgrounds i.e. the occidental text *The Riders to the Sea* by Irish playwright John Millington Synge and the oriental work *Mother of 1084* by Indian playwright Mahasweta Devi do make an arduous attempt to formulate a completely unparalleled but celebrated concept of motherhood. Here we very vividly visualise how two mothers by encountering multiple nightmarish situations and hardships finally consummate themselves with two mature souls that in the end posses the daunting courage to accept every critical and unexpected situation.

Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* is the dramatisation of her original Bengali novel *Hazar Churashir Maa*. The novel is set against the background of late 1960s uprising of Naxalite

Movement fuelled by the incident of Naxalbari agitation. The Naxalites are the supportive of far left radical communist ideology, especially the Marxist-Leninist ideologies. They raise their voice against the politics of economic deprivation, exploitation of the farmers and the poor backward communities by the elites, zamindars and bureaucrats. Against this deprivation and injustice meted out to them, a group of young men from both village and town take up cudgels and vehemently protest against these questionable acts of human force. The government unable to camouflage anymore of its real faces tries to choke their throats very brutally by having them encountered with the help of the political hooligans, and thus creates violence and turmoil in the entire state the brutality of which we experience through the mouth of Nandini "Arrest? Torture? Murders in the name of encounters? A whole generation between sixteen and forty is being wiped out" (Devi 28). Having been caught in this political and social upheaval Brati, the radical young supporter of the Naxalite Movement in the play, loses his life which paves the way for Mahasweta Devi to portray a more developed and mature picture of the mother, Sujata Chatterjee.

Brati experiences an acute knowledge of the corruption and exploitation that is rampant in all spheres of the society- in administration, in household, in politics and in every social conduct. The world seems to be the place of the complacent bourgeois, corrupt politicians who manipulate the innocent mind to face the gun of the bullets. They enjoy every right to live, but the reformist like Brati, and his friends who do not conform to this corrupt hegemony, and strive to bring classless society, are killed. When this reality is uncovered by the more experienced, enthusiastic and revolutionary figure like Nandini, the mother bemoans "Brati was the soul of my life, yet I knew him so little" (Devi 28). This acknowledgement of her insufficient knowledge about her beloved son adds fuel to her broken heart to take a painful journey to discover how dedicated his son was for the freedom of the neglected and ever exploited people from the hands of the complacent hypocritical, bourgeois society. Samik Bandyopadhyay writes, "The one day in the life of Sujata, spent in 'discovering' Brati for the first time,

in a series of encounter with people beyond her circuit of experience, is spent in forging a connection with Brati or, rather, with what he strove and died for. (Bandyopadhyay xiv) This journey gradually ripens the mother with a new transition - a mother from an innocent, apolitical, inactive member of a family to a more responsible, mature and dutiful one. Kovilpillai quotes Mahasweta's words:

I set an apolitical mother's quest to know her martyred Naxalite son, to know what he stood for; for she had not known true Brati ever, as long as he had been alive. Death brings him closer to her through her quest and leads the mother to a journey of self discovery and discovery of the cause of her son's rebellion (Kovilpillai 76).

Set against the background of The Aran Island, "an island off the west of Ireland" Syngé's *Riders to the Sea* encapsulates the conflict between the tiny human force and the largely powerful natural force that is the sea. The complete activity of the island is such that "it is the life of a young man to be going on the sea" (Syngé 84) to earn their daily bread and butter and for this cause they regularly lose their lives. Maurya in this process of harsh reality losses all her children and other family members as she bemoans that "they are all gone now, and there is not anything the sea can do to me..." (Syngé 92). Unlike Sujata, she has deep knowledge of the imminent result of Bartley's going to the sea as she articulates "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" (Syngé 85). She curses the life, and the sea. She shows her growing impatience and her veterinary of the activities of the sea when she articulates her thoughts that "In the big world the old 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" (Syngé 86). This Maurya who at the beginning of the play always execrates the life and the cruelty of the sea, ultimately accepts the fate with a lot more mature self when she very confidently pronounces that "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied" (Syngé 93).

Both the plays depict the grim faces of the mothers by developing many other characters. Somu's mother is another such picture of the heartbroken mother who set the tune of the background for the morgue scene. For the whole scene she is crying with a low voice that intensifies the tragic notion of the play. Sharmila Lahiri in her paper "Bridging Angst" beautifully suggests that "the scene is reminiscent of Syngé's *Riders to the Sea*, where Maurya sits bereft of speech at the loss of the male members of her family as the other mourners come in to join the keening. Uncontrolled, almost hysteric, she forms a strong contrast to the taut Sujata who stands with her hands tightly pressed to her mouth, a look of disbelief in her eyes" (Lahiri 2). Sujata is the only person in the family who wishes to have a look at her encountered child while all the other male members step back to keep intact their social respectability. The father finds it immensely humiliating if he or even his car approaches to Kantapukur, the sensitive zone of Naxalite activity. His social image will be demeaned that time. So he prefers not to be identified with a Naxalite son. This is the gap that exists between modern parents and children. Nandini very vehemently attacks when she articulates that "Everyone remains stranger these days to everyone" (Devi 28).

"...the children and the parents were stranger to one another" (Devi 29).

When the entire world tries to prove itself as stranger to a Naxal body, the mother cannot withdraw herself from the evergreen love for her children. Now she is identified as the mother of 1084, the demeaned numerical number of the dead body, and not the mother of Brati Chaterjee. Saroj Pal, the deputy commissioner, crudely argues that "No. You won't get the body" which reverberates into the mother's ear so many times that she ultimately breaks down. But she does not lose her heart. She goes on to explore the reality with the heavy heart and learns many facts in the process. She explores the actual face of the government through the character of Saroj Pal, now Deputy Commissioner, detective Department; she invents the honest dedication of the member for the revolution through the daunting figure of Nandini. Nandini represents "the prison. The solitary cell. The

worst torture" (Devi 30). She never submits herself to the brutal authority. She very vividly declares her indomitable note that "I'll never come back to the so called tidy life. Some day you'll learn that I've been arrested again" (Devi 35). Such is the zeal that rejuvenates Sujata, the mother of 1084 to invent herself, to protest against the maxim "all's right with the world, let's go on nicely" (Devi 35). Beside this she also encounters the grim faces of the society through the person of Anindya for whose betrayal a series of the young reformers has to lose their lives. All these human forces, activities and experiences stimulate the mother to strengthen her soul as a seasoned timber, to announce a clarion call to the audience to break the ice and to search for a world "where there's no killer, no bullets, no prison, no vans" (Devi 41).

It is the natural forces, the activities and experiences of the sea that strengthen the heart of Maurya bit by bit, and ultimately she also becomes a mother of seasoned timber. She is the traditional woman who living her entire life in the lap of the island is well aware of every activity and each movement of the sea. To quote Judith Remy Leder, "She knows it intimately-its winds, its graves, its portents. She knows the amount of turf necessary to keep a fire alive, and the way a drowned son will look when he has been floating on the sea for nine days; she knows the long history of her own family- mostly a litany of death" (Leder 208). And it is this litany of death as a continuous process that develops Maurya as the ideal mother, the mother who has to take responsibility of the two surviving daughters. She after losing all her children bemoans:

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. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening (Synge 92).

Though this tearing speech comes out from the piercing heart yet she accepts it because she very acutely knows the cruelty of the sea that shall gobble every male bone of the island either today or tomorrow. She exclaims, though ironically, that "It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain." (Synge 92) Thus, the greatness of the mother is reflected through her abundance optimism, through her tremendous ability to accept the fate which is the Holy Grail to continue our life in this ephemeral world. When Maurya articulates at the end of the play:

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 93).

It is nothing but her maturity speaks, the inventive mother with so many experiences speaks. When the entire world goes blind, she discovers the nobility of heart by placing extreme faith to the action of the omnipotent God. She defies Gloucester's belief in *King Lear* (Act IV, Sc i. 41-42) that "as flies to the wanton boys are we to the gods/ They kill us for their sport" and keeps firm faith on herself understanding that every clouds has a silver lining.

Both these plays exhibit some striking similarities that pave the way to depict a more transparent picture of the mature self of the mothers. They are the living document of chill poverty that binds the thread of the plot in a very acute manner. We realise the moaning of the mother and how the child arrange their daily hard livings by depending solely on the price of the pigs or the sheep. Their complete source of bread depends on the good season at Connemara where they sell their sheep or pigs. They are well aware of the fact that how difficult it is for the female members to survive without having any male source of income. When Bartley goes, Maurya who is well aware of his drowning express their hard life afterwards "...it is a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and may be a fish that would be stinking" (Synge 92). It is the inexpressive poverty, the acute need of earning that force them to take their

journey even in hostile weather, and thus in turn to lose their lives. The tender heart of mother is ready to sacrifice her appetite, but is not ready to lose her child. She protests "If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only" (Synge 84). The same poverty we come into contact in *Mother of 1084* as well through the bitter experience of Somu's mother. When Sujata visits Somu's mother she shares the actual happenings of that unfortunate night and in the process unlocks her poverty stricken feeling as she continues "With all the attention we paid to Somu, we never had time to look to her schooling. And Somu had to leave us behind, all at sea!" (Devi 12) Thus, they invest all their earnings on Somu with the hope to living a peaceful life in their old days. But the things happen otherwise with the untimely death of Somu leaving them in the clutches of hunger. This striking poverty in the lives of the mothers speaks a universal language that "asserts an overall unity and significance to every form of communication and social behaviour" (Bressler 102) by defying all the cultural differences and barriers that attempt to prove autonomy of the text.

If we engross our concern over the writing style of the writers, their themes, their techniques, their use of the settings and obviously their purpose of the writing then we acknowledge many more similarities between these two writers which again help us depict a consummate pictures of the mothers. The predominant concern of Mahasweta Devi's writing is as explained by Nivedita Sen and Nikhil Yadav:

"...the exploitations of the Adivasis by the landed rich or the urban administrative machinery callously perpetuating a legacy of complicity with the colonizers, bonded labour and prostitution, the destitution and misery of city dwellers who are condemned to live at the fringes and eke-out a meager livelihood, the plight of woman who are breadwinners and victims of male sexual violence, dependent widows, ill-treated wives, and unwanted daughters whose bodies can fetch a price – are adequately represented..." (Sen 13).

And the immediate motive of this particular play as pointed out by Deshpande is "the urban Bhadra Lok Bengal in the context of rising people's movements. She offers us a view of politics which is both moving and disturbing" (Deshpande 579). The greatest concern of Synge's play is the reality and the happenings he has experienced during the Irish literary renaissance. Probably the greatest of the dramatist associated with the Abbey Theatre, Synge presents a living document of the painful lives of the fishermen of the Aran Islands and other parts of the Ireland, and gives it dramatic form and rich verbal expression with his own poetic imagination. *Riders to the Sea* is purposefully written to elevate the Celtic paganism by dismissing the Christian belief and thus it becomes the greatest example of classical tragedy in a single act. Now, these two plays though distinct in their general and particular themes and with regard to their different backgrounds and purposes, they identify with each other in one place – the profound sketching of two mothers, their intense pain and immeasurable misery they have gone through for a prolonged period, their emotional rootlessness and societal deprivation, their untimely loss and subsequent findings, their unopposed acceptance of fate and simultaneously gaining of maturity, and above all these, their final invention of themselves.

It may apparently seem that Mahasweta Devi's writing is influenced by Marxist ideology as her drama attempts to abolish "Das Capital" and tries to influence communism as evidenced by the naxalite ideology of Brati Chatterjee; or worshippers of feminist ideology may try to apply feminism into it through the exemplification of marginalised treatment of Sujata Chatterjee. All these notions of different critics and theorists may be true especially relating to the nature of the cited work. But personally Mahasweta Devi is never influenced by any sorts of such ideologies. It is the reality, her personal experience that she achieves through her everyday experiences that invigorates her to investigate about a whole mass of outcasts and neglected tribal who are speechless to express their boundless anguish, who are still colonized by our hybrid colonizers, and she just takes pain to put words into their feelings. Same is the case with

Riders to the Sea. Critics may here also claim the implication of feminism by opposing the patriarchal ideologies- women are weak or they are suppose to remain at home whereas male members shall only work- by exemplifying the tradition of the people of Aran Island, and thus they may propagate the ideologies of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's theorisation of material feminism that attempts to unburden the women from their "traditional" female tasks and aims to improve their material condition. But Synge's intention is never like that because *Riders to the Sea* is the outcome of his actual experience during his staying of five summers in the Aran Island. It is the culture, traditions and superstitions of that land which he wants to present as it is.

Hence, if we are able to free ourselves from the shackles of these narrow perceptions of multiple opportunistic theories then we can certainly acknowledge the universal bondage that knots all the mothers in the same thread; we can confidently realise the boundless torment and agony that all the mothers pass through after losing their child before them; we can undoubtedly wish to serve food and water to poverty stricken Somu's Mother or Maurya survived by two girl child; we can certainly share our sympathy and extend our kind hand to them in their distresses. We need not any feministic ideology to sympathise with the bereaved mother or any Marxist belief to release the oppressed discriminated by the brutal forces of the society. That time all the "binary opposition", all the "transcendental signified" shall easily be deconstructed. The long worshipping notion that east is east and west is west or the occidental works belong to the superior canon and oriental writings are produced by the wretched of the earth, and hence they can never identify with each-other, shall easily be shattered. Thus, Mauryas and Sujatas are no longer separated from each-other. They become two end of a single rope sharing the same fate by crossing the east-west fence, the oriental-occidental ideologies, the superior-inferior complexes, and ultimately become enable to consummate themselves with a more mature mind and soul, and prints an example of universal motherhood in the pages of history.

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