

The Portrayal of Alienated Mother in *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht

A. Periyasamy, M.Phil., Research Scholar (FT)

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show the reader that the importance of the woman in any society whether she is a mother, a sister, a daughter of a hard worker. She is a crucial component in any community. Mothers are everywhere in literature. Brecht tries to focus on the idea or theme of mother during his play *Mother Courage and Her Children*, that deals with a mother as a business woman and at the same time how she does lose her children because of her greed and business in a very vivid description, details, incidents and circumstances that develop throughout the courage of the play that Brecht tries to make his dramatic works as an instruments and a source of new ideas for change. Mother courage's attempt to maintain and secure financial profit leads to a tragic failure because her endeavor falls into the alienated labor.

Keywords: Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Society, business woman, alienation

Introduction

I wish to emphasize at this point the importance of accepting all form of motherhood. There isn't a perfect way to be a mother. Mothers are in unique situations: some don't have husbands; others live with female partners some are in conventional family structures. These entire situations are valid. The important thing is that a mother loves her children deeply. A mother's role is to love her children with all her heart. One of the most meaningful roles that a mother plays is the role of nurturer. This word is sometimes taken synonymously with the word "mother". When a mother nurtures her children well, love and goodness are awakened in the children's hearts.

Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* is an anti-war play that hints us that war devastates common people's lives. However, the play can be interpreted as a business play because throughout the play, the characters do business transactions in the war. Whatever the characters do, there is a business motive. Brecht uses historical material in this play as significant part in his epic theatre. He is very confident that the effect of history can create the audience more awareness of the modern world. Brecht chooses the set in the background of the thirty years war. The play mainly describes the devastation of war. It describes how a war ruins innocent people's lives and how people suffer from poverty, cruelty and power. Hence, this play is called an anti-war play because it wants to convey a message that war is inhumane. The play particularly describes the devastation of the thirty years war on innocent people. This war called

a war of religion. The war was between the protestant and Catholics. The war spread too many of the European countries and ruined people's lives ruthlessly. Especially Germans suffered a lot.

The protagonist in this play is a woman whose name is Anna Fierling, but she is generally known as Mother Courage. In the play, the first scene opens in Dalarna, a peace full province of Sweden. Mother Courage earns her livelihood by selling food items such as drinks, cigarettes, bread, belts and so on in the Protestant's camp. She is a middle-aged woman who runs a canteen on a Wagon. She has three children; two sons: Eilif and Swiss Cheese (Feyos) and one daughter, Kattrin. She pulls her wagon with her three children and sells food-items to the army soldiers and thus she is earning enough money for her livelihood.

Mother courage is a clever woman and the whole play revolves around her. The play describes how her life is ruined, how her son Eilif is killed of bravery, how A Swiss Cheese is killed of honesty and how her dumb daughter is burnt alive to death because of her kindness. Thus, the whole play portrays the events related to mother courage's life. It further portrays how courageously she tries to run her family at the wartime. She is a business woman, and everything has become a business in her life. She gains money from the war but loses her family for the same war. Thus, the again and loss has made her a complex character of the play.

Realistic and Pity Woman

Once she seems to be intelligent in commenting the war, but she seems to be a blind in saving her children's lives. She can be praised for her intelligent comments on war. She brilliantly comments on the war, its devastation, its victory and defeat. For example, once she says that the victory of a huge army is a defeat to a small group and similarly, a defeat of a huge army is a victory to a small group. The other striking characteristic is that she is realistic but not successful. She practically thinks how to run her family peacefully. So, she decides that she should earn money. Hence, she earns money by her business. She wants to exploit the entire situation for her benefit. Once, the cook has been ordered by his commander to prepare chicken. That time, there prevails famine and people are hard to get meat. So, Mother Courage increases the price.

As the heroine of the play, she receives sympathy from an audience because she loses all her three children in the war. Although she earns livelihood from the war and wants a peaceful life, she is unable to protect her children and live peacefully. She herself wants the war to continue and she does not want to involve of the war actively. Hence, the Chaplain calls her 'a hyena of the battlefield' because she wants to exploit the most from the war. Thus, Mother courage is presented as a complex character who wants a peaceful life out of the jarring voices of the war. She is a courageous woman because she wants to survive in wartime. She has wanted war for her livelihood, but war has taken her sympathy from an audience.

Mother courage says that war will give her harm and eventually it will kill the life of her children. Courage is upset and laments over the fate of her son. She foretells the fate of her children that Eilif will die for his bravery Swiss Cheese for his honesty and Kattrin for her kindness. As she predicts, all her children die one by one for their virtues.

Loss of Virtue

Eilif is the elder son of Mother Courage. He is very brave like his father. He does brave deeds and gets appreciation from his camp officer. But, Mother Courage feels that her son will excel bravely in the war field and will be killed because of his bravery. In Scene 1, as he is physically strong, He is persuaded by the recruiting officers and joins the army and ignoring his mother's advice. After joining the army, he bravely breaks into a peasant's farm and steal cattle. He gives the cattle to his officer in order to have meat and to offer it to soldiers. The officer praises his bravery and compares him to Julius Caesar. But, when the peace is announced, he does the same brave deed. He breaks into a peasant's farmhouse and steals cattle. For this, he is arrested by the Catholic soldiers and he is executed. Mother courage is not known about her son's death till end of the play. Thus, Eilif bravery has killed him.

Similarly, Mother Courage's young son Swiss is killed for his honesty. He joins the army as a paymaster. His job is to give salary and maintain the accounts. Once, when the catholic army attacks the Protestant camp, the soldiers run away. Swiss takes the cash box and hides himself and cash box in his mother's canteen. Later, the Catholic soldiers enquire about the cash box. As he is honest, he hardly says anything about the cashbox. So, he is killed for his honesty.

Likewise, Mother Courage's dumb daughter Kattrin is killed for her kindness. At the end of the play, the Catholic soldiers come to the house where Kattrin is staying. The soldiers threaten the members of the family and ask them to guide them to reach the town. The soldiers have decided to ransack the townspeople. So, Kattrin wants to save the townspeople. She climbs up to the top of the roof and starts beating drums to wake the people by sound. The soldiers become furious and set fire. Kattrin succeeds in her mission but she dies of the fire. Kattrin is a victim of the war. When she was a child a soldier put something into her mouth and that harmed her. Thereafter, she has become a dumb. So, whenever she comes across a soldier or the topics of the war, she hides herself in her canteen. She does not comment on war.

The song that Mother Courage sings at the beginning and at the end of the play is an ironic commentary on the war on religion while the "Song of the Grand Capitulation" describes life as full of broken hopes and dreams. Mother Courage sings this song to advise the young soldier not to curse the captain because his own life is more important than money. This song reveals both Mother Courage's vulnerability and capitulation. The story of the song is the story of mother courage's life who has submitted her youthful idealism and self-confidence to the need of the circumstances and compromise with the system. The song describes life as full of broken hopes and dreams.

Mother Courage is lamenting over the death of her Mother. However, she goes to her wagon and begins to pull it all alone in order to earn her livelihood. She believes that she can do it alone and sell the goods. When the noise of the soldiers pass by, courage begins to follow the soldiers and the introductory song of scene one is played now. Showing Courage's following, the play ends.

Alienation of Mother

The war makes many victims who are innocent and common people. In this play, almost all the important characters are victims of the war. Eilif dies for his brave deed in the field. Swiss

dies for his honesty. Kattrin dies for her kindness. Yvette becomes a prostitute because she is unable to find out her lover and find a job for her livelihood. He finds no other means for survival. Moreover, Mother Courage who wants to have a peaceful family loses her whole family. The war has frozen the people's emotions and sense of justice. They are forced to have mere animalistic life by which they can struggle hard only for their livelihood. There is no place for justice, freedom of speech and emotions. They have to simply witness the atrocities of war and bear all by surrendering all their sense of justice, emotions and liberty.

Business takes mother courage away from her children. In every hard situation she taken by her profit motive. Mother courage has failed to achieve her goal to get her business and her children's safety. Mother courage attempts to protect her children, but her profit motive Makes her lose them. Mother courage is very selfish to save her children during the wartime. Despite her claims to protect her children from war, she loses them from it. Mother courage actually destroys her and family.

Many Critics consider *Mother Courage and Her Children* a tragedy, from the point of view that Mother Courage fails to learn, and also the play is perhaps Mother Courage's tragedy. After all, her children trading during the war. Brecht used many alienation devices in the play; it includes songs are used to illustrate the action and are regarded as an ironic commentary on the action. He believed that theatre must make people aware of social abuse and provokes them to change of social abuse and provokes them to change the society, moral diseases and social ills. Mother Courage is shown as a politically alienated since the harder she works throughout the play to earn money, the more miserable and wretched she becomes in the end.

Brecht's Mother Courage benefits from war. Brecht explores that war is a great capitalist system: the false hope of the mother can profit like the rulers who profit from the system of war. Mother Courage represents the world of capitalism that makes use of its essential contradictions. She finds her personal profit in the destruction, misery and exploitation of others. If she had not made the mistake of haggling too long over the price of her son's release, she could have saved him and the canteen, the means of survival. The mother and the children are victims of society. Born in poor conditions lead the mother to occupy immoral professions or working with ill payments midst of living and opportunities for good living.

The lack of financial support, war and poor conditions affected the mothers and their children. Each mother bears the burden of a family alone without a father to share the responsibilities. The mother's economic requirements drag them to lead unhealthy life. Finally, the mothers face tragedies, although they strive to survive and maintain their children's living. The restless and confused life which the mothers lead had shaken the audience's senses and minds. Mother Courage always mentions, and it has proved finally that if a war gives something, it will take something in return.

Conclusion

Anna feels alienated due to her identity to understand her children and stand by their noble decision to serve in the Nations army. She is an ordinary mother who wishes to see her children comfortably settled in life. Her mind is circumscribed by the details of the mundane world. She simply does not possess the strength and sacrifice of a soldier's mother. Her

alienation in the result of her failure to fall in line with her children's dream. She had been able to her life would have been so much. Because, her alienation on intensifies when she loses her children one after one in the combat. She feels no pride in bringing such children of noble qualities. Nor close she feels pride in sacrificing at the battlefield. In the end she presents a lonely picture of an alienated mother.

Works Cited

Bentley, E. "Mother Courage and Her Children". *A chronicle of the Thirty years War*. Gover Press.1963.

Brecht, B. *Mother Courage and Her Children*. "International Journal of Business and Social Science".1980, PP.137-141.

Thomson, Peter. Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Cambridge University Press.

A. Periyasamy
M.Phil., Research Scholar (FT)
Kandaswami Kandar's College
P. Velur-Namakkal-638 182
rajperiyasamy01@gmail.com