

A WAR FOR JUST AND UNJUST CONCERNS

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The dominant mode of expression in the twentieth century is realism. It embraces all writings in which the natural world is candidly presented, particularly the Post-World War drama. It is the affiliation of democratic reformism, of the new concern with the condition of the people. The Post-World War playwrights deal with the disturbing social problems such as poverty, disharmony and war. Bertolt Brecht utilized the drama to awaken a smug and indifferent world to fulfill a sense of social responsibility. His *Mother Courage and Her Children* is one of the illustrious creation. It is at once representation of and a brilliant vindication of Brecht's criticism of Post-World War society. He gave the subtitle to this play as *A Chronicle of the Thirty years War*. From the subtitle of the play, it seems that the play has a historical background but this is not a historical play because the dramatic personae are not historical personages. The characters are all fictitious persons. The historical personages are only mentioned in the stage directions; they are referred in the course of dialogues by some of the fictitious characters.

However, the play has the historical importance and the significance of it, lies in bringing to our minds the havoc and the devastation that the Thirty Years War caused. The war is called as the Thirty Years War as it was ranged over Europe from 1618 to 1648. Mother Courage and her children and other characters of the play are representative of the common people who suffered physically and mentally in the offshoot of war. Brecht succeeded in portraying the horrifying picture of Post-World War society. Talking about the description of war Brian says_

Healthy, challenging, intensely sad. I was lost at first, wondering whether I even cared. By the end, my heart was broken and my brain-gears working overtime. Highly recommended one of the best plays I have read.¹

Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* is entirely original though he may have had in mind some literary antecedents. The name of Brecht's central figure derives from the work of the same period by Grimmelshausen called *The Life the Arch Imposter and Adventure Courage*, which also provide a horrific torture of war. This particular viewpoint seems identical with Brecht's who drew upon both the works for background and atmosphere in writing his famous play *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

The title of the play itself creates the image of a formidable woman possessing several admirable qualities. Mother Courage the central character of the play produces a mingled

impression upon the readers of the play. Brecht depicts mother with admirable qualities as well as certain weaknesses. The root cause of her suffering is in some of her faults, weaknesses and surroundings. The playwright reflects war as a continuation of human business. Christopher Michael Sperberg noticed Brecht's efforts to relate business with war:

Brecht works hard to connect business and the bourgeois with war because it is Courage's denial of that connection which destroys her.²

The story proceeds and ends with the two thoughts, the business in war and war for business. In this tale, Anna Fierling has a name as 'Mother Courage'. She is a camp follower who in her small way helps the prosecution of the Thirty Years War by providing shoes, ale and commodities for the soldiers. Mother Courage creates an appropriate protagonist while the play has two major themes. The first theme is of war and second is of motherhood. It is an anti-war play, which conveys the futility of war and at the same time, deals with the role and glory of motherhood.

Throughout the play, from beginning to the end, Brecht focused clearly on war and motherhood. When the play opens, Mother Courage is found in tension. Her tension is because of her full awareness of the dangers of war and her maternal anxiety about the safety of her sons. In the opening scene by singing a song, Mother Courage invites soldiers to buy food. Through the same song, she also warns soldiers, of the premature deaths that they are doomed to meet. She calls upon the soldiers wording metaphorically the line of her song that they are to fill the hole in their bellies before they fill the holes underground.

Mother Courage finds that, the Recruiting Officer and the Sergeant are very keen to enlist her sons in the army. She not only warns them but also threatens them by drawing her knife, against any such move. This opening scene evidently tells how the story of the play revolves around these two themes. The theme of war reflects its dangers and the theme of motherhood reflects the anxiety of a mother about the safety of her children.

The theme of the war is developed with the heroic action of Eilif and the faithful description of the cruelty of war. Eilif sings a song that develops the idea of heroism in war and a soldier's premature death. War means merciless killing because Eilif had cut down his enemies with his sword. War also brings about a shortage of food and especially of meat.

A little later, on meeting Eilif after a long time Mother Courage expresses her great joy. She also boxes Eilif's ear for having risked his life in the fighting. This action shows a mother's anxiety about the safety of her son as well as her joy at his heroic deed. Through this contradiction in Mother Courage, Brecht successfully interlinks the theme of war and motherhood placing both the themes on the test of danger and death. This contradiction is one part of the alienation technique, aiming at the closer view of life and living.

Mother Courage points out the evils of war and the corruption that prevails among the army officers. In an ironical way she says, as long as there is corruption, there will be merciful judges. Even the innocent may go free. Certainly, Mother Courage wanted her son to be honest but like a wise a mother, she warns him against being too honest to survive. Swiss Cheese sacrifices his life in order to save the cash box of his regiment from falling into hands of enemy. She endures the death of Swiss Cheese in a stoical manner.

Her deepest maternal love is expressed through her conversation with Chaplain. In the whole play, this speech is the most poignant. It reveals that Kattrin's dumbness had been caused by a soldier when she was yet a child. She says, "I'll not see Swiss Cheese again, and where my Eilif is, the Good Lord knows. Curse the war!" This speech expresses a mother's deepest love

and sense of protection for her children. Human resentment against a war is pictorially conveyed to the audience.

Mother Courage realizes the cruelty of war. She is aware of destructiveness and terrible misfortunes that have befallen in her personal life. The contradictions in Mother Courage are perceived throughout the play. Once she praises the war for feeding its people better than peace does. Immediately in the very next utterance, she shows her resentment and warns the soldiers of the premature death they would meet. She considers herself as ruined by peace.

The lament of Mother Courage provokes the Chaplain to describe her as a hyena of the battlefield. Mother Courage sings another song inviting men to join the army in order to fight and continue the war. At the same time unaware of Eilif's death, she hopes to see him. Here again the contradiction between the desire of Mother Courage for the continuation of war and her awareness of destructiveness of war is emphasized.

As the course of action proceeds to the end of the play, Mother Courage faces a painful dilemma. She for a while thinks of going with the Cook to his native town. She dreams of leading a life of leisure and ease, with him. However, the Cook is not ready to allow Mother Courage to take Kattrin with her. Therefore, she decides to forego the opportunity to settle down to a comfortable life that is offered by the Cook. Her decision, once again shows a mother's genuine love for her child. She forsakes the Cook to look after her dumb daughter. Kattrin with all her motherly love for people around desires obviously not to obstruct her mother's happiness. In Kattrin's dream of making her mother happy and Mother Courage's sacrifice of personal life in choice with her children takes the theme of motherhood and compassion to its highest manifestation.

The attitude of Mother Courage points out that, circumstances always force human beings to accept compromises in living. The continuation of war leads both Mother Courage and Kattrin undergo the hard toil of pulling the wagon. It is remarkable that neither of them complain or grumble about their hardships. Despite of all the misfortunes Mother Courage has suffered consequential to war, she could not give up her dangerous profession.

The two themes, of motherhood and anti-war compassion for humanity subsequently give rise to the third theme that is the sense of loss. In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Brecht mirrored the horror of destitution in the Post-World War world. The destitution consequential to the world war creates multiple issues for people in struggle for life. The pauperism deprived the spirit of life from common people. The central character and some of the other characters suffer from the sense of loss.

In the chaos of war, Mother Courage has to face the loss of her three children one by one. Though her live asset of her three children has been vanquished by the war but not her spirit. Perhaps it may be her miseries which made her heart as hard as stone. In Sperberg's opinion_

Brecht apparently wished to clarify the conflict between business and humanitarianism, to show how her business and the loss of her son have hardened Courage's heart, and to make Courage less likable.³

Above words of Sperberg assert that the heart of Mother Courage gets hard and hardened with increase in her miseries. Not just Mother but others too faced various and different loss as the life tosses in war field. First the Chaplain and then the Cook loses the expected love of Mother Courage and Yvetti has to suffer the loss of her virginity. The sense of loss of these characters makes their survival difficult for them. Among these characters particularly Mother

Courage and Yvetti after all their sorrowful loss and suffering, have enough spirit for their survival. Their spirit of endurance and their determination to face the coming ordeals of life are appreciative. In this play, Brecht succeeds in exalting motherhood as accomplishing its anti-war theme and the resulting sense of loss.

References

1. Brian. *Mother Courage and her Children*. Germany: Penguin Classics, 2007, p.27
2. Sperberg Christopher. *Approaching Mother Courage*. California: Stanford University, 1979, p. 22.
3. *Ibid*. 29.
4. Matt John. *Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage and her Children*. Germany: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951