RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Universal Appeals of Edmund John Millington Synge’s Tragic Play “Riders to The Sea”

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Abstract

This paper explores the universal appeal in Edmund John Millington Synge’s tragic play “Riders to the Sea”. The subject matters in this study e.g. suffering, supernaturalism, and death are the representative of the universality of literary works. The sense of universality in literature is disposed to the relationships among human spirit, hope, emotion and social beings. Literature goes beyond national boundaries, time barriers, gender disparity and even historical grounds. The story Riders to the Sea is centered on the protagonist, an old woman, Maurya, who lost all her male family members of her family. All her male family members have drowned at sea. The sea becomes a secreted enemy never giving a chance for her to live a life of peace. The study was conducted by means of descriptive qualitative method. Synge succeeds in transforming the lifestyle of the peasants through a realistic representation into a universal worldwide appeal.

Keywords: Universal Appeal, Riders to the Sea, Suffering, Supernaturalism, Death.

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of universal appeal in literary works is a truth on the basis that the system of a literary work is a demonstration of the world of life. Literary works bring the book lover to the phenomenon of society over the world of life that is understood by an author as one of the edifying agents.

Edmund John Millington Synge (April 16, 1871 – March 24, 1909) was an Irish playwright, poet, prose writer, travel writer, collector of folklore and so on. He was a key figure in the Irish Literary Revival and was one of the co-founders of the Abbey Theatre.

Riders to the Sea, one-act play by John Millington Synge, published in 1903 and produced in 1904. (1) “Riders to the Sea” is set in the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland and is based on a tale Synge heard there.

Edmund John Millington Synge celebrates the life of the individuals, especially those Irish peasants. “Riders to the Sea” deals with the lives and manners

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Md. Waliullah
of a cross-section of humanity. The power of the sea is the central theme of the text. The sea stands for the main source and the life for the Islanders, but meanwhile the same kind sea turns out to be destroyer and life taking agent. The sea is the natural force which can be violent and fierce at times. It has taken many lives of the islanders, including all the male members of Maurya’s family and is poised to take the rest of them as well. Gazalba (1984) (2) states that death is definite and everyone can accept it. Thus making death is a universal affair.

The subject matters in this study e.g. suffering, supernaturalism, and death are the representative of the universality of literary works. Suffering is something universal that means suffering can be found in every community as well as individual. Cassel, Chapman, and Volinn in Anderson (2013) (3), define suffering as perceived threat or damage to a sense of self. Riders to the Sea deals with the sufferings of a common human being named Maurya who represents the head of an Irish peasant-cum fisherman family.

The “supernatural” is defined as “all that is not natural, that which is regarded as extraordinary, not of the ordinary world, mysterious or unexplainable in ordinary terms” (Norbeck in [10]). (4) Riders to the Sea by Synge contains various supernatural elements exposed in the daily life of Aran people. Some of the most significant supernatural phenomena in the play are the mystery of Michael’s death, Maurya’s ability as a protagonist to see things related to the supernatural. In this play Riders to the Sea, at first Maurya represents the Aran Islander mother who believes in superstition. Then, being left by all the male members of her family, she accepts the truth of their life and their fate and by this surrendering to the fate she becomes a universal mother from only Bartley’s mother. She says –

“May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley’s soul, and on Michael’s soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn, and May He has mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.”

Again,

“What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied”

However, there are many references to local beliefs and legends rotating around the supernatural. As a final indication, Maurya sees a vision in which she sees the spirit of Michael riding behind Bartley while he is about to go to the sea. Supernatural nuances can also be seen from the following quotations.

MAURYA: (speaking very slowly) I’ve seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen, since, the day Bride Dara seen dead man with the child in his arms...

MAURYA: I went down to the spring-well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the red mare with the gray pony behind him. (She puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes.) The Son of God spare us, Nora!

MAURYA: I seen Michael himself... and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

In Riders to the Sea death becomes a significant occurrence. Maurya during her life is always associated with death. Beginning with the Maurya’s audacity and the cause of death is sea, a frightening enemy that always gives dark shades to her, until finally she no longer has male family members.

MAURYA: 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.

2 | RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore the universality in “Riders to the Sea”
- To analyze the meaning of life of the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland.
- To define the responsibility of the male members in “Riders to the Sea”
- To know how the female characters are treated and suppressed in Riders to the sea.
THE UNIVERSAL APPEALS OF EDMUND JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE’S TRAGIC PLAY “RIDERS TO THE SEA”

3 | RESEARCH QUESTIONS

· What is the universality of the play Riders to the Sea?
· How the sea is both a curse and a blessing to the family?
· Does Maurya, the protagonist, submit herself to fate?

4 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper focuses on the universality of literary works in “Riders to the Sea”. The nature of the research is qualitative approach as for as descriptive method is used for analysis. “Riders to the Sea” is the text which is taken as a sample to make clear the universality of literary works in the mentioned play.

5 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Ashcroft in Waseem (2013) (5) states that universalism offers a hegemonic view of existence by which the experiences, values and expectations of a dominant culture are held to be true for all humanity and this could be traced to all literary works.

Sumardjo & Saini (1997) (6) states that literature is a personal expression of man in the form of experience, thought, feeling, idea, spirit, belief in a form of concrete images that evoke charm with the language tool. This is reinforced by the opinion of Saryono (2009: 18) (7) that literature also has the ability to record all experiences of natural-empirical and non-empirical-supernatural experiences, in other words literature can be a witness and commentary of human life.

Schopenhauer Chakraberty(2013) (8) states that every man being no matter what he is can absolute never do anything else just what at that moment he does do. Accordingly, the whole course of man’s life, in all its incidents great and small, is necessarily predetermined as the course of a clock.

6 | FINDINGS

The play “Riders to the Sea” by Synge has a universal appeal. The result showed that the subject matters in this study e.g. suffering, supernaturalism, and death are the representative of the universality of literary works. The external layer of the play tells about the local problems faced by a group of people and is specifically faced by any/individuals; but Synge with his ability to delineate the situation, can represent the local crisis into impressive universal to all people on a large scale in the literary world. (9) The tragedy in the play Riders to the Sea is not just that of a woman belonging to one of the Aran Island but is a human tragedy which has a universal appeal. (10) In this respect Riders to the Sea is the ancient classical tragedies in which fate is the principal opponent of human beings. Considering the above discussion, it is clear that though Riders to the Sea is a modern play; it possesses the classical ideals and becomes a universal one. (11)

7 | CONCLUSION

Edmund John Millington Synge is well known for his treatment of Irish myths and folktales within a realistic background. “Riders to the Sea” is one of the best works of literature which is popular for its universality. It is noted that the elements of universality always arise from literary works. John Millington Synge is giving attention to the aspects of Aran Island people’s lifestyle which in a broader sight becomes a universal appeal. From the beginning of the story to the end, it is very clear that Maurya is a very distressed person. She has to endure mental and physical suffering of all the problems around her. No doubt Riders to the Sea focuses on suffering, supernaturalism, and death as the representative of universality in any literary work. “The Sea is portrayed as being both the source of livelihood as well as source of destruction. In this play, the sea is an insatiable tyrant that takes the lives of all the male members of Maurya’s family. The sea is nothing but a symbol of fate.” Tony Sam (2018). (12) Thus it is remarked that the work of literature of Riders to the Sea is universal and the
elements of universality appear in a literary work to give shade of reflection and beliefs for the learners.

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