



Humanitarian issues in J.M. Synge's plays

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Abstract

As a humanitarian author his works deals with the manners of a cross section of the society, While, his plays are concerned with the local matters. He presents the matter with universal interest in other words Synge's like many great writers such as Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, universalize the experiences of a particular individual, of a group of individual. Synge focuses our attention up on that aspect of life that absorbs the interest of humanity in general. His plays have a timeless appeal because its content draws attentions to something that is essentially human. The relevance of his plays lies in its intensity of appeal and its sense of contemporaneity. The issues which discussed for the welfare of people is known as humanitarian issues like social economical add cultural etc. There are a number of meanings for the term humanitarian. Here humanitarian pertains to the practice of saving lives and alleviating suffering. Humanitarianism is a moral of kindness, benevolence, and sympathy extended to all human beings. Humanitarianism has been an evolving concept historically, but universality is a common theme in its evolution. No distinction is to be made on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race, caste, age, religion, ability, or nationality.

Keywords: human dignity, cultural identity, Irish peasantry, Gaelic culture, Irish freedom, slavery, begging, Irish myths

1. Introduction

Humanitarian education teaches various social topics from a humanitarian perspective. A desire to reduce suffering, save lives and maintain human dignity is central to understanding humanitarian education. It is based on the assumption that people have an innate desire to help others, so is centrally concerned with our shared humanity. Humanitarian education is an area of learning that concentrates on the desire or impulse to save lives, protect human dignity and reduce suffering. It particularly relates to offering assistance to others in an emergency or crisis and is also used to refer to the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for individuals and communities to help themselves. The goal of humanitarian education is that communities increase their resilience and those individuals and groups are more confident, able and willing to help themselves and others when faced with a crisis. By exploring crisis situations humanitarian education enables students to recognize that people can overcome adversity. It develops their understanding of humanitarian issues, the skills that build resilience and encourages them to intervene to support others in crisis. The way in which educators explore with students any topic, issue or event must be within the framework of the principles of humanity and impartiality. It does not directly address causes and explicitly avoids exploring political, religious, social class, nationality.

Synge portrays different aspects of the Irish cultural identity through dramatizing the perils and sufferings, traditions and rituals of the Irish people. In doing so, he plays a major role in the preservation of the Irish identity that is almost disappearing. The research attempts to study Synge's portrayal of the Irish identity in his works *Riders to the Sea*, *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Tinker's Wedding*. These are real representatives of the Irish peasants' lifestyle as they are based upon incidents and

stories that Synge either witnesses or hears from the Irish peasants themselves.

Sympathizing with the Irish Nationalists cause and agreeing with the Movement of the Irish Literary Revival, the Anglo-Irish dramatist, John Millington Synge does not adopt the very methods of Lady Augusta Gregory and William Butler Yeats, the founders of the Revival movement, in portraying the Irish identity. Yeats has planned to support the "cultural unity of his nation" through "dramatizing Irish myths and legends and by their performance awakening heroic passions dormant to the racial memory.

Synge draws material for his plays from the life of the peasants in the Aran Islands and eastern Ireland. His works immortalize a lifestyle of a disappearing Gaelic culture. He depicts, with an eye of the honest observer, their suffering, perils and traditions. As an artist he believes "every life is a symphony, and the translation of this life into music, and from music back to literature ... is the real effort of the artist" He does translate the hard primitive peasantry Irish life into literature. He "brings to the audience's mind the glory of the Irish peasantry, their hopes, dreams, despairs and joys by means of the language of their daily lives" He has lived with the peasants, observed their way of lives, attended their funerals, listened to their patterns of speech and learnt about their mannerism. Out of these careful observations, he has collected facts, events and stories as models for his plays. Living with the peasants, Synge observes the dominating and powerful effect of nature and environment on their lives and realizes their guiding influences on their destinies.

Synge's realism is shaped by the presentation of "a fragment of life" and his greatness is derived from his portrayal of "common interests of life" His justification for dramatizing the "vices" and "wilderness" of Irish peasantry and which has displeased many Irish nationalists is written in *The Aran*

Islands: "All art that is not conceived by a soul in harmony with some mood of the earth is without value, and unless we are able to produce a myth more beautiful than nature ... it is better to be silent" Synge's drama is rich with various "moods of the earth". He neither glorifies nor scorns the Irish peasant. But he is honest in dramatizing this community that was, like an outcast, isolated from the outside world. By doing this, he preserves a way of life that was almost disappearing.

John M. Synge was the most brilliant discoveries of the Irish Literary Renaissance. The plays of Irish peasant life on which his fame rests were written in the last six years of his life. The first two one-act plays, *In the Shadow of the Glen* a comedy, and *Riders to the Sea* finest tragedies ever written, were produced by the Irish National Theater Society. This group, with Synge, Yeats and Lady Gregory as co-directors, organized in 1904 the famous Abbey Theater. Two comedies, *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy of the Western World* were presented by the Abbey players. The latter play created uproar of resentment among Irish patriots stung by Synge's bitter humour. Synge's later included *The Tinker's Wedding*, published in 1908 but not produced for fear of further riots, and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, a tragedy unfinished at the time of his death. The play is based on Irish mythology, in particular the myths concerning Deirdre and Conchubor. But was completed by William Butler Yeats and Synge's fiancée, Molly Allgood", which is often considered his best literary work. Although he came from an Anglo-Irish background, his writings are mainly concerned with the world of the Roman Catholic peasants of rural Ireland.

Present study is done on the literature of Ireland which is well-known for the works of great authors like Yeats, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. The author taken up for this particular study is J.M. Synge. His greatness lies in the fact that he has brought about the essence of Ireland and its people in all his works. One of the aims of the study is to focus on the unique Irish ness found in Synge's works. It is very difficult to understand Irish ness. How do we understand Irish ness? When it has so often been written by others, including the English who ruled part of the Irish Ireland for a century? What does it mean to be Irish? The English ruled part of Ireland for a century and so the Irish people faced the problems of language, national identity and representation. Ireland is separated from England by the sea; the two islands are connected by a linguistic umbilical cord, the English language. Linguistic dilemma is faced by every writer and the claim to authentic representation of Ireland largely depended upon an extensive use of Irish speech.

Living with the peasants the Anglo-Irish dramatist, John Millington Synge portrays different aspects of the Irish cultural identity through dramatizing the perils and sufferings, traditions and rituals of the Irish people. In doing so, he plays a major role to sustain the Irish identity that is almost vanishing. The research attempts to study Synge's portrayal of the Irish identity. He emphasizes a link between the imagination of the Irish country people and their speech itself, which is "rich and living." He credits the Irish people for having such a "fiery", "magnificent language", and further credits himself for having both the presence of mind and poetic vision to recognize those virtues.

Synge's plays helped set the Abbey house style for the following four decades. The stylized realism of his writing was reflected in the training given at the theater's school of

acting, and plays of peasant life were the main staple of the repertoire until the end of the 1950s. Sean O'Casey, the next major dramatist to write for the Abbey, knew Synge's work well and attempted to do for the Dublin working classes what his predecessor had done for the rural poor.

His first account of life on the islands published in the *New Ireland Review* in 1898 and his book-length journal, *The Aran Islands*, was completed in 1901 and published in 1907 with illustrations by Jack Yeats. This book is a slow-paced reflection of life on the islands and reflects Synge's belief that beneath the Catholicism of the islanders it was possible to detect a substratum of the older pagan beliefs of their ancestors. His experiences on Aran were to form the basis for many of the plays of Irish peasant and fishing community life that Synge went on to write.

In their sharp and comprehensive recreation of the life of the peasantry, in their finely etched description, and in the dialogue recorded they illustrate that ability to convey the quality of concrete impression which is one of the most important elements in Synge's dramatic equipment. He loved chiefly what was wild and primitive in Irish life, and he had little interest in the modern age of industrialism, believing that it was robbing life of those climactic moments of surging passion and bitter contest which his dramatic instinct led him to value alone. He was in no sense a philosopher; his art offers no solution to the problem of life, and his only comment lies in the merciless irony with which all of his plays, with the exception of „*Riders to the Sea*“ and „*Deirdre of the Sorrows*,“ are pregnant.

Synge was interested in the life of the common peoples, only in so far as that life represented a survival of the life of the ancient Gael. He had no desire to embody a social content in his art; his business was with folk-lore and folk-history, and especially with folk-tradition in its most primitive forms. He clearly asserted that he did not wish his work to be understood as a comment upon, or criticism of, modern Irish life. It was this interest in the ancient Gael, combined with a lively sense of the value of peasant's idiom as a medium for artistic expression, which led him to write in a prose which can best be described as a literal translation of Gaelic into English. Earlier experiments with this form had been made by Douglas Hyde in his translations of the songs of Connacht, and by Lady Gregory in "Cuchulainn of Muirthemne", and to the work of Hyde in particular Synge was greatly indebted. He labored incessantly at the vehicle of his expression, adding, as he learned, to its exuberance, to its fantasy, to its poetry, and finally he achieved that perfect harmony of form and content which is the index of true and noble art. It is one of these curious coincidences in literary history that when he felt he had sufficiently prepared himself to deal with the material for which he cared most deeply, the prehistoric legend of Ireland, he began a play in which the most poignant tragedy is that of love and youth and power interrupted by death, and that death itself interrupted him at his task. He conceived his tale of Deirdre in his wonted naturalistic vein, and wrote it out in folk-dialect, bringing the legend out of the land of mystic vision to which it had been relegated by Yeats and by A. E., into the realm of reality and common experience.

Synge became a stable signifier for classic Irish Revivalism early on and did not live long enough to challenge attempts to cast him in that role. His innovative use of dialect informed by the rhythms of Irish language syntax and his vivid renderings of rural customs and landscapes,

particularly in the west of Ireland, were easily co-opted to the nation building agendas of the new Irish State. Because of Synge's willingness to go "into the cabins of the poor", ardent nationalist critics such as Daniel Corkery could forgive his Anglo-Irish roots and enlist him to the cultural programme of independent Ireland.

2. Conclusion

Thus, J.M. Synge is one greatest humanitarian playwright, whose work captures the contemporary life of Ireland. Synge make significant contribution to the development of modern Ireland (Irish people), representing the contemporary ethos of Ireland. No other playwright had the power of observation or recorded the life of the peasantry, and national customs with much delight and objectivity. Synge fascination with the objective details of life of the peasants in the Aran Ireland shapes the direction of his plays. No doubt that Synge highlight the humanitarian thematic issues in his work, the issues are the social, cultural, religious etc. for the Irish peasantry. His dramatic work is the outstanding characteristic of it are the language, the characterization, human sympathy and understanding depicted in his plays and the expression of his own philosophy of life. His play shows the mentality of the Irish peoples of his time and his plays washed their minds, and develop the instinct for their national, cultural, religious identity.

Finally John Millington Synge was a revolutionary playwright during a transformative period in Irish history. His gift, however, was not that of uniting people in a common cause. Synge's genius was provocative, disturbing, and challenging. As W. B. Yeats put it so vividly: "He loves all that has edge, all that is salt in the mouth, all that is rough to the hand, all that heightens the emotions by contest." Despite this, or rather because of it, Synge can lay claim to be the true laureate of the Irish cultural revival. Like all who truly express themselves, he expressed his country, he expressed mankind; but being a certain type of Irishman, and a certain type of man, he expressed Ireland and mankind only as he saw them, or saw himself in them. His plays are Ireland; they are mankind."

3. References

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