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Class Classification in Arnold Wesker's Roots

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Abstract:

Arnold Wesker, an English playwright, a writer of international reputation, was born in Stephney (London) on 24 May, 1932. He is the author of about forty-two plays mainly for the stage, four books of short stories, two collections of essays, a book for young people, three more of non-fiction and an autobiography. His works depict various themes, ideas, an obvious expression of deep sympathy, dreams, hopes and the humanism. Wesker is a dramatist with distinct social leanings. *Roots* is the second play of Wesker Triology which begins with *Chicken soup with Barley* and ends with *I'm talking about Jerusalem*. *Roots* is considered as kitchen-sink drama as this drama revolved, both physically and psychologically, around the kitchen sink. It is a play of relationships; husband-wife relationship, mother-daughter relationship, siblings's relationship, man-woman relationship and master - servant relationship. *Roots* bring in light the problems of working class in the 20th century. Wesker brings out apathy of working class, dullness, stubbornness, drabness and cultural decadence. He stressed on importance of education because education is the only tool which will make them fully humane in this materialistic society. Through *Roots* Wesker urges working class to fight against existing social system by becoming educated and taking part in discussions to improve their condition. The play is a powerful attack on pop culture which has deadened the intellectuality of working class. He focussed on evolutionary measures not on revolutionary. Wesker believes that art, culture and education can bring huge change in condition of working class.

Keywords: Materialism, Intellectuality, Cultural Decadence

Roots is the second play of Wesker Triology in which the differences between two classes are depicted one working class i.e. kitchen employees who are exposed to urbanized capitalist world and second the rural people of Norfolk who are farm laborers. The play is a story of a forthright of Beatie Bryant's life, Beatie Bryant, "an ample, blonde, healthy-faced young woman of twenty-two years" (Wesker P.13). The conflicts between the two generations i.e. parents and children are well depicted through *Roots*. In this play Wesker tried to explore and expose the emotions in human relationships in the post-war Britain. Wesker has made an attempt to study the role of communication in a family, community and in the context of culture.

The un intellectual rural environment is the main cause of rootlessness, selfishness and lack of communication. They remain indulged in random observation and lazy gossips even they were incapable of exchanging ideas. Even the elderly Bryant couple's relationship was not harmonious. Wesker find out the cause behind this disharmony is lack of money. Money plays great role in keeping a relationship harmonious even husband-wife's relationship is not an exception. There was lack of communication between Mr. and Mrs. Bryant. They have accepted silence to avoid conflict between them and for smooth functioning of house work. As the playwright states:

This is a silence that needs organizing. Throughout the play there is no Sign of intense living from any of the characters... They continue in a routine rural manner. The day comes, one sleeps at night, there is always the winter, the spring, the autumn and the summer- little amazes them. They talk in fits and starts mainly as a sort of gossip, and they talk quickly too, enacting as though for an audience what they say. Their sense of humor is keen and dry. They show no affection for each other - though this does not mean they would not be upset, were one of them to die. The silences are important – as important as the way they speak if we are to know them (Wesker, P.18).

The elderly Bryant couple used to quarrel with each other. Mrs. Bryant was materialistic. She fails to understand anything other than the material requirements. The harmony was lacking in their marital relationship. Mrs. Bryant even abuses her husband and calls him “Bloody old miser” (Wesker,P.47). She even threatens her husband that she will walk out to disown him. Their relationship was so ruined that they use their daughter Beatie as an intermediary between them when they have a row. Mr. Bryant’s regular Job comes in danger when even after eighteen years of service he was put on casual job by his employers. He’ll be given “half pay” (P.61)

Mrs. Bryant accuses him inhumanly instead of sympathizing her husband in this tough situation. Poverty has made Mrs. Bryant emotionally unstable and dead. The condition become more tragic for Mr. Bryant because he accepts everything quietly, he was unaware about the actions which he can take to alter the situation. Beatie asks her father to fight against the sacking he says, “you just can’t do nothing”.....(P.46).

The apathetic attitude of the working class i.e laborers is responsible for the inhuman treatment which they receive. Lack of money spoils relationship, it is again demonstrated when Beatie wants to bake a cake for her sister, Jenny, But Mr. Bryant objects to the making of a cake on the ground that it will inflate his electricity bill. Beatie is about to weep at this mean and rude behavior of her father. Mrs. Bryant has been portrayed as a representative of the women in the rural area, each confined to her cottage leading an isolated and neglected life which affects the nature and behavior of these women, making them furious and indulge themselves in gossips.

This lack of communication and love is not only in elder couples but it is also depicted through young loveless married couple: Jenny and Jimmy also. Though Jimmy is not a farm labourer. He is a garage mechanic. But the situation with this couple was also no different. Though in this case Jenny is little different from Mrs Bryant ; she reveals a deep affection for her husband.

When Beatie had been to London, she falls in love with a young , intellectual man Ronnie Khan. He is a man with a variety of interests. Although he is not academically intelligent man but he is concerned with painting, reading, music, politics, art and culture and all other hobbies of intellectuals. Ronnie and Beatie belong to different classes. Both have different attitudes and approach towards life. Ronnie is a working class intellectual who works in a hotel. Beatie loves Ronnie deeply. Like other rural people she also wastes her quality time in reading comics; it’s fun for them. Beatie tells Jimmy that when she told Ronnie that reading comics is a fun. ‘Fun?’ he say, ‘fun?’ Playing an instrument is fun, painting is fun, reading a book is fun, talking with friend is fun – but a comic? A comic? for a young woman of twenty two?’(P.15).Ronnie wants to change Beatie’s attitude towards life. He wants to see her as an intellectual girl. He advised her to utilize her valuable time in reading good literature, to learn and listen good quality music, should take interest in politics and invest her time in art and culture which were Ronnie’s own interest being an urban class person. Ronnie like any other urban person like Cleanliness. He likes everything in a proper manner. Beatie learns the importance of cleanliness from Ronnie. Beatie pretends to

understand Ronnie's ideas about life though she didn't tried to understand them; her only aim was to get married with Ronnie, not to change her own attitude or interests in which she was deeply entangled. She thought if she got married Ronnie after marriage everything will be all right she asserts: It'll be all right once we're married. Once we're married and I got babies, I won't need to be interested in half the things I got to be interested in now"(Wesker,P.22). This becomes the main cause for their breakup. She led a fake life just to impress Ronnie. She was unable to bring those positive changes in her personality which Ronnie taught her being an intellectual. Though Beatie pretends to be eager to learn but at the same time she gets annoyed at being taught those things which are not her cup of tea. Beatie confesses to her sister, Jenny: So I pretended I was interested- but I didn't understand much. All the time he's trying to teach me, but I can't take it Jenny. And yet, at the same time, I want to show I'm willing. I'm not used to learning.Learning was at school and that's finished with (Wesker,P.21).

She feels anxious about her relationship with Ronnie. Ronnie has introduced her to a new world, she struggled hard to remain in tune with this new world which Ronnie has introduced to her. But she was not born and brought up in that culture. Her rural background and fake attitude which she only uses to impress Ronnie comes in between their relationship. The only similarity between Ronnie and Beatie is that both belong to the working class. Three years she tried to make her match up with Ronnie but she found herself unable to completely convert herself according to his way of life. She parted between two worlds of Ronnie and her family. Ronnie also seems to be pseudo intellectual he keep forcing Beatie to develop the interests of intellectuals but in his brake-up letter to Beatie he confesses that his ideas to become her personality traits seems to be impossible to get implemented. He starts doubting his own potential for achieving: "It wouldn't really work would it? My ideas about handing on a new kind of life are quite useless and romantic if I'm really honest." (Wesker,P.68). He tells her he devoted all his energies to make Beatie an intellectual but he remained fail. He has lost faith in his own ideals: "If I were a healthy human being it might have been all right but most of us intellectuals are pretty sick and neurotic-as you have often observed-and we couldn't build a world even if were given the reins of government-not yet any rate .I don't blame you for being stubborn, I don't blame you for ignoring every suggestion I ever made – I only blame myself for encouraging you to believe we could make a go of it....." (Wesker,P.68).

The conflict between both is conflict of two classes; rural and urban. Beatie was losing her own individuality; she was indulging herself in a fake personality in order to impress Ronnie. An illiterate person easily get indulged in pop culture as it does not require any understanding, meditation, or concentration similarly reading comics is not a type of reading as it doesn't provide any knowledge. Reading literature requires knowledge and vocabulary which in not a cup of tea of those rural people. Family is the first school for a child, it's a place where a child is born nurtured, taught, socialized, matured and moved to start a life of its own. A person's social relationship, his communication and capability of co-existence, art of cleanliness and orderliness, his approach to life all belongs with the environment which he received in his growing phase in his family. Working class people's approach to life is just casual and selfish. It is of indifference and helplessness which affects their interpersonal relationships in a family. The play successfully points out lack of communication among working class people due to their inability to express themselves. Their rigidity, stubbornness on their part is the main cause for their apathetic condition. In this play, Wesker clearly brings out the fact that if the working class people have strong roots planted in the soil of education and manure with art , culture and literature then only they will be able to communicate and articulate themselves and will lead harmonious relationships.

Works Cited:

Wesker, Arnold. *Roots*. Chandigarh: Arun Publishing House, 2004