

Excavating Eco-feminist Paradox in Synge's *Riders to the Sea*

Chintamani Mainali Sharma

Research Scholar, T U, Nepal

ORCID: <https://0009-0001-6342-8472>

Abstract

*This paper excavates John Millington Synge's a seminal work (one-act play), **Riders to the Seas** to examine how human life is extremely controlled by natural entities viz. seas, storms and tides. Deploying a theoretical tenet of environmental determinism (in general) and applying a conceptual framework of eco-feminism (in particular) it scrutinizes how the destructive forces of nature make human survival a tough nut to crack. Furthermore, it looks for the contrasting characteristics between nature and male members of a family. The paper examines nature and female figures as strong and influencing agents, to cause to extinct the male figures in the family, disregarding conventional ecofeminist scrutiny. Adverse weather conditions and women are characterized as stronger agents to gear up weak patriarchy. Being a tragic figure and the protagonist of the play, elderly Maurya suffers the loss painstakingly. However, her stoic endurance against the misfortunes brought about by the death of her husband and sons makes her psychologically stronger. She remains constant in consoling herself, No men at all can be living forever(14). As a finding, the text undertones destructive forces of nature against innocent male characters of the play can invite a threat to entire existence of humanity. Therefore, understanding and tolerance with the intimidating forces of nature can avoid downfall of patriarchy to make human existence sustaining.*

Keywords: Eco-Feminism, Environmental Determinism, Paradox, Patriarchy

INTRODUCTION

John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Seas* (1904) is widely acknowledged as an influential one-act play of modern times. Its setting takes place on an island called Aran, off the coast of Ireland. The play is an undaunted elegy for the entire community, settled on the remote landscape of the Island. It displays pathetic condition of human life in the natural landscape of the island. Natural forces (Storms, waves and adverse weather conditions) exclusively pick off the male members of the community. Unlike, the well-established theory of ecofeminism Synge's play portrays nature as a supernatural masculine elegy, since its forces do not only shape the life of common people but also set up the socio-cultural beliefs of the islanders. Moreover, the natural forces take off the life of all male members of an old Maurya's family, mercilessly. While comparing male characters with the female Synge's play depicts that male characters are psychologically and spiritually inferior to female characters, particularly Maurya.

Throughout his harrowing narrative Synge constructs nature as a prime force of antagonism that determines and dictates the destiny of human life i.e., their existence is perpetually based on at

the mercy of such natural agents. These dominating agents of natural entities take only the lives of male-members in the play. Whereas, the female characters, demonstrate enough strength to metabolize their pain and they represent higher sensitivity to read nature. Therefore, Synge's narrative delves in a profound theme of a systematic annihilation of all the men characters by the hostile agents of natural world.

The principle of "Environmental Determinism" is also known as environmentalism, or determinism. Rohit Manglik refers this philosophical concept as: "everything in human life is caused inevitably by the natural environment." (33) and he further, stresses that environmental influences treat human beings as they are "subordinate to the environment" (33). With the same token, in his text Philip L. Wagner puts up it as: "One of the implied premises of traditional environmental determinism holds that environmental conditions presiding over human destiny or characters are those conditions that are man-made. Nature dominates mankind" (57). Wagner considers, in traditional trends of environmental determinism nature controls human beings and their activities.

Likewise, *Dictionary of Geography*, edited by Audrey N. Clerk illustrates Environmental determinism/determinism as: "[T]he belief that the environment (particularly its physical factors) dominates, even determines the pattern of human life and human behavior that people are largely controlled by environmental factors" (112). According to him the physical factors of environment dominates and determines the patterns of human life and behaviors. Environmental aspects and their influences on human beings are studied in Physical Geography. Therefore, Physical Geography keeps accountabilities of natural influences on human activities.

In similar fashion, in his "The Paradox in Environmental Determinism and Possibilism: A Literature Review." K. Fekadu states environmentalists' argument as: "[N]othing is free of the influence of environment" (133). Natural environments influence all, and every nooks and corners of biotic and abiotic components of the earth. So, human beings instinctively cannot be separated from natural environments. He further asserts this, "[P]eoples and their environments are inseparable" in fact, "the character of people is seen in the light of the physical environment they inhabit"(qtd. in Fekadu 133). Therefore, the physical environment where the people reside shapes attitudinal characteristics in people.

On contrary to this argument, considerable numbers of environmentalists commonly argue that physical environment does not only influence human beings and their physical activities but also human activities influence nature considerably. According to them there is a reciprocal relationship between human beings and natural environments. Human beings and nature are always in dialectal stance, in collusion courses. Moreover, human beings manipulate natural environments in accordance with their needs. This concept is studied under the theory of possibilism. However, Fekadu considers, "the idea of environmentalist is dominant and widely accepted than that of possibilist" (133). Thus, physical factors of natural environments are crucial and dominating agents in human livelihood activities.

Whereas, the theoretical tenet of ecofeminism stands against the well acknowledged concept of environmental determinism. The theory of ecofeminism is a sub-set of ecocriticism or eco-literary criticism. A considerable numbers of ecofeminists regard nature and women are weak

and remain under the severe domination of masculine forces. According to them the denigration of nature and domination of women are highly patriarchal. Interconnecting the issues of women and deteriorating condition of natural ecology a prominent critic of ecofeminism Karen J. Warren regards the issues of nature and women are common. He elucidates, "According to ecofeminists, nature is a feminist issue" (4). Warren assimilates nature with women as their issues are similar. Likewise, in his article, "An Overview of Ecofeminism: Women, Nature and Hierarchies." Yıldız Merve Öztürk advocates this concept in as: "Ecofeminism is a political, philosophical and social movement, and according to this movement, women and nature are exploited by the male-dominant system. Thus, this critical theory claims that environmental problems and women's issues are interrelated. That is, as the patriarchal order continues to exploit nature, discrimination against women will also endure" (3). Öztürk considers ecofeminism is a socio-political and philosophical movement against the system of male domination, in the contemporary society over the exploitation of nature and women. His extract further infers, women and nature are weak figures and they are prone to exploitation. Consequently, he confers that the domination of nature goes in tandem with the domination of women.

Within this context, ecofeminists regard the ecological problems and issues related to women are analogous, rather intricately interconnected. The patriarchal order of the society keeps exploiting nature and discriminating women. However, in Synge's play dominating forces of nature are responsible for causing death of male members of Maurya's family. Along with these, all-female characters seem stronger to bare the fatal tragedy caused by natural agents, and they are equally farsighted to sense the catastrophes of the nature in comparison to their male counterparts. In this regard this study concentrates only on how natural forces possess supernatural energy to control the entire process of livelihood, depicted in the text.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human-nature relation is intertwined in a complex way with each other, moreover it has been influencing each other since time-immemorial. Barry Commoner's first law of ecology considers all the entities of natural environment are interconnected. It states, "Everything is connected to everything else" (qtd. in Glotfelty xix). In fact, they are in the course of collision since natural forces of physical environment influence various aspects of human beings, and vice versa. In their research Judkins et al. emphasize complex interactions between natural environment and human society. Judkins and his colleagues recapitulate this intricacy as:

Decades of research have demonstrated that human–environment relations are a complex of intertwining influences and limitations that resist single-factor causal correlations. The deterministic leanings attributed to each moment of human–environment research demonstrate the recent convergence of determinism across the three axes of household, society and environment. 27

This extract highlights how human activities and environmental consequences shape each other. Therefore, the finding of Judkins et al. accomplishes that the deterministic learning of environmental aspects affects human beings particularly in three sectors i.e., household, society and environment.

The concept of environmental determinism is a crucial tenet to understand human-nature relationship. This idea posits how human society, culture, and individual agency are shaped, constrained, and ultimately dictated by the physical environment. According to Rohit Manglik

environmental determinism has been remain as a prominent notion to define "man-environment relationship" (32), since the ancient time. Early philosophers namely Aristotle, Eratosthenes, and Hippocrates were deterministic that human habitability is extremely controlled by the climates that surround them. In medieval period, in his book, *The Spirit of Laws* (1748) French scholars Montesquieu has discussed, "how climatic conditions govern the degeneration and persistence of cultural traits" (32). Even in the early modern period this concept keeps flourishing, for instance Kant supported it vehemently. Therefore, the concept of environmental determinism has been ever remained at the center of not only environmental researches but also in the study of humanities and social sciences, from ancient to modern periods. Furthermore, this segment of environmental study has been found to be supported by significant numbers of geographers and even non-geographers.

Kassa Fedaku confers that environmental determinism is "thought to be incompatible with free will," due to the fact that environmentalists believe that everything in natural landscapes, including all kinds of human activities are predestined. He discovers that this concept was given by an American geographer Harlan H. Barrows (1977-1960), by reversing the customary form of "human ecology" to account "man's adjustments to natural environment" (133). He further reveals the fact that Andrew et al. consider climate and its influence on "the psychological mind-set of individual" are the aspects of the study of physical geography. They (Andrew et al.) include "Ellen Churchill Semple, Ellsworth Huntington, Thomas Griffith Taylor, and possibly Jared Diamond or Philip M. Parker " (qtd. in Fedaku 133) as the key proponents of this concept.

Environment is a broad term since it consists natural elements, ecosystems, biotic and abiotic components and so on. Extending the horizon of the term 'environment' Judkins et al. regard environment as: "the elements that compose the physical or conceived aspects of nature, along with their groupings in landscapes and ecosystems, with special reference to that which is considered the 'non-human'" (19). According to Judkins et al. environment assimilates all kinds of physical aspects of nature, natural landscapes, and ecosystem that offers special reference to non-human beings. They further put up this as: "During different times, the environment has been attributed varying degrees of determinism" (19). Correspondingly, Philip L. Wagner regards environmental determinism "revolves around the common uses of the term 'environment'" (56). He ahead asserts, "In particular, it (environmental determinism) concerns itself with factors of natural environment." (56). Therefore, the factors of natural environment are the key components of the study of environmental determinism.

Elaborating the exponential trends of the study of environmental determinism in the shifting academic paradigms Paul Coombes and Keith Barber update its accountability. In this respect their article, "Environmental Determinism in Holocene Research: Causality or Co-incidence?" credits Baron de Montesquieu for advocating the concept of environmental determinism. The article highlights how Montesquieu study has shown the connection between human cultural behaviors with their surrounding climatic condition particularly in European and Asian countries. It illustrates, "In Montesquieu's cosmology, the mores of European, Asian and 'barbarian' cultures were intimately connected to global climatic patterns; human nature was thus a construct that could be related to the environment by scientific laws" (303). This extract shows that human beings and nature are intricately intermingled with each other and closely constructed. Therefore,

climatic patterns influence human social customs, ethical values and behaviors, moreover the entire socio-cultural activities, globally.

Along with this, the study of the concept of environmental determinism gets culminated in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries by "The colonial expansion of the European powers " (303). Therefore, the colonialism emphasized the impetus of its study. In this concern, Paul Coombes and Keith Barber regard "the late nineteen an early twentieth centuries" (303) as the peak, and towering epoch for the growth of this concept in academic domain. Coombes and Barber furthermore account that the study of "Classical Environmental Determinism" has been destined to saturate in the penumbra of new scientific and technological study. Therefore, they regard, the new drive of qualification, "anti-colonialism and the backlash against Nazi-embarrassment" (303) etc. are responsible for its disgrace.

Although the classical trend of the study of environmental determinism has been overshadowed by pre-modern and early modern socio-cultural activities Arponen et al. purports that this concept is "a re-curring topic of debate in modern archaeology and related disciplines" (1). Rather, they claim ecological issues have become more prominent in the recent years, due to "the rise and dissemination of new scientific techniques in archaeology" (2) and so on. Therefore, in the contemporary era of global warming, the study of environmental determinism seems rather inevitable, through innovative dimension.

On contrary to this concept, from the perspective framework of ecofeminism male, civilized people, Whites, and overall humans are considered superior to female, nature and non-whites. Thus, men exploit and master both i.e., nature and women. Rosemary Radford Ruether, an ecofeminist theologian, defines ecofeminism as: "Ecofeminism brings together these two explorations of ecology and feminism, in their full, or deep forms, and explores how male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology and in social structures" (qtd. in Howell 232). In the definition she features the interplay between women and nature, and further she explores how the domination of men over women and nature are interconnected. Therefore, ecofeminism regards exploitation of natural environment and oppression of women take place simultaneously, in the present society because of flourishing patriarchal culture, in contemporary social system.

The basic assumption of ecofeminist is, women are closely related to nature as they share some common qualities like reproduction, nurturing and so on. Yıldız Merve Öztürk states this relationship as: "In male-dominant societies women and nature have close positions to each other, and this also establishes a close relationship between them" (6). Their close connection helps them to understand each other and thus, their relation is well established. Likewise, in his article, "An Ecofeminist Philosophical Prospective" Karen J. Warren interconnects the activities of environmental destructions with ill-treatment with women and other inferior humans and non-human natural entities. He illustrates:

According to ecological feminists ("ecofeminists"), important connections exist between the treatment of women, people of colour, and the underclass on one hand and the treatment of non-human nature on the other. Ecologist feminists claim that any feminism, environmentalism, or environmental ethics which fail to take these connections seriously is grossly inadequate.

Warren's extract deduces that the existed connection between nature, women, and colored and underclass people are hardly acknowledged, and taken seriously by the contemporary feminism and environmentalism. It is essential to address the issues (of women and nature) equally. Therefore, ecofeminism underscores environmental exploitation and oppression of women and marginalized communities are undermined under the existed patriarchal hierarchal of social system.

The term 'ecofeminism' is an umbrella term to address multiple issues, related to women and nature, and beyond them as well. In his book, E. Cudworth extends the theoretical horizon of ecofeminism. He exposes this as: "Ecofeminism is not "only" about the relationship between domination of woman and of nature" (2), rather he prefers to call, it contains "multiplicities of domination". Appropriately he states, it consists, "intra-human and extra-human domination and the intricate patterns of such domination, ecofeminism could be about everything in critical, social and political theory" (2). This extract elaborates the magnitudes of domination i.e., from 'intra-human' (among themselves through patriarchy, racism, class discrimination colonialism and so on) to 'extra-human' domination (over non-human natural entities like forests, wild lives, natural resources for profit and so on). Therefore, all such multiple layers of domination, studied under the framework of socio-political theories, come under the radar of the theory of ecofeminism.

Numerous critics have analyzed Synge's *Riders to the Seas* through numerous perspectives. Ali Masud argues in the article, "Domination of Patriarchy in J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Seas*: A Feminist Reading" that the text is "a poetic play," due to the fact that it contains a rich "imaginative quality". He endeavors to analyze the play from feminist perspective and considers Maurya "as a victim of male-dominated society" (12). He regards the seas "the symbol of patriarchy who causes suffering for the naïve women like Maurya" (12). Synge's text can be analyzed through multiple perceptions.

Within the similar conceptual framework, Mohammad Jashim Uddin and Md. FerdousIqbal Chaudhary aim to show patriarchal dominance in their paper. Their finding regards Bartley, a dominated male figure who, "always intends to control his mother and sisters" (4). Their paper further illustrates, even when he goes to the mainland to sell the ponies "he instructs his mother and sisters what they should do if he is missing because of rough weather" (4). Uddin and Chaudhary underscore the dominating patriarchal roles of male members of in Synge's play. They depict Bartley as a dominating male figure to instruct his sister and mother. However, at the same time the critics show the vulnerability of Bartley in front of rough weather, as he is heading off to the jaw of death to earn a living for the family.

Whereas, Sajal Sarkar's article, "J. M. Synge's Modern Tragic Flow in *Riders to the Seas*" reads the play as an example of a "modern tragic flow" i.e., "a movement of dramatic intensity characterized by structural compassion, ritualized language, communal rather than heroic catharsis, and the anthropomorphizing of nature as primary tragic agent" (16). This extract examines collective suffering of nature and human beings in the play. Therefore, Sarkar discovers the element of personification in natural forces that shapes dramatic intensity in modern tragedy.

Herewith, various scholars have examined the play through multiple perspectives. This study has endeavored to excavate how the conventional concept of ecofeminism remains paradox in the

play. This paper does not only consider the central figure Maurya, a helpless victim however, she possesses a strong stamina of endurance against impalpable power of the seas. She is the heroine of the play. Although she is projected as a tragic figure in the play, in fact all the male members are the true victim. According to Mohammed Elis Maurya is not "living under a tribal curse. Nor is her suffering due to any weakness or flaw in her own nature. Yet her stoic endurance of the misfortune brought about by the loss of all her sons is heroic and tragic" (110). Elis statement emphasizes Maurya is a strong, assertive figure, as she directs household affairs and restricts Bartley's journey. Therefore, she is a victim as well as a female protagonist of the play.

Textual Analysis

The conventional concept of ecofeminism is based on societal patriarchal dominance over nature and women. A significant number of ecofeminists believe that patriarchal domination has degraded the nature along with oppression of female gender. Cheryll Glotfelty, a prominent postmodern eco-critic considers "ecofeminism," "a theoretical discourse whose theme is to link between the oppression of women and domination of nature" (xxiv). Similar to Glotfelty, there are considerable numbers of ecofeminist critics who regard nature and feminine gender are comparative weaker, and hence they have been constantly dominating and degrading by patriarchal hierarchy of human society. In this context this research explores to uncover the ecofeminist paradox in Synge's narrative.

Unlike classical concept of ecofeminist critics, Synge's play demonstrates a severe domination of natural forces over the residents of Aran Island, particularly over all the male members of Maurya's family. Supernatural forces (of nature) like seas, wind, waves, tides and adverse weather condition turn to a hard nut to crack, to all the patriarchal beings of her family. In the text, Cathleen, Maurya's elder daughter expresses collective female voice, "It's the life of a young man to be going on the seas" (5). She remarks over the social responsibility of male members of her family, to struggle for the needs of the family. Cathleen's statement contains double connotations i.e., for livelihood and fatality. Hence, venturing a continue economic source of livelihood has turned a hard nut to crack, for all the male members against deadly seas.

The play portrays natural entities (seas, windstorms, waves and so on) as the most potent symbols of domination. The dominance over all the male members of Maurya's family, by the agents of adverse weather condition of the seas is observed from the initial scene in the play. Nora (younger daughter) brings a bundle of clothes to clear her doubt, if it belongs to her brother (Michael). She shows the bundle to her elder sister Cathleen and informs, "The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal" (1). Cathleen identifies his clothes, "It's the same stuff" (8). Finally, they discover that Michael was the same drowned man found in Donegal. In this way the seas's dominance over the men is felt from the opening scene, through the tangible evidence of its violence.

Synge's story shows the menfolk of Maurya's family are indirectly degenerated by their female relatives. The female figures degenerate men not through their direct actions however, they highlight their contrasting resilience. In this respect, Maurya manages white boards to make coffins for her dead sons, without getting her cold feet. Looking round at the wooden boards she states, "It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there is no man in to

make the coffin, and I after giving a pig price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara" (4). In this context, she patronizes her male companions, and manages every nook and corners of household responsibilities. Therefore, Synge's matriarch Maurya, is often viewed as a symbol of enduring feminine strength against men, and in the face of a hostile, empress seas.

Male gender is considered a weaker sex in comparison to women in Synge's classical modern tragedy. According to Maurya Bartley's risk to go to the seas is his false decision, whereas for Bartley it is his compelled performance, as it is a socially assigned duty for men to bear risk for the family. He knows the seas is treacherous. Moreover, he is equally aware that the seas has been nipping out the lives of his beloved elder members. From patriarchal perspective, Bartley's journey shows his efforts to provide economic support to run the family's household smoothly. Whereas, from Maurya's standpoint it is a futile and unworthy effort. Therefore, Bartley is right to accomplish his socially assigned responsibility, to bear a risk for his family.

In contrast to the major male characters in the story the female characters disregard seas as a pathway for economic prosperity, rather they consider it as a predatory force. So, Maurya's attempts to avoid Bartley's journey indicates women are the sole supporter of a family's stability. Women play a fundamental role to support livelihood of their family. For instance, they bake bread and look after households, furthermore, they handle domestic affairs which serve as fundamental foundation of a family life. In this respect Bartley's struggle seems a fruitless jeopardy from the perspective of feminism. Thus, Bartley is not a dominating character. Rather, he is victimized by nature.

Masculine strategic plan is always a failure enterprise in Synge's narrative. Bartley's plan to go across the seas turns to dust as he meets his own tragic demise on his way. His incomplete journey to the mainland horse fair in Connemara represents the failure of male archetypal enterprises. His heart-rending departure portrays how masculine agency turns to a tragic downfall in the course collision of authoritative environmental domain. While examining the under-toned message of this context, Bartley is not considered as a heroic or robust figure. Rather, he is as one, already worn out by his own self desire. In addition to this, his physical and emotional state betrays his inherent weakness. Therefore, he seems to be victimized by his own inherent wickedness.

Synge portrays Maurya as a strong character for she is capable to bear up all kinds of physical and mental pain. She is the protagonist and also the tragic figure of the play. Her stoic endurance of the misfortunes caused by the heart-rending demise of all her male members is tragic, as well as heroic. She is evolved stronger by the constant death of her male family members, who died untimely. Being an old mother, she goes through a wretched situation. Once, she had a big and happy family. She had "a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons" (10). However, they all have been killed by natural agents, unexpectedly. Now she has only two daughters (Nora and Cathleen) to take care of her, and to mourn with.

Nature is always remained as a decisive dominating power. Realizing the ultimate reality of nature, finally Maurya kneels down and tries to consoles herself, "What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied" (14). Consequently, Maurya realizes nature cannot be beaten hollow, human struggle against natural forces is a futile attempt. Therefore, Synge's chronicle does not only portray the male characters as victims of hostile

environments, but also, he sympathetically contrasts a dramatic world where male characters are weaker, more sensitive and more psychologically fragile to the natural forces, than their female counterparts.

In comparison to female characters (particularly the matriarch Maurya) male characters are consistently represented as existentially and physically worn down, by the natural forces they seek to conquer. In the funeral event of Michael and Bartley old Maurya declares, "I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and surf in the west, . . . I won't care what way the seas is when the other women will be keening" (12-13). This statement shows her well matured mental stamina to bear up the agony of dead male members of her family. Thus, the narrative shows that the elderly matron is mentally stronger as well as physically healthier.

In Synge's family tragedy female characters are represented as stoic figures to achieve a form of tragic transcendence. In the very beginning of the play, both daughters are presented very sensitive to break down the sad news of Bartley's death, to their mother. Cathleen scares to reveal the news of his death to her mother. She whispers, "Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done. (*Coming to the table*) It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying" (2). Although both sisters are young, yet they are stronger enough to manage their lamentation.

Likewise, Maurya is characterized as capable figure to forecast the extreme weather pattern and advise her sons accordingly. Her statement, "He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west" (3) shows her knowledge to forecast the condition of extreme weather. She tries her best to avoid Bartley's journey since she assumes some misfortunes going to be occurred on his fate. When Bartley does not obey her, she laments helplessly, "He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling, I'll have no son left me in the world" (5). Her lamentation shows that she is pretty sure about the approaching misfortune. However, she forgets to bless his journey, as she goes through a state of traumatized paralysis. Her concern for Bartley culminates when she forgets to give him the customary bread sustenance. Cathleen reacts this mournfully, "The son of God forgive us, Nora, we're after forgetting his (Bartley's) bit of bread" (5). This incident shows that the women's role for physical and spiritual sustenance is paramount.

Along with this, Maurya develops a prophetic skill, out of her constant experience from evolving the extreme weather condition. Her earnest pleading to Bartley, to postpone his journey on the particular day "[i]sn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman" (5) shows her farsightedness. Moreover, her intimacy towards the tragedy she perceives is the outcome of her sensitive sub-conscious mind. She envisions when Bartley rides red mare dead Michael's spirit (on grey pony) is following him "with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet" (10), and red pony drags him into the seas. This incident remains as a pure mystical moment. She narrates defiantly her hallucinated vision of Bartley's death as: "I'm often seeing this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare; and I tried to say 'God speed you,' but something choked the word in my throat" (10). This account of her incident does not only infer the effect of her hallucinating psyche, but also it shows her attempt to attune the facts of mystical realism.

Moreover, Bartley's sacrifice for the family is not considered as a conscious choice, rather a predictable failure of masculine strength to master over nature. So, the patriarchal efforts and struggle over the natural factors are significantly unacknowledged by matriarchal Maurya. Maurya's memoir shows community's welfare does not sustain through risky ventures of masculine youth, rather on enduring reproductive and spiritual labour of feminine strength and farsightedness sustain a household's wellbeing.

Environmental determinism is a gender predator, with a detailed appetite. Synge's narrative shows, to be a man means to be ridden out and claimed by treacherous seas. The seas hunt masculine workforce. It harvests strong and adventurous youths. It cannot be considered as a neutral natural force, rather it harvests only a male member of a family. Its conflicting relationship with the men creates a situation where masculinity is synonymous with a fatalistic engagement. Only men are constantly victimized by the deterministic natural forces. Therefore, the narrative shows only men are penalized by the natural forces, for being adventurous.

The play shows a rise of feminism through ritual and pragmatic practices in post-patriarchal world. When the seas and its associative agents; winds, black clouds, tides, waves etc. dismantle the presence of male identity, the women do not remain as passive mourners. Cathleen suggests an old man to make a coffin, "Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards . . ." (13) Their suggestion to men shows that they are neither under the subjugation of a male dominated society nor victimized by the seas. Rather they have surpassed both. Moreover, the circumstances obviously force them to develop a strength of pragmatism, to meet the demand of organic and economic necessity of the family, against natural forces.

Synge's *Riders to the Seas* glorifies the feminine, particularly through over-toning Maurya's tragic transcendence. She is constructed as an everlasting monument of endurance, in comparison to male members, who are vulnerably frail and fatal. Consoling herself, old Maurya expresses her grief on the untimely demise of her family's male members as: "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything the seas can do to me" (12). This extract shows, her strength contains a profound capacity to transcend and assimilate suffering and tragic consequences. On contrary, the patriarchal figures of her family are worn out and ultimately doomed by the seas.

In addition to this, Maurya's journey surpasses from a state of anxious dread to a tragic, cosmic and consequently to the state of peace throughout the play. Towards the end of the play, she seems contented to evoke her inner stoic feeling. She comfortably claims: "What more we want than that? No man all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied" (14). This evolution constructs her as a superior and enduring gender, who is capable of spiritual resonance. Therefore, her enduring resistance makes her exceed far beyond the patriarchal figures.

The initial scene of the play reflects Maurya as an old and enduring woman, traumatized with the mourning of death of Michael. However, actually she is in a state of acquiring the ultimate knowledge of human existence. She has been encountering with the constant and accidental death of her beloved male members. Her heart-rending lament, "I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house – six fine men, though it was hard birth I had with every one of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now, a lot of them" (10) demonstrates her record of death members. Therefore, she works as a record-keeper of male-mortality, gaining eternal value of human existence.

The core of Synge's text contains ecofeminist paradox. It portrays, the seas plays a dominating role to wipe out the existence of male members of a family and hollow victory of feminine over innocent patriarchy. The play under-tones the fact that the obliteration of the patriarchal figures does not construct a perfect society, rather it is on the way to degenerating the entire existence of humanity. In absence of male members, no family sustains further. Many contemporary ecofeminists critics typically purpose to overthrow patriarchal restrictions to promote self-determination of female gender. In this social milieu, Synge's narrative offers this paradoxical concept. The concluding scene of he plays demonstrates women in profound isolation and they are destined towards social and biological dead-end. Furthermore, the narrative asserts, even the nature setting under the process of environmental determinism cannot liberate women, by targeting only male figures. Thus, environmental determinism limits both genders into fatalistic condition.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, Synge's *Riders to the Seas* inverts gender hierarchy. His narrative masterfully converses the conventional gender dynamics to present a changing scenario of dramatic world-view where masculine identity is annihilated by its futile attempts to venture household economy, on the face of daunting seas. On contrary, women's stamina evolves from profound engagement with loss of their male members of the family. Their strength is not impervious to pain, rather they are capable to metabolize it. Their evolutionary capacity to metabolize pain does not only mark them as stronger genders but also it considers them as superior to their male counterparts of the family. The patriarchal structure of the family is perpetually eroding as it is built on weak foundation, and inherently fragile. Such downfall of patriarchal inherent characteristics symbolizes the intrinsic power of male is illusory and transient. In comparison to female male figures are portrayed as spiritually and psychologically bleaker. So, they are the prime victim of the seas. Their physical strength, strategic plan and pragmatic world-view have turn down to dust by the power of empress seas, a potent symbol of determinism. Thus, the paradox of ecofeminism is observed in the text, not through women's direct domination over the male figures of the play, rather through consecutive portrayal of women's evolutionary strength of endurance to pain and pragmatic practices in post-patriarchal society.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Funding

None

REFERENCES

- Arponen, Vesa PJ, et al. "Environmental Determinism and Archaeology: Understanding and Evaluating Determinism in Research Design." *Archaeological Dialogues*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-9. *Cambridge Core*, doi:10.1017/S1380203819000059.
- Clark, Audrey N. *Dictionary of Geography*. Penguin Reference Books, 2003.
- Coombes, Paul, and Keith Barber. "Environmental Determinism in Holocene Research: Causality or Coincidence?" *Area*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2005, pp. 303-11.

- Cudworth, Erika. *Developing Ecofeminist Theory: The Complexity of Difference*. Springer, 2005.
- Elias, Mohammed, editor. *Plays in One Act*. Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2011.
- Fekadu, Kassa. "The Paradox in Environmental Determinism and Possibilism: A Literature Review." *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning*, vol. 7, no. 7, 2014, pp. 132–139.
- Glottfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Howell, Nancy R. "Ecofeminism: What One Needs to Know." *Zygon®*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1997, pp. 231-41.
- Judkins, Gabriel, et al. "Determinism within Human-Environment Research and the Rediscovery of Environmental Causation." *Geographical Journal*, vol. 174, no. 1, 2008, pp. 17-29.
- Manglik, Rohit. *Introduction to Ecology and Environment*. EduGorilla Publication, 2024.
- Masud, Ali, and Rabi Kanta Roy. "Domination of Patriarchy in J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Seas*: A Feminist Reading." *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Researches*, vol. 9, 2022, pp. 45-58.
- Öztürk, Yıldız Merve. "An Overview of Ecofeminism: Women, Nature and Hierarchies." *Journal of Academic Social Science Studies*, vol. 13, no. 81, 2020, pp. 303-12.
- Sarkar, Sajal. "J.M. Synge's Modern Tragic Flow in *Riders to the Seas*." *International Journal of Economics, Business and Social Science Research*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2025, pp. 16-20. *IJEBSSR*, ijebssr.com/archive/article-full-text/1234. Accessed 18 Oct. 2025.
- Synge, J. M. "Riders to the Seas." *Plays in One Act*, edited by Mohammed Elias, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2011, pp. 1-14.
- Uddin, Mohammad Jashim, and Md. Ferdous Iqbal Chowdhury. "Patriarchal Dominance in J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Seas*: Viewing from Feminist Perspective." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 21, no. 11, ver. 11, Nov. 2016, pp. 04-09. *IOSRJournals*, www.iosrjournals.org.
- Wagner, Philip L. "The Concept of Environmental Determinism in Cultural Evolution." *The Origins of Agriculture*, edited by Charles A. Reed, Mouton, 1977, pp. 49-74.
- Warren, Karen J., editor. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Indiana University Press, 1997.