

CHAPTER - II

PASSIVE CHARACTERS

In the eight original plays of Lillian Hellman, there are active as well as passive characters. These characters remain there without doing anything. Sometimes they are bystanders or onlookers, they just enjoy the scene without interfering it. They are neither weak nor strong. They remain as they are, we can call them flat characters. There will be a long list of such characters. Some of them are discussed here.

In the Children's Hour,

Joe Gardin is a doctor, and he is a cousin of Mary. He loves Karen. He knows Mary and her pretensions. From the beginning he shows his love for Karen, but when the things are out of his hands, he changes. He pretends as if he is supporting Karen, he loves her; and he is sympathetic towards her but the real appearance of the character is shattering. When he expresses his doubt about Karen - Martha relationship. Karen is frustrated. She is shattered by the accusation made by him. Karen, Martha as well as viewers are hopeful about him. They feel that he really loves Karen, and no one else but he will take them out of the critical situations but his behaviour is ironic enough. Viewers feel that he will be active and like traditional lover he will fight for Karen, against the hazards of life but very passively he moves away from the scene and the result is destructive. Even though, he is passive, he leaves behind a great effect on the other characters. Martha can not bear the reality of the character. Mary is not the only cause of Martha's death, other characters, like Joe Gardin,

Mrs. Tilford, Mrs. Mortar, are same responsible for the misfortune.

These passive characters are harmless on surface level but there is some destructive instinct in them. They are mere onlookers and they are not the participants of mishappening. They do not want to flow with the course of time. On the other hand, they are opportunistic, they seek safer side when they want.

In Days to Come, the Rodmans are passive characters, Cora, Julie, and Andrew Rodman are the important characters of the play. Cora is passive, she often talks about news and likes to discuss them. She knows that her brother is in need of money but she doesn't give him helping hand, when she is able to do so. Always she hates Julie. Except these two things, she just does nothing. She is the partner of the mill and as a partner, she wants the benefits but she doesn't like to participate in the problems of the mill she likes to perform the role of an onlooker. And she behaves according to her wish, she remains idle and watches the things happening.

Andrew, and Julie Rodman are the same passive characters. They see that workers are on strike but they can not stop them, on the contrary, they accept it. We may call Andrew, an unfortunate man. Because he is cheated by his wife, and he is not helped by his sister. Yet he is not angry with them. He accepts whatever comes to him. He does not scold his wife or can not ask for money to his sister, with authority. He accepts everything very quietly.

Julie is rebellious to some extent. She changes her lovers. But she is not successful in her affairs. She is totally defeated, and in the end she tells everything to Andrew because she wants to save her lover. Her exposition of the reality is quite frustrating. Andrew is unhappy after knowing her affairs. Throughout her life he borrows money for Julie's expenses, but he is cheated by the same Julie. He is shattered as well as bankrupt in the end.

All these three passive characters accept their fate and continue living without showing any sign of regret. They do not complain against their misfortune. They are neither happy nor sad. They behave as if they have no emotions. Even though they are frustrated they are not away from their lives, they just continue living, they accept their sturdy way of living. The main action of the play is not strike, but it seems that, character revelation is the main action. From that point of view, Act Three has action. These three characters appear in real form. There is no more cheating and hiding.

Every character is active in The Little Foxes. Birdie is the only exception to it. But, she is weak rather than passive. Because of her weakness she becomes a passive character. She does not change and remains the same frightened woman. She accepts the domination of Oscar and seeks consolation in drinking.

In Watch on the Rhine, too, all the characters are active.

These characters are in the main action. They are always changing and they have challenging roles. Either good or bad, major

or minor, all these characters are involved in the main action

They are not idle men and women. Even the children are active and they are eager to know something new, they are used to change. So they do not feel strange in the house of their grand mother. They adjust with the family very quickly.

In Another Part of the Forest, Oscar and Regina are passive characters, to some extent. Oscar loves Laurette and he wants to go away with her. Therefore, he is asking money to Marcus. Marcus is ready to give him money but Ben realises the loss which would cause because of the marriage and stops them from doing so. Outside the house, Oscar is quite active, or we may say, destructive. We come to know about his fighting with some persons. In that sense, he is dashing, but he can not resist Ben's superiority. Ben is determined and he is very cunning. That way, Oscar is straightforward. He doesn't understand the difference between true love and practical love. He loves Laurette, devotedly. But Laurette does not love him, she loves his money. The realization is quite destructive. He is unhappy but in the end he becomes submissive because he has not the power of money, there is no other way for him.

The same thing happens with Regina. She loves John Bagtry and wants to Marry him but Ben does not allow her to do so. She is lovable child of her father. But when the superiority of her father is taken away by Ben, she Obeys the orders of Ben. She is not happy while talking with her mother. She humiliates her all the

time, like her father. So, activeness of these two characters, does not last longer, It vanishes immediately and their actions make others unhappy.

John Bagtry is a passive character. Once he was a soldier and always he wants to be in war. Therefore, he is in search of an opportunity but he can't go away because of his financial position. He is quite helpless, Birdie knows it and she wants to help him. So, she comes to Hubbards and becomes victim of Ben's cunningness. The same passive Birdie of The Little Foxes, here, is active character. She is at the centre of the action. Her arrival changes the actions of other characters.

All the three passive characters are neither good nor bad. They have no choice for their future. They must undergo their roles which are destined by the superior character.

Watch on the Rhine is the drama of action, The Searching wind is called an extension of it, but the action of the former play is not forwarded in the next play. If watch on the Rhine is the play of action then The Searching Wind is the play of inaction. Every character is passive. Nothing happens novelistic in the play. Everyone knows the end of the play. Therefore, there is a sort of dullness in their action. Everyone is depressed there is not enthusiasm in the play. As Falk Doris depicts them, they are 'bystandards'¹.

In the play, there is confrontation between Sam and his parents. He hates these bystandards. Alexander Hazen Loves Cas

Bowman but he does not marry her. He marries Emily but he does not tell her about his love with Cas. After his marriage he continues loving Cas. Cas is the best friend of Emily but she, too, does not tell her about her clandestine relations with Alex. Emily knows about the love and one day calls Cas for dinner. At that time, she accuses her for stealing her husband. Without any hesitation Cas confesses the reality which is known to Emily.

This love triangle is futile as well as foolish one. Outcome of the realization is frustration. All the three characters are submissive, they admit themselves to their fate.

Moses is charming but disillusioned diplomat. In the play, he, actually, does nothing. Once he was active, he is retired editor of a newspaper. Now he likes to sit and watch the things happening. He always comments on people's compromise. Sam is ashamed of his grandfather.

Sam is the exception, he is a soldier and hates his parents. He doesnot like their behaviour. He accuses his father, mother, and grandfather for damaging his country.

"I don't want any more fancy fooling around with it. No. and I don't want any more of Father's mistakes, for any reason, good or bad, or yours. Mother, because I think they do it harm. I was ashamed of that clipping. But I don't really know why. I found out tonight. I am ashamed of both of you, and that, the truth. I don't want to be ashamed that way again"².

Sam is one of the Hellman's soldier boys. He reminds us Kurt Muller. He is a fighter, he fights for his country but unfortunately he is forced to be away from the war because he is not able to fight because his leg is injured. He is seriously wounded, so, in the play, he remains passive.

The play consists passiveness of two types; one is instinctive, and the other is forced upon the characters.

Falk Doris says about The Autumn Garden,

"The Autumn Garden concerned itself with individual persons, bystanders who try to come to terms with that they have made, or failed to make, of their own private lives."³

Hellman makes character- grouping. Some families have come to rest in Constance's summer boarding house. They have come to enjoy their holidays. The action of Watch on the Rhine or The Children's Hour, we do not see here. The Ellises are passive characters. Mrs. Ellis, Carrie Ellis and Frederick Ellis, do nothing without watching. They see the things passing by. Carrie is restless, when she knows about Payson-Frederick relation, but except accusing her son, she does nothing. Before that she treats Sophie as a rival but after knowing Frederick's interest in Payson, she treats her nicely.

Frederick is homosexual and his love for Sophie is a sort of adjustment. Sophie wants financial support and Frederick wants respectability. Both these motives would have been fulfilled after

their marriage. But Sophie's requirement is fulfilled by an opportunity and she is away from Frederick. According to some critics, Frederick is a passive - dependent mother's boy.

The other bystanders are General Benjamin Griggs and his wife, Rose. Both of them are not interested in each other. General Griggs wants divorce from his wife because he wanted to be loved by some woman like his mother, because of this Oedipus complex he can't live with Rose. Rose, too boasts of her love. But Griggs does not care about it. If Rose will not give him divorce then he is ready to leave her. Their marriage is not successful, in that sense. Rose is a foolish woman, she is always dependent on Nick for advice. When Rose is ill, Ben promises to take care of her and there is no other way for Ben, to escape. Both of them are confined in a certain circle, beyond which they can't move. General Griggs tends to be an active but again he proves to be an inactive. He accepts living with Rose, because it is too late to his escape.

Nick and Nina Dennerly are another boarders of the summer house, Nick is behaving like despoiler but after Act. Two, he is out of the action and Sophie becomes central figure of the action. Because of Nick's drunkenness he faces his doom. Actually he does nothing but in unconscious state, he falls in Sophie's bed, and the tables are turned. He undergoes Sophie's wish and becomes faded, passive character.

Nick's wife, Nina, is another passive character. She knows Nick's nature and doesn't like his disturbing others, so she threatens that she will leave him if he does not stop his meddling in others' lives but Nick does not care and she becomes passive. She can not do anything.

Ned Crossman and Constance know each other from many years. Constance loves Nick but he marries Nina and, now, he is happy without Constance. Constance feels that she has wasted herself and she asks Crossman about marriage because Nick has told that Crossman loves her, which is a lie, but Crossman, too, feels that he has wasted his life in drinking and now it is too late for marriage. In this way, these two characters, prove to be passive characters.

Only Sophie is an active character. She is an opportunistic who seeks solace is gaining money of blackmail. She is compared with Mrs. Ellis. Both of these characters are called realists by some critics. They do not lie and realize the value of money.

The theme of Toys in the Attic, revolves around Berniers; Anna, Carrie, Julian, and Lily. Carrie is a real villain and active character. Carrie hates Anna because Anna makes Carrie face the truth of her incestuous love for Julian. She wishes to see Julian unhappy. She can't bear Julian's relationship with Mrs. Warkins and makes Lily phone Mr. Warkins about their affair. Lily, an inactive, and over-emotional girl, becomes active because of Carrie's force and she phones Mr. Warkins and the result is destructive.

Anna and Julian are passive characters. Julian is unsuccessful in his business, many a time. He is always dependent upon his sisters, and his sisters always plan to go to Europe but can't go because of him. Anna is a Lovable, woman, she is mature, if compared with these two characters. As an elder sister, she accepts to remain elder sister and mother of her brother and sister. Julian can not be happy with his wife because of his sisters. He is always defeated in the business and he has married Lily only because she is the daughter of a wealthy mother and he knows that she will never threaten his manhood. Lily is a child in the sense, her mental growth is twelve years. She always fears that Julian will take away her money and he will leave her. So, she is over-conscious about him. Throughout the play she behaves like a hysteric person. She hates her mother, Albertine. Her mother, too, wants to overcome her daughter. She does not want her daughter to live with her. She fears that if her daughter comes to live with her, then her chauffer, lover, Henry Simpson, will leave her.

These characters are interrelated. Their future is dependent upon others' action, that way, all of them remain passive. Falk Doris explains.

" In contrast to Hellman's active villains like the Hubbards or heroes like Kurt Muller, these characters are what I have called bystanders. They do not intend evil or opposition to evils they are hungry only for love, and their need for it, sometimes confused with the need for money, accomplishes their fate"⁴.

These passive characters are neither villains, nor good characters. They are not at the centre of the action. Yet they are not less important. If they are taken away, then the plays will remain uncomplete. Their presence is necessary. Sometimes they play the role of helping characters, in a sense, they focus upon the actions of other characters and we know better about them. Sometimes, these passive characters are, onlookers, sometimes, they are amateurs. Sometimes, they are so called good people, harmless and joyful.