

## CHAPTER - III

### **DAUGHTERS AND SONS**

The novel *Daughters And Sons*(1937) by Miss Ivy Compton-Burnett presents two household tyrants. Sabine Ponsonby is 84 years old woman. She is the eldest woman in the family of Ponsonby. She is a family tyrant . Hetta-her 48-year-old Daughters is also a family tyrant. Both these tyrants wish to keep the entire family in their firmgrip. Hetta desires to hold possession especially of her brother John. He is a writer by profession. He is a reputed writer. Hetta is proud of him. She feels proud also to have her grip on him. She is a spinster. John is a widower. She doesn't allow John to have second marriage.

After the death of John's wife, her place is occupied by Hetta. The void is filled by Hetta. John's daughter, France, is another writer in the family. She is a good talented writer. France expects that her father should encourage her in writing. But her father John doesn't do so. She publishes her book in the name of Edith, the governess in their house. When her family faces economic problems and crisis, she decides to help her father and family

with large amount under the guise of a grateful reader.

One day Sabine, the old Lady and grandmother, tampers with a personal letter of Edith. The letter is addressed to Edith. Sabine comes to the conclusion that Edith is the unknown benefactress. So, Sabine Ponsonby, mother of John, urges her son John to marry Edith. John is ready to marry her in order to find out a solution to the economic problems of family.

The decision of marriage shocks Hetta. She can't accept the decision. But neither she can dissuade her brother John. There is a conflict between two tyrants Sabine and Hetta. She wants to continue, her grip on John. But John is firm.

John receives help from the grateful reader a second time. John and old Lady take it casually. But Hetta becomes suspicious. So she purchases the book which is in the name of Edith. After reading it she finds it out as the work of France. She discovers the fact that the work was written by France. Now, she decides to teach a lesson to the family members. So, she leaves the house. She decides to commit suicide, she leaves a note

behind her suggesting suicide. Sabine Ponsonby and John both get shocked. But there is no suicide.

Edith, the wife of John, manages everything in a family verywell. The things are going on as before. Hetta suddenly reappears in the family and asks everybody, if a lesson is learnt. But no one cares for her. John resents Hetta and her cruelty. He declares that she has lost her place in the family and to Edith.

The family friends are invited to dinner. Sabine the old weak Lady presides over the table. John tries to keep Hetta in her humbled and humiliated place. But Hetta rebels. She opens in front of everyone the selfishness of her mother, Sabine Ponsonby, and her brother, John. She reveals that her mother and brother have taken Edith into their family only for sake of money and property of Edith. In fact the money belongs to France who is afraid of her father's jealousy. The revelation gives a death blow to Sabine. Chaucer, the clergy-man, is a friend of the family. He proposes Hetta and Hetta accepts the proposal. Edith Hallam is the cool and independent governess. Sabine thinks that the successful novels are written by Edith Hallam. Sabine wants to keep Ediths money

in her own family. So, she urges and forces John to marry Edith . The end of the novel is very striking. Generally, Ivy's novels do not end with happy marriages. In this novel, Hetta, the family tyrant marries Chaucer, a shabby clergyman. It is not a romantic marriage.

The problem of sex in the family loosens the tie of family relations. It brings with it jealousy and enmity. The families are full of frailties. The central phenomenon of upper middle class family is the possession of power. The possession of power and the possession of purse-string over -shadow the rules, the ethics and morality.

Lust for power, incest and family tyranny are the dominate themes in this novel. Hetta Ponsonby is a possessive tyrant. John, her brother is the victim of her excessive devotion. The nature of these two tyrants Sabine and Hetta is very complex and varied. Ivy Compton-Burnett puts a particular form of wickedness of her characters in their wrong deeds. They commit crime. But they remain unpunished.

Tyranny in family life is the chief theme of this novel. The desire for domination of a dictator brings misery in family life. Some characters in the

novel resist the dictation. They do not submit themselves to the tyrants. But many have to be on the side of the dictators. The bond of affection and love make these characters submit to tyranny. This tyranny in the family generates a tense atmosphere.

Sabine and Hetta are family tyrants. But they are of different kind of tyrants. They feel that their tyranny is for the well-being of family. They are eager to know the real benefactor of the family. There is a letter addressed to Edith. Sabine feels that Edith is a rich lady. But Hetta wants to know more. So, she opens a private letter addressed to Edith. She finds out the truth. She is against the marriage of John and Edith. But there is a pathetic failure. She makes a show of suicide. She wants to demonstrate her own indispensability for the family. But no one cares for her. So, she escapes into a marriage with the vicar.

The conversation between two tyrants - Sabine and Hetta- is interesting. Both are trying to establish their power over other members-

“He always admires me for being the head of things,” said Hetta.

“I am that,” said Sabine.

“Oh, well, the actual and ultimate head. It makes no difference to him.” “It make a

difference to me, my dear,  
whether I am alive or dead.”<sup>1</sup>

The reckless nature of the family tyrant is exposed by Ivy Compton-Burnett very effectively. Sabine recklessly inflicts injuries on all with whom she speaks to. Even guests are no exception for this. After a dinner in her house Sabine ask:

“Are they never going?” said Sabine, Suddenly from her chair, where she sat with her hands on its arms and her head bent forward. Her guests threw her a glance and rose to their feet,(....)”<sup>2</sup>

When Sabine is very angry she speaks harshly with grand-children. She raps her stick on the ground and speaks in a harsh and hoarse voice-

“What do you think you are?” You are raw and ignorant girls and boys, of no use to anyone but yourselves, dependent on others for a roof above your heads, food to put into your mouths, teaching to enable you to associate with the civilised.”<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes Sabine speaks infavour of another tyrant-her daughter, Hetta, she expresses her feelings for Hetta as;

“And your aunt is a gifted, experienced woman, with her own powers, her own poise, her own place in your

fathers life life, from which  
nothing will dislodge her!"<sup>4</sup>

Ivy explains Sabine's cordial approach to Hetta "

"Sabine regarded her Daughters with a proud, possessive eye, admiring her powers, seeing her above any ordinary mate, submitting or no to her absolute direction, according to her own mood. Hetta was the only person who didnot fear Sabine and Sabine along was normally at ease with her daughters; but they were both the only people in much of what they did.

The grand-children saw their aunt with feelings which had grown with themselves and which they hardly defined. She was an influence at once dubious and powerful, at once natural and sinister, an authority at once lower and higher than Sabine."<sup>5</sup>

In Ivy's novels, self-importance, selfishness and greed are the characteristics of the family tyrants. For their own interests they may commit forgery, incest and even a murder . Their evil deeds are limited only to their own families. But their crime is not punished eventually.

In this novel Sabine rules over a small domin - the family, but she has unlimited powers. The tyrant exist to torment, to dominate and to rule.

As Frederick R. Karl says -

“The surface behaviour is impeccable, but beneath lie arrogance, vanity, jealousy and excessive pride—all the characteristics of normal people.”<sup>6</sup>

Sabine’s dominating nature is exposed by

Ivy as:

“When I give a direction, I wish to be followed I do not care to have a member of my house with dull complexion and dull manner and dull face.”<sup>7</sup>

Sabine wants to share everything of the family she rudely says: “This house is mine and I will know everything in it, I will not have talk going on that. I don’t share.”<sup>8</sup> This is the extreme end of tyranny and egoist person.

The Ponsonby family is a big family. It is an old fashioned family . It includes a big household. It consists of servants, companions, nurses with nurserys. It has big halls and long corridors. There are big gardens. The setting of this novel is standard. It is a large country house capable of being converted into a school. There are a great many stairs and passages suitable for eavesdropping. There is sound of a gong, prayer bell old and young persons, brothers and sisters, men and wives, master and servants, all muster in the dinning room.



The other points of assembly are the nursery, the kitchen and the common room.

The scenes in this novel shift from house to house or from house to cottage, or from house to church or school. The motives of the family members and characters are fundamental. The motives are relevant to human predicament. These motives are deep-rooted in their nature. They are woven with family structures.

The novel presents a fine commentary on human behaviour and the situational failings of human being. This novel is about English life between 1888 and 1910. According to Ivy Compton-Burnett family life is a continuous flow. It is a flux. Ivy tries to discover reality. The unhappy family and the root cause of the unhappiness are the concerns of Ivy Compton-Burnett. The theme of the novel is the tensions between human beings-between classes, between the strong and the weak, and between the generations. Ivy Compton-Burnett tries to bring together two worlds and their ways. The worlds of parents and children, the worlds of the present and the past, and the worlds of darkness and light.

The Major theme of this novel is family tyranny and sacrifice. The central figure of this novel

is John Ponsonby. He is a successful novelist. He appears to be sacrificing the books written by him. He wants to write the books and publish them in order to produce the best sellers that will support his large family. But he never succeeds in doing so. The different kinds of relationship are shown in love and sacrifice. John marries Edith, the governess not for sake of love, but her so-called wealth. This is the stark reality of the Victorian period, humorously depicted by Ivy Compton-Burnett.

The novel depicts also the sacrifice of a daughter, France. She is the most sensitive character in this novel. Although she decides to help her family in a novel way. She is a talented novelist. She is conscious of the tensions in the family. She known her family's deploring financial status. She also knows that her father is jealous of her talent as a writer, she gains an unexpected insight into her father's jealous nature. When she shows him her manuscript of her written work, he shows no interest in it. He advises her not to publish it. In face John fears that France might supersede him as a writer. The inert fear and jealousy is well exposed when Hetta asks John:

“Do you not want France to be a writer, as you are?”

There was a pause, and then John spoke more sharply. "Do I want her to be a worker, as I am? Why should I want it? What is there to want about it? Can I leave them all to your support?"<sup>9</sup>

So France decides to publish it under a secret name and wins a prize. Instead of using this money for her own sake she directs the money to her family. Money is surrendered anonymous to John. Sabine feels that this anonymous help to John to bring him out of the financial difficulty is a help given by her governess, Edith. So, she forces John to marry her. But Hetta, John's sister, can not digest the truth. The marriage creates a tension in the family.

The sacrifice of the governess Edith and sacrifice of France are remarkable, Especially the sacrifice of France reminds the readers the sacrifice of Ivy Compton-Burnett for her own family. She remained unmarried throughout and dated herself for the care of her two brothers.

In this novel Hetta seems to be functioning as an unpaid secretary and housekeeper. She is working solely for her widowed brother John. She finds emotional satisfaction in the power over

him. It gives a sense of purpose for her. Hetta is dictator by nature. But she has to submit her to another dictator, her mother Sabine. When she realizes that her power over John is over, She is upset. She decides to commit suicide. But ironically she returns but to find out that she has lost her place in the family permanently. It leads her to the decision of marriage. Hetta's crude nature and her jealousy for Edith is expressed in the following lines. After the marriage of John and Edith they are going to sit close to each other by the dining table. Hetta ironically remarks :

"It is difficult to make arrangements for a family reinforced by the tutor and the governess. People don't like sitting by them and there you are. It makes awkwardness."<sup>10</sup>

All the children - Chilton, Victor, Muriel, Clare and France - live under the fear of the two tyrants - Hetta and Sabine. They are not freely allowed to Yawn even.

Hetta rebukes Muriel:

"You were yawning when I left three weeks ago, and you are yawning still ! You must try and conquer the habit"<sup>11</sup>

Ivy Compton-Burnett creates Hetta to some extent, out of her own experience. Hetta goes to church. But she is not religious. She has no faith in church and religion. The sisters of the Ponsonby family are talking about Hetta, their aunt-Muriel says - "She goes to church, and she does not have to go, does she?"

On this question of Muriel, France says-

"If she were religious she would not go. She would have thought about her religion and lost it."<sup>12</sup>

There is no depiction of ordinary sensual love in this novel. The married couples appear brothers and sister in this novel. There is a proposal of marriage and acceptance of it. But it seems to be a mere business agreement. It is without any perceptible motive. Hetta's furious and frustrated love for her brother John is expressed in the following words :

"So Edith is everything, is she? Edith, whom you married because you thought she had given you money and would give you more! Edith, whom you married for the paltry sums you thought she would earn and go on giving you! You did not want her for herself! You did not want to earn for your wife! She was to earn for you."<sup>13</sup>

In this novel Ivy Compton-Burnett has made the accurate and sensitive depiction of a very common kind of family. The family is under stress. The balance of the family is upset by the tyranny of central characters. The balance is restored after the death of one tyrant and the marriage of another. Some of the characters are under the strain of maintaining good relations with other members.

Edith, the governess in the family, is portrayed positively by Ivy in this novel. She preserves her detachment from the matters and situations in the family she herself belongs to a poor family. But in the difficult situations she behaves very well. She becomes wife of John accidentally. This event also shows that in the late Victorian Era and in the Edwardian period money used to control family motives. Edith is a witty character. She is a person of self-knowledge. She possesses an impregnable strength. But her marriage with John has made her at some extent vulnerable.

On the other hand John seems to be a gentleman. He loves his family. But on the other hand his character is callous. His decision of

marrying Edith is a catastrophe. This event also throws light on his greedy and selfish nature.

The disaster of the family of John is an economic disaster. The members of the family try to adjust themselves in the economic position of the family. They try to sacrifice for sake of family.

In this novel there is an onslaught of egoism and the blind fate on the characters. Some characters succumb to the egoism of some characters. They become frustrated, and nervous, and some of them become cynic. Clare is cynic. She is defeated by the family situation. So she wants to escape from it. She wants to marry the opportunist who will advance himself for marriage. She expresses the depths of her cynicism in the following dialogue-

"I want to get out of this house to another life. That is all I think of. I have borne enough."<sup>14</sup>

In this novel there is a credo of stoicism. The character are introduced in a different way. Stephen Marcon, for example is introduced in the following way-

"He was a contented disappointed man, happy in his own disappointment and seeing in his small advance

in science the reward and reason of life, to which he didnot assign any great reward or reason”<sup>15</sup>

Death is a turning point in the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett. All the family is threatened by the change. The total change is brought by the death of a person in the family. In this novel there is death of the old tyrant Sabine. This scene of death bed, creates a tensionful situation on the other hand, the family member experience a kind of relief.

As clare says-

“We shall soon have another kind of freedom” Aunt Hetta has killed Grandma.”<sup>16</sup>

Death is associated with enjoyment here by Ivy France explains:

“There seems to be a threat in the air hy did we have this dinner? With Grandma’s death approaching, and Aunt Hetta’s barely averted, it does not seem the moment in our family life, when so many have been passed over.”<sup>17</sup>

Even the natural relations in a family are looked at from a different angle. Miss Marcon talks to Edith:

“I have heard of wives who did not tolerate the husband’s sister in his



home, but not of a sister  
who didn't tolerate the  
wife."<sup>18</sup>

Children in the family have altogether a  
different view towards the marriage between John  
and Edith:

"We might have been  
required to show distress at  
fathers replacing mother."  
said Victor.  
"He replaced her by Aunt  
Hetta long ago," said Clare.  
"And Grandma has never  
been affected by the blank."  
"Was it nice for Aunt Hetta,  
when mother died and she  
had the place?" said Muriel<sup>19</sup>

Ivy Compton-Burnett has an entirely  
revolutionary conception of denouncement. Her  
characters are neither completely good nor  
completely bad. They are human beings with virtues  
and vices. They exemplify the real horror of human  
frailty. Ivy Compton-Burnett's understanding of tyranny,  
rage, frustration, pride, obsessive greed and human  
wickedness is wonderful.

Ivy Compton-Burnett was conscious about  
the status of women in the society. She was  
conscious about the status especially of the  
governess and maid servants as well as tutors, lady  
teachers, spinsters, nurses and widows.

Marriage is an important event in a family. But the second marriage was looked at from a dubious angle in the Victorian era. Dinner parties, tea parties and lunches are very important occasions when the real nature of characters get exposed. In the dinner party Rowland points out pathetic truth:

“People at the head of things are always alone,” said Rowland.<sup>20</sup>

The governess and children in this novel spring out of Ivy's personal experience. Brother and sister relationship in this novel is also a personal experience of Ivy Compton-Burnett as it depicts a great bond between John and Hetta. This relationship is closer to Ivy's relationship with her brother Guy and Noel.

The setting of this novel is at stand or near London. It is a family life having superficial cohesion. The family life has its inert antagonism and rivalries. In the beginning there is a rivalry for power between the mother and the daughter. The family has psychic divisions. The writer John hates his Daughters France who is also a writer. Hetta desires to possess John forever. The psychic division causes some tension amongst the members of family.

In this novel Ivy's main concern is with the propensities in human nature for the domination of others. Ivy points out the evils of human nature. She presents the family unit in its last phase of strong cohesion. She reveals now within its frameworks, the selfish and ruthless people live together. In such family system deadly crimes are made possible. There are the virtues of the good characters. But they are seldom proud enough and strong enough to win the independence.

The novel presents clumsy relationships where the mother, Sabine, loves her daughter, Hetta, more than her son John. On the other hand, John doesn't love his Daughters France, much. The novel from the very beginning to the end deals with family relations and tension.

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