

Chapter - V

A MOTHER : SELF MONOMANIAC

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I

A Mother belongs to the fourth phase, public life of Joyce's career. The story deals with a woman called Mrs. Kearney. Formerly Mrs. Kearney was Miss. Delvin.

"She had been educated in a high-class convent, where she had learned French and music. As she was naturally pale and unbending in manner she made few friends at school. When she came to the age of marriage she was sent out to many houses, where her playing and ivory manners were much admired."<sup>1</sup>

She marries Mr. Kearney a bootmaker. He is poor and unimaginative man. It seems that she does not want her husband to be superior to her. Mr. Kearney was :

"sober, thrifty, and pious; he went to the altar every first Friday, sometimes with her, oftner by himself".<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Kearney is a money-minded woman who is always conscious of her profit than anything else in her life. The attitude of Mrs. Kearney towards her husband shows that Irish social life is totally disturbed. And Mrs. Kearney represents Irish woman in general.

Mr. Kearney, her husband is a prosperous tradesman. Miss Kathleen is the daughter of Mrs. Kearney. She sends Kathleen to a good convent. Kathleen learns French and music there. When Mrs. Kearney observes the process of the Irish revival. She determines to take advantage of the situation and also of her daughter's name. She asks an Irish teacher to come to teach Kathleen. People began to appreciate her art.

Mrs. Kearney and her daughter are leading a comfortable life. But unsatisfied desire of earning money in Mrs. Kearney makes her more conscious about money.

Mr. Holohan, who is an active member of Irish cultural movement, helps her in this direction. One day he comes to the house of Mrs. Kearney and proposes to Kathleen to be accompanist at a series of four grand concerts in the Antient Concert Rooms. Kathleen has signed an agreement of concerts for which she is entitled to get some amount. Mrs. Kearney is anxious than Kathleen herself. She is very practical and she has some tacts to deal with these people.

Mr. Holohan arranges concerts on four days on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. Mrs. Kearney is

introduced to the secretary of the society, Mr. Fitzpatrick :

"... a little man, with a white, vacant face."<sup>3</sup>

During the session of concerts Mrs. Kearney observes that Mr. Holohan is not a good organiser. Mr. Holohan admits that the artists are not good. Friday's concert is cancelled. She feels that something might go wrong. She wants to learn whether Kathleen will receive her eight guineas even though she will play at only three concerts, not four as originally agreed upon. Moreover she finds that the secretary of the programme is trying to avoid the payment. Oftentimes she insists on Holohan to pay the money. Miss. Beirne, another member of the Organising Committee also does not give her clear reply. She is shown as weak and ineffectual. Mr. Kearney is a good husband. He comes along with Mrs. Kearney to attend the concert on Saturday evening. Mrs. Kearney is pleased to see him with her.

"She respected her husband in the same way as she respected the General Post Office, as something large, secure and fixed; and though she knew the small number of his talents she appreciated his abstract value as a male."<sup>4</sup>

She demands to pay full eight guineas to Kathleen. Mr. Holohan is displeased by her words. He refers her to Mr. Fitzpatrick. When the discussion between Mrs. Kearney and the secretary of the programme is hot, the organiser requests Miss Healy to play one or two accompaniments.

It is a time for concert Mr. Holohan asks her to reconsider. The crowd is getting restless. But Mrs. Kearney is adamant. At last Mr. Holohan gives four pounds promising to pay the rest of money during the intermission. The first half of the concert is successful. At the intermission Mrs. Kearney again demands the rest of the money. She tells Mr. Holohan that unless she receives the rest of money she will forbid her daughter to play for the second half. Mr. Holohan asks her to have a little consideration, but his opponent is relentless. And she tells him that she is asking for her right. And Mr. Holohan says only, "You might have some sense of decency."<sup>5</sup>

It seems that no one likes her conduct. She turns to her husband, with whom she speaks animatedly.

"She stood still for an instant like an angry stone image and, when the first notes of song

struck her ear, she caught up her daughter's  
Cloak and said to her husband : 'Get a cab!'"<sup>6</sup>

At last she leaves the theatre with her daughter Kath-  
leen, and her husband Mr. Kearney.

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## II

The story presents a portrait of Mrs. Kearney. She represents Dublin's cultural social life. Joyce is concerned with the presentation of Dublin's life. He portrays them with the fullest truth. The society in which he lived was a decaying one. Precisely Joyce has pointed out this in his stories. It seems that through the portrait of Mrs. Kearney Joyce depicts the sterile and provincial quality of Dublin's cultural life.

A Mother is a story of an individual. It is narrated in third person narrative technique. It is based on personal experience of Joyce. Joyce is interested in Mrs. Kearney's personal situation rather than in the public life of the story; because :

"... Joyce confines himself for the most part to the point of view of Mrs. Kearney."<sup>7</sup>

Joyce throws light on the private life of Mrs. Kearney through her brief biography. As a young girl she was admired for her lady like manners. She lived in her romantic manners. She marries a middle-aged bootmaker.

"After the first year of married life, Mrs. Kearney perceived that such a man would wear better than a romantic person, but she never put her own romantic ideas away."<sup>8</sup>

She prefers shrewdly sober and an ordinary man as her husband to continue her romantic desires with a secret luxury. She reveals the nature of Irish woman of the time of Joyce. Her daughter Kathleen, has musical talent. She provides some material to her daughter to improve her stage appearance. It indicates that :

"... her romanticism is allowed to override her financial prudence ..."<sup>9</sup>

Mrs. Kearney regrets for the money which she has spent, when she learns that the organisers of the programme are ordinary. She asks the organiser to pay for four concerts. Finally she does think of social etiquette. Her passion leads her into social error and against lady like behaviour. Mr. Holohan, asks Mrs. Kearney to have a little consideration.

"I thought you were a lady".<sup>10</sup>

Mrs. Kearney becomes angry and leaves. Kathleen follows her mother. Mr. Holohan delivers his parting shot :



"That's a nice lady ! O, She's a nice lady !" <sup>11</sup>

Mr. Kearney is a father who is depicted as model while Mrs. Kearney is depicted as :

"...a mother who is ready to jeopardise or even destroy her daughter's musical career because of her obstination in enforcing the law of a contract she has drawn herself. She has married Mr. Kearney out of spite and to silence the slander of her friends, but she soon capitalises on his name. She seizes the opportunity to introduce her daughter into nationalist circles to promote her piano-playing." <sup>12</sup>

Instead of traits like tenderness and self-sacrifice we get a cold, pushing, grasping shrew mother in her character. Her conduct at the time of concert is apposite to high class educated woman. It is dramatic. By nature she is sterile and avarice. The theme of the story is Irish Nationalist cultural life is shown as feeble and ineffective. Mr. Burke's judgement about pretentious conduct of Mrs. Kearney is correct.

"Kathleen is vehicle for her mother's thwarted romanticism and social pretensions, ..." <sup>13</sup>

It seems that through the character of Kathleen Joyce has depicted exploitation of the Irish movement. And Mrs. Kearney always thinks to improve her financial condition.

Though A Mother is a portrait of a lady, Mrs. Kearney, her daughter Miss Kathleen is equally as important as Ireland's church. And the role of her mother in her life is of a manager. It seems that :

"Like the church, Mrs. Kearney slips "the doubtful items in between the old favourites". Like the church, she offers wine and biscuits to the visitors whom she dominates. Like the Church, she insists on being paid; and like the Church she futilely excommunicates those who displease her.<sup>14</sup>

Jame Joyce is always concerned with the Dublin's society. It is mostly paralysed in all aspects. It seems that Dublin suffers from cultural as well as political paralysis. Kathleen belongs to the middle-class in the society. Through the depiction of musical programme, Joyce Portrays feeble cultural pretension in the Irish Nationalist Movement. Mrs. Kearney expects and financial gain which she never gets

in proper way. She is disillusioned then. Through such description Joyce has presented the life of Dubliners to the readers.

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7. Peake, C.H. James Joyce - The Citizen and the Artist, London : Edward Arnold, 1977, p.39.
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