In such a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people, not to be on the side of the executioners.

Albert Camus

Chapter I

War and the Human Factor: The Impact of War on Family, Women and Soldiers

Our century has confronted many turbulent changes and threats, starting with WWI, the atomic bombs and finally the threats of terror that have endangered the world. All these violent events of our history have led to a negative impact on individuals, families and nations. No one can ignore the terror of the impact of war on women and children. Many people have lost their lives and their private possessions and have become homeless and physically and psychologically handicapped. All the miserable images of war take place almost daily. What happens after war is much more tragic and miserable. Babies are left with no parents or non to take care of them. In our modern age, war targets civilians more than the combatants. Many reports and studies have shown that the number of casualties among non-combatants is outnumbered the casualties among the civilians. Graça Machel has made a detailed study of the impact of war on children. In his first chapter “Wars against Children”, he quotes the words of a ‘Ugandan schoolgirl who escaped the abduction by the lord’s Resistance Army’. These words inform the reader that there are many untold stories that are similar but not have been told to public. These unspeakable words of the victims have been common in our century where man has lost his humanity. The words of the Ugandan girl make clear the suffering undergone in war and in its aftermath: “I tell you, you can’t feel the pain of this suffering if you don’t see it physically. If you only glance at it, a sword of sorrow will pierce your heart ...” (Machel 1). Machel further informs the reader how war victimises children and civilians. Here his words go like this:

Throughout history, war has exacted an horrific toll on children. But modern warfare kills, maims and exploits children more callously and more systemically than ever before. ... During the 1990s, more than 2 million children died as a result of armed conflicts, often deliberately targeted and murdered. More than three times that number were permanently doubled or seriously injured. Even greater numbers have
fallen victim to disease, malnutrition and sexual violence. Modern-day conflicts are particularly lethal for children because little or no practical distinction is made between combatants and civilians. In recent decades, the incidence of civilians killed and wounded has risen dramatically, from 5 per cent to over 90 per cent of all casualties. (1)

War does not distinguish between man or woman, child or adult, old or young, civilian or combatant. All are victimised and brutalised during fighting. One of the miserable situations that entangle young soldiers in the times of war is that they are forced to join war or threatened to be killed. Here Machel produces the words of one ‘child soldier’ below the age of eighteen who was recruited by the rebels to fight. This soldier narrates his experience: “when I was killing, I felt like it wasn’t me doing these things. I had to because the rebels threatened to kill me” (Machel 7). Stanley Krippner and Teresa McIntyre in “Overview: In the Wake of War” confirm that the casualties and victims in modern wars are civilians: “During World War I, combatants represented 95 percent of the people killed. In recent years, it has been estimated that at least 90 percent of the people killed in ethnic, political, and religious wars are civilians non-combatants” (1).

The aftermath of war is the most terrible reality which a soldier faces. After he finishes fighting and a peace break begins, the trauma of war starts. He begins to think about himself and about other combatants who either died, maimed, or psychologically broken down because of what war caused to them. It would be a difficult moment for them and their families if they join back. What would happen to a soldier who lost an arm, a leg, an eye or half of his face or half of his body? How would he confront himself? How would he be able to reintegrate himself into the society? Raymond M Scurfield quotes these lines which were verbalised by a soldier:

We came home one by one, just like mortar rounds, just dropping in all over America. One by one, with absolutely no help or understanding! Random hits, but no help! They trained us psychologically, but can you still train that dog to do new tricks! Oh, to live happy. You have that family of brothers in Vietnam always in your thoughts. But, you left them there in Vietnam, kind of like a divorce, forever! Divorce from war/ trauma/ life/ pain/ hurt/ death/ loneliness. A void that sucks
on your life’s blood. To come from Hell and walk in to an American Part; but make sure you check your mind at the door! (201)

These are the feelings of many soldiers who come back from war or who desert it. Chris and Larry in All My Sons, Musgrave and his men in Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance, Harry in The Silver Tassie, and dead soldiers in Burry the Dead are just examples of the traumatic experience that soldiers face during war. This point is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Whatever the political or the economic motives of war, it is the common human beings who suffer and undergo all the miserable agonies that war imposes on them. Images of war such as killing of innocents, demolishing of livestock, trapping people inside their homes and countries have happened again and again throughout history. This chapter will attempt to analyse and bring out the inhuman acts of war and violence: humankind’s suffering against the atrocities and mindlessness of the war monster. The suffering of common people and the voiceless segment of the society in war will be discussed in detail in the plays selected under this chapter. In addition to the impact of war on soldiers, this chapter will examine the family units affected by war as dramatised in Brecht’s Mother Courage and Miller’s All My Sons.

Family is the central force behind all human activities according to religious scholars, spiritualists, sociologists and psychologists. It is the place where the human being shapes his personality and character that determine his future interaction with others inside and outside the family. Family is the small unit that has its impact on the larger world – the society which one lives in. Family is defined as the institution that “human being require; it is the key social unit within where we learn to love, come to terms with our aggressions, develop a conscience and require values” (qtd. in Lee 34). Parents are the centre of the family and the family is the core of this universe. In recent times, the family set-up has been under the impact of many destructive forces on top of which is war which has affected all aspects of life including family. Family in our age is becoming ‘nuclear’ and it is constantly threatened by atomic bombs. It is surrounded by nuclear weapons of mass destruction and has come under constant threat from all corners.

The absence of love and affection is rising in modern families resulting in straitened relationship among the family members. All these evils are the effects of the spread of wars and conflicts. The modern family in our age – the age of nuclear
weapons – has come under the perpetual threats of war. Flames of war are reaching every corner in the world and affect every individual, including those who are far away from the battlefield. Family members are under various pressures from different quarters as will be discussed in Arthur Miller’s All My Sons, Brecht’s Mother Courage and O’Casey’s The Plough. In these plays, war has created chaotic atmosphere, total family destruction and has left members of one family in complete disorder lacking mutual understanding, respect and love. The family has fallen apart and broken into ‘pieces’ due to the absence of peace and harmony. War has snatched away all human values and left the man in a ‘waste land’ with a heap of broken and breaking experiences.

This chapter shall identify and discuss such experiences that war left on women, family and soldiers. Mother Courage shows the losses which the family has faced during a war which lasted for thirty years. Mother Courage loses all her family members during this war. She appears on the stage with her children whose fathers must have been killed during the war. It has become a burden on her to bring up those children. During the course of work, Mother Courage’s daughter was injured several times which made her appear ugly. Courage was obsessed to get her daughter married. Unfortunately, she can not marry because a soldier once molested her and thrust something into her mouth which resulted in dumbness and in a later stage she was wounded on her forefront worsening her chances of getting married. All these incidents took place while the daughter was with her mother in the war front. In All My Sons, the family has to lead a miserable life due to the father’s involvement in manufacturing and shipping out faulty parts for warplanes. The son went missing and the mother was expecting him to come back. In The Plough, O’Casey examines how war can cause a rift between a wife and a commandant husband and how wives feel when they are left alone in their houses. This couple is newly married but their life is disrupted because of the war situation. The scene between Nora the wife, Clitheroe, the recently promoted commandant, and the Captain reflects women’s hatred towards war. Nora hides away a promotion letter for her husband just to keep his attention focused on her and for the fear of falling prey to the war monster. She feels sad because her husband cares only for the Citizen Army, forgetting his own commitment towards his wife. On hearing the news of her husband’s death she has a miscarriage and becomes mad. Like Lady Macbeth, she walks in her sleep due to her intense
emotions that tie her to her husband. These plays will be thematically analysed in this chapter to illustrate how family and women in particular suffer from war.

The playwrights selected under this chapter are basically concerned with social problems that result as the aftermath of war such as feeling of insecurity, loneliness and absence of love and devotion. Miller has addressed a socio-economic issue that has been prevailing in United States for many years. He affirms that the family disorder and the difficult social circumstances are the immediate consequences to war and capitalism that have shaken and wrecked the economy of the United States. All My Sons probes into the social and economic insecurity in relation to war. Mother Courage also addresses such social problems that have been forced on people. It also addresses the theme of capitalism in relation to war and its effect on common people. The Plough seriously addresses the human issues pertaining to the suffering of women during the war times. O’Casey stresses that it is always the women and children who are the innocent victims of war.

The Plough and the Stars (1926)

O’Casey believes that the slum dwellers of Dublin were the victims of the follies of war initiated by the nationalists. Though he was a freedom fighter and served in various fronts, O’Casey hated blood-shedding and killing because it increased the suffering of the slum dwellers who had had enough from wars. He thought that the present condition of Ireland would not afford more violence. He knew the consequences which the war may cause to the poor. Leady Gregory narrates O’Casey’s experience which he went through during the Rising:

He had taken no part in it, but a shot had been fired from some house … and the soldiers had dragged him and were actually raising their rifles to fire at him – ‘I felt in a doze, just from instinct I said a prayer, was certain death was there. But someone fired a shot that just missed their captain, and they ran to see where it came from, and I ran for my life through the fields and escaped.’ He thinks the Rising was ‘a terrible mistake and we lost such fine men. We should have won freedom by them. … (135)

The Plough expresses O’Casey’s antipathy towards the madness of war and violence during the Easter Rising and “exposes the human costs of political revolution” (Atkinson 42). Claire Gleitman in Modern Irish Writers points out the
nature of O’Casey’s anti-war view “… the Dublin plays deplore the glorification of violence that O’Casey finds endemic to Irish culture, the rush toward self-immolation that Pearse exalts in his soliloquies.” (303). O’Casey thought that war for the freedom of Ireland was not right at that time where people were dying of hunger and diseases. He thought that people needed to wage a war against want, poverty, illnesses and deteriorating living conditions. Schrank in Irish Playwrights argues this view “… these plays [Dublin Trilogy] provide a devastating critique of the new nation’s public pieties, arguing that Irish nationalism was not merely irrelevant to Dublin’s slum dwellers but also dangerous, increasing the toll of death and destruction without any compensatory benefits” (254). Further, Atkinson comments on O’Casey’s view towards war in relation to nationalism: “Being full of humanity, Mr O’Casey hates warfare and bloodshed. He writes down the revolution as nothing nobler than folly. His insurgents are not motivated by heroism. They are either vain or excitable men, intoxicated by words and stupid oratory” (71).

O’Casey reflected war images as they really happened in battlefields. Shots, blood shedding, corpses in streets, smoke, flames, fires, ruins and destruction of private and public assets, and looting are vivid war images communicated through the play. He focused on the impact of war on the non combatants and innocents and brings them as real victims of war. His main concerns were to portray the suffering of the women and children in the slums of Dublin and to contrast it with the foolishness and vanity of the patriotic leaders of the Easter Rising. These two images are maintained through the play. The audience feel the anguish of these slum dwellers against the background of war, and at the same time, they abominate the false patriotism and rhetoric of the leaders used to move the crowd’s spirit for fighting. Therefore, this section will attempt to give a critical analysis of the play focusing on the terrifying experiences the people who have suffered under the war.

The theme of the play is war with its true dimensions of disaster which gobbles up the society and its men and women who start the war with the holy intention of restoring to themselves their rights denied to them by the colonial masters. The beginning is very alluring but by the end everything is lost and what remains is mere disillusionment and destruction. The drama ultimately comes to the impact of war on the society and human beings.

The first to feel its negative and destructive impact is the human relationship in its myriad forms. Love is its victim and woman, the symbol and the centre of love
and its creativity, is systematically destroyed by the monster of war machine. The drama has many significant women characters; their significance lies in their dislike for war. The social scientists suggest that the female consciousness is more interested in continuity than in revolution. The idea of continuity is very close to the heart of woman. Marriage and family life maintain the stability and continuity of civilisation which is corroded by political and economic divisions, crises and wars. This is woman’s creativity in pressuring and restoring what history tears apart. Corrosion is uniform and repetitive. Vitality and organisation are unique and infinitely discoverable. These appeal the female consciousness of the women in the drama. They, directly or indirectly, deny the claims and opinions of men. Men assert themselves through violence and instability. Women – in marriage and family – work for non-violence and stability, for culture and spirit. Women are the unacknowledged energy of culture and community. Men systematically destroy this basic, elemental energy and try to invent an illusionary world of energy of their own in their war machine. This war machine forcibly weans away men from their women and thereby destroys its own inventor. Woman intuitively knows this basic truth of life. Man feels it and wants to lose himself in sharing this creative energy with his woman but his cerebral part or element is so strong that it arouses his ego to go apart in order to enjoy his own creation – the illusionary world of destructive energy of war machine and get destroyed. Mrs. Gogan understands this world of man – the world of death:

> I dunno; there's many a man this minute lowerin' a pint, thinkin' of a woman, or pickin' out a winner, or doin' work as you'r doin', while th' hearse drawn be th' horses with the black plumes is drivin' up to his own hall door, an' a voice that he doesn't hear is mutthering' in his ear, 'Earth to earth an' ashes t' ashes, an' dust to dust.' (The Plough 141)

The dialogue between Fluther and Mrs. Gogan is symbolic. Fluther feels “It’s only a little cold I have” (The Plough 141). He does not feel that something is seriously wrong with him; man underplays the reality of his world of death. So arrogant is he of his man’s power. Only a woman understands where the reality lies. She makes man aware of the danger staring in his face but he will not take care of it as Fluther states saying: “A man in th’ pink o’ health should have a holy horror of allowin’ thoughts o’ death to be festerin’ in his mind” (The Plough 141). The man might be faint and coughing but he can not think of death – he must keep it at a far
distance from himself. This is his ego speaking. The reality bursts out from the mouth of the woman who knows that the world of man is the world of death.

The woman next in importance is Nora who herself is the creative life-force seeking to keep her partner to herself and away from his destructive war-machine. Similar to Mahfouz’s woman in Death and Resurrection, Nora tries to hold her man back from engaging himself in further action. Symbolically, Mahfouz’s nameless woman represents the life-force acting as a mediator between the giant, a symbol for imperialism (USA), and the man, a symbol for Egypt to resolve the conflict and work out a peace plan. To Nora, men are mere “babies” who “don’t know th’ danger o’ them things” (The Plough 148). Man has made the sword but he does not know how to wield it; while using it he has no sense of time and place and that comes his ego. Peter is not ready to tolerate that somebody should call him “a lemon-whiskered oul’ Swine” (The Plough 148). So he will have his revenge with the sword. The war-machine is so handy that he jumps to it at the slightest provocation without thinking about the priority of its use and the correctness of time and place. He is ready even to violate the sanctity of home. So for man nothing is important - even house and family. His ego must not be touched. He needs to keep himself within his senses. He needs a woman to put his sword in a sheath so that there can be peace in the home and then in the world – Nora warning him, “If you attempt to wage that sword of yours at anybody again, it’ll have to be taken off you an’ put in a safe place away from babies that don’t know th’ danger o’ them things” (The Plough 148). She has to remind him “of what’s proper an’ allowable in a respectable home” (The Plough 148).

Men are really like babies who make mess and cause violence. For this reason, Nora takes the responsibility of restoring peace. She asks the two men to put an end to the dispute so that she can be ready to receive her husband. She wants to make a peaceful home for her husband, which in return will spread to the outside world: “let it end at that, for God’s sake; Jack’ll be in any minute, an’ allowable in a respectable home” (The Plough 148). She thinks that peace starts at home first and then in the universe. She attempts to create an atmosphere of peace for her husband, but the atmosphere outside is so intense that it has rooted out the peace at home.

The woman is to the man as the mother to the baby. Nora is the actual source of energy to her husband. But his ego is not ready to accept this essential truth. Man takes woman to be just a doll with which he can play as and when he likes without
taking care of the sentiments and desires of the woman without treating her as a sentient human being. She is expected just to satisfy him and his desires at his sweet will. He comes home just for this. Love to him is just a game; comes home, plays the game and again goes out with the puffed up feeling of having won the game and with the bloated ego of being the master. But the woman understands her baby. Nora is that understanding woman. There is this significant long talk between Clitheroe and Nora:

NORA. You were thinkin’ of th’ ... meetin’ ... Jack. When we were courtin’ an’ I wanted you to go, you’d say, ‘Oh, to hell with meetin’s,’ an’ that you felt lonely in cheerin’ crowds when I was absent. An’ we weren’t a month married when you began that you couldn’t keep away from them.

CLITHEROE. Oh, that’s enough about the meetin’. It looks as if you wanted me to go th’ way you’re talkin’. You were always at me to give up th’ Citizen Army, an’ I gave it up; surely that ought to satisfy you.

NORA. Ay, you gave it up – because you got th’ sulks when they didn’t make a Captain of you. It wasn’t for my sake, Jack.

CLITHEROE. For you sake or no, you’re benefitin’ by it, aren’t you? I didn’t forget this was you birthday, did I? (He puts his arms around her) And you liked your new hat; didn’t you? [He kisses her rapidly several times.]

... NORA coquettishly removing his arm from around her. Oh, yes, your little, little red-lipped Nora’s a sweet little girl when th’ fit seizes you; but your little, little red-lipped Nora has to clean your boots every mornin’, all the same.

... NORA. It’s hard for a body to be always keepin’ her mind bent on makin’ thoughts that’ll be no longer than th’ length of your own satisfaction. (The Plough 153-154)

This long talk explains the position of a man and a woman in their actual relationship. Man is made to understand the significance of love between them. For sometime he is lost in singing the tune of love. But the vainglorious world of man will
not allow him to betray if it knocks at his door and encourages his ego with an offer of
worldly advancement. The man becomes dazzled and blinded and forgets her and his
love for her. The requests of the woman are simply brutally rejected:

NORA a little nervous. Take no notice of it, Jack; they’ll go away in a
minute. [Another knock, followed by a voice.
VOICE. Commandant Clitheroe, Commandant Clitheroe, are you
there? A message from General Jim Connolly.
CLITHEROE. Damn it, it’s Captain Brennan.
NORA anxiously. Don’t mind him, don’t mind, Jack. Don’t break our
happiness. … Pretend we’re not in. let us forget everything to-night
but our two selves!
CLITHEROE reassuringly. Don’t be alarmed, darling; I’ll just see
what he wants, an’ send him about his business.
NORA tremulously. No, no. Please, Jack; don’t open it. Please, for
your own little Nora’s sake! (The Plough 156-57)

Clitheroe gets irritated with Nora’s plea to intervene between him and the call
of war. The nature of man favours violence and destruction over peace and happiness,
especially when there is remuneration or promotion. Like Mahfouz’s Woman in
Death, Nora’s love and affection is denied and she is thrown away after she has been
used. Clitheroe is selfish and wants to achieve his own desires at the expense of his
family. What the Woman says of the Man in Mahfouz’s Death is also true of
Clitheroe: “You are selfish. You have had your fill of me and now you cast me off
and hanker after the smell of blood” (Death 137). This is what exactly Clitheroe does
when the message comes from General Jim Connolly. He pushes his wife to hanker
after blood. Nora attempts to stop her husband by all means but he is not going to
listen to her words. She burns the promotion letter, but this plan does not work as
well. She again pleads to Jack to ignore the knock at the door and pretend that they
are not in the house, but she fails again. Clitheroe opens the door for the Captain to
to get in. The Captain informs him that he has been promoted and that the promotion
letter has already been sent to him. In the course of action, we feel sympathetic
towards Nora who has been doing her best to prevent her husband from joining the
fight. She has been desperately attempting to secure her husband from the viciousness
of war. She knows that the death of her husband is the death of the family. They are
newly married and she is pregnant. She anticipated that promotion to a commandant is the way to destruction – abjuring the purest creative love leading to peace and tranquillity by breaking the heart of woman and running after something which is destructive of human relationship and humanity:

NORA flaming up. I burned it, I burned it! That’s what I did with it! Is General Connolly an’ th’ Citizen Army goin’ to be your only care? Is your home goin’ to be only a place to rest in? Am I goin’ to be only somethin’ to provide merry-makin’ at night for you? Your vanity’ll be th’ ruin of you an’ me yet. … That’s what’s movin’ you: because they’ve made an officer of you, you’ll make a glorious cause of what you’re doin’, while your little red-lipp’d Nora can go on sittin’ here, makin’ a companion of th’ loneliness of th’ night! (The Plough 158)

Nora is hurt for this. But she is indifferent to her own humiliation and pain. No amount of torture can stop her from seeking to save the man from jaws of death. Man is needed for herself and for love. Hence life is not to be offered to death. With this belief Nora searches for her husband: “All last night at th’ barricades I sought you, Jack. … I didn’t think of th’ danger – I could think of you. … I asked for you everywhere. … Some of them laughed. … I was pushed away, but I shoved back. … Some o’ them even struck me … an’ screamed an’ screamed your name” (The Plough 196). It is the mother searching out for her lost child; it is the mother trying to save her child from the jaws of death. For this the mother is ready to make any sacrifice. But the man is an ignorant child that he can not appreciate the maternal affection. For his vanity he treats himself as a mature man who can take care of himself and does not like to be called a mother’s child – “… What way d’ye think I’ll feel when I’m told my wife was bawling’ for me at th’ barricades? What are you more than any other woman” (The Plough 196)?

The purest love is beyond his understanding. He can understand only war, destruction and death for these make him manly. This is how he understands Nora’s sentiments: “Are you goin’ to turn all th’ risks I’m takin’ into a laugh” (The Plough 196)? The vainglorious man gets everything from woman. The fact is that he is a man worth the name because of the woman who makes all sorts of sacrifices to make him a man – Nora implores Jack: “please, Jack. … You’re hurting me, Jack. … Honestly. … Oh, you’re hurting me! … I won’t, I won’t! … Oh, Jack. I gave you everything you
asked me. ... Don’t fling me from you, now” (The Plough 197). It is the clash of man’s selfishness and woman’s unselfishness. Once the child stands on his feet he flings himself away from his mother; he does not care if it hurts her. Here is the ego of the grown-up man – the Captain Brennan who fiercely addresses Clitheroe, “Why are you beggin’ her to let you go? Are you afraid of her, or what? Break her hold on you, man, or go up, an’ sit on her lap” (The Plough 197).

Now, the vast world is his field of activity and so he must rip himself away from the woman’s lap. He has now grown up too big for her lap: “He roughly loosens her grip, and pushes her away from him” (The Plough 197). The battlefield is calling him; he must go even if he meets his death. He calls this courage, bravery and manhood. But the truth is only known to woman – it is really cowardice that pushes him into war and he has to hide his true feelings and put up a brave face:

NORA clinging to Clitheroe, and indicating Brennan. Look, Jack, look at th’ anger in his face; look at th’ fear glintin’ in his eyes. ... He himself’s afraid, afraid, afraid! ... He wants you to go th’ way he’ll haveth chance of death shrikin’ you an’ missin’ him! ... his vry soul is cold ... shiverin’ with the thought of what may happen to him. ... It is his fear that is thryin’ to frighten you from recognizin’ th’ same fear that is in your heart! (The Plough 197)

Nora can read the face of the Captain who has come to inform Clitheroe of his promotion to a commandant, which will encourage him to lead the combatants. She sees fear and anguish on the face of Capitan Brennan and she attempts to drive her husband’s attention to the truth behind his promotion. All her attempts to protect him are gone with wind. For the sake of his false bravery he abjures the true ‘comrade’ – and embraces the false one; deliberately and foolishly love and lives are sacrificed for death. This is the wisdom of man that will not listen to the sanity of woman – the principle of love, peace and creativity. Nora desperately attempts to obstruct him: “I won’t let you go. ... I want you to be thure to me, Jack. ... I’m your dearest comrade; I’m your thurest comrade. ... they only want th’ comfort of havin’ you in th’ same danger as themselves. ... Oh, Jack, I can’t let you go” (The Plough 195-6)! She is left only with “a scream of pain” (The Plough 199) and agony of madness. But even in this state of her mind she is fixated on Clitheroe whom she feels incapable of protecting himself. The Covey describes her condition:

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Th’ doctor thinks she’ll never be th’ same; thinks she’ll be a little touched here. (He touches his forehead.) She’s ramblin’ a lot; thinkin’ she’s out in th’ country with Jack; or gettin’ his dinner ready for him before he comes home; or yellin’ for her kiddie. All that; though, might be th’ chloroform she got. … I don’t know what we’d have done only for oul’ Bessie; up with her for th’ past three nights, hand runnin’.

(The Plough 202)

Her mind seems to be in a state similar to that of Lady Macbeth; people have only their screams. Both are lost in “madly minglin’ memories of th’ past” (The Plough 203). Too much of violence of spirit has fallen upon their minds. Bessie describes that Nora’s state of mind mixes up dead things for living things. She affirms that Nora will not recover from this serious disease. Her husband betrays her for he does not need her help any more. There is a total break between the husband and the wife; in separation and loneliness she turns mad while the husband feels pride in embracing death – “she has had a hero for a husband” (The Plough 204).

In a state of hallucination during her sleep she screams “Something ails me, something ails me ...” (The Plough 205) and then she wakes up calling Jack. Her condition has worsened. Both suffer from the same ailment – violent separation from their husbands whom they have cared for as their babies. They want their babies back to themselves but the war would not allow it: it has its own demand; it needs the sacrifice of babies of its own altar. Women are helpless before this god of war: they can at best scream and go mad:

NORA thoughtfully. There is something I want to remember, an’ I can’t. With agony I can’t. I can’t. I can’t! My head, my head! Suddenly breaking from Bessie, and running over to the men, and gripping Fluther by the shoulders Where is it? Where’s my baby? Tell me where you’ve put it, where’ve you hidden it? My baby, my baby; I want my baby! My head my poor head. … Oh, I can’t tell what is wrong with me. Screaming Give him to me, give me my husband! (The Plough 205)

While the war is going on both husband and wife embrace death. That is the one and only one end to which this war leads. It bloats the ego of man and separates
the husband from wife and kills their love. That’s why it is a murderer - “Murderers, that’s what yous are; murderers, murderers” (The Plough 205)! War succeeds because man plays in its hands. Only if the man listens to the sanity of woman, the whole situation might change. But the bloated egoist that man is, he would not listen to her and accept her love. And that is because he wrongly assumes that he can stand on his own feet whereas the fact is that whatever he is, he is the creation of woman. Man without a woman is nothing: such a man turns destructive.

Somewhat similar is the theme of Bernard Shaw’s drama Candida. Candida too calls her husband Morell a baby: “Oh come! You great baby” (131). The adjective great is significant and ironical. It is a jibe at the bloated ego of man who actually is no better than a ‘baby’. Candida exposes the manhood of Morell:

CANDIDA. Ask me what it costs to be James’s mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one. Ask Prossy and Maria how troublesome the house is even when we have no visitors to help us to slice the onions. Ask the tradesmen who want to worry James and spoil his beautiful sermons who it is that puts them off. When there is money to give, he gives it; when there is money to refuse, I refuse it. I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him, and stand sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it, and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so. [With sweet irony] And when he thought I might go away with you, his only anxiety was what should become of me! And to tempt me to stay he offered me [leaning forward to stroke his hair caressingly at each phrase] his strength for my defence! His industry for my livelihood! his dignity for my position! (151)

Morell surrenders to her sanity:

MORELL. quite overcome. kneeling beside her chair and embracing her with hoyish ingenuousness. It’s all true, every word. What I am you have made me with the labor of your hands and the love of your heart. You are my wife, my mother, my sisters: you are the sum of all loving care to me. (151)
Morell understands that peace, happiness and prosperity flourish at home first and then all around. Clitheroe is arrogant and blind to this reality. Death and destruction follow. To be a hero, he abjures the love of his wife and embraces war and death. It is the death of no particular man or woman. It is the murder of humanity and human relationship; the murder of woman and of all the purest and innocent things of life and society.

Nora and Clitheroe start their life together with a vision of a happier life. It is not a fanciful romantic world of which they see a dream. It is a reality of life – the end of life to which together they have to move. In moving towards that end they come closer to the love, peace, and tranquility in Nature. It is the cradle “of happier transports to be” (The Plough 165). Nature is the centre of all creative energy shared by the trees, birds, and bees. They know of no other thing. Only man knows about war and destruction in violation of the principle of Nature. In the world of man there is this direct clash between world and Nature. Man embraces world and thus war and destruction in preference to Nature providing ‘happier transports to be’. World is abhorrent of this transport. Thus, when Nora and Clitheroe are singing of this transport ‘a knock is heard at the door’. Here one is reminded both of Wordsworth and Shakespeare. Wordsworth in his poem ‘The World is Too Much With Us’ repents over the destruction of the soul of man by his worldliness; he then wishes to be a Pagan enjoying the beauty and tranquility of Nature. Man violates these with a vengeance and creates an imbalance in his life. When he moves towards that there is a knock. Significantly the word ‘knock’ reminds us of the ‘knock’ at the gate in Shakespeare’s Macbeth. It is the gate of hell where innocence has been murdered. Here murderers are knocking at the door making Nora fearful and clinging closely to Clitheroe. She is really apprehensive; murderers are out prowling and may snatch Clitheroe away from her; her sentiments resemble that of Lady Macduff. And so she anxiously prays “Don’t mind him … Jack. Don’t break our happiness. … Pretend we’re not in. Let us forget everything to-night but our two selves” (The Plough 156)!

But murderers must have the man – Clitheroe, to be fed into the war-machine and thus to be dead. Nature is helpless; the world with its war-machine is all powerful. Nature can transport birds, trees and bees to a happier world but it is helpless before man who prefers the world with destructive machines. Man is so willing to embrace the danger; only woman protests. Here is Bessie –
BESSIE speaking in towards the room. There’s th’ men marchin’ out into th’ dreadful dimness o’ danger, while th’ lice is crawlin’ about feedin’ on the fatness o’ the land! But yous’ll not escape from th’ arrow that fleith be night, or th’ sickness that wasteth be day. ... An’ ladyship an’ all, as some o’ them may be, they’ll be scattered abroad, like th’ dust in th’ darkness! (The Plough 159-60)

O’Casey makes his audience aware of the suffering the women face during war. Women continuously scream over their men and protest against war and destruction. There is Bessie with anger in her heart over “th’ poor Tommies ... me own son, dhrenched in water an’ soaked in blood groppin’ their way to a shatterin’ death, in a shower o’ shells” (The Plough 168). These women can not think of the bloody bodies torn into pieces. Therefore, they keep screaming time after time but nothing happens to protect them from these horrible sights which war leaves behind. Woman’s cry or search for her man is considered a shameful act to man in the public view. It is considered an act of cowardice. That is, women must not weep or search for their men and they must accept the situation they lie in. But that is not the nature of women – they can not be kept silent when they are in danger. They raise their voices hysterically to be heard as Nora does when she searches for her husband “My Jack will be killed. my jack will be killed! ... He is to be butchered as a sacrifice to th’ dead” (The Plough 184)! Nora again reflects the true nature of woman. She states that “there’s no woman gives a son or a husband to be killed – if they say it, they’re lyin’. against God, Nature, an’ against themselves ...” (The Plough 184).

It is a clash of love and hate. The woman is for love; the man is for hate. Thus the two are not allowed to meet; Nora searches for Clitheroe everywhere and he is not to be found anywhere. Man and woman must remain separate; love must be lost in the wilderness. That is the dictate of war. And the woman who is working against this dictate must be dead. Nora goes hysterical and has to die without her man and without a little bit of their happiness: “I’d been lyin’ in th’ streets, only for him. ... they have driven away th’ little happiness life had to spare for me. He has gone from me for ever, for ever. ... Oh, Jack, Jack, Jack” (The Plough 186)! Another innocent woman leaves this world – a world of cruel war. She has been a sincere friend to Nora after Clitheroe’s murder. She has been with Nora in her bedroom to take care of her because Nora has developed insomnia and sleepwalking. She is a real victim of this
war in spite of her persistent attempt to establish peace. But, she is the one who pays the price for these follies of the man. Bessie is killed with shot while she has been pushing Nora away from the window. No man was there to help. All are out except for the insane Nora. Blood is pouring out of Bessie and Nora is hallucinating. What a miserable condition they have been through. Bessie asks Nora for a glass of water to quench her thirst before death; Nora is standstill. Bessie dies singing her death song:

I do believe, I will believe
That Jesus died for me;
That on th’ cross He she His blood,
From sin to set me free. ... (The Plough 216)

She ceases singing, and lies stretched out, still and very rigid as described by O’Casey. Her horrifying condition is narrated by Mrs. Gogan: Bessie dies. innocence incarnate is killed –

MRS. GOGAN quivering with fright. Blessed be God, what’s affther hapennin’? (To Nora) What’s wrong, Child, what’s wrong? She sees Bessie, runs to her and bends over the body Bessie. Bessie! She shakes the Body Mrs. Burgess, Mrs. Burgess! She feels Bessie’s forehead My God, she’s as cold as death. They’re affther murdherin’ th’ poor inoffensive woman! (The Plough 217)

In this war, the innocent women are always at the receiving end. Keeping a home together with a man is forbidden. There should be no woman; there should be no home. There is only war and blood. For real redemption lies in them.

The whole atmosphere of the war-torn nation is grim and dark. With O’Casey’s dramatic skills, the audience is able to visualise and draw a complete picture of the war situation. These visualised images of the on-going fight are ‘broadcasted’ through Mr Gogan: “I hear they’re blazin’ aways out o’ th’ G.P.O. That th’ Tommies is sthretched in heaps around Nelson’s Pillar an’ th’ Parnell Statue. an’ that th’ pavin’ sets in O’Connell Street is nearly covered be pools o’ blood” (The Plough 181). Blood here and there; it is everywhere. It is in the eyes of the people. People are suspicious because each one is a murderer. That is why, like Lady Macduff in Shakespeare’s Macbeth, Nora too cries “I won’t go away for you; I won’t. Not till you give me back my husband. Screaming Murderers, that’s what yous are: murderers, murderers” (The Plough 205)! The whole atmosphere is similar to that of
Macbeth where people are being butchered and people know not for what. In Macbeth sleep has been murdered and so Macbeth needs not sleep. Here also nobody seems to be sleeping, nobody is sure about his tomorrow; Fluther draws the grim picture in one sentence “How th’ hell does a fella know there’ll be any to-morrow” (The Plough 202)? This is the feeling that people have in Macbeth. Both the present and the future seem to be going out of their hands. Thus, no body is secure. There is no place on earth which can give security to the lives of the people as reflected below:

FLUTHER *furtively peeping out of the window.* Give them the a good shuffling. ... Th’ sky’s getting’ reddher an’ reddher. ...You’d think it was afire. ... Half o’ th’ city must be burnin’.

THE COVEY. If I was you. Fluther, I’d keep away from that window ... It’s dangerous, an’, besides, if they see you, you’ll only bring a nose

PITTER. Yes; an’ he knows we had to leave our own place th’ way They were riddlin’ it with machine-gun fir. ... He will keep on pimpin’ an’ pimpin’ there, till we have to fly out o’ this place too.

(The Plough 201)

Again there is a dialogue among people which makes it clear how insecure the people feel here:

The COVEY to Brennan. Now that you’v seen how bad she is, an’ that we daren’t tell her what has happened till she is betther, you’d best be slippin’ back to where you come from.

CAPT. BRENNAN. There is no chance o’ slippin’ back now, for th’ military are everywhere: a fly couldn’t get through. I’d never have got here, only, I managed to change me uniform for what I’m wearin’.... I’ll have to take me chance, an’ thry to lie low here for a while.

The COVEY frightened. There’s no place here to lie low. Th’ Tommies ‘ll be hoppi’ in here, any minute!

PETER *aghast.* An’ then we’d all be shanghaied! (The Plough 207)

No body is ready to give a place of hiding to a soldier. Everybody is thinking of his safety first. How can an unsafe man save another? Danger is lurking everywhere: it is not wise to invite it. Humanity and comradeship take a back seat. Everybody feels the encircling gloom. Bessie sings this song which draws a complete
picture of gloom. It is so complete that it is now beyond the power of any man to break it. The only hope is God. This is the extreme of man’s hopelessness:

BESSIE (singing as she leads Nora into room):

Lead, kindly light, amid th’ encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;
Th’ night is dark an’ I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on;
Keep Thou me feet; I do not ask to see
Th’ distant scene – one step enough for me.
So long that Thou hast blessed me, sure Thou still
Wilt lead me on;
O’er moor an’ fen, o’er an’ torrent, till
Th’ night is gone.
An’ in th’ morn those angel faces smile
That I have lov’d long since, an’ lost awhile! (The Plough 206-7)

The ray of hope can now reach man only if God is willing and merciful. Otherwise everybody is to be choked by the heavy cloud of darkness. In such a situation one seeks the support of another; it is like the blind supporting the lame man. Nora asks Bessie to support her and hold her in her arms so that she can feel somehow protected. But, if Bessie does so then how long will this temporary security last? Everyone is under threat. After sometime Bessie gets a shot and she succumbs to her wounds. When she asks Nora for help, the helpless Nora does not respond to Bessie which makes the situation worse.

The false notion of security engulfs the whole nation and Nora is just an example. This woman and many others suffered a lot due to the false notions of nationalism. She is suffering the ‘agony’ and the loss of happiness which lies in her husband who has been snatched away from her by the war-lords who have no mercy and have no humane feelings. Nora is in the same situation in which Lady Macduff feels herself to be alone, unprotected and at the mercy of the cruel world around her. Macduff has run away; Clitheroe too. Both have betrayed their wives. There is thus a complete break of the basic human relationship.

There is thus a total loss of humanity. Dehumanisation (the subject of the 4th chapter) has set in; it has overwhelmed the individuals and the society. We have the
picture of a human body in an anguished movement, tugged, wrenched, beaten, pierced, stung, scourged, dislocated, flayed, gashed, scalded, tortured and finally broken on the rack. It is the suffering not of particular men and women, but of man and the suffering is perhaps more important than its causes. However, the people are not all hopeless. They simply need patience and fortitude to bear their suffering. Peter tells Nora to “have to have patience … to put up with twarthers an’ tormentors in this world” (The Plough 185).

Mother Courage and Her Children (1939)

Brecht devoted his writings to denounce and criticise capitalism and the German fascist system which led the nation to a catastrophic war. Dickson in Towards Utopia points out that Brecht condemned Hitler for his wrong foreign policy which plunged Europe “into war on an unprecedented scale” (97). Brecht was unhappy with his own times and was enraged with the policy of his country. As a young man, he was still unaware of the dangers of war and its political dimensions. The early months of the Great War were “characterised by a high degree of national unity born of optimism” (Rosenhaft 5). This spirit inspired Brecht to write “All of us, all Germans fear God and nothing else on earth” (“Rosenhaft 5). But, when the war affected all spheres of life, economically, politically and socially, Brecht began to denounce it and warn people against its capitalistic motives. Wermer Hecht states that Brecht “looked upon the events of the times with critical eyes” without being influenced by “the imperialistic war propaganda that was carried on in the schools” (qtd in Grimm 24). Esolin adds that Brecht’s “glowing hatred of war” (qtd in Grimm 24) has firm grounds in his early works. Describing the Brechtian tragic vision of the human condition in 1920s when Germany underwent drastic changes, M. Helena GonClves Da Silva comments:

The middle-class values he [Brecht] was taught as a child (his father was the managing director of a paper mill and his mother was the daughter of a civil servant) had been shattered by the mass slaughter of the war and by the cynicism of the 1920s. In the place of the grandeur of the Reich he saw ruins, unemployment, starvation rations, galloping inflation, and still the determination to restore the country's military power which, with the exception of the newly constituted Communist
Party (whose leaders were assassinated in the first two months of the Armistice), encountered no serious resistance. (105)

He kept silent because many of his colleagues and writers were assassinated and executed. This “historical turbulence,” Da Silva notes, “may well explain why he avoids characters and situations that might suggest an idealised version of communist man and society” (108). By Historical turbulence and experiences, she refers to “the death and suffering of German refugees” and to “the alliance between Hitler and Stalin” (108). Brecht critical view of war and the prevailing situation in his country becomes clear through Wieland Herzfelde’s conversation with an English woman on a ship heading towards America. Herzfelde quotes few lines from Brecht’s German Marginal Notes to answer the woman’s query about important contemporary German literature. He translates the following lines to her which explicitly reflect Brecht’s vision of the tyrannical regime of his society at that time:

Oh the wall it said in Chalk:
They want war.
He who wrote it
is already fallen. (Herzfelde 96)

These lines, as Herzfelde narrates, affected the woman and convinced her that the danger of extinction of the humanity is approaching. This stunning destructibility which the German system employed was an alarming danger forcing many to leave their homeland, as the man on the ship. The situation in Germany became disastrous and intolerable for people to stay. This situation has been described by Brecht in Scene IX: “The great war of religion has lasted sixteen years and Germany has lost half its habitants. Those who are spared in the battle die by plague. Over once blooming countryside hunger rages. Towns are burned down. Wolves prowl the empty streets …” (Courage 67). Mother Courage remarks on the deteriorating conditions of the people: “What do I want with bed feathers? People don’t even have houses” (Courage 56). She further converses with the Cook about the situation:

MOTHER COURAGE. In Saxony someone tried to saddle me with a chestful of books in return for two eggs. And in Württemberg they would have let me have their plough for a bag of salt. … In Pomerania I hear the villagers have been eating their younger children. Nuns have been caught committing robbery.

THE COOK. The world’s dying out. (Courage 67-68)
Many left the country to escape death. During the WWI, the rate of casualties was alarming among civilians as it was among the military people due to hunger and diseases (Rosenhaft, 7). This compelled Brecht to write Mother Courage as a response to the unavoidable situation prevailing in Germany for a long time. He uses the ‘Thirty Years War’ as a subject to his play because he found Germany was heading towards another war which might be much more ferocious than the ‘Thirty Years War’. His prophetic vision in Mother Courage came true. Using Wedgwood’s description of the ‘Thirty Years of War’, Eric Bentley, in the preface to Mother Courage writes:

The war solved no problem. Its effects, both immediate and indirect, were either negative or disastrous. Morally subversive, economically destructive, socially degrading, confused in its causes, devious in its course, futile in its result, it is the outstanding example in European history of meaningless conflict. The overwhelming majority in Europe, the overwhelming in Germany, wanted no war; powerless and voiceless, there was no need even to peruse them that they did. ... They did not learn then, and have not since, that war breeds only war. (“Preface” VI)

Dickson notes that war, as presented in Mother Courage, “is man-made, not the work of fate or what insurance policies still quaintly call an act of God” (107) further points out that “Brecht specifically warned against any fatalistic interpretation of history: ‘Historical conditions may not be conceived ... as inscrutable forces ...: they are created and maintained by man’” (107). Peter Demetz remarks that “Brecht correctly resisted anyone presenting her primarily as a mother who, like Niobe’s, is unable to protect her children from the vicissitudes of war.’ For the playwright, Mother Courage is the “merchant-mother,” “a great living contradiction who is disfigured and deformed beyond recognition” (139).

Niobe is one of the more tragic figures in Greek myth. Niobe was the queen of Thebes married to Amphion, King of Thebes. Niobe and Amphion had fourteen children (the Niobids), and in a moment of arrogance, Niobe bragged about her seven sons and seven daughters at a ceremony in honor of Leto, the daughter of the titans Coeus and Phoebe. She mocked Leto, who only had two children, Apollo, god of prophecy and music, and Artemis, virgin goddess of the wild. Leto did not take the insult lightly, and in retaliation, sent Apollo and Artemis to earth to slaughter all of Niobe’s children. Apollo killed the seven sons while they practiced their athletics. Artemis killed the seven daughters with her lethal arrows. (Some versions have a few of the children being spared.)

source: encyclopedia Mythica <http://www.pantheon.org/>
Fowler describes *Mother Courage* as “a story of cruelty, barbarism, and unfreedom, of a crime against humanity … where no benefit is had from human industry, but all live in continual danger and fear of violent death, and ‘the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’” (3). Fuegi adds that it is “a play of protracted war and of fragile peace” (Fuegi, Bertolt Brecht 111). These arguments will be analysed through the textual analyses of character’s speeches and their reactions towards the follies of war.

*Mother Courage* depicts the traumatic experiences of a family against the background of war. It probes into various critical issues related to war which one often hears and watches in this age. It satirically exposes the evils of the army leaders who exploit the defeated villagers and townspeople. Those are the conditions which Brecht warns his people against. He is alarmed to the threats of the Nazis represented by Hitler. In this section, an attempt will be made to analyse how human beings suffer due to war which becomes a curse on people especially the poor. *Mother Courage* has been criticised for being a feeder to the war machine. This view, of course, does not reduce or affect the audience’s attitude against the destructibility of the war monster. Houses are demolished, babies are trapped inside damaged houses and people are bleeding as dramatised in the play. Brecht revised the play several times to alienate the spectators from sympathy with *Mother Courage* but people continue to look at her as a victim of war whose grievance is similar to that of Niobe whose seven children were killed one after another by Apollo. This view irritated Brecht because he wanted people to look at courage as a business woman.

*Mother Courage* is a remarkable play which probes into social issues revealing the tremendous amount of destruction the war leaves behind among the civilians and their possessions. Brecht’s *Mother Courage* is placed in a complicated situation full of contradictions, which makes his audience ask questions about their society – do they put the blame on *Mother Courage*, or on her society or on both of them? This intellectual engagement is one of the brilliant features of Brecht’s epic theatre. Spectators are intellectually engaged with these issues. They have to think about the issue and suggest solutions to it which in turn may bring about a better social change.

Agitated by the turn of events sweeping the whole Europe, Brecht felt that if precautions were not taken, the whole nation would face another war due to the growing threat of the Nazi Germany. Brecht drew the attention of his audience to an
important aspect that threatened the society – war and capitalism. He emphasised that the common people and proletariats were the real victims of war driven by capitalists. The working class, the villagers and the voiceless and powerless part of the society, were the ones who suffer the atrocities of war. They were the first ones to be recruited for the war. The play attempts to bring out the traumatisms of war inflicted upon the have-nots and helpless people. Brecht himself had a first-hand experience during the WWI. He was posted as a medical apprentice in Munich University in 1917. During his training in a local military hospital, he saw human bodies being patched and amputated. At this tender age, Brecht understood what it meant to go to war. From then onwards he started to attack the regimes responsible for wars and instability.

Brecht’s Mother Courage carries the anti-war message that Aristophanes’s Lysistrata does. Lysistrata, the central character warns her female friends of the war consequences and urges them to act decisively and quickly to put an end to it. She suggests to her friends to go on a sex strike till their husbands draw back from war. Though this step sounds antisocial, but Lysistrata continues to get her plan fulfilled. Her determination is similar to that of Kattrin’s in Mother Courage. Kattrin is an admirable character. She takes up a courageous adventure to warn the townspeople against the advance of the enemy. She succeeds in getting her message by beating the drums. She has been shot by one of the soldiers. These extreme steps taken by Lysistrata and Kattrin illustrate the intensity of their hatred to war and violence. Kattrin knows that she is a dead person because the soldier will not spare her life if she gets down of the roof and goes on beating the drums.

In Scene XI, Brecht presents his spectators with moving confrontations between the forces of evil represented by the Catholic soldiers from one side and the forces of good represented by the peasants and innocent townspeople from another side. This destructive evil force advance towards the town at night to bring the maximum point of obliteration on their opponent forces. They searched for a guide among the villagers to show them the way to the town. The peasants got confused and hesitated to show them the way. The soldiers became aggressive and intimidated to demolish the livestock and kill all the cattle. The peasants could not do anything except to pray to God for protection:

Our Father, which art in Heaven, hear our prayer, let not the town perish with all that lie therein asleep and fearing nothing. Wake them, that they
rise and go to the walls and see the foe that comes with fire and sword in
the night down the hill and across the fields. … Heavenly Father, hear us,
only Thou canst help us or we die, for we are weak and have no sword
nor nothing; we cannot trust our own strength but only Thine, O Lord; we
are in Thy hands, our cattle, our farm, and the town too, we’re all in Thy
hands, and the foe is nigh unto the walls with all his power. (Courage 76)

The peasant woman invoked God to grant the townspeople safety and rescue
from this expected tragedy. With this vivid presentation of the assault process, the
spectators became emotional towards the peasants’ helplessness and the
townspeople’s innocence. They identified themselves with both the sleeping innocents
and helpless peasants who would not be able to act to prevent the human crisis from
taking place. The woman’s prayers in times of violence and helplessness are similar to
Peter Porter’s lines in “Your Attention Please”, in which he voices the possibility of a
rocket attack. He warns people and instructs them how to act within the ten minutes
left for them to get shelter. In the last lines of this poem he proclaims:

We are all in the hands of God.
Whatever happens happens by His Will.
Now go quickly to your shelters. (61-63)

The woman’s vivid account of war and the religious language makes one visualise
how terrible the monster of war is and how the innocent people are victimised. With
this presentation, one is reminded what happens in this modern age (the ‘Blind Age’
as Dharamvir Bharati calls it) – age of destruction and mass slaughter of innocents.

Scene XI dramatises the human disaster which was initiated by the Catholic
forces to attack their Protestant enemies in town of Halle. The Catholics planned to
kill the innocents sleeping in their beds and destroy their possessions. Here, the
religion is abused and politicised to attain certain goals laid down by politicians and
capitalists. They use religion to achieve their capitalistic aims of territorial expansion
and exploitation of the poor class. This point will be elaborated in chapter II which
discusses the relation between war and capitalism. This inhuman catastrophe takes
place during war through various incidents. In addition to the intended destruction of
Halle town and the village near it in Scene XI, Brecht had already introduced his
spectators in Scene V with similar act of violence. The Scene begins with “The wagon
stands in a war ruined village” (Courage 45). From the conversation between the
characters, one gets to know the victory of King Tilly’s over the protestant village. There is a lot of destruction and casualties among the villagers. The victorious forces act inhumanely towards the helpless people. A soldier tells Mother Courage that the army chief “allowed an hour to plunder the town, it is a swindle” (Courage 45). The victorious soldiers seized every opportunity to drink and entertain themselves at the expense of the villagers. This dialogue reflects the victimisation of the villagers:

THE FIRST SOLDIER. In a bombardment we can’t pick and choose.

A PEASANT. Brought in by The Chaplain. My arm’s gone.

...THE PEASANT. The child is still there! Kattrin runs in.

THE CHAPLAIN. To the woman. Stay where you are. She is getting it for you. (Courage 46)

A house is demolished by the enemy’s attack and a peasant was rescued but lost an arm; a child is trapped inside the house and the roof may fall any moment. Kattrin rushed in to save the child whose mother was rescued by the Chaplain. Like a humanitarian worker, the Chaplain saves the casualties and persuades Mother Courage to hand him bandages for the wounded. This war image takes the spectators to a real war front where houses are demolished; casualties are rescued and humanitarian aids are offered for the victims. With these images of a war situation, audience is engaged emotionally and intellectually with live-like pictures of war. This increases the anti-war feelings communicated in the play. Brecht also draws the attention of his spectators to a dark aspect of the army life and action when they conquer a city or a village. They kill, destroy, rape and drink whenever they get the opportunity. This crisis in values is pointed out by Mother Courage to her daughter. She tells her that soldiers are beasts and warns her not to appear attractive in front of them, though she knows that the present state of her daughter does not attract anyone. During the war, a reference is made that a soldier thrust something into her mouth which made her dumb. The scar on her forehead is also by a soldier when she has gone to the town to bring goods for her mother to sell in the war. The Chaplain puts the blame on the war-mongers: “The men who start the wars are responsible, they bring out the worst in people” (Courage 54). Like the Covey in O’Casey’s The Plough, the Chaplain states that it is the political and economic motives which are
behind the wars. Like the Covey who blames the politics for abusing the religion in war, the Chaplain states that religion is used as a cloak to hide political motives.

Mother Courage suffered a lot as a result of the war when she decided to join it. She had no idea what she might face in the war. Received by recruiting officers, she verbally confronted them and threatened to slice them with her knife if they came closer to her sons. As the action moves on, one feels the agony of Mother Courage over the loss of her children one after another and blames the recruiters for this. Eilif was executed for a robbery crime he committed during peace for which he would have been rewarded during war. During this temporary truce, her son has been executed, which suggests that the blame should not be put on Mother Courage. Of course, she contributed to it but she should not be held responsible for it. Her other son, Swiss, was caught by the enemy forces for hiding the cash box. The regiment of the enemy forces held him as a hostage and demanded an adequate ransom with which Mother Courage could not comply. She haggled a lot but she finally made up her mind to pay the amount as a bribe after she agreed to sell the wagon to Yvette. Unfortunately, she was too late. A shot was heard in a distance indicating the execution. Mother Courage contributes to the death of her sons. but it is the war which is the main factor. If there is no war, Mother Courage and her family could have been living safely. She tried to prevent them from being enlisted:

MOTHER COURAGE. To Swiss Cheese. Run and tell everybody they’re trying to steel your brother! She draws a knife. Yes, just you try, and I’ll cut you down like dogs! We sell cloth, we sell ham, we are peaceful people! (Courage 8)

Brecht employs every single episode to expose the repercussions and iniquities of war. In addition to the horrible reality of destruction the war brings on human beings, Brecht exposes the corruption of the army officers and soldiers especially during war. If Mother Courage had bribed the Sergeant in the right time, her son could have been spared. In another occasion, Brecht exposes one of the army officers selling his ammunition to Mother Courage. In Scene V, Mother Courage rebukes another soldier for stealing a coat during their attack on a village.

Mother Courage’s most terrifying bereavement is the death of her daughter Kattrin. Courage leaves her daughter in the custody of a peasant family while she goes to town to buy articles to sell to the soldiers. The death of her daughter is due to
the war, of course. Courage cannot keep an eye on her children constantly. It is the war that hunts down their lives. She realises the destructiveness of war when her daughter is wounded by a drunken soldier. Her agony increases when she sees her dumb daughter shot dead by a soldier.

Courage did not join the war because she liked it but she was forced into it. As stated earlier, it was the circumstances that had compelled her to search for sustenance for her family. She saw that the people around her were starving to death. She thought that by joining the war she could make some profit. But, even the soldiers and sergeants did not have enough and they live on plunder and corruption. She cursed the war several times but she continued because the situation did not help her much to quit. Brecht gave us an example of Courage’s intention to leave the war and stay away peacefully with her daughter. Courage decided to quit the war and go with the Cook to his hometown, Utrecht, where they could run an inn inherited from his mother. After the bloody business journey which she underwent along with her children, Courage ultimately decided to draw back. The continuous and devastating war in Europe had already cost her two sons and had brought serious damage to her daughter. Unfortunately, her desire to live peacefully failed because of the Cook’s callousness and selfishness. He accepted her company on the condition that she had to come alone because the inn would not accommodate more than two. Courage rejected this condition and decided to stay with her deformed and dumb daughter. This incident raised Courage high. All the previous selfish actions of Courage melted at this point when she was not only concerned with her safety but with the safety of her daughter. This sacrifice refutes the fact that she is a despicable person or a hyena of the war.

Family in the times of war and violence is another important aspect in Mother Courage. As mentioned earlier that the modern family is under continuous threat of war. War only brings calamities and disasters upon family and the universe. As this play dramatises, family unit dissolves gradually as the war goes on. Although one knows that Courage and her family appear on the stage after many years of war. The family appears to be one unit in the first scene though the children of Courage are from different husbands belonging to different nationalities. This proves that Courage has attempted to keep her children together despite the adversities of life. The family is disrupted with the recruiting officers whose aim is to recruit fresh blood for the
army. In this regard, John Fuegi makes use of the photographic record for *Mother Courage* contained in the Berlin Ensemble to comment on Courage’s family: “The family first appears as a very tightly knit group, in opposition to the visual clump on the other side of the stage, of the soldiers” (*Bertolt Brecht: Chaos* 121); in another figure, “the unity of the family is disturbed as Courage enters what we may call the space of the recruiters and one of the recruiters enters the family space” (*Bertolt Brecht: Chaos* 120).

If one puts the picture of the first Scene and that of the last one (Scene XII) one can understand the impact of the war on the family. The first Scene shows Courage with her children; the last Scene shows her alone. This makes the audience reflect on the miserable circumstance of the family during this particular war. Courage lost her three children to the war that continued for many years. Fuegi’s figures in page 121 and 122 describe Courage’s family in the first Scene of the play. Those three reproduced figures critically examine the family against the background of war. The first figure reveals the family integration and unity just before getting involved in the war: her three children appear to be in one spot while the mother negotiates with the recruiting soldiers. In the second figure, the family integration is disrupted by the appearance of the soldiers. As the picture indicates, one of her sons moves away from the rest of the ‘herd’ towards the soldiers and stands in the middle: Courage being alert to the danger which her son may face in approaching the soldiers bending down with a warning finger towards her son as if telling him to stick to the wagon. As a mother, Courage senses the danger and acts to protect her children from approaching the army life. War was broken out in Europe and there was no place safe to keep her children. She was probably right in taking her children with her. She thought she could defend them against any danger. The third figure indicates that the family is now away from their wagon which indicates the disintegration and looseness of the family as a result of being in a war front. The common people are intriguingly recruited and victimised by the sergeants. Her two sons are ultimately enlisted against her wish. Fuegi describes this act of recruiting as “horrible” in which “a person [Eilif] is led away to certain death with no outcry at all” (*Bertolt Brecht: Chaos* 123). Courage is not to be blamed for losing her son to the military because of “a moment spent bartering over a belt. The moment is a quiet one, a natural one” (Fuegi, *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos* 123). That is, war mongers are the ones who are responsible for such
destruction and agony which people suffer. Courage's tragedy is far from being expressed in terms of words. Even at the extreme adversity, Courage is stubborn with strong determination to live through unpleasant circumstances. She moves on and do not lament her misfortune. Among the most agonising incidents was the unjust execution of Eilif by the enemy regiment for hiding the cash-box. The agony of Courage is indescribable when the corpse of Eilif was brought by the soldiers for recognition. All became standstill when the soldier uncovered Eilif's face. She did not acknowledge that the dead body was her son for the sake of saving the lives of her daughter and the Chaplain. She suppressed her sorrows and "looked the other way and tore her mouth wide open" (qtd. in Fuegi, Bertolt Brecht: Chaos 126).

Brecht makes his audience standstill and motionless as the dead body of Eilif was carried by two men to confirm his identification. Of course, the audience sympathises with Courage as a stretcher carrying her son to be placed in front of her to identify him. All the people around her knew that the dead body was her son, but she denied him. She had a look and turned silent and speechless. This is how Brecht puts it in Scene III:

Yvette brings Katrin, who walks over to her mother and stands by her. Mother Courage takes her hand. Two men come on with a stretcher: there is a sheet on it and something underneath. Beside them, the sergeant. They put the stretcher down.

THE SERGEANT. Here's a man we don't know the name of. But he has to be registered to keep the records straight. He bought a meal from you. Look at him, see if you know him. He pulls back the sheet. Do you know him? Mother Courage shakes her head. What? You never know him before he took that meal? Mother Courage shakes her head. Lift him up. Throw him in the carrion pit. He has no one that knows him. (Courage 40)

Courage's grievance over her son can be compared to that of Niobe whose seven sons were killed by Apollo:

Her Hair no breeze can stir; her cheeks are drained
And bloodless; in her doleful face her eyes
Stare fixed and hard - a likeness without life.
So too inside; that tongue of hers congeals;
Her palate's hard; no pulse beats in her veins;
No way for neck to bend nor arms to wave
Nor feet to walk; and all within is stone. (Ovid 130)

Mother Courage conveys Brecht's criticism of war and stresses that destruction will engulf the world if the people keep passive towards it. Brecht believed that war was the creation of people or a group of people. He refuted the fact that war was a natural disaster and affirmed that the man contributed to it and played a vital role in keeping the wheels of the war machine going. Brecht thought that the people could put an end to any particular war if they took up positive actions. In the play, Brecht explained how the passiveness of some people, who did not take courageous steps to stand against the war mongers, worsens the situation further. The catastrophe that happened in Halle, Scene XI, explains how passive the people were to take a bold stand towards the attacking soldiers. The villagers were depicted as fear-stricken and cowards in retaliating against the invaders. They also seemed to yield to help the army locate the way to the town. This passive image of the villagers was contrasted with Kattrin’s active and positive reaction. When the villagers succumb to their fate, Kattrin climbed up the roof with a drum. She beat the drum loudly so that the people of the neighbouring town could hear the warning beats and act accordingly. She succeeded in getting her message through but after she was shot dead – ‘One dies better than many’. That is what Kattrin did to save the lives of many innocents. Brecht watched a similar incident when he was inside Sternberg’s flat looking from the window at the police shooting innocent people in the street in 1929 (Willet, Brecht in Context 181). Therefore, to put an end to such kind of violations and killings, Brecht urged his people to be active participants to end war and violence or else war would continue for ages as the soldiers’ song illustrates:

Dangers, surprises, devastation-
The war takes hold and will not quit.
But though it last three generations
We shall get nothing out of it.
Starvation, filth, and cold enslave us.
The army robs us of our pay.
Only a miracle can save us

8 See also Kenneth R Fowler’s dissertation The Mother of All Wars (46-47)
And miracles have had their day. (Courage 81)

The continuation of the war is because of the peoples’ passive action towards war. That is, if people determine to change themselves, then the environment around them will have to respond to this change. This is what Brecht conveys to his audience. According to the Marxist ideology, which is central to many of Brecht’s works including Mother Courage, human beings can change the conditions under which they live and that active assistance of the people is required to change the society around. This is how Brecht looks at Mother Courage, unable to change and unable to learn from her experiences. If she changes, the society will change. The message which Brecht urges his audience to draw from Mother Courage is the importance of positive steps and reaction towards corruption and violence in one’s society. If people, as Mother Courage dramatises, are passive, then this violence will reign for generations as prophesied in the soldiers’ song at the end of the play. This idea will be elaborated in the following chapter.

All My Sons (1947)

All My Sons discusses the miserable life of the victims of the American dream - the war - to impose the American power on the rest of the world. It discusses the American imperialistic and capitalistic exploitations of the people overseas and its adverse impact on its own people. Recently, the American war policy has been satirically criticised by Michael Moore, an American anti-war activist and a film maker, in his controversial film of 2004 Fahrenheit 9/11. This film finds an echo in All My Sons for they both probe into the economic motives behind war and address the exploitation and victimisation of the youths of the common people who are disillusioned by the American authorities. Moore exposes real families suffering from the loss of their dear ones in the war. In All My Sons, for example, one finds that the Keller family has two young people in the Army fighting overseas. One returned and the other crashed his plane intentionally to escape the scandal that his father has committed during the WWII. This family, as many others, suffered a lot because the country being involved in the war. Similarly, Fahrenheit 9/11 depicts the agony of families crying at the loss of their dear ones as a result of the war with a country thousands of miles away from the United States, which causes no threat to the American society. In one episode, the film exposes that it is only the poor people who are recruited for the Army. It is these young poor people who suffer the horrors of
war, as conveyed through the film, and not the youths of the families of the White House or those who constitute the influential sector of the society. Moore in his film puts the blame where it belongs. It is the US administration which is responsible for the suffering of the families and the young soldiers. He criticises America for the suffering of the people of Iraq and for victimising the American soldiers for ungrounded accusations against Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, Jean Gould in *Modern American Playwrights* argues that the Americans begin to ask questions after the end of WWII blaming not only the enemy but also the American individual for being involved in the slaughter which Miller exposes in his play showing the consequences on the man’s negligence (251-52).

Joe Keller, resembling the US administration, is doing the same job that Moore criticises in his film. Joe Keller kills many innocent people for his mere economic motives. *All My Sons* examines this idea as well as focuses on the psychological barriers between the family members in post-WWII America. The suffering of the Keller and the Deever family members is due to the pressures of the government authorities on manufacturing and shipping out the defective parts to Air forces. The situation becomes more complicated when Joe and his partner comply with authorities’ demand for airplanes’ motors. It is a very difficult choice for Joe he has either to accept the contract or suffer by losing the business contract. After he has made sure that his son, Larry, does not fly the P-40 planes, for which the defective parts are shipped out, he directs his partner to accept the deal. Three years have elapsed; Larry is still missing and is never heard of. The relationship between Joe and his son Chris gets worse. He becomes sure of his father’s war crime when he gets to know that his brother has committed suicide to escape the scandal his father had committed, as explained in the suicide note. He also decides to leave his parents. This chaos in the family set-up is created by the destructive system of the American capitalism that has led the country through many wars. The background behind all these psychological disturbances and nervous breakdowns is provided by the prevailing materialism and continuous wars which America has engaged with many countries. The atmosphere is that all families have suffered the horrors of war in one way or another. The suffering of this family is just one example that helps the audience and readers to understand America of the 1940s. Many families have suffered different losses during wars especially in the WWII – many have lost their
loved ones; many others have suffered from hunger and starvation in their home countries because of the miserable economic conditions. This is what a war brings along with it for nations and individuals. On the family situation during the WWII, Judy Barrett Litoff writes: “family separations and dislocations were commonplace during the 1940s, with just over 18 per cent of the America’s families contributing fathers, sons and brothers to the armed services during the World War II” (“Introduction” IX). Litoff, further, states that the children are the ones who suffer a lot during war times since their father or their elder brother serves in war overseas and it is not sure whether they are coming back. Litoff quotes this emotional plea appearing in one of the letters which Sammy writes to his father serving in the war front: “I wish you would come back because I want to see you, I wish you could come back now. Are you going to come back some day, Poppa, are you, are you” (“Introduction” ix)?

The universality of All My Sons lies in the way it depicts the emotions and sufferings of a mother on the loss of her son. The mother’s feeling is different from that of the husband who values business over everything else. The mother can not accept the truth that her son is not coming back any more. She keeps dreaming about him for almost three years. All other members are quite sure that Larry is dead and it is impossible what Kate, the mother, thinks. The father’s attitude to life and business is similar to that of Brecht’s Mother Courage. He risks his family in holding a business deal with air forces. Of course, he does not want his son to be killed or suffer due to the defective parts. But, his sense of responsibility towards others is totally absent. Others’ safety is not his concern. His passive reaction to his son’s suicide shows that his engagement in his business surpasses all his human relations. He seems to pay no heed to the trouble his family or neighbours may face and which may distract him from doing his business. The father is a true image of capitalism which will be elaborated in the next chapter. Capitalists can do anything to make their business a success whatever the consequences may be. War provides a suitable environment where capitalists such as Joe, the father, can grow with their business. So it is the war and the material motives of the war-mongers that have destroyed the relationship between families and among members of each and every family. The Keller and the Deever families have suffered terrible discomfort because of the war. The father in the Deever family has been unjustly convicted as being guilty of
shipping defective parts to the Army. His son and daughter denounced him and terminated their visits to him. The Keller family has suffered likewise. Joe’s son, Larry has been reported missing in the war. Twenty-one pilots were killed in a plane crash due to the defective parts sold to the Army. Instead, Joe’s friend takes the charge and is sentenced to imprisonment for many years.

Joe Keller’s obligation and commitment to ensure comfortable life for his family is normal in an insecure society. Many Americans have suffered a lot from difficult circumstances which have made them anxious about their future. Many have lived through miserable poverty which has pushed many to be selfish and money-oriented ignoring all human values. Joe is born into this society which has no consideration for anything except material success. Therefore, Joe is not to be blamed for his fault in securing a good business for his son with which he can start a good life. It is true that he is a good father but not a good citizen because he is not committed to the outer world – his bigger family. Joe’s words and actions do not match. Joe once remarks “I never believed in crucifying people” (Sons 116). This is certainly not true about him. He really treats the people around him cruelly to attain his material goals. His greed for money has made him conspire against his partner and his neighbour in shipping defective heads to air forces. The mother has been under stress at the loss of her son. She has been swinging between hope and despair for many years since Larry has been reported missing. She knows that her husband is directly or indirectly behind the death of her son but she can not talk about it. She is an ideal wife and a good mother especially in her attempts to balance the nerve-racking situation in the family. She has never lost hope in the return of her son form the war front. She is so emotional that she can not imagine the death of her son. Unlike Kate, the mother, Joe, the father, is strong enough to bear the news about Larry. The environment he has been creating taught him to be so. That’s why the death of his son in the war does not cause any obstacle to his business and his partner’s imprisonment has not produced any sense of regret or remorse in him. Before he directs his partner to ship the defective parts to Army, he knows that his sons, especially Larry, are part of the Air Forces. He has not thought that his son may fly one of those planes for which the defective heads had been shipped. But, he may not seize any other golden opportunity to get this business deal and that will be a big loss if he misses it. Joe Keller is like Mother Courage whose main goal is profit even...
at extreme adversity. The loss of her children one after another in the war does not stop her business deals, which will be elaborated in the next chapter. She keeps on doing her business at the time of war till she ends up with nothing – she has lost all her children for whom she has joined the war to make a living.

Joe, the father, is the source of the chaotic atmosphere in the family because of the war crime he has committed. His two sons have taken different steps to express their attitude to their father’s ethics of materialism. Larry commits suicide by crashing his plane; Chris decides to leave his parents after he explodes at the face of his father. Ronald Hayman explains that the nature of the conflict between the father and his sons in the following words:

The conflict between Joe Keller and his son Chris stems from the difference between their degree of commitment to society. Chris feels towards the whole of humanity the same sort of responsibility that Joe feels only towards his family. As Miller has put it, Joe’s trouble is that ‘his cast of mind cannot admit that he personally has any viable connection with his world, his universe or his society.’ The realization that his past behaviour in selling cracked cylinder heads to the Army Air Force has driven one son to suicide and the other to hating him, forces him to admit that other men whose deaths he caused were ‘all my sons’. (113)

This is the father who claims to ensure a ‘prosperous’ business for his sons which results in adverse consequences full of tension and unrest among the members of the family. His business can not hold his sons to his side; but rather pushes them away and causes a family disintegration. Joe’s dream to secure his family and business together has failed because his business is devoid of human qualities. Joe’s family has paid a lot for his unforgivable crime – Larry has committed suicide and then Joe shoots himself. The family has lost two of its members due to war that has vitiated the whole atmosphere. If there were no war, Joe would not have directed his partner to ship out the defective heads. This family could have lived peacefully if war had not taken place. If war has been away from the life of this family many unfavourable things might not have taken place – Larry and his father would not have committed suicide.

Togetherness and integration of a family are not possible in a society idealising material success. This is one of Miller’s major themes which he addresses
in many of his plays. He uses familial issues to communicate his political views. The Death of a Salesman, for example, deals with a tragic situation in Willy’s family. But the real message which Miller wants to deliver is the destruction which capitalism brings upon people and society. Similarly, All My Sons depicts the tragic situation occurring in a family as a result of a war crime. The main issues which this play raises are the family set-up during the WWII; and the American capitalistic system that has driven the country into many wars with other nations. Miller in this play exposes the war crimes that Joe Keller and his partner have committed and their apparent impact on the family members and their neighbours. The first act of this play is intensely emotional that the characters get actively in hot arguments about Larry. Joe’s son who has been reported missing after the war has ended. The mother is still confused about his return. Stories that appear in newspapers about missing soldiers returning from war after they have been reported missing, reinforce her belief that her son is still alive somewhere and will turn up one day. These stories are an evidence of the anxiety and the disillusionment of the American society during the WWII and illustrate the fate of many American soldiers. Many families, like the Keller family, suffer a lot because of waiting for their dear ones to come back after the war. Kate, like many American mothers, is still waiting for her son:

MOTHER. I was fast asleep, and — [Raising her arm over the audience.] Remember the way he used to fly low past the house when he was in training? When we used to see his face in the cockpit going by? That’s the way I saw him. Only high up. Way, way up, where the clouds are. He was so real I could reach out and touch him. And suddenly he started to fall. And crying, crying to me … Mom, mom! I could hear him like he was in the room. Mom! … It was his voice! If I could touch him I know I could stop him, if I could only — [Breaks off, allowing her outstretched hand to fall.] I woke up and it was so funny—the wind … it was like the roaring of his engine. I came out here … I must’ve still been half asleep. I could hear that roaring like he was going by – came awake. [She is looking at tree. She suddenly realizes something, turns with a reprimanding finger shaking slightly at Keller.] See? We should have never planted that tree. I said so in the first place; it was too soon too soon to plant a tree for him. (Sons 105)
This long emotional speech by Kate reflects her obsession with her son. She fervently believes that Larry is still alive. She speaks proudly of his training days when he was flying low over his house so that his mother could see him. She dreams that Larry suddenly has started to fall down crying ‘Mom’ to which she wakes up. But she wakes up to something different – an apple tree that has been uprooted by the storm at night. This terrible vision by Kate foreshadows the actions that would take place in the coming acts. The storm is significant for it foretells that something unusual will take place in the Keller family especially after the threatening gesture Kate has made at her husband. The other important point is that she makes a comparison between the roaring of the storm that night with the roaring of the engine of the plane Larry has been flying as she dreams. She has been living through this confusion for many years.

Women, mothers or wives, suffered a lot because of the Second World War in America. It was quite difficult for the women to cope with the new situation that war created. The real victims of war are not their men – for the dead are dead. But, what happens to the children and their mothers who are left behind? Shall they wait for their relatives to come back from war? What is their fault in leading a miserable life? Kate and Ann in All My Sons are the victims of this turmoil and suffering imposed on them by the state of war. Bessie and Nora in The Plough have suffered brutally. Nora lost her husband; Bessie was shot dead while trying to drive away the war-made mad Nora from the window for the fear of being shot. Miserably, she gets the shot herself leaving the spectators speechless on this agonising moment. There are several miserable stories about women’s sufferings. This is an example of an American wife who is left at home with her kids while her husband is fighting in WWII:

She [Isabel, the wife] wrote coping with inadequate gas rations, searching for new overshoes for the children, and tending to childhood illness, such as measles, chicken pox, tonsillitis, and ear infections. Other topics included the cantankerous coal furnace, their diminished income, the turkey shortage during Thanksgiving during 1944, and, of course, the myriad activities of the children. (Litoff ix)

Many women all over the world suffer this traumatism of war as widowed and homeless creatures, sometimes even detained and raped. They are often separated from their loved ones as in case of Ann who has lost her fiancé in war. Yet, women have proved resilience and resourcefulness in coping with war. They try their best to
drive their men away from war because they know that war victimises only women and children. Lysistrata by Aristophanes is an anti-war play in which women attempt to establish peace by going into a sex strike if their husbands do not stop war. Lysistrata, the women’s leader contrives the sex-for-peace plan to hold men back from war. They find this plan the most effective to end such atrocities. Although this play was written in 410 BC, it is still being revived as a few plays in our modern times. Its effective theme made it alive because it deals with a very important issue – women and war. This play was performed in different states in America as a protest against the war in Iraq. Women have realised the threat of war and have decided to find a plan to end it. What role can women play in modern time to prevent war? Nora in The Plough worked out a plan, but not the same, to hold her husband back from war. She tried to hide a promotion letter for her husband to the position of the Army Commandant. She felt that her husband was being driven away from her day by day and, therefore, she did her best to keep her husband. But, she did not succeed in her plan. Instead, her husband became wild and violent towards her. He left her and their first unborn baby to their destiny and chose war.

Kate in All My Sons has a firm belief that Joe, her husband, is involved in the killing of their son Larry, but she remarks that she has to continue to believe that Larry is still alive. Her intention is to keep the family integrated even at a pseudo-disillusioned basis. That is why she does not want to believe that he is dead and if she does, the family will collapse. It is only through hope that she sustains the family unity. Kate, like Nora, does her utmost to hold the family tight together. Both the female characters lost their dear ones in war. The circumstances wrapping the deaths of their relatives are quite different because the two families belong to two different societies – American and Irish. As mentioned earlier, Larry commits suicide as a result of his father’s war crime, and Joe, the father, commits suicide after he is confronted with his crime and his sense of irresponsibility. But Nora’s agony is incomparable to that of Kate’s. She becomes mad because her husband, Clitheroe, is killed by the British colonial soldiers during the 1916 Easter Uprising. Kate is strong enough, so she does not collapse under unpleasant state of affairs. She remains firm to keep the family ties intact and sound. Although she knows that her husband is guilty, she still appears to be a good wife supporting her husband. She can not help the situation she has been pushed into. Towards the end of the play, when Joe’s crime has been exposed, Kate becomes out of control. When she is totally broken down, the
whole family collapses. Joe shoots himself and Chris returns on hearing the shot to find his father soaked in blood. He is shocked as he does not want actions to go to that extreme for he intended to make his father realise his guilt.

There is a different image of humanity in Chris. He is an opposite picture of his father in his attitude and sense of belonging to a bigger family – the society is his family to which he feels responsible and committed. He feels sorry for his friends who died for each other in the battlefield. War has taught him how to be humane. When Chris comes back from war, he is shocked to find his society getting much more selfish and competitive than it had been before the war. Chris says: “I went to work with Dad, and that rat-race again. I felt ... ashamed somehow ... I felt wrong to be alive, to open the bank-book, to drive the new car, to see new refrigerator” (Sons 22). His interaction with society has left a deep impact on him. Soldiers sacrificed themselves in vain for a dog-eat-dog society. Chris does not know the reality behind his father’s confusing behaviour when, all of a sudden, Ann visits them after so many years. The simultaneous visit of George to his father in the prison after many years of renouncement worsens the situation and sets Joe at alarm. Joe becomes more suspicious of the situation and gets restless especially when George calls his sister. Kate frantically asks Joe to be smart in case an ugly situation arises and he assures her that there is nothing to be worried about. Chris grows more apprehensive about his father especially when he is trying to solace Ann who expresses her hatred to her father. Ann feels that it is her father who is responsible for Larry’s suicide. Joe tries to prove to Ann that her father should not have been held responsible for the murder of the twenty-one pilots as well as for the murder of Larry. According to Joe, if there is any one to be blamed it is the government. It is the continuous pressure of the Air Force administration which has led to such a disaster. Joe tries his best to convince her that a ‘father is a father’ after all. But Ann is not satisfied with what her father has done and she cannot excuse him for his crime:

ANN. What else can you say? When they took him away I followed him, went to him every visiting day. I was crying all the time. Until the news came about Larry. Then I realized. It’s wrong to pity a man like that. Father or no father, there’s only one way to look at him. He knowingly shipped out parts that would crash an airplane. And how do you know Larry wasn’t one of them. (Sons 117)
Joe asks Chris to help him persuade her that Larry did not die in that crash, which makes Chris irritated with his father. But, Joe has the following excuse:

KELLER. You want her to go on like this? [Too Ann] Those cylinder heads went to P-40 only. What’s the matter with you? You know Larry never flew a P-40. (Sons 118)

Deever’s family has suffered a lot because of the fabricated story that Joe and his wife have narrated in the court. Joe pretended that he had flu in the same day his partner shipped out the cracked heads to the Air Force. His wife confirmed that to the jury to help her husband escape conviction. George tells the fabricated story to his sister: “The Army was screaming for stuff and Dad didn’t have anything to ship. So Joe told him … on the phone he told him to weld, cover up the cracks in anyway he could, and ship them out …” (Sons 141). George believes that his father has been convicted because he is “a little man,” as Willy Loman, in a society with not “much of law” (Sons 139). Kate attempts to soothe George and reduce his anger by telling him: “We all got hit by the same lightening” (Sons 146). Kate believes that both the families have suffered because of “lightening” – which she could mean the follies of war and capitalism, a characteristic feature of the American society.

This chapter has discussed so far the impact of war on woman and family in general. The soldier remains a crucial part to the theme of war in modern drama. Prototypically, soldiers are looked upon as victimisers and merciless beasts as seen in Mother Courage and The Plough. They have been the source of suffering and turmoil to the people and the towns they invade. But, the fact is that the soldiers, as the present section will argue, are themselves real victims of war. As victims, they suffer the atrocities of war as do the common people; and as victimisers, they make other people suffer following the whims of their military leaders whose main interest is victory and nothing else. In addition to the plays selected under this section, there are plays that also discuss this theme such as Joan Littlewood’s Oh, What a Lovely War. This play satirically portrays war as a game played by the politicians and capitalists. It depicts some of the famous incidents in WWI. It reflects how commanders and generals have no care for anything except victory. They do not care about the huge number of soldiers being killed and injured. Shaw’s Arms and the Man attacks the romantic view of war and how a soldier feels after three days under fire. O’Casey’s The Silver Tassie is again a story of Harry, a soldier, maimed by the war. Arden’s
Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance depicts the negative aspects of army life on soldiers and military occupation as reflected on the deserted soldiers.

War leaves a deep scar on the soldiers’ psyche. Many soldiers are wounded physically or psychologically. Many go to war without sufficient contentment either because of the nature of the war which they have to fight or because of the callous training they receive before going to the battlefield. However, some may return back with a positive view towards life. This happens to Chris whom the war has taught to be humane, unselfish, and responsible. Chris was a commander who returned from the battlefield unwounded but he felt somehow unhappy because all the soldiers under his command died in the war. He felt that he was selfish because he survived alone. He became more depressed when he felt that the society did not deserve the sacrifice his soldiers had offered. Arvin R. Wells writes on the impact of war on Chris:

Chris has learnt from the war an idealistic morality of brotherhood based on what he has seen of mutual self-sacrifice among the men whom he commanded. But he has not survived the war unwounded; he bears a still festering psychological wound, a sense of inadequacy and guilt. He has survived to enjoy the fruits of a war-time economy, and he fears that in enjoying them he becomes unworthy, condemned by his own idealism. Even his love for Ann Deever, the sweetheart of the dead to whom he somehow owes his life. (98)

There are circumstances that exacerbate the suffering of soldiers further and make life difficult for them. It has become common that soldiers to commit suicide due to the surrounding situations that force them to commit crimes against innocent people and children. Some commit suicide because of the illegal practices of their authorities to which they are helpless. They can not do anything except to leave letters to their dear ones to explain the extreme step they took as a reaction towards that particular situation. Larry and Chris are living in a society that is concerned about commercialism more than anything else. In All My Sons, a group of soldiers are killed in a plane crash because of the irresponsible action of Joe Keller, representing the spirit of capitalism in the play. Larry gets to know about his father’s crime through the newspapers sent to them. He could not believe that his father and his partner were behind the death of the twenty-one pilots. He could not stand the scandal his father committed in shipping out the cracked heads to the Air Forces. In a very emotional letter, he writes to Ann, his fiancée what he felt about the crime indicating his
intention to commit suicide. Chris reads the letter out to his family to make his father aware of his crime which pushed Larry to kill himself.

Chris. … ‘My dear Ann: it is impossible to put down the things I feel. But I’ve got to tell you something. Yesterday they flew in a load of papers from the states and I read about Dad and your father being convicted. I can’t express myself. I can’t tell you how I feel –I can’t bear to live any more. Last night I circled the base for twenty minutes before I could bring myself in. How could he have done that? Every day three or four men never come back and he sits back there doing business. … I don’t know how to tell you what I feel. … I can’t face anybody. … I’m going out on a mission in few minutes. They will probably report me missing. If they do, I want you to know that you mustn’t wait for me. I tell you, Ann if I had him there now I could kill him.’ (Sons 169-70)

This letter made the situation worse. A suicide letter led to another suicide. When Joe Keller heard of the manner of Larry’s death, he then realised how horrible his crime was. Everything he was trying to establish had fallen apart. Joe Keller realised that he should have had commitment and responsibility to the world outside his family if he wanted his own life to go smoothly. But he believed that it is the outer world which made him act in such a way – “This is the land of the great big dogs. … You don’t love a man here. you eat him” (Sons 167)!

Through Chris, Miller praises the soldiers for their bravery and their human feelings they have towards each other and towards their own society. If they have no responsibility or no sense of belonging they will not be there in the war front. But do the soldiers get the due respect and care from their society in return? They do not. Their society does not have the least concern for them but rather it contributes to their suffering and miseries. Chris stresses that the soldiers sacrifice themselves for a country which does not deserve so. They have been victimised by the capitalistic system they are living in. They are the object of exploitation because the majority of the soldiers belong to the poor class who are always being ignored during peace and whose community is deprived of the basic services. But, they are the first ones to be recruited and be in the fire line. What is the reward they get? Killed in a group due to cracked heads shipped out to the Air Force by one of the companies in their homeland? Commit suicide because they can not reintegrate into their society?
As a commander, Chris’s image about his society changed when he was discharged from the WWII. He held high esteem for the soldiers who sacrificed themselves for others and proved the meaning of altruism. But, Chris was confronted with the reality that no body in America realised the value of these soldiers. This is because the society was busy in pursuing materialism. Like many other soldiers, Chris could not get integrated to his society when he returned from war. This disintegration was created due to the gap in values between the society that glorifies materialism and the soldiers who represent the set of human values towards their fellow soldiers and society. This difficulty in reintegrating into the normal channel in the society is pointed out in these words: “No man has ever felt identity with a group more deeply and intimately than a soldier in battle. But … the usual veteran returning to his city or town on the usual day finds no common goal at all” (qtd. in Lee 42).

The soldiers are great human beings with sense of morality and responsibility, in Chris’s point of view, but the society around is indifferent to them. It is hard for him to forget them after he came back from war. He explains to Ann the reason of his admiration for them. This is how Chris feels for them:

It takes a little time to toss that off. Because they weren’t just men. For instance, one time it’d been raining several days and this kid came to me, and gave me his last pair of dry socks. Put them in my pocket. That’s only a little thing . . . but . . . that’s the kind of guys I had. They didn’t die; they killed themselves for each other. I mean that exactly; a little more selfish and they’d’ve been here today. And I got an idea - watching them go down. Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of . . . responsibility. Man for man. You understand me? (Sons 121)

Chris is indebted to the soldiers who died for him and died for each other. If he is alive, it is because of them. But Chris did not find that ‘the love of a man can have for a man’ prevailing in the American society which has not changed but has become more brutal and selfish. Chris came back from war with the view that his society would have changed to better discarding materialism and commercialism which have run over all human values.

Joe’s two sons served in the Army in WWII. These two soldiers are different in their viewpoints towards their father’s war crime. Although Chris had a feeling that
his father was responsible for the plane crash, he preferred not to understand and move on that way. He thought it was useless after this long time to take action against his father because that will not “raise the dead” if he puts “him behind the bars” (Sons 167). Chris could not break the familial bond because he was living in that house for a long time and got used to what his father was doing. He was unhappy but he could not change the whole situation. Chris admits: “I was made yellow in this house because I suspected my father and did nothing about it.” And he adds: “But I am like everybody else now. I am practical now” (Sons 166).

Although Chris appear to possess moral values but he has certain demerits. He is selfish and has been described as a killer who likes to kill. When one looks at his action one gets to know that he loves himself. Like many war commanders, he sacrificed his soldiers first till no one was left alive accept him. The other selfish act that Chris demonstrated was his proposal to marry ‘his brother’s sweetheart’. There are few moments when personal interests overcome other values. This is what exactly happened to Chris. He described his return from war safely as an act of cowardice and selfishness. Chris’s attempt to marry Ann, Larry’s fiancée was an act of betrayal for the ‘vanished hand’ and against social norms. The soldiers are really pathetic when they are betrayed by their dear ones. Even Ann could not wait and she agreed to marry the brother of her fiancé, who would be a consistent reminder of her betrayal for Larry. She might be right in her viewpoint to marry and move on, but marrying Chris would torment Kate. That’s why Kate strongly objected to their marriage and encouraged Ann to leave the house because she could not imagine that Ann would marry Larry’s brother. Another act of selfishness on the part of Chris was his decision to leave the house, not because he loved his brother but because his own desire was not fulfilled. When Ann decided to leave Keller’s house he declared that he also had no place in that house.

Soldiers are being betrayed by their own people and by their own nation. The story of Larry and Ann repeats itself throughout generations – a soldier’s fiancée marrying his brother after a long time of waiting. This act of betrayal to a soldier is also addressed in O’Casey’s The Silver Tassie. Harry, a soldier, was betrayed by his fiancée as well as by the people around him. People used to gather around him when he was a famous champion and a brave soldier. When he became maimed, he is discarded even by his dearest ones. When his fiancée came to know that he was in a critical situation and that he lost his two legs in the war, she refused to visit him and

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just sent him a ‘bunch’ of flowers and turned to another man, an intimate friend of Harry. O’Casey also directs the attention of his audience to the suffering and turmoil of soldiers heading for battles. The first soldier is dreaming “of his missus and his little girl Emmie wanting a balloon” (Krause 117) and in the same scene, the stage direction goes like this: “The soldiers try to reject the hopeless prophecy of the mad Croucher, the death’s head figure; they try to pray, they try desperately to convince themselves that they can escape this valley of death” (Krause 117).

Soldiers laying down their lives to make war a success are really a miserable lot. They are in the war not because their heart is in it. They are there because as soldiers in war they feel glorified with power, sacrifice and a glorious cause which will make them heroes in their death. For these allurements they abandon their home and love. All human relationships which make them human beings are abandoned. And they rush to the battlefields like automatons knowing well that death – brutal, agonising and inhuman – is their only end. Nora in The Plough knows this truth but Clitheroe will not accept it. No human sentiments vibrate their soul and body. They have deliberately killed them knowing well that with them they can not fight a war. Beside sentiments, they have to kill their sense too: “Is there anybody goin’, Mrs. Clitheroe, with a titther o’ sense” (The Plough 160)? Without these qualities, soldiers become beasts killing their own kind without least regret and grieve over their action. They are beings with only the blood boiling in their veins and they “must be ready to pour out the same red wine in the same glorious sacrifice, for without shedding of blood there is no redemption” (The Plough 164)! There is a dialogue among the soldiers that shows their attitude and their reason for going into war. These soldiers seem to be patriotic and brave to sacrifice their lives for their homeland. But is it true what they claim for? Or, is it just pretence? Here is their dialogue which explains the reason behind joining the war, they are victims of false slogans and politics:

CAPTAIN BRENNAN. We won’t have long to wait now.
LIEUT. LANGON. Th’ time is rotten ripe for revolution.
CLITHEROE. You have a mother, Langon.
LIEUT. LANGON. Ireland is greater than a mother.
CAPTAIN BRENNAN. You have a wife, Clitheroe.
CLITHEROE. Ireland is grater than a wife.
LIEUT. LANGON. Th’ time for Ireland’s battle is now – th’ place for Ireland’s battle is here. (The Plough 178)
How brave these sons of Ireland seem to be. But to Nora their bravery is a sham: “I know he’s longin’ to be passin’ his hand through me hair, to be caressin’ me neck … An’ he stands wherever he is because he’s brave? (Vehemently) No, but because he’s a coward, a coward, a coward” (The Plough 185)! Nora has her own justification, her own personal experience to call them cowards. Here is her account of the soldiers’ state during the war time. Her speech reflects the soldiers’ false claim of bravery and patriotism. They are being victimised by their leaders. To Nora, the soldiers are just pathetic who has no sense of reason and who just follow the dictates of their leaders without questioning. Nora ‘with denunciatory anger’ exposes them:

...they’re afraid to say they are afraid! … Oh, I saw it, Mrs Gogan. …

At th’ barricade in North King Street I saw fear glowin’ in all their eyes … His face was jammed again th’ stones, an’ his arm was twisted round his back. … An’ every twist of his body was a cry against th’ terrible thing that had happened to him. … An’ I saw they were afraid to look at it. … An’ some o’ them laughed at me, but th’ laugh was a frightened one … they were afraid, afraid, afraid! (The Plough 185)

Nora does not seem to be prejudiced at all. Her words ring with emphatic sincerity and truthfulness. In real death they are as miserable and pitiable as real human beings. Before death they might be challenging death and behaving like demi-gods. But in death all their lost and suppressed human emotions come back to them to torture them as if taking their revenge on them: “An’ every twist of his body was a cry against th’ terrible thing that had happened to him” (The Plough 185). Their laughter is torn with fear. They can still shout but are frightened. Fear is all over their faces. Still they pose to be brave. Such an unacknowledged contradiction is there in their life. Lieut. Langon suffers from this contradiction. The dying soldier realises that he should exist to live and he craves for an ambulance for himself. Lieut Langon moaning for help: “My God, is there ne’er an ambulance knockin’ around anywhere? … Th’ stomach is ripped out o’ me; I feel it – o-o-oh, Christ” (The Plough 194)! Feeling his clothes soaked with blood he desperately asks his comrades for help where his wound can be healed. What a pity is there in his craving for life when he is at the point of death. Other ‘brave’ comrades escape leaving him to face death alone. At his dying moments Lieut. Langon blames himself for coming down quickly. He admits that if he has waited a little bit longer he will not have faced that terrible end. He does not want to die first and wants his friend to be the first one to die. This again
proves the soldiers’ false notion of bravery and that they are victims to their own whims. He now understands that joining war means death, blood and agony. He does not know that he can also cause the same thing to other soldiers and innocents. He can stand to see others’ blood but he is terrified to see his own blood pouring from his ripped belly. He can shed other man’s blood but to see his own blood flowing is simply miserable and feeling the worth of one’s own blood. He wants to live; the blood must be stopped from flowing. Langon, who must have killed so many, craves for the mercy of God in his death. He is being so selfish. Everybody is ready to kill but nobody wants to die.

This contradiction is also true of Clitheroe. A brave soldier that he is fascinated with war; he is ever so ready to cling to Nora when he gets a chance even though he is seeing a comrade dying before his eyes. He seems to be snatching a moment of love and joy in the face of death. The feeling of love and joy that had been suppressed appears at the slightest provocation and he seems to repent his earlier decision. He is completely confused and does not know what to do. He does not know whether to stick to his wife who desperately covets him or rushes to help his dying comrade. He unwillingly moves to bring a doctor for his friend because, as he tells Nora, he does not want his comrades to accuse him of being unfaithful to them. The story repeats itself when another comrade leaves the dying Clitheroe to save himself. The instinct of saving oneself from the jaws of death is strong in every soldier: “...I had to leave him to save meself. ...look at th’ way a machine-gun tore at me coat, as I belted out o’ the buildin’ an’ darted across th’ street for shelter” (The Plough 204).

The real soldiers in The Plough are not the ones in uniforms or the ones who carry guns to fight. The real soldiers are these women, who are given a lesson in bravery by the dying soldier. They are better since they are helping each other in the midst of such turmoil. Bessie keeps awake for nights together to help the sick Nora; they take care of the coffin of Mollser. They are real brave comrades. Bessie dies to protect Nora. The soldier protects himself and lets his comrade die. Bessie is brave; the soldier is a coward. However, the soldier is a helpless creature who has been trapped into the situation he finds himself. He is a helpless victim of a system that makes him live in contradiction and sham. He is thus an object of sympathy.