ISSN INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER
ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed,Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

UGC Approved Journal

Volume 6, Issue 11, November 2018

www.ijellh.com

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Matrimony and Motherhood in Arnold Wesker's ***Four Portraits***

Four Portraits - of Mothers is a collection of short plays in which Arnold Wesker dismantles the power structures supporting male domination in the domestic milieu. Experimenting boldly with the form and structure of drama by excluding the presence of any male character in these plays, he focuses the spotlight on four mothers of different age groups. Trapped in varied milieus, these women strive for their identity and dignity under the cumbersome burden of patriarchal canons, lopsided constructs of gender roles and suppressed desires. Though the matrimonial and maternal experiences described are highly individualized, and take place in different circumstances and environs, yet all share a similar historical legacy and common ground with reference to both. This paper is an attempt to explore how Wesker unmasks the struggle of mothers for self recognition and how matrimony and motherhood can turn into an agency of either subalternity or empowerment in varied situations.

Most feminists believe that women's responsibility of bearing and rearing children has remained invariable through the annals of social history, and that their matrimonial and reproductive functions have put them in a disadvantageous position wherein their identity, liberty and voice are restricted. While they have constantly been burdened, both biologically and culturally with domestic responsibilities; men, on the other hand, have enjoyed

unqualified liberty. Because of her biological role as a mother and a nurturer, a woman's social sphere is restricted to homes and nurseries, and she has been relegated to position advantageous to man but disadvantageous to her own self. The four mothers presented by Wesker in *Four Portraits - of Mothers* embody diverse experiences of subalternity within the familial, matrimonial and social spaces. Rejection, suppression and alienation constitute their common fate. Through their individual experiences, Wesker critiques all those structures and factors such as patriarchy, ethnicity, poverty, and convoluted socio-cultural norms which impose physical and psychological subservience on women in the garb of marriage and motherhood.

Before scrutinizing Wesker's treatment of mothers in *Four Portraits* it is imperative to re-view the definition of a 'mother.' The word refers to a particular societal role or function which, though biologically assigned to women, can also be performed by men. Cultural feminists, however, hold the process of taking care of a child or mothering as the prerogative of a woman. Perceiving her to be a special person possessing uniquely specific traits, they define her as one who conceives, gives birth to, and nurtures a child. By positing that mother is a woman, they deny the capability of mothering to men. These dichotomies in the interpretative definitions of motherhood open scope for new readings such as the one provided by Adrianne Rich. According to her: "Motherhood does not fall in the category of biological essentialism" and that the maternal matrix is "delineated by intractable culturally sanctioned presumptions and coercive regulatory systems" (Yorke 64-65). However, the fact remains that while men can choose to avoid the responsibility of mothering, women cannot.

Wesker's *Four Portraits* underscores this quintessential reality of four women by scrutinizing both, motherhood and the institution of marriage from new perspectives at variance with the established norms. He lends subjectivity and individual identity to each one by foregrounding her individual stand-point and experience to establish that if a woman is

also a wife or mother, it does not imply that her individuality as an independent being is subsumed within this singular identity. With a twin-edged approach, Wesker not only establishes the pre-eminence of a woman or mother's role in child-rearing but also deconstructs the myth of male-superiority by exposing the inherent selfishness, callousness and incapacity of some father figures in contributing constructively to the rearing of children. To instate his stand on the issue, Wesker, very innovatively, removes the male authority from all the four plays. Consequently, in the absence of the domineering patriarchal figure, the power centre shifts, and we witness some of his women transform from passive receivers to active performers.

The first mother introduced in the play is Ruth, 39, an unmarried woman with a young daughter, fending for herself and her child alone in a "hard world dominated by men." She belongs to a social environment where a single mother, to quote Simone de Beauvoir, is regarded as "a socially incomplete being even if she makes her own living. If she tries to attain the whole dignity of a person and gain her full rights, she must wear a wedding ring. Maternity in particular is respectable only for a married woman; the unwed mother remains an offence to public opinion, and her child is a severe handicap for her in life" (Beauvoir 451). However, Ruth challenges this belief, for not only does she reject marriage willingly, but also chooses to be a mother without entering into wedlock. This choice may be ascribed to her rebellion against the social dogma that attaches undue significance to the external beauty of women. With no physical attractiveness or material assets to recommend her, she had been shunned by all men who came her way in her youth. Unhappy and stung, she retaliated by using make-up and change-over to impress the man of her choice, even though for a short time, and had a daughter from that union. Thus by asserting her sexual liberty, she has openly challenged the male bastion as she candidly admits:

> RUTH (*To herself. Complete change of mood*). Besides, I grabbed my chance. Who would've wanted to marry me? Plain, graceless, difficult, clever. Impossible combination for a man to accept. Could hardly get one to talk to me let alone sleep with me! And to marry me? Never! So I saw this man and I said to myself – 'him'! Paid a fortune to be made up, used all my will power to be gracious and tried hard not to be clever. Result? The Divine Brat! (*One Woman Plays* 51)

Evidently, Ruth is projected here not as an individual but as a representative of all those of her gender who suffer rejection on flimsy grounds. She avenges her humiliation by asserting two choices – one, of selecting the man she desires, and second, of having a child without getting into matrimony. According to Kiernan, Land and Lewis in their book *Lone Mothers in Twentieth Century Britain: from Footnote to Front Page*:

> [There exist] three main routes to lone motherhood: partnership breakdown; death of husband; and having a child on one's own. The majority of lone mother families emerge from the breakdown of partnerships, and the ensuing separation which in the case of married couples is typically followed by divorce. The death of a father remained a prominent cause of lone motherhood until the 1960s but nowadays is a minor cause. Most of the remainder of lone-mother families consist of never-married women rearing children on their own. (Kiernan et. al. 22)

Ruth belongs, by preference, to the last category. By refusing to seek from her child's father any physical, emotional, or financial support, or share in any responsibility, she not only dares, but also inverts the social discourse that assigns free choice to men, and denies it to women. Her deliberate step is an act of defiance against the imposition of a subordinate role on women both within, and outside marriage. Hence she chooses motherhood over marriage, celebrating it as an achievement rather than a mandatory social responsibility bound inseparably with matrimony. She herself confesses with regards to her daughter:

RUTH. And it is worth every tear of it. Every humiliation, every lie, every struggle. She was what I wanted. Exactly the way she looks, the way she thinks, the way she feels, the way she loves, quarrels, smiles, screams, sings, teases, dances, cries, blackmails, questions, observes, perseveres. (*OWP* 52)

In this context, her daughter becomes a perennial source of joy, satisfaction and solace to Ruth. The child not only lends her an identity and a purposeful life, but also establishes her as a rebel. Life, however, is never easy for a radical. Adrianne Rich has also pointed out: "The unmarried mother has borne the most savage excoriations of Church and society, and still carried a heavy burden of economic and social pressures which penalize her for her choice" (Rich 107). Ruth too, finds her path of motherhood beset with numerous problems, but is determined not to succumb to any pressure. In this context, she embodies the image of a liberated woman who wants her daughter to grow up into a fearless young woman equipped with all the qualities that would enable her to maintain her dignity and distinctiveness in a "hard world run by men":

RUTH. I want you to learn everything from threading a needle to cooking a dinner, from running a career to packing a case. It's a hard world run by men who are frightened of [strong] women, and I'm going to make certain you are independent of them. (*OWP* 47)

As a mother, she scales all impediments to provide the child everything she needs and desires. Elizabeth Bortolaia Silva, however, avers that lone mothering is widely regarded as "bad mothering since it is assumed that the traditional hetero-sexual two-parent family is a better agency for the proper socialization of children" (Silva 8). But by standing in both for the mother and father figure, Ruth erases the conventional boundaries between gender roles. That she has planned a skiing holiday trip for her daughter despite her own dislike for the sport shows the primacy she attaches to her child's choice and needs. Ruth's devotion to her

daughter can be understood in the light of Beauvoir's view expressed in *The Second Sex* that a daughter is a "mother's double":

> They [mothers] want to give the child opportunities they have had and also those they have missed; they will make her youth a happy one … she makes her child's happiness her only care; she may even be egotistical and hard towards the rest of the world. (Beauvoir 533)

Evidently, having borne rejection and trauma in her early youth, Ruth wishes to protect her daughter from a similar fate. Asserting that "no one is indispensable" (*OWP* 48), she refuses to make any emotional compromise to fulfil the child's desire for a father figure. Conterminously, it is wrong to perceive that Ruth is an emotionless woman. In fact, she too craves for love, warmth, companionship and security, but is not ready to sacrifice her dignity and liberty for the same. Although one discerns traces of sadness and loneliness in her, she is too strong and proud to wallow in self pity. Having experienced the trauma resultant of her subaltern status and the unjust male hegemony, she is not ready to barter her individuality for anything. Ruth realizes that marriage does offer certain material and sexual conveniences, companionship and a sense of security by placing a person in the domestic climate of home and children, but she is not ready to pawn her daughter's future. She embodies a marked shift in gender roles, especially of women, in the contemporary world both culturally and socially. Though Ruth flouts the convention by eschewing marriage, she maintains the conformist ideals associated with motherhood – of preserving and rearing the next generation with little thought for her own needs or socio-economic circumstances. In this way, she acquires a strength that challenges the orthodox notions of maternal powerlessness and voicelessness.

Thus, by rejecting the presence, let alone domination, of any man in her life, Ruth virtually challenges the age-old ethos of male superiority over women. She refuses to exist on the margins of the patrilineal society that celebrates the power and supremacy of man over

woman. In fact, she emerges as the epitome of a modern liberated woman who prefers to find fulfilment and meaning on her own terms in motherhood, rather than in matrimony. Thus by transcending the conventional boundaries between the roles of a mother and a father, not out of any compulsion but by choice, she establishes a new social norm.

The second portrait presented by Wesker is that of an old Jewish woman called Naomi, aged 70, whom he introduces as a "Mother who never was." Through her, the playwright narrates a poignant tale of an old lonely woman deprived of the joys of maternity because she never got a chance to get married. Naomi is a moving image of a kind and caring woman, used and discarded by her family to lead a life of abysmal loneliness. Having spent her entire youth tending to an old invalid mother and later, an ailing sister, she has been dispossessed of her chance not only of getting married and having a family of her own but also of leading a 'happy and fulfilling' life. Ironically, even this notion that women can find joy and completeness only in matrimony and motherhood is also a social and cultural construct indoctrinated in women.

Naomi's ruptured matriline may be imputed to the 'mothering' of her own mother and nursing of her sick sister which denied her the chance of having her own children. Some theorists, by defining 'mother' as one who mothers - cares, nurses or protects - conjoin mothering with an activity rather than with a person. Even Adrianne Rich's query pertaining to what makes one mother seems very relevant and apt in Naomi's situation:

> What makes us mothers? The care of small children? The physical changes of pregnancy and birth? The years of nurture? What of the woman who, never having been pregnant, begins lactating when she adopts an infant? What of the woman who stuffs her new born into a bus-station locker and goes numbly back to her "child-free" life? What of the woman who, as the eldest girl in a large family, has practically raised her younger sisters and brothers and then entered a convent? (Rich 251)

In the light of this observation, it may be said that motherhood is not strictly a physical condition but a psychological and emotional experience of nurturing, caring and loving. In this regard, though Naomi's reproductive desires and domestic circumstances had been in conflict, she proves herself to be more than a mother to her own mother, sister and nephew. Her predicament also draws attention to the dichotomy between the conventional gender roles assigned by society to men and women. While men enjoy the liberty of choosing coveted careers and venturing into new lands, women have been confined to nursing the sick and mothering babies. The absence of male members in her early life, as recounted by Naomi, points to their utter disregard for the suffering of the women in the family. The fact that such women were abandoned to fend for themselves in the absence of any institutional assistance is reflective of a callous and disinterested approach of the male dominated society towards the plight of women.

In this context, Naomi stands in for that section of the social spectrum which finds no representation on any platform. She is undoubtedly a victim of the coldness, selfishness and indifference of the patriarchal order which imprisons women in the role of nurturing and nursing, and denies them the joy of fulfilling their own dreams. With no family, husband or children to support, Naomi spends her days in utter isolation alleviated only by her nephew Danny, whom she adores as her own son. Her contact with the outer world of activity, prosperity and development is only through Danny's occasional phone calls. For the rest of the time, she has a torn paperback book and a television set to keep her absorbed. For Naomi, time stands still just as in the case of Wordsworth's Michael waiting endlessly for his son's return from the city in a poem by the same name, or as in the case of Vladimir and Estragon waiting hopelessly for Godot's arrival in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

The burden of having lost every chance to have a family of her own hangs heavy upon the old lady, and also reflects her servility to the conventional notions. In her longing for

motherhood, she epitomizes the typical feminine psyche which, having been under the sustained control and domination of men for ages, seeks joy, fulfilment and meaning only in the gendered role of a wife, progenitor and nurturer. But in Naomi's case, poverty, inhospitable circumstances and familial responsibilities have led to her disconnection with the matrimony and motherhood. Lack of emotional and institutional support has further compounded her suffering. Believing that only matrimony and maternity can assign any value to her life, she regards it worthless in their absence. The fact that she still hums a negro lullaby "Oh ma babby, ma curly headed babby" (*OWP* 52) is a pointer towards her unfulfilled wish which has become an inseparable part of her psyche and existence. Adrienne Rich is of the view that "even childlessness has been manipulated to turn women into negative quantities, or bearers of evil" (Rich 249). Perhaps that's why, Naomi feels reduced to a non-entity. For her, being a woman is being a wife and a mother. Her missed opportunities remind her of the unfair treatment meted out to her by the male dominated world. Ironically even God, she says, has been prejudiced against her for her Jewish faith. She recalls from her past:

> NAOMI. I remember once, a Christmas time, it was when we were living in the East End, still young girls, and all the other children were talking about their Christmas stocking, and how it was going to be filled. … So I thought, well, I'll also try it, see what happens. Jewish people don't celebrate Christmas but maybe Father Christmas couldn't tell the difference between Jews and Christians. I'd take a chance! So I hung up a huge pillow case and when I woke on Christmas morning I rushed to look and found – it was empty! It's been like that ever since. (*OWP* 57)

The emptiness of her stockings linked symbolically with the barrenness of her life is a poignant but potent comment on the plight of old women like Naomi who exist silently - neglected, uncared for, and forlorn - on the periphery of the fast moving world. But like

Wesker's other women, Naomi too is a spirited person. She can still amuse herself with the memories of her prince charming and enjoy a hearty laugh at his expense. When Danny calls her up twice in a day, she is more worried about his well being than her own. Refusing to succumb to the sadness arising out of a life of disregard, want and alienation, she pulls along rather cheerfully. These words strike home the anguish not just of Naomi but all those of her predicament and generation whose frail voices have been lost in the din of the callous, apathetic and materialistic world.

Miriam, 45, is the third mother introduced by Wesker to draw spotlight on another woman who, trapped in a marital bond with an incompatible man, has been unable to cope with the resultant domestic tensions. Just like Adela Quested who is troubled by an indescribable 'echo' in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, Miriam too, is traumatized by a 'scream,' and is seeking a psychiatrist's assistance to find relief from it. Her unhappy marriage has shattered all her dreams of conjugal felicity nurtured in her early youth like most girls. Several years later, as a mother of young daughters who have turned out to be rebellious and rude, Miriam is overcome with remorse and an unbearable sense of defeat. Failing to find anyone to share her anguish with, she visits the psychoanalyst, and confesses:

> MIRIAM. Do you know what it's costing me to sit before you and say all this? Do you know with what confidence and happiness and expectation I entered marriage and motherhood? … I couldn't wait to have children. Do you know that? Some women want happy husbands as their monument, some fight for careers, or plan wealth, or scheme for status. But not me. My monument was to be my children. (*OWP* 60)

Evidently, Miriam had nurtured the dreams of being an ideal wife and mother by being liberal, gentle and friendly with her children. She had wanted to provide them an

atmosphere suffused with love, care and gentleness, and help them blossom into fearless, confident and happy individuals. All that mattered to her was their happiness.

> MIRIAM. …I didn't have special ambitions for them. It wasn't that I wanted one to be a doctor, another to be a film star, another to run a business. … But no. Instead I said, "I don't care what you do so long as you're happy'! (*OWP* 60-61)

However, as she delves deeper into self-analysis, she confesses, though hesitatingly, that her daughters have not turned out the way she wanted because of the unhealthy influence of their chauvinistic father. In fact, as a typical submissive wife, she prefers to take the entire blame on her own self rather than accuse her husband. This points towards her servile mindset programmed to believe in male superiority and infallibility. Since both parents differ in their approach, the children are the ultimate sufferers. Miriam admits sadly that "they were badly brought up, my poor daughters. Yanked up through life by one arm instead of two," because their father "didn't allow their mother to be what she is! He didn't give me my space" (*OWP* 63).

Feminist theorist Nancy Chodorow is of the view that if both the parents participate equally in raising their children, they would be groomed into autonomous and compassionate beings. Miriam understands that children, just like human relationships, need tender nurturing, and that no bond can last if people are not allowed any space to think, analyze and speak independently. Thus, through Miriam, Wesker exposes that form of patriarchal hegemony which pushes the mothers into margins even within the maternal space. Her husband, a typical chauvinist, exercises his imperious domination on both, his wife as well as his daughters. Her preference for talking, discussing and explaining is clearly at variance with his aggressive means of ensuring compliance. However, the fact that she can neither rebel against her husband, nor check the increasing insolence of her daughters is symptomatic of her own servility and weakness. Consequently, she is unable to take any emancipatory steps

to redeem her own self or her daughters. Since they have become defiant, they misbehave, and derive vicarious pleasure out of it. Their misdemeanor may be interpretted to be directed against their mother's powerlessness and consequent failure to stand up for them. Adrianne Rich, in a similar context, posits:

> The nurture of daughters in patriarchy calls for a strong sense of self-nurture in the mother…. A woman who feels pride in being female will not visit her depreciation upon her female child. A woman who has used her anger creatively will not seek to suppress anger in her daughters. (Rich 245)

Clearly, Miriam's inability and helplessness in protecting her daughters from their ruthless father mirrors her own subalternity. It is the guilt of abandoning her daughters at the mercy of their unfeeling father that troubles Miriam in the form of a terrifying scream. Calling herself "unworldly," she owns her failure in mothering her children properly. The acute realization of her own powerlessness adds to her own anguish and burden. As she struggles to find answers to the disturbing questions pertaining to the loss of her own role, identity and voice, she realizes that she is not the only one of her kind. Denial, negation and rejection have been suffered by women universally for ages. Hence her scream is not hers alone:

> MIRIAM. I'm not even the original scream. My whole life is just an echo of someone else's echo whose life was an echo of someone else's echo, whose life was an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo … But who was the scream?
>
> My poor girls. Echoes! Thin echoes! And each echo becomes thinner. (*OWP* 63)

Thus, by equating Miriam's predicament with the echo of a scream, Wesker is hinting symbolically at the vacuity and vagueness of her existence. Her life may be regarded as a mere repetition or an extension of her own mother's, her grandmother's and so forth.

Likewise, the same legacy of subordination, exploitation and silence is further being passed on to her daughters who are thin echoes of her own scream. The image of scream, used very skilfully by Wesker, stands in for the hitherto muted voices of all wives and mothers who, being victims of domestic violence, are shoved into silent submission in the patriarchal set up.

The last part of *Four Portraits - of Mothers* introduces us to Deborah, 35, an "energetic, defiant [housewife] full of delight in her life" (*OWP* 64) who, contrary to many, is in command of her domestic space. In her, Wesker creates an unconventional woman who is proud of her domestic world and celebrates it as her exclusive and independent domain. Inverting the social and cultural construct of gendered roles which push women into subordinate status, Deborah is proud of the role assigned to her, and turns it into a creative, satisfying and delightful activity that bestows on her at least some identity. Through this character, Wesker appears to suggest that those who allow themselves to be dominated lose their identity and voice, while women such as Deborah, who seek delight even in mundane domestic activities, can turn them into acts of assertion of power.

An antithesis of Miriam who submits passively to her husband's domination and allows her home to become a seat of marital discord with regard to the rearing of her children, Deborah is strong, confident and positive in her approach. She makes the best of what lies in her jurisdiction – cooking, shopping, cleaning and rearing her three children. Like a typical mother who celebrates her motherhood as an achievement and enjoys every aspect of it, Deborah too, has her dream fulfilled as she talks proudly of her children:

> DEBORAH. Yes, I have three of them, and if it wasn't so tiring and costly and boring to be married to a woman who was always fat and pregnant I'd have a dozen of them,…I loved carrying them, giving birth to them, suckling them. I loved changing their smelly nappies, washing their smelly bums with smelly oils, powdering their

> fat bodies with smelly powders – all of it! It's what I always wanted to do, and what I'm supremely equipped to do. So just let anyone dare bully me into thinking it's me who's the prisoner. (*OWP* 64)

Interestingly, Deborah deconstructs the myth of male superiority by regarding men as inferior, and ill equipped to carry out the same onerous tasks which women perform on daily basis. Rather, she pities them for being trapped in the socially imposed roles. The pressure of maintaining their identity, social presence and economic stature in a highly competitive world has made their existence more challenging and difficult. Enslaved by their ambitions and professions, men are not half as happy and free as women. She asserts confidently:

> DEBORAH. Me a prisoner? Never. Those poor men, tied to their jobs, tied to their hours, aught in a rush to a top they'll never reach in a thousand years – they are the prisoners, they're the slaves! But not me! I enjoy the freedom of my home too much. (*OWP* 64)

Thus, reversing the normative order, Deborah while exulting in her motherhood, pities men for they are bogged down by social compulsions to be superior, responsible and bread winners. In this context, psychoanalyst Robert Seidenberg asserts that this pressure distorts the natural character of men:

> Men become victims of their own advantages. An unearned superiority is thrust upon them which causes distortion of character and personality which are tragic to behold…. Often to prove his doubtful superiority, he must resort to pseudo self-enhancement such as uncalled for bravery….Their personalities become warped by the myth of their own dominance and superiority. (Seidenberg 34)

For her own sake, Deborah is innocently happy because the idea that mothering and nurturing are the prime duties of a woman has been ingrained into her psyche right from her childhood by the societal and cultural norms regulated stringently by the patriarchal

authorities. That she cherishes no other dream beyond her home, husband and children, and glories in her domestic power may also be seen as the triumph of the chauvinistic ideology that enforces subalternity in various forms. It is a different matter, however, that Deborah relishes it and turns it into a positive and satisfying activity. Her interest in the domestic routine re-affirms her control over her environment. It is by refusing to be treated as a non-entity that she is able to command respect:

> DEBORAH. I get very angry when people ask what I do and tell them and they say "Oh, you don't have a profession then? I do have a profession. A very skilful profession. A profession full of different skills. Not only cooking, washing, ironing but organizing. People don't realize the organization that goes into running a household. Budgeting, stocking up, planning ahead. And the imagination that's required! All those details that make my home a haven, a womb, an anchor, a magnet! (*OWP* 66)

Thus, Wesker accords a place of respect, honour and importance to Deborah and all those women, who are denied opportunities to venture out of their homes to have a professional life, yet they make the best of whatever liberty and space is available to them. Instead of cribbing or lamenting the limitations of a woman's world, Deborah turns her home into a haven - a place to be proud of, rather than a prison. For her, mothering is an empowering experience, fundamental to her survival. Her view is in opposition to the established ideology which sees motherhood as restrictive of women's freedom. Contrary to the disturbed atmosphere precipitated by marital discord in Miriam's world, we find Deborah basking in the glory of carrying out her mother work in the best possible fashion.

Armed with confidence in her capabilities, Deborah has made herself indispensable for her family, and turned everything to her benefit even within the limitations of the domestic environment. "I'm needed, wanted, depended upon. I glory in it, bathe in it, thrive

on it" (*OWP* 67) she declares proudly. In fact, she subverts Martha Gimenez's view that motherhood is an instrument of oppression. In her article 'Feminism, Pro-natalism, and Motherhood,' Gimenez avers: "Motherhood, if conceived as taken for granted dimension of woman's normal adult role becomes one of the key sources of women's oppression" (Trebilcot 287). But by refusing to be oppressed, Deborah establishes the elemental and creative power of a woman through her motherhood, and turns out to be Wesker's model mother who embodies the strengths and virtues of all other three mothers - Ruth, Nora, and Miriam - and epitomizes the true mother who is confident, strong and in control. From Wesker's perspective such a woman who does not let motherhood become a burden, and happily contributes to the society by nurturing responsible citizens, is indeed an ideal mother.

Noted feminist scholar Simone de Beauvoir regards marriage as an oppressive and exploitative economic arrangement which forces sexual inequality and smothers the voice of women. However, in *Four Portraits - of Mothers*, instead of berating marriage or motherhood, Wesker appears to expose, and scoff at the social and ideological construct of patriarchy and other gendered mores which bequeath a position of prominence and power to the male, however undeserving, in both family and society, and push mothers into subalternity. Thus it is evident that artificial constructs and gender stereotypes have put women in disadvantageous position, reducing them to the subjugated 'other' in a predominantly patriarchal set up. Through *Four Portraits—of Mothers* he foregrounds the vital issues, challenges and complexities which inform and define a woman's identity as a wife and a mother. Despite the deficiencies and weaknesses inherent in them, Wesker asserts his faith in the primacy of the mother in the society, and her innate capacity to counter the forces that assign a subaltern status to her. In this regard, he not only lends voice to their dilemmas, yearnings and anguish, but also accords them a place of power and superiority in the societal and familial setup.

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