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# J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and the Lives of Fishermen in Bangladesh's Bay of Bengal: Similarities in Struggle, Faith, Tragedy, and Women's Contributions

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the parallels between J.M. Synge's play *Riders to the Sea* and the lives of fishing communities in Bangladesh along the Bay of Bengal, focusing on struggle, faith, tragedy, and women's contribution. In the play, Maurya loses her husband and sons to the sea, but she demonstrates strength through acceptance and prayer. Her struggle mirrors that of women from Bangladeshi fishing families, who face constant danger as their loved ones brave the waves and storms to earn a living. Women in the communities, like Maurya, step in where there are no male members around, managing households, providing emotional support, and engaging in small-scale economic activities to ensure family survival. Their prayer and belief in the Almighty provide them with emotional strength, enabling them to bear loss and uncertainty. The play's drama and actual circumstances of Bangladeshi fishermen portray human vulnerability, courage, and moral responsibility. By exploring these shared experiences, the study highlights the universality of endurance, the essential role of women, and the profound human capacity to navigate extreme natural and social challenges.

**Keywords:** J.M. Synge; *Riders to the Sea*; Human Struggle; Faith; Tragedy; Women in Fishing Communities; Coastal Bangladesh; Bay of Bengal; Women in Fishing Communities; Trust on Almighty

### 1. Introduction

The sea has been both life and peril to coastal communities everywhere for centuries. Literature has frequently explored this contradiction, capturing the ambivalent relationship between human life and nature. J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* is a classic in this regard, recording the life of an Irish fishing household whose existence is dominated by the harsh and whimsical sea. The play centers around Maurya, a woman who has lost her husband and sons but continues to keep her household running with courage and stoic silence. The play, in its narration of the lives of Maurya and her family, addresses universal human themes of struggle, faith, tragedy, and the psychological and emotional strength required to endure unimaginable loss. The story is not only a depiction of personal loss but also a reflection on the human condition in general, where mortality, duty, and resilience intersect.

This paper examines the parallels between the narrative of *Riders to the Sea* and the lives of fishing communities in Bangladesh, particularly those along the Bay of Bengal. These communities encounter similar natural hazards: cyclones, storms, high waves, and unpredictable tides that threaten both life and livelihood. Like Maurya, women in these communities assume critical responsibilities when male members are lost to the sea. They manage households, contribute economically, and provide emotional support, ensuring the survival and stability of their families.

The general theme of this paper is to illustrate the similarity of struggle, faith, tragedy, and women's contribution between the play and Bangladeshi fishing communities. From these shared experiences, the research highlights the universality of human resilience, the women's pivotal role, and the social and psychological mechanisms that allow families to survive in the face of nature's unstoppable forces. This research bridges literature and real social realities, showing how art can reflect and reveal lived human experiences across cultures.

### 2. Methodology

#### 2.1. Research Approach:

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative approach, bridging literary analysis and real-life experiences of coastal communities.

## 2.2. Literary Analysis:

2.2.1. J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. (Primary Material)

2.2.2. Focus on Maurya's character, examining her struggle, faith, and tragic experiences.

2.2.3. Detailed analysis of the Key Quote: "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied."

## 2.3. Bangladeshi Fishermen Context:

2.3.1. Secondary sources: news reports, academic articles, ethnographic studies, and government/NGO reports.

2.3.2. Focus on household management, livelihood, and the crucial role of women in sustaining fishing families.

2.3.3. Consideration of emotional, social, and economic impacts of maritime hazards.

2.3.4. Environmental Analysis: Examination of Bay of Bengal hazards: storms, cyclones, unpredictable currents, and their impact on fishermen.

## 2.4. Thematic Comparison:

2.4.1. Parallels drawn between Maurya's experiences and the lived realities of Bangladeshi fishing families.

## 2.5. Analytical Methods:

2.5.1. Thematic synthesis of literary and real-life data.

2.5.2. Contextual interpretation integrating character analysis, line-specific insights, and socio-economic realities.

## 2.6. Researcher's Perspective:

2.6.1. Analysis conducted with reflective and empathetic lens, linking literary insight to real-life human experiences.

2.6.2. Recognition of Maurya's emotional endurance inspired comparison with Bangladeshi women sustaining households under risk.

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## 3. Analysis and Findings

### 3.1. Struggle:

In J.M. Synge's play *Riders to the Sea*, Maurya's sons venture into the sea despite the constant threat of sudden storms and towering waves, which appear as agents of death before them. The play shows how her husband and sons Bartley, Michael, and Martin lose their lives to the very sea that sustains them, highlighting the immense risks inherent in seeking livelihood.

Maurya bears the responsibility of protecting her family, a duty that amplifies her daily mental strain and constant struggle. The limitations of human power are clear, as the fishermen are often powerless against sudden disasters. Even after the loss of her husband and sons, Maurya must endure and continue to sustain her household, demonstrating the relentless pressure of survival in an unforgiving environment.

Similarly in Bangladesh, fishermen venture into the Bay of Bengal during pre-monsoon and monsoon periods when heavy rain, strong winds, and high waves are major threats. As they are faced with such a threat, they live at risk to make their living, mostly attaching less significance to their individual safety but more to income and existence. Natural disasters remain beyond their control, often damaging boats, destroying catches, and claiming lives, leaving families economically vulnerable. Women belonging to these fisher families, like Maurya, come forward where there are no male members. They manage homes, take care of children and the elderly, and engage in small-scale financial or economic undertakings in order to support the family.

These women become heads of households, parents, and providers during such times, ensuring both the emotional and economic well-being of their families. This constant strife, duplicated as much in fiction as in life, represents the persistence it takes to live on against unpredictable and brutal natural forces of the Bay of Bengal.

### 3.2. Faith:

In J.M. Synge's play *Riders to the Sea*, Maurya faces life alone after her husband has long been lost to the sea. She assumes full responsibility for her household, mentally preparing herself with the understanding that human power is limited against the forces of nature and fate.

One by one, she loses her remaining sons, leaving her entirely alone, yet she finds peace and inner strength through prayer. For Maurya, prayer is not merely a religious act but a source of resilience, a means to endure and confront the relentless challenges posed by the sea.

In the same way, in Bangladeshi fishing communities, many women have lost their husbands to the dangers of the Bay of Bengal. These women take up the household head and guardian role and handle family and finance matters. They have the ever-present knowledge of the unreliability of the sea and the danger that accidents or storms can take away their fathers, brothers, husbands, or sons at any moment. The death of loved ones along with economic tribulations burdens them with unimaginable emotional weight.

Like Maurya, these women do not lose faith and find strength through prayer, placing their trust in the Almighty. Their belief in a higher power guides their daily lives and ventures out to sea for food and livelihood, exemplifying extraordinary resilience and courage against the overwhelming natural forces.

### 3.3. *Tragedy:*

Maurya and her family, in *Riders to the Sea*, are destined to struggle against the sea, which is unavoidable. Maurya's sons, Bartley, Michael, and Martin, go out to the sea for livelihood, knowing well that storms, huge waves, or an accident can turn their life upside down. In such a situation, they demonstrate gallantry, sense of responsibility, and moral courage at every moment. All their actions share the traits of a tragic hero: they know the dangers but stake everything for family and duty. Maurya's faith and psychological fortitude make the tragic process even deeper.

The same kind of reflection of tragic heroism occurs in the lives of Bangladeshis too. Bangladeshi fishermen have to face the threat of Bay of Bengal's perilous waves and storms daily. They were aware that the sea is capable of killing a person, but they ventured out to fish. Each trawler might sink, any storm might introduce fresh danger. Yet they face all these threats with mental resilience, experience, and belief.

The fishermen's life, being tragic heroes, delineates human frailty, invincibility of nature, and the hopelessness one feels facing the uncontrollable stroke of destiny. Maurya's sons and Bangladeshi fishermen alike show an evident parallel, both are aware of the danger, yet continue their battle with valor and duty. This battle makes them tragic heroes.

Tragically enough, tragedy here is not just about death; it means the ongoing struggle against human confines, natural perils, duty, and psychological courage. Both Maurya's sons and Bangladesh's fishermen view this tragedy as a testament to profound understanding of human and natural dynamics.

#### 3.3.1. *Key Quote Analysis:*

The key quote: "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied" is the essence of Maurya's deeper understanding of human mortality and the inescapable nature of loss. In *Riders to the Sea*, this affirmation follows a series of losses, as a statement of her acceptance of human helplessness in the presence of the inescapable nature of the sea. The statement shows that Maurya doesn't perceive death or hardship as capricious punishment but realizes the order of life and the inevitability of human weakness. Her acceptance is emotional and practical, embracing the frailty of life itself as well as building the will to continue sustaining her family. Here "satisfaction" does not imply the Victorian meaning of being content but signifies a pragmatic acceptance, an understanding that survival and endurance so frequently entail accepting forces beyond human control.

This line also expresses the greater human wisdom of resilience in the midst of adversity. Maurya's tale is a literary demonstration of how men and women, particularly those whose very lives are subject to capricious forces like the ocean, deal with continuous risk and loss. Her philosophical resignation converts personal grief into tempered bravery and moral fortitude so she may stride through the mundane responsibilities of family, sustenance, and survival.

Meanwhile, Bangladeshi fisherwomen portray a similar awareness. They know very well that the Bay of Bengal might kill fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons instantly. Nonetheless, they maintain the household, manage economic activities, and provide emotional nourishment to the family. The acceptance of risk is not resignation but an adaptive strategy that supports their emotional resilience. The acknowledgment of human frailty does not discourage hope or effort, but only promotes prudence, persistence, and courage. Like Maurya, these women embed the reality of mortality, turning knowledge of danger into aware action and unshakeable support of their families.

Ultimately, the quotation is a thematic bridge between life and literature. It is a statement of the eternity of man's ability to survive, how accepting impermanence in existence fosters psychological resilience, ethical responsibility, and worldly tenacity. Maurya and Bangladeshi fisherwomen both embody the idea that accepting the limits set by fate, nature, or chance is not defeat but a powerful form of strength that enables survival, courage, and deep concern for their loved ones.

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## 4. Discussion

J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* is a vivid portrayal of human strength against relentless natural forces. Maurya's life is one of relentless exposure to loss, uncertainty, and death. The death of her husband and sons points to the volatility of livelihoods pegged on the sea but she endures, taking full control of her household. Her courage is not passive but active engagement with the world, splitting between emotional resilience, realistic mastery, and moral accountability. Prayer is her anchor, giving both psychological stability and a system for interpreting life's uncertain pulse.

The lives of Bay of Bengal Bangladesh fishing people turn out to be an incredibly parallel tale. Fishermen face the uncertainty of the sea on a daily basis, fighting storms, cyclones, high tides, and turbulent waves. They are not demotivated by these natural threats; instead, they motivate effective preparation,

collective decision-making, and unstinting effort towards long-term economic stability. Danger is part of daily life, and survival is accompanied with courage and cautious persistence.

In literature and daily life, women stand as central actors in maintaining family and society. Like Maurya, Bangladeshi fisherwomen move into the stereotypically male areas that are involved in managing households, obtaining education and child-rearing, overseeing money, and contributing to the economy through small-scale ventures. They are not peripheral characters but central ones, reconstituting family strength and social continuity. These women transform adversity into concerted action, demonstrating resourcefulness, emotional competency, and leadership in the contexts of persistent uncertainty.

Religion is an indirect yet strong force behind human resilience. For Maurya, prayer serves as an intermediary to neutralize grief and provide the courage for fulfilling day-to-day needs. Bangladeshi women rely on religious faith in the Divine for addressing tangible hazards and mental anguish. Religion here is cohesive, exerting on choice, affective states, and social behavior, offering insulation against despair and spurring the articulation of hope, guidance, and moral direction.

The idea of tragedy transcends personal loss. The heroic struggle with forces beyond them by the Bangladeshi fishermen and Maurya's sons embodies the idea of tragedy. Their heightened awareness of threat coupled with purposeful action in the service of duty and survival transmutes danger into moral courage. Tragedy in this sense is not episodic but chronic, affecting family life, social roles, and individual psyche.

The statement: "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied," captures this intersection of acceptance and resilience. Maurya's face is one of deep acceptance that human life is finite and that enduring strength springs from acceptance, not denial, of this fact. The same adjustment is made by women in Bangladeshi coastal fisher communities, capturing this awareness in everyday life, transforming existential risk into pragmatism and affective preparedness. Acceptance is converted into an instrument of empowerment rather than resignation, shaping decisions, preventing the break-up of families, and creating resilience in circumstances with high uncertainty.

By linking the literary presentation to lived realities, this analysis highlights common human coping mechanisms under hard conditions. It points out that resilience is not unidimensional; practical, emotional, and spiritual, and that active women's roles play a vital but largely forgotten role in keeping households and communities endangered by chronic natural disasters.

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## 5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* effectively mirrors the lives of Bangladeshi fishing communities. Shared experiences of struggle, reliance on faith, persistent tragedy, and the indispensable contributions of women highlight the universality of human resilience against uncontrollable natural forces. Women, in both the play and real fishing communities, run homes, manage finances, and act as pillars of emotional support, ensuring families' survival in perpetual danger. Both contexts reveal that survival, courage, and emotional fortitude, with women's active participation, are essential in sustaining families and communities dependent on the sea.

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