

THE PLAY OF POLITICAL AND INDIVIDUAL DYNAMICS IN GEORGE RYGA'S SEVEN HOURS TO SUNDOWN

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Abstract

George Ryga's play Seven Hours to Sundown deals with the dynamics which operates at the level of an individual and at the political level. It highlights how individuals with their innocent demands get mired into the intrigues and play of power politics indulged in by the people at the administrative realms. The play shows the struggle waged by characters like Irma, Goyda and even Kiosk the mayor innocently and become victims at the hands of political manipulators like Janice the newspaper correspondent, Dolan, the newspaper proprietor and Tom Rossini the alderman on the other side. It shows how a simple demand of Goyda becomes a matter of group politics.

Keywords: Older Generation community Values, Younger Generation Social Value, Politicization of Individuals, Individualization of Politics

George Ryga's *Seven Hours to Sundown* deals with the nature of political: the politicization of individual of versus the individualization of political. The play highlights how individual initiatives when supported by the people lose the objective and get mired in group politics. People get trapped into positions or moral stance: neither side is totally right or wrong. The political conflict is based on an incident in Ryga's own city between city officials wanting to demolish a heritage building and a citizens group wishing it to preserve it as a cultural heritage.

Ryga also focuses on the dynamics of the conflict between the social values of the older generation and the aspirations of the younger generation which are at logger heads with each other. The antagonism between the old and the new in the Canadian society culminates in the evolution of a society with new ethical and moral values. The struggle between the father and the children extends as a fight between the establishment and the new generation. Society becomes always a battering force against which individuals fight for survival. The seeds of conflict start form the familial to the political. Both the protagonists of the play, Sid Kiosk and Jerry Goyda suffer from broken families. They are deserted by their wives and children. Goyda lost his son and Kiosk, his only daughter Irma Kiosk. Kiosk loves his daughter but they are different in attitude and life style. Kiosk exhibits a typical bourgeois attitude and does not like his daughter work in a small leather workshop along with his political rival Goyda. According to him, 'To cut a leather and sew buttons is not a man's way of making a Living' (15). He holds the view that knitting and shoe lace and not manly activities (21) He fails to realize his daughter's love for craft and her inclination towards Jerry Goyda. Kiosk's authoritarian propensity as a Mayor and his rigid temperament as a father estranged Irma from her father resulting in her death. His corrupt politics ultimately brings about his downfall.

The theme of the play is based on a real incident that took place in Summerland. The normal central situation centers on the civic and legal tussle over the *Summerland* crafts centre which raged between the Government and a group of citizens led by Goyda. He fights with the mayor for allocating a room in the church building for establishing a cultural centre. The mayor refuses to sanction it but when the people start fighting for it in an organized way the Mayor yields to the demand. Ryga emphasizes that there should be unity among the people in order to achieve any venture; they should also be prepared to sacrifice for their cause. Kiosk is hostile revealing his bourgeois contempt for the people; he is unable to tolerate the popularity of Goyda. Kiosk's lust

for power and his authoritarian streak manifest in his chiding of Dolan for giving importance to Henderson in his editorial wherein the Mayor's prominence is ignored. He admonishes Dolan: "I am campaign" (8). Kiosk is a harsh administrator and this quality is inherited from his father Delkiosk. Much against his wish, Del Kiosk has compelled his son Kiosk to marry Ella. He orders him to marry her but his daughter Irma is different from her father. She aligns with Goyda and works for the welfare of the working class along with him. As Parker remarks Kiosk sees in his daughter's behavior a sure manifestation of the traits of his wife Ella who ignoring him has gone away with a kite flying rancher (64). Likewise Iram gives up a suitable job in Winnipeg to work at crafts in her small town in collaboration with Goyda whom her father resents.

Goyda faces pressure from many sides; Rossini the property developer, Janice the newspaper Correspondent put pressure on the Mayor. Janice keeps Kiosk under her control and, she does everything her owner Dolan wants her to do. The Mayor depends on Janice for she enjoys popular support and can organize people in favour of the Mayor. So it becomes imperative for the Mayor to enlist the support of Janice in order to avenge his enemy Goyda. The animosity between the Mayor and Goyda goes back to the days when Goyda worked as a teacher. Kiosk was the chairman of the school board. As a nationalist, Goyda wants to teach Canadian history to their students instead of American history. This counter culture represented by Goyda is resented by Kiosk and as a result Kiosk dismisses Goyda from his teaching post for challenging the system. Kiosk thinks that the purpose of education is to prepare the children for some jobs instead making them waste their time and energy in political matters: we need a child who can learn to do things, not a fusty vote. They vote or not once every three or four years But every morning they will be getting up to go to work (20). Goyda now wants to settle his personal score with Kiosk. He takes up the issue of setting up of a cultural craft centre in the church building. Kiosk denies this request. Goyda has to seek the help of Janice; Irma also helps him often in his struggle. Irma's influence on him is pronounced.

Irma watches keenly the activities of both the groups represented by Goyda and Kiosk and she is dissatisfied with both of them. Kiosk is not interested in setting up the cultural centre nor is Goyda eager to establish it. There is only mutual slander. Irma is drawn to the revolutionary group of Goyda because of the stiff opposition of her father to the move and the maneuver of the capitalist forces in favour of the Mayor. She wants the revolutionary group to win but she gets frustrated with the group because it is directed more to be after his blood instead of getting success in their demand. She believes: This issue is not as important as breaking my father down. You are moving head stones in a country grave yard... dead. no feeling.. no tears.. no remorse.. no hope.. You are no different than he was! It's just a killing game... Nobody cared anybody! (103)

The power struggle between Goyda and Kiosk ends in the death of Irma. (Janice takes a series of action against the mayor - she collects signatures, organizes a demonstration without consulting Goyda, Goyda himself is shocked to know these plans. Already Irma is frustrated. She feels terribly let down. She thinks: "both of them lied to me.... To yourself... I am going home.... Everything is dead frozen. There is nobody left" (104). When Janice informs Goyda about Thousand signatures obtained in favour of their demand, Goyda refuses to announce the news of support. He talks about the hypocrisy of people like Janice who will say one thing in the presence of mayor and opposite in his absence: "He says if you run into the mayor while doing it (announcing the news) you might give him a flower and then break his legs with a club" (105). He correctly diagnosis Janice character - the taste of power is too heady for our Janice no small town paper is going to tie you down now" (106).

The play *Seven Hours to Sundown* comes in the long line of Ryga's plays like *Grass and wild Strawberries*, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, *Sunrise on Sarah*, *Prometheus Bound* and *Ploughmen of the Glacier* in dramatizing an individual's struggle against his own society. Ryga focuses on the contemporary situation rather than using myths of other countries and dramatizes it for popular viewing. In his play *Seven Hours to Sundown* Ryga explores the political and cultural contours of the demand of the civic society to establish a cultural centre in the church building. It all starts from the family to the political arenas. The situation evades from the conflict between generational shifts. Parents themselves are beset with conflicting sets of values. Obviously children recognize the value of conflict within their parents and perceive the

hypocritical gap between creed and behavior. Consequently children bounce back upon their parents and the society to achieve freedom. Parent-child relationship assumes significant aspect in Canadian society. Children love their parents but this parental care is viewed as a stifling influence on them. Irma of *Seven Hours to sundown* is very much loved by her father Kiosk; but her freedom is stifled to such an extent that she is forced to do a job which she does not like to do. A responsibility is imposed upon the children by parents which the children themselves have not chosen and did not want. Allan in *Grass and Wild Strawberries* is reluctant to concede to Ted's views of history. According to him history helps all to understand the social set up and paves way for the future. To this view, Allan angrily retorts "Is there a social system that will stop building tanks out of concern for the grass over which they roll?" The play portrays the conflict between the nature loving hippy generation and its rule bound city wracked patient. Likewise Kiosk does not want his daughter to cut leather and sew buttons. It disregards his daughter's love for craft. Ryga presents the failure of the family system and the predicament of women. The female protagonists of Ryga are forced to face the male world that exploits them. Irma realizes how she is exploited by Goyda against her father and also his real motive to defeat Kiosk rather than achieving the goal of establishing the cultural centre in a church building. Irma's freedom of choice is thwarted by her father whereas Kiosk himself is forced to marry Ella much against his dislike. The conflicting positions of parents during their childhood and adulthood over an issue clearly expose the gap that exists between creeds and practice. This hypocrisy forces children to fight against their parents. Ryga does not only highlight the cultural conflict between the youth and the older generation in his play but also underlines the significant relation that exists between the individual and politics. There is the politicization of the individual versus the individualization of the politics. Only when an individual becomes a part of the masses then the struggle acquires social dimension. When Kiosk demands the setting up of cultural centre, it remains only a lone voice. But when the demands become the voice of the people, they get political mileage. As Ryga notes "I realized the role of the individual is really minimal; Decisions are made en masse and there are tragic elements and individual initiative doesn't work, it doesn't pay off and people got trapped into positions or moral stances; neither side is totally right or wrong"(Innes 113).

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