

# Ernaux's Critical Account of Women in a Woman's Story "A Propulsive World"

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**Abstract:-** The present paper discusses the traumatic situations experienced by Ernaux's mother during the different phases of her life to depict a vivid picture of the life of mothers and women in general in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Europe. She was overburdened under the shadow of extreme poverty, sans aucun support in life and worked as a factory worker for the survival of her family. The paper will make an attempt to examine her biographical work *A Woman's Story* to present the details on the concerned themes in a condensed manner. Theorists like Albert Camus, Spinoza have manifested in their ideas the pain arising out of such aspects and how it can be dealt with which will be taken as a theoretical background to present the issues. As we know, the presence of poverty puts one's life in coma and the same has been felt in the life of Ernaux's mother who sacrificed everything throughout her life to provide her family a ray of life. The aspects of ambition, interest, and family in their account will be deliberated upon in brief in the communication.

**Keywords:** Ernaux, Women, Gender, Europe, reason.

## Introduction

The destiny of life is something that makes us worrisome as it puts us in a dilemma about how our life is going to be shaped. The phrase "for the first time the door of her room was closed ( Ernaux 1)." The line reflects the escalated life of her mother who used to carry out all the tasks ranging from internal to external works without thinking of life what it is? How it is passing on? In the disturbing atmosphere where she was the sole source of everything and for everyone depicts her tenacious position. The reflections about her mother " There was no harm in that. After all, he would be the last man to take care of my mother, by covering her with earth all afternoon, he might as well enjoy it (Ernaux 8)." The palpable words make us to ponder the drastic condition of her mother who had hardly lived a livable life with no one to share thoughts with and forced to live a pathetic, lonely life. **Albert Camus's novel The Stranger** also expresses the same concern that the world is not in favor of order and reason and so it is futile to look for the same in order to live a life with dignity. No one cares for others, just a self-centered desire to lead one's life without bothering about the humanity which is the soul of one's existence on this earth and can be found in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when people started following the critical approach to lead one's life and conveying the same to do. The thoughts of the daughter regarding the perceptions of the people towards her mother's death reminds us of the chaotic life of her mother "They all thought it was a good thing she had died. The absolute certainty of this statement is something I cannot understand. I drove back home in the evening. Everything was definitely over (Ernaux 22)." The tragic life her mother was living is clearly visible here. Her life was always in question citing the uncountable miseries surrounding her life that made people wished for her death. **As Spinoza states in Think Least of Death: Spinoza on How to Live and How to Die**, there is no immortal soul or self that persists beyond this life. When you are dead, you are dead... These words emphasize the journey of life passed by her mother as painful and once dead, no one should talk about her life as it is futile and unworthy.

The followings lines of Ernaux:

—the six children packed into one room, sharing a bed with one of her sisters, the bouts of sleep- walking, when she was found standing in the courtyard, sound asleep, her eyes wide open . . . (Ernaux 16). The cramped room without minimal facilities expresses the impeccable sufferings she has gone through

all her life where nothing was in order. One can say, a life which is asocial. The harsh fact pertaining to the absence of daughters from the schools makes us to wonder about the uncertainties life can be forced to experience:

“She was neither happy nor unhappy to leave school at the age of twelve and a half, the common practice in those days” ( Ernaux 18). The concerned fact relates the insecure environment regarding the education the women used to receive during those days, resulting their ultimate downfall. The ironic fact is that this is the case of Europe which is regarded as the most progressive society in terms of intellect.

The mother’s resistance regarding the judgment of one’s ability through the prism of capital is highly appreciable and reflects her critical approach which needs to be inculcated in every citizen for the progress of one and all.

The narrator underlines “My mother was the one with the proud, violent temper. She was aware that she belonged to the lower class and she resented it, refusing to be judged according to her social status alone. She would often say of the rich, ‘They’re no better than us. ( Ernaux 21).” This instance explains the critically active nature of her mother who was against the norms that defines the status of the person concerned on the basis of power and money. She resisted against such practices to justify the presence of knowledge as the guiding force and defining element behind it rather than money.

She was also aware of her situation and realized that her own livelihood dependent on families who were living from hand to mouth. The poverty stricken atmosphere does not allow people to uplift the community in terms of education, employment leading to their destruction. They just find themselves in a position to live without following the ethics of living. The government must steps in to support them in getting rid of such obstacles.

She affirms “My father got a job filling in the holes left by the shells. They lived in two rooms without electricity, with the furniture dismantled and stacked up against the wall.(Ernaux 35). ”It reflects the scenario of the people having low level of education that does not allow them to create a better environment of living in order to make a progress in life. The whole life appeared to be burden for them.

The unthinkable life of her mother in the chaotic world reveals the disturbing scenario for the women to face off: “She was always in a rush. She never had time to do the cooking and look after the house “properly,” ( Ernaux 42). The fact reveals how painful it becomes for a woman who is not having quality education making her status chaotic in both spheres of life i.e. professional as well as personal. There is a high possibility that it may lead to poor, weak upbringing of the children and obviously the ignorant environment for them.

In her opinion, self-improvement was first and foremost a question of learning and nothing was more precious than knowledge. (She would often say: \*\*One must occupy one's mind.”) Books were the only things she handled with care.”(Ernaux 44). The interest that she had towards education is highly appreciative but not providing access to quality education to such community is extremely horrific for the society as well for the nation. In present time too, ponder on self-improvement can be proved to be the key for the upliftment of the society and eventually the country. To make progress in any sector needs the support of people who can work together to achieve the objective sans lots of worries.

The affirmation of the narrator “It was only when my mother—born in an oppressed world from which she wanted to escape became history that I started to feel less alone and out of place in a world ruled by words and ideas, the world where she had wanted me to live. ( Ernaux 90). The stark reality that one can extracts from the narrator’s comparison of the period during which her mother lived and she is living is that there will always be presence of hindrances on the path leading to knowledge, prosperity and if one wants to stop it then sensitization of all sections of the society is required on a larger scale.

The following incident reinforces the previous instance. As the narrator states “We considered unimportant meant a lot to her: everyday news items, crime, accidents, being on good terms with one's neighbors, and trying not to “trouble” people. ( Ernaux 63). The unimportant topics of the narrator are in fact of utmost importance for the people across the centuries. To understand how? One needs to be sensitized as news, rapport with the people in the society where we live in can never be considered futile and unworthy. As **Immanuel Kant** deliberates in his famous essay *What is Enlightenment?* on the fact that ‘Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed

immaturity''. One needs to come out from the state of immaturity to find the courage to act reasonably on their own rather than defining something good or bad through the perceptions of others.

### Conclusion

We can conclude by saying that Annie Ernaux has tried to bring to center the life of women in different phases that they live and various obstacles they face. The presence of trouble, sufferings, sacrifices, discriminations are very revealing truths in the contemporary times in Europe through which women are passing their lives and raising questions about the modernized society that they referred themselves as. As Foucault states in *Subject and Power*, Power plays major role in making one the subject but once the truth is revealed power loses its presence and that is what is happening in Western Society. I believe the concept of universalism is also one of the elements that has come out from the same and Ernaux's work justifies the same. The concept of universalism cannot succeed in a world where there is an immersion of people carrying different cultures, upbringings, traditions, customs, and religions.

### References

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