

Absurdity of Life with reference to Satish Alekar's '*Mahanirvan or The Dread Departure*'

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Article Received: 22/04/2023

Article Revised: 12/05/2023

Article Accepted: 26/05/2023

Published Online: 28/05/2023

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2023.5.05.107

Abstract

In Modern age there are various schools of drama and the absurd theatre is one of the most popular of them. The absurd drama deals with the theme of alienation, lack of communication, meaninglessness and absurd condition of man. It is a term or on particular movement started in late 1950's. The word absurd means foolishness, senseless, nonsensical and something which is ridiculous, unreasonable and illogical. Critic Martin Esslin coined the term in his book "The Theatre of the Absurd" (1961). The present play "Mahanirvan" by Satish Alekar is an excellent example of an absurd play. In this play the writer has used some absurd characters, absurd situation and absurd themes to show us the reality that our life itself is meaningless as we have become aimless. Through the play Mahanirvan the present paper will focus on the absurdity of life and existence that in modern days how people have lost their own identity in this crowded world. In this modern world people have lost their own self and everything. Their sense of belonging to the society has been cut off. People have become self centered and they have lost interest in basic human values. And so, they have become the victim of aimlessness, meaninglessness, frustration and alienation.

Keywords: meaninglessness, absurdity of Life, situation, sense of belonging, existence.

Introduction

Meaning of Absurdity/ Absurd Literature:

The term absurdity is applied to various works in drama and prose fiction which have common in the sense that human condition is essentially absurd and this condition can be adequately represented only in the works of literature that are themselves absurd. But though the absurd play Seems nonsensical at the surface but it deals with a serious theme – meaninglessness of human existence. It moves from the nothingness whence it came towards the nothingness where it must end as an existence which is both anguished and absurd. So,

the use of absurdity in literature is a vehicle for writers to explain those elements in the world that do not make sense. It examines questions of meaning and life. And writers often use absurd themes, characters and situation to question whether meaning or structure exists at all. For example, "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett is the best example of an absurd play which represents the helplessness, meaninglessness and absurdity of life in dramatic form. The present play "Mahanirvan" by Satish Alekar is also good example of an absurd play.

Features of the Absurdity/Absurd Literature

• Nonsensical expressions and dialogues

An absurd play represents the series of random or arbitrary lines that have no connected meaning or pointless action, non-realistic, non-reasonable and unimaginative plots. The playwrights used illogical situations, silly circumstances, unconventional dialogues and insignificant plots to express the clear ridiculousness of human existence.

• Meaninglessness of life:

The absurd play represents human life as meaningless and one that could simply end in casual laughter. According to the writer's human existence has no meaning and purpose. It's just meaningless and purposeless. As *Fyodor Dostoyevsky* quoted that "*The Mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive but in finding something to live for*".

• Lack of plot:

An absurd play has no beginning, climax and ending, the plot of an absurd play is tragicomic. We feel entertained and at the same time we become serious, however though the plot seems to be illogical but it uncovers the reality of life. So, we laugh at surface but feel sad inside. So the plot of an absurd play is loose which is based on the strange and insignificant things.

• Nothing happens in the play:

Absurd plays are surprising and obscure and mostly it has no end or results. we can't get any idea in the play when we read it for the first time. Through the expressions of the characters and their way of behaving without any exact purpose we realise the exact meaning of human existence. So, we find in it nothingness is the essence. So practically nothing happens in the play.

• Humour and satire:

The use of humour and satire is also one of the main features of an absurd play. The writer uses the humorous and satirical language to show the reality and dark side of human existence. In this type of play the writer satirises on the follies of people.

Elements of Absurdity of Life in the Play

• Mixture of serious and comic events in the Play:

The play has mixture of serious and comic events. In this play the serious occasion of a death is presented in a comic manner, the play opens with the serious occasion-the death of Bhaurao. However, his wife Rama thinks that he is sleeping late in the morning. it is humorous that Bhaurao speaks with his wife though he is dead. Rama fears when she touches the body of Bhaurao but then hears his voice from elsewhere. It is humorous that neighbor thinks that Bhaurao is sleeping late in the morning because he might have drunk heavily last

night but when Rama starts crying one neighbor says that Bhaurao is really dead. The death of Bhaurao because of blood pressure is a sorrowful event however he himself tells us regarding his family and neighbours. It is humorous that he starts hymn singing (keertan) on his own death calling it "The Tale of Dread Departure". Then the neighbours create humour and satire. Bhau says that their palms have become rough because of tying strings of biers. All these things are illogical and absurd which can never happen.

- **Few absurd characters:**

In this play there are some absurd characters of which Bhaurao is one of the major characters in the play but throughout the play he is dead and though he is dead he talks and portrays his own story after death as a dead man. At the beginning of the play, he tries to convince his wife, Rama that he is no more as he died in his sleep last night, but she ignores him assuming that he is just kidding, Bhaurao then proves his demise by giving her some strong evidences and so she finally accepts that he is dead. She starts grieving over her husband's death. Bhaurao then imagines all the proceedings of his funeral and the last rites; He portrays how his neighbours would react to the situation. Unfortunately, on the day of demise Bhaurao's only son Nana is not in town, all the neighbours are waiting for his arrival and last rites and the customs are on hold due to this delay, finally Nana arrives, the funeral starts and all neighbours accompany Nana to the crematorium but they all get stuck as they get to know that municipal corporation has shut down that crematorium and new one has been set up far away and the rights get further delayed. Then Bhaurao imagines that he has been through all the rituals and reached the heaven but Nana makes him realize that it's not over yet and the last rights are yet to be done and Bhaurao insists that he would want his last rites to be performed in the old crematorium only. In this way all these characters throw light on the absurdity of life.

- **Nothing happens in the play:**

Like an absurd play, the plot is Serio-comic, Bhau makes us laugh with the puns and satirical expressions, however we cannot forget that he is dead and because of these all-illogical things practically nothing happens in the play. Because how can a dead person speak? So, the plot seems to be absurd but it reveals reality of life and that is why the plot can be explained in one sentence as " Bhau is dead and after some obstacles he is burnt in the old crematorium as he wished". So practically nothing happens in the play.

- **Nonsensical dialogues and expressions:**

Throughout the play there are nonsensical expressions for example in this play the protagonist is not a live human being but a dead person's soul but still he plays the role of narrator, his dialogues are nonsensical because these dialogues are of a dead person, for example- As a narrator of Aakhyan the dead Bhaurao himself emerges from his dead body and narrates that-
"And so the way of all flesh folks and friends!

*In the long run we are all dead I know I am of high blood pressure,
Before the sun rose high, In Nana's absence died I" (Alekar : 26)*

In second act, from the beginning till the fire given to the pyre of Bhaurao akhyana is done by Bhaurao himself which gives a philosophical message-

“When you are alive your sorrows are for sharing but when you are dead, they are only for bearing”. (Alekar : 25)

Bhaurao also talks about body and soul, death and life.

He says-

“What is this body all about but the flesh and the bones? for once you are dead and gone. Then comes the time of the bone.” (Alekar: 24)

Sometimes Bhaurao also speaks about the stage direction, for example he says -

“And so, everything made ready. My neighbors are busy making the bier for my body. While tying the bamboos they are singing a threnody.”(Alekar: 31)

Then at that point when Rama can't believe that Bhaurao is dead, his soliloquy shows his pain by directly addressing audience,he says-

“Poor thing! What trust? What conviction? She still doesn't believe I am dead. What more can I do? She'll believe it fast enough when the neighbors tell her, or when the doctor tells her! But wont believe me? her husband and lord and master and companion of many years? No way had she never taken my living word for anything; She's not the one to take my dead word either. Well!” (Alekar: 21) All these dialogues are nonsensical because these are the dialogues of a dead person.

- **Humour and satire:**

The play is filled with comic and satirical expressions, In fact the writer satirizes the hypocritical and superstitious behavior of the relatives and neighbours after the death of a middle class person. The serious occasion of a death is introduced in a comic and satirical manner. The author laughs at the relatives for their false mourning. They are nothing but hypocrites. Bhaurao's wife Rama weeps continuously for ten days, but then she longs for a man with black suit and black glasses and tells Nana that she would not live alone after the death of Bhaurao. Nana too makes humorous efforts to find out the man. Here with the help of characters language, behaviour, manners and their communication author has revealed an Absurdity of life which is ridiculous. The characters are different, and their way of behaving is purposeless which creates meaninglessness and absurdity.

- **Popularity in spite of nothingness:**

The play is incredibly important and popular despite having no purpose or significance. Because Satish Alekar has tried to portray the bare reality of life in which people are living with wearing mask to impress others Also, the writer attempted to expose and rip off this mask in order to see reality. The masks of Bhaurao's wife as a devoted to her husband, the mask of a son to show his loyalty to his parents and the neighbours mask of humanity.

The writer mocks and condemns the hypocrisy and duality of human nature in this contemporary world by using death and rituals of death as a subject. So in spite of meaninglessness and nothingness the play is quite successful and popular.

- **Conclusion**

In this way through the play “Mahanirvan” we can find out the dark side of human existence. In this play the dead Bhaurao observes everything objectively. He has the ability to hear and talk with others though he is dead , so by choosing this idea the writer has tried to show all of us that how reality is quite different. People are neither happy nor sad for the suffering of other people. Most people think that no one cares about their own life while they are alive and that we only realise the purpose of life after we have passed away. When a person is alive, his or her existence has some significance but when a person passes away his body becomes useless and it is immediately taken to the crematorium because the body starts decomposing. And throughout the play we learn how the family members becomes selfish as soon as Bhaurao passed away. And all these things proves the meaninglessness of human existence and throws a light on absurdity of human life.

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