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Absurd Assamese Play: Dr. Arun Sarma's "Aahar"

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Abstract:

The Assamese prose, poetry and drama written during the Post- Independence era were at par with the time. It reflected the same social analysis and structural experimentation. Although a lot of great dramas appeared they went unnoticed in comparison to prose and poetry. The prominent western influence of dramatists like Ibsen, Shaw, Beckett, Chekov etc can be seen in the Assamese plays. One more form that developed in this era was the "One Act Plays". Though the influence of absurd plays was not so widespread we can see a couple of playwrights such as Dr. Arun Sarma, Basanta Saikia, and Himendrakumar Borthakur in whose works Ionesco and Beckett apparently reflects.

Dr. Arun Sarma is one of the most noted and distinguished Assamese dramatist. He has a very long and graceful writing career. Though Dr. Sarma is equally proficient as a poet but his first identity which is more celebrated is that of a dramatist in the Assamese Literary circle, that too of a very unique status. His works Shri Nibaran Bhattacharya (1961) and Aahar (1964) were two prominent plays which are treated as the starters of Assamese Absurd Drama. Though many claims that Shri Nibaran Bhattacharya cannot be treated as a fully fledged absurd drama, "Aahar" has a lot to resemble with the absurdist trend.

In this study it is tried to bring out the unique elements of "Aahar" which resembles the characteristics of Absurd Drama.

Keywords: *absurd drama, assamese absurd plays, metaphor of nothingness, theatre of the absurd*

1. Introduction

1.1. What is an Absurd Drama?

The word "Absurd" itself says it all. Meaningless, out of all rules, senselessness and all synonyms that ever exists in our literature defines "Absurdism". So we have a big set of trends for absurdist behavior i.e. trends that are out of all trends. Absurd theory defines the present human predicament in a broader perspective. It doesn't see it as absence or presence of rational thought but as a fundamental lack of coherence and reasonableness in human psyche. So man takes to an elusive alien world.

Critic Martin Esslin named the term "The Theatre of the Absurd" for the work of a number of playwrights, mostly written in the 1950s and 1960s. The term is derived from an essay by the French philosopher Albert Camus. In his 'Myth of Sisyphus', written in 1942, he first defined the human situation as basically meaningless and absurd. The 'absurd' plays by Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter and others all share the view that man inhabits a universe with which he is out of key. Its meaning is indecipherable and his place within it is without purpose. He is bewildered, troubled and obscurely threatened. Critic Martin Esslin, who made it the title of his 1962 book on the subject refers to a particular type of play which first became popular when presented on stage the philosophy articulated by French philosopher Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which he defines the human condition as basically meaningless. Camus argued that humanity had to resign itself to recognizing that a fully satisfying rational explanation of the universe was beyond its reach; in that sense, the world must ultimately be seen as absurd. The most famous and most controversial, absurdist play is probably Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

2. The ' Absurd Effect' In India And Assam

The post-Independence trauma has shaken up the whole of India in a deep way. The class-conflict, wearing and tearing of ethnicity, the dreams and the lost dreams of a desired country etc were among the hundreds of other mental trauma that India was facing. The dramatists well portrayed the conditions in their canvas. The themes of their plays were from the current scenario that was taking place at that time. The tragic split between brothers created by economic scales, the spark of revolt born in protest to social ill judgments, smaller ethnic and non ethnic groups picking up arms to prove their presence, the conflict of man with his inner self took real color in the creations of the playwrights. The Assamese playwrights also created masterpieces just like their other counterparts.

In Post-Independence Assamese Literary circle Arun Sarma, Basanta Saikia, and Himendrakumar Borthakur are treated as the pathfinder of "Absurdism". Their works apparently follows the absurdist set of rules. Arun Sharma is numero Uno in the field of Assamese Absurd Drama.

3. 'Aahar' Through An Absurdist Lens

Sarma is a modern dramatist. In a personal interview he commented that he always try to project an important statement through his plays. The statement sometimes is a society centric statement and sometimes it is an investigation of universal human truth. He understands it very well that there is a very intimate relation between drama and real life. So he always tries to establish one or the other serious human conditions through this plays. This influence can be well seen in the plays of Arun Sarma. They went to become the reflection of the society of that period. In each of his plays a new interpretation can to be seen about the social conditions of man. He has written a number of plays such as "Shri Nibaran Bhattacharya", "Aahar", "and Purush" and the list goes on. His "Aahar" meaning food is treated as the most famous Assamese Absurd play.

Freudian view states that man can be very lonely in a crowd too. The inner mind and the outer mind of an individual are two very different perspectives, like two sides of the same coin. There is a difference between the inner time which actually keeps on ticking inside a human mind and which can be different from the actual physical clock time. The time which we follow in our day to day lives is the mechanical time which we follow by default. But we also have a hidden timing that never reflects in the physical time frame. It's the inner time or the time in mind. People immersed in depth of emotions often lives in the second type of timing that is the inner timing. "Aahar" follows the set of this time frame theory.

If we scrutinize each and every character of the story, we can easily make out that the all of them viz Kamal, Nalini, Dhiren, Nabin are living in their inner time of the mind. That is why the same women have brought in individual feeling in the psyche of four different persons. According to Freud, many emotions move around inside the human brain all the time. So sometimes he is very lonely even in the company of others. It becomes difficult to set up a mental connection with a near one. That is the reason why in the play "Aahar" though the four characters revolves round the same female dead body, each one of them experiences an individual feeling of difference of identity.

"Aahar" is a different kind of play, much apart from the day to day rational plays. The theme, (if we have any), is also a total out of the track one. Very unique as a story "Aahar" centers on a female dead body and four young men. It's a story of a theft of a dead body. The theft of the dead body was only because to show the distinct mentalities and insights towards a women of the four young men. In order to portray the individual perceptions of a man – women relationship, Playwright Sarma has picked up an unusual incident of stealing of an unclaimed female dead body by four young men. The story doesn't even mentions about the future of the dead body thieves. There are no anecdotes of their fate. This is kind of rule of the absurd.

The absurd plays lack a definite or proper storyline. It is argued that since human life is a mixture of different feelings, and human mind is no way definable and as a result we do not have a streamlined story in our own mind. Human mind is a scattered canvas. Human mind is a juncture of principle less, illogical and impossible stories. So a definite way to describe it is a kind of myth. Alike other absurd plays "Aahar" also lacks a good and logical plot. The intense suspense of the theft of a dead body metamorphoses into a totally different portrayal of individual human feelings.

Another aspect of Absurd play is to conceive utter curiosity and suspense in the story only to subside to unresolved conclusions. In this play also though the police comes to the spot and finds the four young men with the corpse, they walks away without doing anything.

Another distinct aspect of Absurd drama is the "wait". Like the two tramps of "Waiting For Godot", who did nothing but to wait for Godot. To race against time and to wait is very clear in "Aahar". The word "wait" was uttered more than 50 times by Nabin to proof this aspect of absurd drama. "Silence" is another aspect of Absurd drama which can be well felt in the play.

Each of the four youths was mentally much apart from each other. One of them, Nalini is a businessman, who has different perspective of treating women. Kamal is a romantic young lad who fantasizes a cuddling evening with his beloved. Dhiren is a revolutionary and Nabin a drunkard. All the characters were rewarded with ample time to visualize the women the way their mental self wants to. Unlike characters of other plays, the characters of absurd plays are a representation of a certain class of people. The name "Aahar" meaning food is a very appropriate title. Women can quench our thirst in many ways. She can, sexually, emotionally and mentally supports the life of man. Hence it's very apt to portray the female character as some "food".

4. Conclusion

"Aahar", following the path of the Absurd Theatre, can be seen as an attempt to restore the importance of myth and ritual to our age, by making man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, by instilling in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish. It hopes to achieve this by shocking man out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical and complacent. It is felt that there is mystical experience in confronting the limits of human condition.

5. References

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