



Review Article

The Theatre of The Absurd in English Literature: Indian Perspectives and Reflections in Contemporary Literature And Indian Cinema

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Abstract

This turned into a prominent literary trend of the twentieth century and a manifestation of the crisis of man in a very different world. It discarded the traditional forms of drama and represented life as unpredictable, irrational, and frequently senseless. After World War II, the movement began in Europe, though the concepts eventually spread into the world of writers and dramatists from other cultures, such as India. Absurdist method was adapted in Indian literature and theatre to reflect social realities like those of the postcolonial identity, cultural conflict and political instability. In modern literature and Indian films, absurdist elements are also used to depict the experiences of modern humans in a disjointed manner and through existential themes.

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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century saw significant political and social changes that impacted people's ideas about life and being. The war that followed World War II led to a sense of uncertainty, hopelessness and disillusionment. It seemed the traditional solutions, like religion, morality and social institutions, were no longer able to offer answers to human problems. Thus, literature and theatre looked for new ways to express themselves.

This new environment inspired a new art form, the theatre of the absurd. Absurdist writers did not tell organised stories with logical conclusions; instead, they represented humans as confused individuals, trying to understand the world in which they lived.

Emergence of Absurdism

The Theatre of the Absurd was closely linked to the social, political and psychological crises that arose in the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War. The war brought a lot of destruction, loss of life and emotional trauma, and these affected the understanding of life and reality. But the traditional systems started being questioned due to the violence and suffering in war. One started to wonder if there was any real purpose to life or if their lives themselves were subject to uncertainty and chaos.

The writers, philosophers and intellectuals felt that the traditional literary and dramatic form were inadequate means of capturing the realities of life in the modern world. Logical plots, unambiguous character development, and meaningful dialogue were characteristics of traditional drama, but seemed inadequate for the confusion and despair of modern people. In response to this, dramatists began to play with alternative forms that mirrored the disjointed and irrationality of human life.

The Theatre of the Absurd thus became an artistic movement which depicted the people as broken and held in situations that they could not understand or control. It emphasized the emotional and psychological state of humanity existing in a world characterized by uncertainty. Other existentialist thinkers, including Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, who preached themes of life's pointlessness, freedom, and quest for purpose, also helped inspire the movement.

In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, the two principal characters Vladimir and Estragon await the arrival of Godot, but he never shows up. All during the play they reiterate their dialogues, think about going, but stay put, and keep hoping for something that doesn't happen. The waiting is an endless process that represents the human desire for meaning, hope, and direction in life. The lack of Godot raises questions and illustrates the irrationality of human life: people live as if finding answers is the solution, but they will never be able to grasp the totality of the answer. The absurdist dramatists tried to uncover the confusion, alienation and existential anxiety of modern society through such representations.

The beginnings of the Theatre of the Absurd; characteristics

Martin Esslin coined the term "Theatre of the Absurd" for works of drama that depicted the irrational and confusing nature of

human existence. In contrast to traditional drama, the absurd theatre abandoned linear stories and realistic scenes.

In the absurd plays, the characters are not able to communicate effectively, as language seems to be a failure. The dialogues are repetitive, and actions often do not flow logically. The emphasis on these dramatic techniques is on the loneliness and confusion felt by contemporary people.

Characteristics of Absurd Drama

The elements of absurd drama: fragmentation of action, repetition of action, breakdown of communication, isolation, symbolism and mixture of comedy and tragedy. Absurd plays do not have a dramatic structure with a logical sequence of events and are deliberately designed to be confusing, uncertain and without conclusion. In Absurdist works, there is no order or certainty to human life, and so drama should mirror that, instead of providing a stage for the presentation of artificially organised narratives. Consequently, absurd plays often have characters caught in illogical and unproductive situations and routines, with no clear conclusion.

Absurd drama is characterised by one of the main elements, the lack of a plot. The events are often disconnected or repetitive and not move towards a clear ending. Actions can be repeated for characters, representing the repetitive and cyclical nature of human life. In Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot all day long, but without any noticeable change in the situation. The constant discussions and actions highlight experiences of helplessness and an effort to make sense.

Another significant characteristic is the breakdown of communication. Conversations are devoid of meaning or context and language becomes ineffective in absurd drama. Characters talk and don't get any real ideas or feelings. An example of this is the inability of language to create meaningful communication, as seen in *The Bald Soprano* by Eugene Ionesco, where normal conversations start to take on increasingly irrational forms. Ionesco proposed in this way that the language might not suffice to express human experiences.

Absurd drama is also highly concerned with isolation and alienation. Characters are frequently isolated and seem to have little to no emotional connection to others even when there are other people around. They have difficulty forming significant connections and often feel cut off from society. Moreover, absurd dramas often contain dramatic situations and funny bits; the result is a blend of comedy and tragedy. This juxtaposition of the irony of human existence where there is suffering and there is humor.

Likewise in *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter, silence and pauses convey psychological tension and fear, not comfort. The normal setting morphs into a fear-filled and uncertain environment. As Pinter shows, silence can convey more than anxiety and emotional tension; it can convey them more effectively.

Thus, these qualities illustrate the experimental use of some of the more unusual dramatic devices in order to communicate the sense of uncertainty, confusion, and existential crisis of modernity. In absurd drama, fragments of narratives, repetitive actions, miscommunication, and symbolic situations create a

realistic portrayal of the psychological state of people in a complex and contemporary world.

Major Theatrical Absurd Writers in English Literature

The Theatre of the Absurd was an influence of several dramatists, many of which have contributed to the development of modern drama by their innovative ideas, unconventional acts and their philosophical concerns. These writers questioned the traditional concepts of theatre and tried to depict the ambiguity and chaos of modern human life. They chose themes like alienation, meaninglessness, failure to communicate and psychological tension, rather than presenting organized plots and realistic situations. Dramatic works have brought new techniques to storytelling which focused on man's struggles in an unpredictable world.

Samuel Beckett became one of the most important masters of absurd theatre, and concentrated on the themes of loneliness, helplessness, suffering and waiting. His art often portrays people in mundane situations that they find themselves asking "why me?". His most renowned play *Waits for Godot* is about two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait for a man named Godot who never comes. The endless waiting and repetitive actions in the play symbolize humanity's search for meaning and hope in a world that often provides no definite answers.

The *Bald Soprano* is a play in which normal conversations slowly begin to seem illogical and disconnected, showing how language fails. Likewise, his play *Rhinoceros* depicts the people that are transformed into rhinos as a metaphor for conformity and the loss of individuality in society.

In his plays, Harold Pinter used silence, pauses, ambiguity and hidden tension in a novel way. In contrast to the traditional dramatists, who make their feelings and thoughts openly known, Pinter's characters often suppress their thoughts and leave their audience guessing at the meaning through understated communications. *The Birthday Party* is a work in which normal events get increasingly threatening and mysterious and cause fear and psychological discomfort. Likewise, in *The Caretaker*, uncertainty and power struggles are displayed in mundane dialogues and interactions between characters.

As a combined effort, these absurd writers changed the course of modern theatre, breaking away from traditional methods of storytelling and adopting new approaches that mirrored the psychological and existential challenges of modern man. The themes of uncertainty, alienation, and the search for meaning are still relevant in today's society, and their works continue to be influential in contemporary literature, theatre, and cinema.

Contributions of Absurdist Writers

The writers of the absurd were essential to the redefinition, transformation, and reincarnation of the purpose, form, and structure of modern drama. A traditional drama typically was based on an organized plot, a realistic situation, a clear characterization, and a logical conclusion. But absurdist dramatists broke these rules as they felt that these rules were insufficient to convey the chaos and uncertainty of contemporary human life. They did not provide straightforward

narratives and solutions but rather experimental techniques which emphasized the psychological state, existential issues and irrationality of existence. They focused on loneliness and alienation, on the inability to communicate, on fear, and on the need for meaning in life when it seems to lack meaning.

By examining the helplessness of man and his existential anxiety, Samuel Beckett became one of the foremost figures of absurd theatre. *Waiting for Godot* is a play in which Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot, who never comes. They have repetitive discussions and activities that represent the human drive to keep looking for meaning and hope even when it is not clear what they will find. The play is a satire on the futility and repetition of life and an inquiry into whether life meaningful has a meaning.

In a similar way, the French writer Eugène Ionesco worked on the theme of communication failure and irrational human behavior to enrich the absurd theatre. *Rhinoceros* is an unusual play, one in which people slowly become rhinos. This bizarre metamorphosis is a symbolic criticism of conformity in society and loss of individuality. Ionesco employed the situation as absurd in order to show how people sometimes give up the exercise of their judgement, and then become affected by the surrounding society.

Harold Pinter added another layer to the concept of absurd drama by employing ambiguity, silence, psychological tension. In *The Caretaker*, characters concealed by their ordinary conversations are insecure, at conflict, and power-obsessed. Pinter showed that silences and pauses convey emotion and tensions that are more powerful than ordinary speech. His style of performance made audience members uncertain and prompted them to read into the performance beyond what was actually said.

These writers greatly enlarged the scope of dramatic expression and had an impact on subsequent literary trends and theatrical traditions. Their unique approaches engaged the audience and questioned them about the nature and existence of people and modern society. Absurdist writers challenged the traditional approaches to storytelling and added philosophical and psychological elements to drama, shifting the current perception of literature and theatre which is still influential to writers and film makers today.

To see the Absurd in theatre, one must go to India. Absurd in the theatre, one must go to India.

Inspired by the Theatre of the Absurd, which started in Europe, Indian writers and dramatists took the concepts of the theatre and applied them to the Indian social, political and cultural context. European absurdism was most commonly a reaction to the psychological shock and ambiguity of the Second World War, and was heavily inspired by existential philosophy. On the other hand, Indian absurdism grew in a different atmosphere and expressed themes of postcolonialism, poverty, unemployment, social inequality, identity crisis, political turmoil and cultural conflicts. Thus, Indian writers went beyond the mere imitations of Western absurdist traditions to make them Indian in nature.

The Indian society and politics underwent rapid transformations after independence, impacting the lives of the people in different ways. As people entered the Industrial Age and

became urban, and moved away from their countryside homes and societies, they became confused and unhappy. There was a sense of disorientation and disconnection from traditional values and lifestyles for many. The Indian dramatists adopted the absurdist style to depict these conflicts and to bring to life the discontent of common folk struggling to come to terms with shifting landscapes.

One of the most important contributors to Indian experimental theatre was Badal Sircar. His performance as Evam Indrajit has been regarded as one of the most significant instances of the absurdist influence in Indian Drama. The play depicts a life of routine and repetition of common people who seem to be confined to rigid patterns and expectations. The repeated use of names and situations in the play symbolizes the uniform and mechanical nature of human life. The character Indrajit is that of modern people who are always trying to find their identity and their purpose in life, but are never satisfied and never connect with other people emotionally.

Likewise, Girish Karnad experimented in the field of drama and the themes of identity, social pressures and existential conflict were explored. While one might not exactly call Karnad an absurdist playwright, many of his plays do have symbolic and unusual elements that embody absurdist concerns. He frequently explores internal conflicts and relationships in a society that is changing.

Also, Indian absurdism differs from European absurdism not only in its greater emphasis on the social problem as opposed to individual existential crisis but also in the emphasis placed on the collective nature of the social problem. European dramatists tended to focus on philosophical issues around the meaning of life, whereas Indian playwrights tended to intertwine absurdity with the mundane issues like unemployment, social discrimination, political corruption and cultural rifts. Indian playwrights used symbolic characters, broken up stories, and odd dramaturgical forms to depict the multifaceted nature of contemporary Indian society.

Indian Adaptation of Absurdism

Theatre of the Absurd was adapted by the Indian writers rather than simply emulating the absurdist tradition of the West, taking into account the Indian social, cultural and historical context. In the European context, most absurdism was concerned with the existential crisis in the aftermath of war and the lack of meaning in human life, while Indian absurdism was focused on the problems related to postcolonial identity, poverty, unemployment, social inequality, political corruption and cultural conflicts. After the process of Independence, there were very sharp changes in Indian society and human beings' feelings of uncertainty and frustration. This often-placed individuals in a dilemma between traditional values and practices and modernity, leading to psychological conflicts and identity crises. These realities were therefore portrayed by Indian writers, using the technique of Absurdist, which was used to represent the struggle of the common man.

The most important is Badal Sircar and his game of Evam Indrajit. The play depicts the lives of the middle class, who live in ways that are seemingly repetitive and dull, hoping to find satisfaction and meaning in their lives but never getting it. The

characters like Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit are common people, who are living within the framework of the society and the cycle of life. The repetitive scenes and dialogue reflect the mechanical aspects of modern life and the struggle to be individual and to have meaning. Indrajit, in particular, is the modern man who fights against conformity and looks for an identity.

Likewise, in numerous plays Girish Karnad used experimental dramatic techniques and existential themes. His work is not exclusively absurd theatre, but is frequently symbolic and depicts identity crises and struggles through odd structures and scenarios. For instance, in Hayavadana the issues of completeness, identity and the clash between the mind and the body are explored. Human existence and self-understanding are philosophical themes that also are explored in absurdist literature, such as the play.

Indian absurdism thus turned into a very strong literary and dramatic means to analyze the post-colonial realities and social paradoxes of the Indian society. It enabled writers to represent the experiences of individuals facing social pressures, economic difficulties, and cultural changes. Indian dramatists used symbolism, repetition and broken structures to vividly depict the bewilderment and isolation of individuals in a fast-changing society. Indian absurdism was not simply a reaction against the meaninglessness of life but also brought together the existential issues in the context of the social and familiar realities of everyday life, thus carving out an identity for itself in modern literature and theatre.

Absurdism in Contemporary Literature

Absurdist themes are still used today because there is still uncertainty, emotional disconnections, and psychological conflicts in today's society. While the times have changed since the Theatre of the Absurd began, the issues of the absurdist writers are still pertinent in this present day. The challenges regarding identity, communication, and human relationships were new in the context of technological advancement, rapid urbanization, globalization, consumer culture and changing social structures. But, in contemporary society, there is often a feeling of isolation and loneliness despite the increased technological connectivity.

In modern literature, a character often is someone who cannot comprehend his or her role in the intricate social structure. Competition, evolving cultural expectations and technology often lead to anxiety and uncertainty. This is one of the reasons for using absurdist themes and techniques in contemporary writing, as they are used to examine the psychological impact of modern life, while dealing with these realities.

The role of relevance in contemporary literature. The function of relevance in modern texts.

Absurdism is still relevant because there are still many things in modern society that evoke the same kinds of emotional disorientation, alienation and confusion that one felt in the 20th century. Today's society comes with identity crises as people try to live their way to their goals and goals directed at society and a rapidly changing lifestyle. Technological advancements have made it easier to communicate with others via social

media and digital platforms, but have also made others feel more remote emotionally. People can be virtually linked to thousands of others but still feel isolated and disconnected from others in their personal lives.

In modern works, such as those by filmmakers, such psychological dilemmas and social stressors are often depicted through non-narrative, symbolic imagery and unusual film techniques. Fragmented structures typify the complexity and disorder of modern life, and symbolism is used to represent emotional and existential issues. The theme of urban isolation and identity conflicts is frequently portrayed in literary works, where characters face difficulties in forming meaningful relationships and finding meaning in their lives.

In *White Noise* by Don DeLillo, the fear of death and the media's influence in today's society are explored. These compositions bear witness to the uncertainty and lack of emotional connection faced by modern people.

The persistence of absurdist themes in modern literature, therefore, suggests that the issues of identity, existence and a quest for meaning are still important in the contemporary society. The social situation has changed but the human dilemma and uncertainty persist as does the absurdity as an important literary context of contemporary human experiences. Indian cinema is an absurd art form, as well. Indian cinema, too, is an absurd art form.

In recent years, the Indian film industry has increasingly embraced absurdist notions in an experimental narrative style and with an unconventional plot. Although the majority of films are more traditionally structured, much like a commercial film, with a plot that is more linear and a conclusion that more predictable, many modern filmmakers have started utilizing more innovative filmmaking techniques in order to create a film that conveys a theme of uncertainty, alienation, and existential struggle. Often integrating philosophical concepts and symbolism, these films seek to explore social realities and the intricacies of human life. Indian films through the medium of visual stories, ludicrous situations and broken narratives have developed new means of portraying psychological and social issues.

Absurdism in Indian cinema can be seen in the movies that play with the notions of reality and human existence. These movies tend to feature protagonists in atypical situations, with challenges thrown at them to make them question themselves and their environment. That is, through the depiction of irrational events or symbolic situations, the filmmakers ask their audience to reflect on socially shared beliefs and to look at the meaning of everyday experiences.

Absurdism in Indian Cinema

The absurdist approach made by Indian cinema in addressing the intricate questions of identity, reality, morality, and human existence. In modern movies, symbolism, non-linear narratives, surreal imagery and humor are used to depict the paradoxes and ambiguities of modern life. The cinematic techniques are similar to the techniques used in Absurd drama, but Absurd drama has logical explanation as a focus as opposed to emotional and psychological experience.

For instance, *Ship of Theseus* explores moral, identity and consciousness issues in three related stories. The movie addresses significant issues about identity and the question of whether people are the same when they change in body and mind. The word itself refers to the Ship of Theseus paradox, which is a philosophical one in which the question is raised whether the ship is the same ship as it was when it was built. In this storytelling approach, the film investigates the question of uncertainty about the human identity and existence.

Likewise, *No Smoking* poses surreal and psychologically disturbing situations, thus leading to confusion and uncertainty. The main character goes to the odd rehabilitation centre where he is not sure about the difference between reality and imagination. This film employs symbolism and unusual scenes to signify psychological conflicts and lack of personal agency. The audience is left wondering if what is going on in the character's head is real, or only in his imagination, and that is an important facet of absurdist storytelling.

An example of another type is *Super Deluxe* which presents several interwoven stories with peculiar scenarios that explore social norms and human behavior. Through its dark humor, irony, and surprising events the film questions the conventional notions of morality, family, and social expectations. With their seemingly unrelated stories, they all uncover issues of identity and acceptance in modern society.

Besides, even the films like *Delhi Belly* and *Jagga Jasoos* have some absurdist features which are brought out through chaotic situations, unconventional narratives and exaggerated circumstances. These films demonstrate the ridiculous and they are not only for philosophical investigation but also for social criticism and entertainment.

So, the Indian cinema is becoming absurd in order to depict the ambiguities and paradoxes of contemporary life. Today's film makers have returned to an absurdist approach, but with social and philosophical concerns, and have re-invented the concept in terms of Indian cultural realities and the different experiences of humans.

Overall Significance

The Theatre of the Absurd is still significant today as a way of comprehending the complexities and paradoxes of human life. It is important because of its ability to portray the emotional, psychological and social challenges one faces in an uncertain environment. Absurdist literature does not provide a clear solution or give definitive answers, but rather calls upon the audience and the reader to contemplate life and the questions of meaning, identity and purpose that have been accepted.

The significance can be seen in significant books and movies in various cultures and times. In *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, the characters wait and wait and wait for something to happen, which symbolizes the human quest for meaning. *Ship of Theseus* questions philosophical issues of ethics and self-identity, and *Super Deluxe* looks at social norms and human behavior in unconventional ways and strange situations.

The examples illustrate that absurdism is not limited to one culture or historical period or art form. Themes have continued to develop over time and are still present in modern day life, and therefore, themes from the book are still relevant in books

and plays, as well as in movies. This is the reason that Theatre of the Absurd remains a strong artistic and intellectual instrument for grasping the world and the complexities of modern human life.

CONCLUSION

The Theatre of the Absurd transformed modern literature and drama by providing a different means of understanding human existence, uncertainty and the psychological state of individuals in modern society. It violated the conventions of dramatic action, which were based on logical plots, realistic characterisation, and meaningful communication. Rather, the absurd play writers created a confusing world of alienation, repetition and the quest for meaning. It was an outgrowth of the social and psychological crises of the twentieth century, especially in the post-World War II era, and was a reflection of the anxieties of those who lived in uncertain times.

Absurdism's influence was not confined to European literature and over time began to have an impact in other literary traditions such as India. Absurdist techniques were used by Indian writers and dramatists in the light of local social and cultural conditions. Indian absurdism dealt not only with the existential dilemmas that followed the experience of war, but also with other themes like postcolonial identity, poverty, social inequality, political instability and cultural conflicts. Indian authors used unrealistic constructs and symbols to generate absurdism as a significant means to convey the tribulations of ordinary people.

In the same way, current literature and film have continued to reinterpret the ideas of the absurd, as uncertainty and identity conflicts are prevalent in today's society. Feelings of emotional isolation and confusion continue to be fuelled by rapid technological change, globalization, urbanization and the shift in social values. Consequently, themes that are "absurdist" continue to be very relevant to portray experiences and challenges of modern life.

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