



## The Kannada Absurd Theatre

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### Introduction

The word 'absurd' originally comes from the science of music meaning 'disharmony'. The lexical meanings are 'irrelevant', 'ridiculous', or useless. In literature the word absurd was first used by Albert Camus. According to him life is absurd or meaningless. Martin Esslin defines the drama of the absurd as " an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition,....to shock him out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical, complacent and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness".

The feeling of absurdity could rise in many ways like, when man feels alone or stranger in the world or when he feels the sense of isolation from other human beings. Albert Camus talk about Absurd in his book 'The Myth of Sisyphus' (1942) he says:

'A word that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar word but in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come.

This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity'.

Absurd in life arouse because of many reasons. The industrialization, urbanization and the advancement in science and technology made man to enquire everything. Slowly man starts losing faith in religion and the centre of the religion 'GOD'. Man's sense of feeling of lost in this world which is meaningless goes back to Victorian times. Darwin's 'The origin of Species' made man to feel meaninglessness of life.

The absurd drama in Europe started during 1950's. it was not a literary movement with clear philosophy or ideology. The post-war situation influence the writers like Sartre, Camus, ArthurAdmov, Harold Pinter, Gunter Grass and Eugene Ionesco.

Absurdist principles were earlier part of existential philosophy of life. But the general principles and background of absurd were discussed in detail by Albert Camus in his work 'The Myth of Sisyphus'. He says man is not able to live in harmony with the external world and thus life will become purposeless. When life becomes purposeless his actions becomes meaningless and it creates metaphysical anxiety in him. This metaphysical anxiety is the basic of the absurd literature.



This absurd vision of life is expressed by the writers in their plays. Absurdity can be found in fictions like Kafka's 'The Trial', Joyce's 'Ulysses', Sartre's 'The age of Reason' and Camus 'The Outsider'. We do not find any major work in poetry except The Waste Land. Jean Genet, Ionesco, Admov and Beckett discussed this absurdism as the main problem of modern society in their plays. Sartre and Camus expressed the absurd vision of life in a logically systematic technique. Later the play writers who came after them made the drama completely absurd both in theme and technique. The settings, thought, characters and actions of the plays are illogical.

French philosopher Fredrick Nietzsche's famous work 'Thus Spoke Zaratushtira' expressed the majority of the European's vision that 'GOD IS DEAD'. After this famous dictum people tend to believe that the centre of the religion 'the God' is dead. Everything in the world appeared to be illogical and absurd after the belief that God is dead. So man tends to search for meaning in this absurd world. Man's search for the meaning itself happens to be the central concern of the Absurd Drama. Absurd dramas can be compared to the Greek Tragedies and the Medieval Mystery plays where man being trapped in the Universe suffers to come out of it.

Albert Camus 'The Outsider' is an example of absurdity. Meursault, the protagonist of the story is neither a good man nor a bad man; neither a moral nor an immoral one but he is just an absurd man. He lost his mother but the death of his mother did not move him. He was indifferent to it. He accidentally shoots an Arab to death. He was punished with death by hanging. In the prison he feels that life is meaningless.

Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' is another example of an absurd play. The play has no story line in it. Two characters Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for a man called Godot. The man called Godot never comes. The act of waiting of these characters is every individuals waiting in their life which never comes. As result man tend to commit suicide as these two characters did.

Harold pinter's 'The Birth Day Party' is one more example. The protagonist of the play Stanley's experience of loss of Meg, maternal affection and sexual attraction is nothing but man's displacement and disorientation.

The Absurd Literature was very popular in Europe that showed influence on Indian writers also. For the last one century Indian regional literature has been influenced by the western literature. In Hindi dramatists like Bharatendu Harish Chandra, Lakshmi Narayan Lal and others have written very good absurd plays. In Kannada writers like Karnad, ChandrashekarKambar, Chandra shekarPatil, Chandrakanthkusnur, Na Ratna, and P.Lankesh have written many absurd plays.

The Absurd drama in Kannada is an offshoot of Navya movement. This was directly influenced by the western modern literature. Earlier the Absurd drama was not very successful on stage. Tejaswi, Lankesh, Kambar, ChandrakanthKusnur and many others wrote many plays but it was not received well by the audience. The Absurd plays shocked the traditional audiences and the elite audience attracted by its freshness and novelty. The absurd plays could not meet the expectations of the audiences. They were expecting song, dance or crude



language like professional theatre which was very much absent in absurd drama. So the audience couldn't sit and enjoy the plays. The traditional audiences call the absurd plays as 'fools play' because they cannot understand what is happening on the stage.

In the Kannada absurd drama, it is the technique which is absurd than the vision of life presented in it. Indian's belief in the Karma theory and belief in God has not completely gone so the western metaphysical absurdity cannot be found in Kannada absurd drama. The Kannada absurd dramatists are of two groups;

1. The first group of writers presents the absurd vision of life through absurd language and technique;

Girishkarnad comes under this group. Girish Kamad has written ten plays, all of them are not absurd plays. Only his Tughlaq and Hayavadana have such concerns as related to the Theatre of the Absurd. His play Tughlaq (1964) shows how a very intelligent man can be a foolish. In the play he depicts the life of such an absurd protagonist in a rational and systematic language and technique.

2. The second group of writers presents the absurd thematic content through the absurd language and technique.

P.Lankesh, Chandrakanth Kusnur, and Na Ratna belongs to this group.

Na Ratna is an important Kannada playwright. He puzzles the audience as his plays are absurd both in content and technique. His three plays are

GodeBekeGode, Bonthe and Ellige. His play GodeBekeGode (Do you want a wall 1973) is one of the earliest absurd plays in Kannada. The play is symbolic in action and language. There are four characters in the play. 'One' man and

'another' man are seen hawking a glass wall. They begin;

One. D'you want the wall?

Other. Wall, wall.

One. D'you want the wall?

Other. Wall, a tasty wall.

One. What're you calling?

Other. Why? A tasty wall?

One. Is that an eatable?

Other. Otherwise it can't be sold.

Selling of a wall is very absurd. The glass wall in the play is very symbolic. It symbolises the modern man's loss of privacy. It is an absurd play as it depicts man's meaningless activity. The play is about man's loneliness.

Chandrashekarkambar's 'Chalesh' and 'Narcissus' comes under Absurd category.

The play 'Chalesh' (A Man with sunglasses, 1971) portrays the life of Govinda who struggles to pay the rent for his house. Govinda an actor in the Gubbi Company wears sunglasses to escape himself from money lenders. When Nanjappa shouts at him to pay off the rent he indulges in conceited talk and starts praising himself which is very absurd. Govinda's life events shift from symbolic to real and real to symbolic adds the absurd element to the play.

Chandrakanth Kusnur is a well-known absurd playwright in Kannada. He has written many absurd plays. Halla Kolla, Niru (River, Valley, Water), 'Vidushaka', 'Anti Minti Chaval Chinti', 'Idakkesanshayavilla' are some of his absurd plays.

The play Vidushaka is a play about death and waiting. It is considered as an Indian version of Beckett's Waiting for Godot. There are six characters in the play and they do not have proper names. The three characters who are on the stage waiting for Krura (the cruel man). While they wait for the man called Krura they get bored and started telling the



stories. At the end of the play three persons are missing and on the cap it was written that 'krura had come here'.

The play conveys the message that death is certain but who ever is waiting for death they find life meaningless. In this play Krura is Godot.

Chandrashekhara Patil is a well-known Kannada poet and playwright. He is known for his protest literature. He has written many absurd plays. 'Appa' Kunta Kunta Kuruvatti, Kodegalu, Gurtinavaru and Tingara Buddanna. Tingara Buddanna is a play in three scenes. It has three characters Muduka (Old Man), Muduki (Old Woman) and Huduga (Boy). The Boy goes to school where some children trouble him. When he reports the same to his grandmother, the latter teaches him a mantra. The third scene is about his using such deadly weapon in real life situations. He chants it before a trader and he dies. When he chants before his grandmother she dies. He chants it to the old man too. So he dies. When he chants it for himself he dies. Thus ends the absurd play. The play is about absurdity of man and his death. The play reminds us of Macbeth's ambition and self-ruin

P. Lankesh has written many absurd plays. Nanna Tangigonda gandu kodi, Teregalu, kranti Bantu Kranti, T.Prasannana Grihasthshrama are some of his absurd plays. Teregalu is an example of a good absurd play.

M.S.K Prabhu well known Kannada writer deals with dreams, futile struggle and aimless life of man. Kadegalli kademani and Tappisi kondiddare are example of absurd plays. Dundiraja's Hudukata, Vijaya Sasnur's Huchchara satsanga naalkudina'. H.M Channaya 's Ellarantavanalla nana ganda are good examples of absurd plays.

In Kannada the absurd dramatists are very limited. With the emergence of post-modernist literary movements like Dalit and Bandaya literature the writers attention turned to the portrayal of socio-political issues. The tradition of Kannada absurd theatre has already waned. The absurd drama in Kannada sharpened the sensibility of the audiences.

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