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## Theatre of the Absurd in India and Rajeshwar Prasad's Plays

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### Abstract

In this research article, contributions which have barely been acknowledged by Rajeshwar Prasad to the Absurd Theatre of India are examined. Unlike his counterparts in the West, Prasad grounded existential anxieties within post-independence Indian socio-political contexts, peeling off layers of modernity, corruption, and declining traditions. He synthesizes, innovatively, folk theatre and religious rituals, jarring his audiences into the grim awareness of the gulf lying between inherited values and current realities. Prasad's keen depiction of the breakdown of communication may illustrate the degradation of society in nonsense dialogues and the absurdity-invoking power structure. Confused about identity loss, conformity, and the search for meaning, the protagonists pose an edifying question of belonging and agency. Prasad's consequential annotation of this legacy ranges from the actualization of the poignancy of existential quandaries to insightful critiques of Indian society, merging contemporary art with indigenous aesthetics in enthusiastic pursuits to expose the very absurd depths of human endeavour.

**Keywords:** Indian Absurd Theatre, Post-Independence India, Existentialism, Socio-Political Critique, Communication Breakdown

### Introduction

The Theatre of the Absurd is a group of many very divergent plays, most of which were created from 1940 to 1960 and later in India from 2020 and onward. Original releases of these plays appalled audiences who found that they were unusually different from anything that had been staged previously. Truth is, the majority of them were called "anti-plays." Martin Esslin, drawing the term "The Theatre of the Absurd" from the 1960 book from his own pen, tried to make the point to also a little dig out the books of God He gave the definition because each of the plays contained the point at which the human phenomenon was absurd. D Heiney and LH Downs observe:

"In the nineteen fifties and sixties a new kind of literature emerged in Paris and very soon reached out into the rest of Europe, to England and America."<sup>[1]</sup>

This idea was a response to the "collapse of moral, religious, political, and social structures" following the two World Wars of the Twentieth Century. This change is called the Theatre of the Absurd and was unintentional. There are no organized philosophical doctrines, no organized effort to seek out converts, or no meetings. All the main dramatists seemed to be working independently of each other. Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov, along with Rajeshwar Prasad in India, are the playwrights who are mainly associated with the movement. They explore the world which is faulty although familiar. Man feels that he is exiled here and all around him there is a realm of fear, a sense of isolation and alienation. D Heiney and LH Downs observe:

"A world can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger."<sup>[2]</sup>

Rajeshwar Prasad is, perhaps, not known as popular as some might be like Ionesco and Beckett yet stands as an important and most often ignored figure of the Indian Absurd Theatre. And while existential anxieties brewed globally, Prasad located them in a distinctively Indian context, succeeding in writing highly political and socially relevant plays captured in the post-independence socio-political setting of India. He performed a kind of archaeology that laid bare the absurdity inherent in a nation wrestling with forces like

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modernization and corruption and a loss of traditionally established value systems, ultimately adding a unique voice to an already existing canon of global absurdism.

Whereas some Western absurdist playwrights set their works against stark minimalist backgrounds, Prasad eschews this mode in most of his works, weaving folk theatre and religious rituals into his productions, only to deconstruct and lampoon them. This is to say that traditional Indian performance is an element in some of his plays. The effect jars the audience into confronting the gulf among inherited value systems and their chaotic and often inexplicable current realities.

Prasad does speak of communication collapse, one of the very crucial tenets of absurd theatre. Characters representing a fair range of social stratification or so-called ideologies talk in a dialogue containing heaps and heaps of non-sequiturs and misunderstandings. This very disintegration of communication mirrors the disintegration of the various facets of Indian society, where communication between even communities or generations is gradually weakening. Besides, Prasad unflinchingly points out how various power structures – functioning through bureaucratic inefficiency, political corruption, and mass foolishness – perpetuate such absurdity. A feeling of intense loss of individual identity within the collective forms the crux of Prasad's works. The protagonists evoke far more stark struggles confronted by meaning and purpose against the harsh reality of overwhelming conformity and societal expectations. They ponder over existence, mortality, and futility pursued with the anxiety of life while they engage complexly with Indian society. This nudges the audience to ruminate upon those anxieties concerning belonging, purpose, and agency fraught with travails in that absurd, irrational world.

Ultimately, with his ability to metamorphosize existential crises into the Indian context, Rajeshwar Prasad adds nuance to the absurdity in the theatre. The absurdist canvas is not merely for stylistic purposes; it unleashes onto socio-political realities a higher form of critique. Blending both modern and indigenous aesthetics, his works continue until today to reflect bitter realism with an often dark humour over the age-old human struggle to make sense of the absurd depths of its surroundings. Through the indefinable contradictions and absurdities of Indian society, Prasad urges us to unearth the question, to overturn the question, and to hope – perchance – instead of waking hereby actually setting goals for the future amidst around.

### **A Hollow Journey: Deconstructing Meaning in "The Travellers"**

We see that Rajeshwar Prasad's "The Travellers," a three-act play steeped in the sensibility of absurd theatre, which has won the prestigious Sahitya Sparsh Awards 2025, seems an earnest attempt to articulate the existential anxieties and meaninglessness which characterized this genre. The play incorporates elements associated with Absurdism.

The play undoubtedly follows the structural parameters common to Absurdist theatre, which ensures a deletion, so to speak, of common dramatic elements. This particular intention, as is indicated by Prasad – somewhat daringly – refers to as the 'absurdist formula': (ac1p2t) + (afi2lms) + (tc), or action, character and plot with a reduction in the latter three, accompanied by greater feelings of alienation, fear, isolation, insecurity, loneliness, mystery and suspense interspersed with tragicomic instances. The bare setting – an

utterly featureless platform – and the reduced cast to three characters assiduously place the universe of the play in distanced recognition from reality. The conversation also feels plain and monotonous as well and the breakdown of it causes bad communication finally, people are distant, and that is seen in plays with absurdist elements such as "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett and "The Bald Soprano" by Eugène Ionesco. The exchange between Cecil and Blair might seem amorphous and then between Cecil and Alvin might create an overall feeling of constant break, strengthening instead, a rather perpetuation one so that the audience may survive the characters' simultaneous instability and also the hard times they encounter.

"The Travellers" compels its audience to doubt the veracity of the theatrical experience, and as such, provides a dislocation of theatre as it presents the crass mixing of genres using the huge stage of the market that implies the notion of merriment and yet shows itself to be deep, truthful, and religious theatre at the heart of the work. The tension between these opposing values renders them uncomfortable, and in this, the work is interesting and individualistic. While hidden behind layers of comedy, Alvin's tragedy remains awfully bare. The tragedy of Alvin, who is a skilful configuration of homeless people sitting around braziers on sidewalks while in need of shelter amidst horrid weather, emerges. Being naked in a land stripped of social and economic security, he happens to put a more determined face on the soaring quests of people, thus challenging his scruples to make any unworthy effort on planet Earth. The playwright explores the above hypothesis in the following conversations:

**"CECIL:** You have not worked hard to know and learn.

**ALVIN:** I tried ever so hard, but failed everywhere. [*Sadly*] So, now I am a lone loiterer.

**CECIL:** I can know anyone without asking questions. I knew you were a loiterer. I want to let you know. "Failed" means "you failed at school".

**ALVIN:** [*Sadly*] Everywhere, not only at school."<sup>[3]</sup>

"The Travellers" delivers an equally mega message that its predecessors coveted. The hitches that plague the play include Absurdist elements incorporated into an indiscriminate and preachy didactic ethos within the work. The reliance on this formula indeed could have been intended as a stylistic manoeuvre on the point. The characters remain a bunch too consistent in notion, closest to those of allegory-blend-philosophical-expressions: the great bourgeois, the corrupt complacent (Blair), and the alienated outsider (Alvin). This, among others, still complicates their depth and emotional veracity and does little to relieve the audience from sharing their plight. The playwright reveals:

**"ALVIN:** Thank you Cecil, thank you Blair, thank you very much. The way has been paved. I will depart for home. The train is just to arrive. I am departing for my permanent home. You should escape from here because the police may arrest you charging that you pushed me onto the track."<sup>[4]</sup>

The core of the point was to have some sense of broken communication, but this often veers into nonsensical drivel that fails to yield that unbending poetry or that underlying tension common in the best Absurdist dialogues. Alvin and Blair's conversation could lend itself to absurdity, but it instead may come off as the playwright's forced effort to have the characters exhibit confusion and inability to contact the other on some meaningful level. Conversely, just before

Alvin suddenly breaks off his request for money to sing a semblance of atheistic existentialism comforting inclusivity – a fitting discussion about his struggles is not warranted. The following conversations are remarkable to judge the above ideas:

**“ALVIN:** I am going to eat. [*Goes slowly singing a Man is a traveller, who comes and goes...*”]

**CECIL:** Okay.”<sup>[5]</sup>

In addition, in a sense, existentialism and quests for meaning appear all but shallow within the play. Alvin's suicide is, after all, a startling climax, compared to existential concepts combined into the works of writers such as Camus or Sartre. The exit of Blair and Cecil following Alvin's suicide, therefore, is an opportunity for this contempt. Furthermore, it accidentally serves to draw the audience away from much greater disorder, leaving them in a bog of confusion rather than sobering discomfort. The playwright reveals:

- **“BLAIR:** Oh Alvin! Oh Alvin! Oh my God! Oh my God!
- **CECIL:** Oh my God! The police will arrest us. Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! Save us! Save us! Save us!
- **BLAIR:** O Cecil! Escape from here as soon as we can, leaving all this because the policemen are coming. Oh my God! Oh my God! Save us! Save us! Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!”<sup>[6]</sup>

In conclusion, "The Travellers" is aware of the conventions of Theatre of the Absurd. We also see some of the characteristic styles and themes involved in the genre. It captures the profound sense of alienation, despair, and meaninglessness exemplified in some of the other works of the Absurd theatre. The originality and depth do combine to cast a substantial impact on the audience. Thus the play reveals the issues of a godless world and the disintegration of meaning, but instead of being a genuinely disturbing and thought-provoking treatise on the human condition, it runs the risk of being a mere checking off of absurdist props.

### A Critique of Rajeshwar Prasad's "The Wife"

"The Wife" is a dive into the philosophical environment of the Theatre of the Absurd. This really shows the characters' deep set of worries and the existential spirit of theatrical. Most of its focus is on a godless world and the meaninglessness of life. It tends to become just an absurdist checklist and it thought-provoking and traumatizing.

The success of any absurdist piece lies in the way it instills disorientation and existential angst upon its audience, establishing one after the other through a conscious putting to question the conventional structures of dramatic presentation, thereby framing our expectations for narrative coherence, character motivation, and logical progression. In "The Wife," the meeting of Weston and Carter, two strangers involved in long philosophical debates on God and the meaning of life, illustrates the defining thematic concerns of the play. The description tends to take an unsympathetic view, where characters articulate their philosophical positions and embody the lived experience of absurdity. The conversations allow these questions to be contentious through the actions and interactions of its

characters, absurdist plays are not reduced to mere philosophical debates.

Helena and Robert being introduced certainly provides some more confusion to the already muddled narrative by introducing the main conflict – the vagueness of the identity of "the wife." It is herein that the possibility of true absurdist exploration opens. The breakdown between language and logic is one of the very symptoms of this genre, and it's exemplified here with the absurd umpteenth claim that Helena is both Carter's and Robert's wife. In being silent, she creates an extra layer of ambiguity, rendering her a riddle that might bring to light the objectification of women in an absurd world. But the play calls into question just how deep this exploration goes. Is this ambiguity truly unsettling and posing a challenge to work through for the audience because it calls into question the stability of identity and relationships? Or is it simply a prop for the plot, some bizarre event intended for sheer shock value? The Playwright explores:

**“ROBERT:**What are you doing here, Helena?

**HELENA:** (*Silent.*)

**ROBERT:** Helena?

**HELENA:** (*Silent.*)

**ROBERT:** With whom you have come here?

**HELENA:** (*Looks at CARTER. Silent.*)

**ROBERT:** With CARTER?

**HELENA:** Yes?

**ROBERT:** Why?

**CARTER:** Who's this man, HELENA?

**HELENA:** I don't know.

**ROBERT:** She's my wife.

**CARTER:** She's my wife! She is my life!”<sup>[7]</sup>

The climactic fight between Carter and Robert, culminating in their deaths, suggests the tragicomic nature of the play. Absurdist drama mixes tragedy with comedy in precise reflection of the inherent contradiction of these elements in a world where suffering and meaninglessness coexist. The fight somehow portrays the very darkly humorous reflection of the absurd hallmark of human behaviour – the characters would be willing to kill one another over a woman whose identity is uncertain. Would they not thank God and one another afterwards? The success of the scene entirely depends on the direction: does it find its mark in nailing the alienation and desperation of the characters, or is it just some lame slapstick? The playwright says:

**“CARTER:**She is mine. She is my dream and for her, I can sacrifice my all.

[*Takes a very big knife from his pocket and holds it in his hand.*]

**ROBERT:** [*Takes a knife from his pocket. Runs towards CARTER. Attacks him.*] Come and fight.

**CARTER:** [*Holding a big and edgy knife. Attacks him.*] Come and fight.

**ROBERT:** [*Sighs. Falls on the ground, wounded and covered with blood. Dying.*] Oh! My God! Oh my God! Oh my God. You have snatched my woes and sorrows. Thanks, Carter.

**CARTER:** [*Sighs. Falls on the ground, wounded and covered with blood. Dying.*] Oh my God! Oh my God. Oh! Oh! I'm dying. Let me die. Thank God. Thanks, Robert.”<sup>[8]</sup>

Weston's lifelessness and Helena's retreat before the untoward event underscores the disconnect that exists

between characters in this play. Ironically, Helena thinks of herself as the "reward" for which both men would willingly fight and die. One could argue that the play cannot even be believed, which, as one would say, is the very nature of the Theatre of the Absurd. A true absurd play searches out the unbelievable in the human setting, creating dialogue and scenes very rarely found in real life because of true Absurdism.

In short, summarizing, "the scenes state that 'The Wife' heavily relies on the absurdist formula. Such a definition, which connotes the reduction of action, characters, language, plot, and place and combines alienation, fear, isolation, insecurity, loneliness, mystery, and suspense, along with tragic-comic scenes, provides merely a dilution in the correct sense for the genre. These things in one form or another are indeed present in absurdist drama but are to be not so easily mechanically mixed. The true power of the Theatre of the Absurd flows from its capacity to elicit such effects organically, from the very depth of existential anxiety. There cannot be an empty success merely ticking off boxes of absurdist idiom. One theme within the theatre associated with nihilistic philosophies, exemplified by Samuel Becket, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, and Edward Albee, provides an affirmation of an atheistic existentialism where no meaning exists but that one assigns to life.

In absurdist drama, existentialism is, to some extent, the underlying basis for consideration. It defines the existentialist philosophy, particularly the statement that existence precedes essence. A person is thus born into a world that is utterly meaningless, and they must infuse it with their own meaning and purpose through choices and actions. However, the play should avoid the risk of merely being designed as a philosophical treatise, and instead, lay bare the notch of existential angst as revolves around the characters' conflicts and interactions.

### Hollow Echo of Acclaims: "The Tribute"

With "The Tribute," an absurdist theatre drama in three acts, Rajeshwar Prasad offers interesting opportunities for examining theatre text and the degree of truth to the major tenets of the Theatre of the Absurd. Elements that conform to the genre are pointed out in the play; however, upon acute scrutiny, such attention appears to be given at a rather superficial level to its profound philosophical bases. The play's use of blatantly transmitted themes and somewhat naive, stereotypical characters culminate in weakening the very core of the actual existential discomfort and senselessness which define the extremely effective productions of Absurdist theatre.

First of all, the central irony of an assemblage for a seminar on success being interrupted by news of the Chief Guest's (Mr Well's) death occurring through a helicopter accident, plus Frank's abrupt descent into poverty, is an idea worthy of some note. The timing of Mr Well's arrival, only to be informed of his ghastly death, is a recurring Beckett's theme of an interminable delay for something that never quite arrives, a powerful metaphor for humanity's constantly futile quest for meaning and purpose. Frank's fall from the "top ten" to bankruptcy likewise exemplifies the uncertain nature of human achievement and the ultimately arbitrary nature of success. The playwright reveals:

**"FRANK:** A non-bail-able warrant against all those, who had not paid bank debts. Oh! I lost everything. There is also

an order to lock my company – and the companies of all the debtors – of all the loan defaulters." [9].

The play would have more impact, however, had it relied more on allusion than on a discussion of overtly stated themes. Philosophical proclamations by Harry about life being unhappy, the godlessness of the world, and the equivalency of gain and loss read more like these are the tokens of a Devachanic character in inner turmoil than organic utterances of a character tormented by existential angst. Absurdism flourishes on the unsaid, laden silences, and nonsensical exchanges – the unfortunate reminders of the characters' inability to assign meaning to their existence – instead, Prasad gives Harry the power to pronounce these ideas so readily as to risk the play turning into a monologue; not a vivified experience of Absurdity. In this instance, the characters range around as mere mouthpieces for ideas, doing away with their individual complexity and taking away, there then, their punch for the audience.

Actually, the characterization in "The Tribute" feels a bit simplistic. Harry and Frank personify despair and hope respectively, and although they follow the traditional dramatic device of opposing incognitions, they are less complex and nuanced than the contradictory combinations of characters found in Beckett and Ionesco. Their opposing views on life, love, and disease are expressed a bit in black and white, which does not allow for much exploration of the grey areas of human existence. None of the creations are riddled with any internal contradictions or arbitrary ways of acting that would lend them authenticity and identification so that in the end they are unable to embody the fragmented and shattered quality of an Absurdist protagonist.

The mixture of tragedy and comedy is a very important part of Absurdism, which remarks upon the inherent conflicts within the very existence of human beings. The success of the scenes lies not only in their execution but also in their coordination with the main thrust of the play. The tragic and the comic integrate well with each other to be effective as the "source of excitement" in contextualizing the absurd picture of the world; here, suffering and laughter exist side by side. The playwright says:

**"HARRY:** Don't think anymore. This is natural. Loss and gain is equal. All is meaningless.

**FRANK:** [*Very sad.*] Okay. Oh! All is absurd.

**HARRY:** I have witnessed all this in each and every walk of life.

**FRANK:** Life is absurd. Life is a lyric full of woes and sorrows." [10].

### Critical commentaries on "Zero into Four"

The stage of Rajeshwar Prasad's "Zero into Four," decorated with theory and poetic tenets relating to the Theatre of the Absurd, which has won the prestigious Golden Book Awards 2025, paints a story of man's existence devoid of any innate meaning or purpose. Presenting a disjointed story about people like Amol, James, Tara, and Zara, Prasad unravels the effects of crumbling communication, disconnecting human relationships, and the hollow frameworks upon which all social structures rest – most bizarrely on the idealized notion of motherhood. The theatrical ambition for "absurdism" is there, but the implementation of overt symbolism, together with repetitive dialogues, can sometimes undermine the portrayal of the authentic existential angst that is the very basis for the best works in this genre. The theory of deconstructing



motherhood that runs through this play is instilled in the experiences of Amol and James, two young adult boys struggling with the perception of loss of maternal love or its absence. The declarations Amol makes about the non-existence of real maternal love sound horrible for a child, as it stem from a distorted sense of his father in this context of divorce. It is a good introduction to the main idea of the play. The constant repetition of the phrase "zero into four," which is supposed to refer to a rather disjointed and meaningless state of existence, sometimes sounds like a mere catchphrase and loses its sting through over-preaching. James starts off in such a way that he contrasts the cynicism of Amol, hence portraying himself as a mere believer in the mother's good side. Nevertheless, the confidence with which he sees things regarding the admiration of his mother gets quickly blown down to nil upon her, Zara's departure without notice, and the command from a suddenly unspecified "supreme agency." Such an introduction of an external, inexplicable force that controls human actions is a key concept of absurdism that calls our attention back to the so-called bureaucratic nightmares at the heart of Kafka's works. Zara's submission to this mysterious directive highlights the characters' lack of power and the absence of rational control over their lives. However, to me, the "supreme agency" is a little unorganized, it seems to be missing the eerie uncanniness that we sense in the oppressive forces in certain plays such as Ionesco's "The Chairs" and Beckett's "Waiting for Godot." To the theme of motherhood, Tara, the maid at the school, adds one more layer. While she initially offers comforting words about the universal nature of maternal love, she ultimately reveals that she has also "divorced" her children. The layers of the boys' stories, in this mind-blowing series, this statement show they are the same people on the course of deepening the sad view of the play, which is frequently used by the boys. A mother "being separated" from her kids is rather ludicrous on the surface and hence stresses the breakdown of language and the inadequate attempt of traditional language to inscribe the fragmented realities of the characters' lives. The playwright reveals:

**"ZARA:** [*Goes to JAMES and kisses her.*] I love you, my heart-beat – I love you my blood-bit. When the time comes, I will welcome you. Care yourself. Your father will guide you. Your father will look after you.

**JAMES:** [*Restlessly.*] What? What? What...mama?

**AMOL:** [*astonishingly.*] Annihilation...annihilation!

**JAMES:** [*restlessly.*] What? Tell me, mama.

**ZARA:** I am going.

**JAMES:** [*restlessly.*] Where?

**ZARA:** The uncle is waiting for me outside our home."<sup>[11]</sup>

Prasad's intelligent use of the "absurdist formula" is seen in the play. The author's strategy, employed in terms of action, personages, language, plot, and scene will, in the final analysis, generate an overall impression of confusion and alienation. The play environment, which is only the area below the neem and peepal trees and James's guest room, makes a very enclosed room. The dialogue is built on repetitive phrases and flat statements, which consistently echoes the degeneration of meaningful communication. The comic tragedy, especially the discrepancy between the boys' innocent play and the harsh occurrences of neglect and existential dread, produces a feeling of discomfort. The playwright explores:

**"JAMES:** [*Begins to weep bitterly. Clasps her feet.*] I will die. My dad will die. How will I live? How will we live? My mother...don't divorce me...don't leave me...don't leave us...mama...mama.

**AMOL:** [*Restlessly. Begins to weep bitterly. Clasps her feet.*] Aunt...aunt...don't leave us...don't divorce us...you are our mother...you are full of love and mercy...don't go...aunt...aunt...we will die.

**ZARA:** [*Tries to be free from their clutch.*] Leave my feet. Let me go. The uncle is waiting outside. Your father will care for you.

**AMOL:** [*Weeps bitterly. Clasps her feet.*] Don't leave us...don't divorce us.

**JAMES:** [*Weeps bitterly. Clasps her feet.*] Don't leave us...don't divorce us.

**ZARA:** [*Tries to be free from their clutch. Forcibly.*] I can't stay. This is the order of the supreme agency. None can cancel this order. I am unable to disregard this order. None can disregard the system of 'zero into four'."<sup>[12]</sup>

Still, the play's strict following of this structure sometimes is perceived as clichéd. The simplification of language, for instance, may lead to awkward and unnatural events occasionally. While using phrases such as "zero into four" to elucidate the cyclical and meaningless essence of life is the goal, it can still be wearisome and therefore have no lasting effect. Similarly, the diminishment of the plot meant to emphasize the lack of causal connections can at times make the narration linear quietude.

The play is about the issues of alienation, fear, isolation, insecurity, loneliness, mystery, and suspense, all based on the absurdist view of the world, which intertwines them. The characters are swallowed by a world in which they are not automatically given a purpose and are, therefore, forced to confront the absurdity of their lives without the comfort of familiar beliefs or societal structures. This feeling is most probably portrayed through the final lyric of "Life is zero into four...;" which is the play's core message of despair in terms of existentialism.

"Zero into Four" is not without its merits as it reveals the absurdist perspective with bitterness and yet is very thought-provoking. In the world of theatre, it may not be the most outstanding one, but it demonstrates Prasad's deep knowledge of the central themes of the genre and his fearlessness in addressing the issues of existence in a world without God, meaning, and intention. Within the larger absurdist literature body, the play draws new light on questions of motherhood as a socially constructed norm. It is alarming, yet, it adds a unique voice on the larger scale of theology and philosophy. The dialogue smoothed out and its symbols became more subtly layered, the play would probably gain in strength and seriousness in its critique of the inanity of human life.

### The Hollow Echoes of Wisdom: "Teachers' Day"

Rajeshwar Prasad's "Teachers' Day" is mostly referred to as an absurd drama that provides a means to discuss the Theatre of the Absurd through its most fundamental aspects. To a greater extent, it goes through the features of the genre and the deep disturbing effect that is a characteristic of the real Absurdist works. The play is about a scholarly seminar on "Man and Divinity," that is disturbed by the sad death of its keynote speaker, Know All. The fact-leading scenario is the disappearance of the organizational meaning in the

world which is dealt with through a discussion of the futile nature of intellectual endeavours. The social work that forms the basis of the interaction between academics and the less privileged also fails in its way as the movie is noted elsewhere as enjoying a playful exchange of words and debating polarity. Besides that, the lack of diversity in casting is another issue that makes it difficult to watch the film. Even though it reaches for the weird expectation for the Theatre of the Absurd, "Teachers' Day" quite frequently turns out to be a genuine pursuit of existential despair.

If the play was positive, it was only due to the effort made to outline the basic characteristics of Absurdist drama. It must be said that Prasad is so forward about his aim, as he cites the "absurdist formula." It seems that the formula of the reduced action, characters, language, and plot together with themes of alienation, fear, isolation, insecurity, loneliness, mystery, suspense, and tragic-comic moments looks more like a model of a play than a natural progression of its themes.

Max and Kim's relationship, both of them professors, is the main example of the play's central conflict: the absence or presence of knowledge in a world without intrinsic meaning. Max, whose major is "Man and Divinity" and who is very proud of his doctorate, is the embodiment of a firm conviction in the power of wisdom and knowledge. He insists that knowledge is the only way to bring order and purpose into the world and dreams that it can, laughably, "immediately result in a utopia." In other words, Kim disagrees, saying that all knowledge is unequal to all people who face the situation of being discovered as an unpleasant reality of being a stranger, i.e. an outsider. In fact, he declares, "A person who is not able to read and one who is literate are absolutely alike," and we all can see how the absurd belief that man's function of the mind is avoidance of the absurd or futile is reflected in this statement.

The arrival of, and then immediate tragic death at the end of a mechanical failure, of Dr Know All, the famous "Novel Prize" and "World's Best Teacher", "becomes the absurdist climax turning point in the play. His coming was belated, yet it was caused by a technical failure that also caused the crash that, in essence, was the result of sheer chance. He said in class once that such is unpredictable and often irrational and therefore that is the way of life. Know-all, whose erudition is the foundation of all information, has become a victim of the unlikelihood that undermines the basis of knowledge and authority in a tumultuous world. His death is the demystification of the whole seminar. Unvarnished academic great things when life is such a trembling influence.

The absurdity of the plot is further hammered by the words spoken by the pilot where he orders the passengers to jump out with parachutes and then the door is stuck. The characters are in a situation where there is no logic and reason, they are just like prey to the hunter of destiny, and the immortal mortals have no power. This mess represents an ideal example, which is to say that we are never really in control of our own fate. Even though this particular scene could be made the most dramatic, the play is rather dedicated to philosophical discussions than to bringing out emotional touches to the play. The playwright explores:

**MAX:** Listen to the announcement.

**KIM:** Listen. Oh! Oh!

**MAX:** What happened to him? May God save him!

**KIM:** How did it happen to him?"<sup>[13]</sup>

The director, who has informed the death of the famous philosopher "Know All" and the announcement of the seminar's postponement, gives a harsh criticism of the academic world's remote and, in the end, sterile pursuits. The participants are instructed to go home and wait for the new instructions to be sent to them, thereby stressing the bureaucratic and in some cases dehumanizing features of educational institutions. The performance insinuates the very fact that in the existence of a whole disaster, the system still can do its work, disregarding the profound philosophical questions brought forward by the accident. This recurrent and apparently pointless cycle is a motif in the drama of Absurdism which underlines the vanity of human endeavour. The playwright explores:

**"DAR:** Just I have got important information. Please listen to me. Pray to God for Know All's happy arrival here. The signal system of his plane has failed. The door has been jammed. Now the plane is flying without any signal. It is not known in which direction his plane is going. The pilot told all passengers to evacuate with the help of parachutes to save their life before the plane crashes. They tried hard using their knowledge and wisdom to save their life but they all failed to unlock the door.

**MAX:** Oh...oh! Can we...?

**KIM:** Can your knowledge and wisdom of divinity call him here?

**MAX:** (Silent.)"<sup>[14]</sup>

To sum up, "Teachers' Day" is a great window into the field of Absurdist drama. The play is really good at creating a stylish shell and it elevate to the deep level of existential angst, disorientation, grandeur, and beauty typical of the best works of the genre.

### A Critical Examination of "Zero into Nine"

Rajeshwar Prasad's "Zero into Nine" is definitely designed and developed to be a gloomy but very intriguing analysis of the human condition and is a theme through the Theatre of the Absurd which is why it becomes an interesting subject for its analysis as a style of the Theatre of the Absurd. Their absurdist nature is from the title of the play: "Zero into Nine" which immediately establishes it, and this becomes clear from the beginning. This mathematical impossibility metaphorically presents the idea of the absurdity of the characters' lives since the era of globalization started. Right from the beginning, themes such as the cyclical nature of existence, the futility of finding solutions in a chaotic world, and the erosion of traditional values – characteristics of the Absurd are presented. To illustrate, the playwright uses striking, symbolic language that is reinforced by the characters' names: SAM, JAX, GAY, and LESB. Such names as SAM, JAX, GAY, and LESB, right from the outset, deprive the characters of their personal identity. This, in turn, creates the impression of an ongoing, widespread atmosphere of alienation typical of the absurd drama. It shows us that the characters are more symbols of general societal fears and existential threats than people with unique life paths.

The play's non-linear narrative which comprises three acts, is comprised mostly of such encounters and, in dialogues, the drama play demonstrates the communication failure as well as the alienation of the individuals. The exordium with this trace was between SAM and JAX once and we are presented with a planet that was plagued by pain and

regrets. JAX's personal battle – the treatment from his son and daughter-in-law, and the town's passivity of his suffering – unveils the lack of empathy and care in the society he lives in. He, being one of these, stated that the world is shaped by the "zero into nine" in comparison to the equilibrium of two numbers transpiring the one being and the other one being growth and success. This sentence is the essence of an absurdist view that life is inherently paradoxical: a cycle of ruin and emptiness rather than something to be built and progress to be made. The Absurd, which is not the advancement of time and logic, through the abandoning of the cause and effect relations, has become a central part of the new world of the Absurd.

The cheerful demeanour of SAM who explicitly announced his happiness when and where he wanted to do just that and JAX is very disenchanted in life, their life is a brief contrast. But it is not long before the accused is accused of infidelity and the birth of an illegitimate child by the wife of GAY something that burst the illusion of LESB who is always the more honest one. The situation becomes even more ludicrous by the fact that both the child and his two parents, PRE and POST, adhere to the principle of "right and justice", which highlights the irrationality of societal expectations and the foolishness of making order out of a fundamentally chaotic world. The peculiar case of the child that has a name in the future and one in the past at the same time, and still the parents are stubbornly standing on the "right and honour" way brings to light the humanity striving to be logical where it is just not possible and a world constantly in disarray. The Absurd is likely to illustrate this matter as a "rash and a mad" showing the inherent absurdity of human behaviour and societal structures in such events. The playwright rightly explores:

**GAY:** Greater and greater problems we have. I have named him Pre and she has named him Post. The officer says that there will be only one name for one child. Never two names in any situation. Both parents must agree.

**SAM:** You should submit the letter of consent.

**GAY:** There is no consent on this point. This is an internal problem. I will never change his name because this is a matter of right and honour and she says the same."<sup>[15]</sup>

The author's deliberate method of creating a no-win scenario for his characters is regarded as the crux of the play's absurdity. The play also tries to show that relationships based on reason, compromise, and empathy have no chance. SAM is initially presented as a character endowed with stability, and later, he is helpless due to the crisis. The lack of a "formula" for his role in resolving the conflict reveals the Absurd's renunciation of ready answers and its preference for each person's individual experience of meaningless existence. The collapse of communication, the fight to get beyond ideology and the final cutting bond of the family all contribute to the omnipresent mood of desolation and hopelessness. The playwright says:

**"JAX:** There is no problem. All are illegitimate.

**GAY:** There are problems and problems. The officer has written a note on the file and needs our clarification that what is the reason behind the dispute of names and why there are two names of one child. It has been pasted onto the notice board. If we don't submit an answer within twenty-four hours the application will be dismissed.

**SAM:** If you change your mind, the answer is very easy.

**JAX:** No. The answer is very difficult. There is no answer to this question.

**GAY:** Lesb says that she can't give up her name under any condition. How can I talk of my relationship with Lesb before marriage? If I say, another problem will arise."<sup>[16]</sup>

The play's climax, which is characterized by the collective suicides of characters following GAY's disillusionment, is a certainly deserving the label of the theatre of absurd. His last words stating, "we are all the same" are a tongue-in-cheek way to ignore the meaninglessness of everything and a view of life as being absolutely worthless. For this reason, the playwrights used it to explain the reflections on life and the Absurd's insistence on the fact that death and life are things that are not stable, but that it is rather contingent. It is used as a device to reveal how everyone becomes meaningless and futile in a world without inherent meaning. The final line, "zero into nine," is the incantation that encapsulates the play's principal topic of existential hopelessness and the attempt to find true understanding or connection.

**"JAX:** Oh! Oh! All are under 'zero into nine'.

*Sings.* Life is an illusion.

With the tiny vision.

Amid such joys.

Which is like toys.

Life is a shadow – 'Zero into nine' show."<sup>[17]</sup>

The playwright's conscious choice to limit the dramatic components (action, characters, language, plot, and setting) adds depth to the play's linkage to the Theatre of the Absurd. A closed space (e.g., SAM's room) with few spoken words and clear character descriptions gives off an ill-at-ease and disassociated atmosphere. The focus turns from a candidate story-driven topic to a critical analysis of the existential issues and the description of the characters that are twisted by the absurd. This simplification helps the playwright to stress the philosophical basis of the play and explore the emotional responses of the characters who face a life that is insignificant.

In "Zero into Nine", the three aforementioned are two of the most ground-breaking thinkers the world has ever seen. In fact, this philosophical principle, the driving force of the existentialism school of thought, is still known now because human beings such as Sartre and Camus were the earliest and best believers in human dignity and freedom as the ultimate concerns. In "Zero into Nine," the figures are burdened with the difficulty of creating their own meaning in a world that doesn't care about them. Their endeavour to find the meaning of life, which is combined with the feeling of being distant from each other, eventually takes them to the ground. Thus, the play can be considered a dramatic presentation of the existentialist point of view on anxieties and contradictions that can be experienced by the existentialist.

To put it simply, the summary gives a broad overview of the play's absurdist side, but the all-important dive into the full text is the absolute factor in the evaluation of its aesthetic worth and its genre positioning. Such things as the dialogue nuances, the specific stage directions employed, and the general flow and timing of the play are some of the main factors for the correct understanding of its impact.

"Zero into Nine" could, in a way, be seen as a magnifying glass of themes and techniques found in the Theatre of the

Absurd, which is the statement of the author. It perfectly portrays how communication breaks down, human efforts are futile and the overwhelming existential despair transpires. By utilizing symbolic language, archetypal characters, and a well-thought-out irrational plot line, the playwright develops a disturbing and reflecting criticism of the human experience. In the event that a thorough discussion of the text justifies it, "Zero into Nine" is likely to be a valid addition to the whole discussion about the Theatre of the Absurd and its relevance for modern audiences. It gives a very gloomy, relentless depiction of a world that is wrestling with paradoxical concepts, such as no purpose yet absolute freedom.

### "Zero into Plus" as Existential Triumph

Zero into Plus exudes such overconfidence and such discomforting brightness, yet it comes off as nothing but insanity in reality. Line by line, this play opens up on the illusion-stage and vigorously attacks it till the end of its extensive path through the narrative. JAY's deep-set negativity is portrayed as immensely opposite to that of RAY's, who believes resolutely along with the wickedness of DON. They are thus slowly shedding some light on the irrationality of aggression with the use of vivacity, in the process reaching the unexpected heights of their imaginations. Unmotivated and unappreciated by the audience, a sudden and unexpected intervention by the author-like figure results in a brutal and sudden end of JAY and RAY, leaving amoral DON to provide the last laugh, which was his all along, with a surprising, ultimate punchline. "Life is 0 into +," quite a disturbing final line, reflects the play's frigid paradox: life is travelling from zero to... well, more zero. The playwright explores:

**RAY:** [Weeps.] Oh...oh! All of my family members have been killed in the bomb blasts who were staying in the Hotel Aliet.

**JAY:** It seems that we will not save ourselves from this condition because the firing has begun at our office and it is announced by the administration that militants are hiding in another cell of this office and have captured some pilgrims to kill.

**DON:** [Silent.]

**RAY:** [Weeps.]

**JAY:** Oh! Oh! The bullet pierced RAY. He fell to the ground. He is dying. Oh! Oh!

**RAY:** Oh my God...oh...oh...m...y...G...o...d! The bullet pierces. Falls. Covered with blood.

**DON:** Let him go to his own home. You will also go.

**JAY:** Oh! Oh...!

### Conclusion

Rajeshwar Prasad's abiding contribution to the *Theatre of the Absurd* drops the realm of performing arts in the hands of the actor and brings to the stage, the ultimate existential dread of human life in a specially Indian context. The innovator does not treat the absurdity of the universe as one of the formal and aesthetic means but uses the phenomena of the absurd to engage in the issue of social criticism. Through a fusion of traditional Indian performance, the disappearance of communication, and the nature of power becoming oppressive, Prasad gains an individual voice in "Absurd" theatre, beyond the limitations of the global cultural discourse. He is so convincing with his art of representing contradictions and absurdities that actually

confront and challenge society members, urging them to find a way through the numbers of daily chaos towards a meaningful and purposeful life, the artist declares. Thereby, Prasad holds the power to convert the genre of The Theatre of the Absurd into a highly effective magnifying glass that helps to peruse the plights of the human condition in the constantly changing Indian context, which is the telling of the enduring importance of the absurdism as one that exposes our world to the truths, which oftentimes are not too comfortable to deal with. So speaking of the legacy of Prasad is remembering his skill to revise and vamp the Theatre of the Absurd as a valve to observe the dark and the bright sides of humans in a dreamy Indian context that is constantly undergoing transformation, which is just an indication that absurdism is a reflection of all the grey areas in our life.

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