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Mahesh Elkunchwar's play "Flowers of Blood" as Theatre of Absurd.

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ABSTRACT

The play "Raktapushp" or Flower of Blood is written by a Marathi writer Mahesh Elkunchwar will be analyzed in this article. Evaluation of Mahesh Elkunchwar as a playwright of "Theatre of Absurd" in context of Indian and Western context will be looked into to understand the elements of Absurdity in the play "Raktapushp" and the behavioral pattern of the characters in the play will be evaluated based on the psychoanalysis theory especially using the ideas proposed by Sigmund Freud in his work "Civilization and its Discontents". The plight of the characters, mainly focusing on Padma, will be illustrated. Conclusion and the overall assumption of the play will be established. Discursive and Qualitative analysis of the play "Flowers of Blood" will be done.

**Keywords:** Absurdity, Culture, Psychoanalysis, Existentialism, Civilization, Oedipal.

Mahesh Elkunchwar is an Indian playwright who belongs to the tradition of Indian Theatre of Absurd. He is a diligent personality, a minute observer of the nature and its proceedings and an acclaimed and established scholar who looks into the intricacies of modern life. The choice of his genre and the portrayal of those characters speak a lot about his personality. It can be said that Elkunchwar speaks through his characters. One such play is "Raktapushp" or *Flower of Blood* where the problems pertaining to Indian familial structure are identified and delved into. The problems which are very much related to the Indian culture and are also based on the overall process of expulsion of those primitive emotions will be observed in this play. Mahesh Elkunchwar understands the psychanalysis of the native place and the suppressed libido that emerges because of the societal constraints, resulting in abnormality or oedipal issues. The anomalous behavior and the ruptures in the family also happen because of the sudden unfortunate incidents like death resulting in absurd behavior of human beings like in this play Raja son of Bhau and Padma dies and hence Padma is shown as fragile and often breaks down because of the unbearable trauma that she has gone through making her behavior inconsistent and at the same time unpredictable. A conversation among them where Bhau and Leelu are discussing about Leelu's marriage goes like it is quoted below. The anger is seen when Padma arrives:

**Bhau.** Don't be silly. I was just asking Leely how many silk sarees she would like to have for her wedding.

**Padma.** Oh yes, of course. How silly of me. I should have known nobody is planning to buy a silk saree for a hag like me...

**Bhau.** Who said so? Of course, we'll buy one for you. The one you have now is too old in any case.

**Padma** (suddenly flaring up). Don't you know on what occasion silk sarees are bought? (Calming down.) Leelu, drink your tea. It'll get cold. (Elkunchwar 35)

Padma is affected by her son's premature death. The whole family is trying to recover from that but she was the most hurt being a mother. The effect of that death can be reflected in her health. If one is not healthy then scenes of frustrated mind do erupt. Her daughter Leelu is more often than not the victim of that situation as she always comes in and suffers because of it. The other reason of her frustration is oedipal as she thinks herself not as beautiful as she used to be. There is a latency in her marital life. Bhau has fatherly affection towards her daughter that also infuriates Padma. She can feel the coldness in her partner's action regarding her. Leelu, as she has grown older, also becomes a matter of concern and there is a kind of unacknowledged competition that mother has developed towards her daughter. This overall creates an absurd situation where people are not aware and are able to go the root of the matter in totality. The psychological constraints and not being able to express the deeply rooted desires have been the one of the most absurd characteristics of the Indian culture.

### Theoretical Framework

Post-world war 2nd, came a phase of uncertainty, obscurity and distrust among the human civilization across the world and tremors of it were felt across the globe and in a way, heavens were collapsing. The sadistic environment perpetrated a literature which was in a way congruent to the mindset of humanity of that period, which was fragmented, unstructured, ambiguous and meaningless. The situation propelled thinkers like Martin Esslin to come up with a new kind of branch which later came to known as "Theatre of Absurd" during the year 1940. A widespread tendency occurred prominent in the existential philosophy of men of letters such as Jean- Paul Sartre and Albert Camus to view human-being as an isolated existent casted into an alien universe. They tried to understand the human world as possessing no inherent truth, or meaning: and to represent in its vain search for purpose and importance as the being navigates from nothingness from where it begin to nothingness where it needs to end, as an existence which is both frustrating and absurd

"In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels as a stranger. His is an irremediable exile... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity." (Abrams 1)

The theatre of absurd, that emerged in Europe was not constrained to specific culture and space. It spread across, the influence also touched India seen majorly in people like Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and Mahesh Elkunchwar who were influenced by western writers and philosophers like Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Tom Stoppard and Franz Kafka who is somewhat a precursor of this kind of writing. The world was always very bizarre for them and some critical minds have always looked for the solution to it but ending it without an end, an answer. Mahesh Elkunchwar's ability to deconstruct the arbitrariness between Western absurd theatre and Indian absurd theatre is terrific as he understands that Indian absurdity occurs because of a reason as there is a reason why Padma is behaving in a manner like that she does:

"Indian theatre's absurdity is born from the contradictions of modernity and tradition, of language and silence, of dreams and disillusionment." (Rath, 172)

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This quotation gives an overall view, source of the problem as in "*Raktapushp*", he wants to highlight. Maximum time and thought are exhausted in not being able to do what people want. The tendency of not accepting the basic realities of life, the change that happens with time. The characters especially of Mahesh Elkunchwar has that basic feature which audience gets to read and see in his plays.

"Oedipal problems" do have a say in this play. Although, Mahesh Elkunchwar never directly hints because of the culture he is in. Acceptability among his people may be the issue but he cleverly hints at the possible scenario and relation among the characters.

According to Sigmund Freud, Oedipal problems stem from the Oedipus complex, a concept in his psychoanalytic theory. The Oedipus complex occurs during the phallic stage of psychosexual development (around ages 3-6), where a child experiences unconscious desires for the opposite-sex parent and feelings of rivalry or jealousy toward the same-sex parent. As Sigmund Freud has mentioned in his work "*Civilization and its discontents*" how societal restriction leads human being into a crisis where it becomes sort of difficult for a being to understand and look inside themselves. The dissatisfaction is quite dangerous as human is not able to realize the connection of their problem. The source becomes so oblivious and that ignorance works as a kind of mirage that eventually leads them into crisis.

A civilization that leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them into revolt neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting existence. (Freud 80).

This quotation which explains the root cause of the problem that the human beings are facing. Sigmund Freud believes that human civilization is largely a dissatisfied civilization. The major chunk of the population is left aloof from the fulfillment which might vary with the subject position and materiality.

## Discussion

Padma who is in her forties and has faced a lot in her life, to such an extent that she faces death of her son, among her various problems. The problem here exists in the form of feeling of alienation of self. She thinks as if she is being ignored by her own family. She develops a sort of hatred for her own daughter as she thinks her more beautiful. She develops an affection towards a young tenant and she diverts her all care for him. She talks and takes care of all his small things. Raja also communicates with her and responds to her affection. Raja is like an image of her son and at the same time oedipal connection between the two cannot be denied. She feels authenticated and validated through the words of Raja. One such conversation between them goes like.

**RAJA.** You'll never believe how good my mother is

**PADMA.** And I am terrible, aren't i? An ogress, like I said just now.

**RAJA** Kaku, why do you suddenly become so depressed?

**PADMA.** Raja, I want to know the truth. Please tell me: Do you think I'm good women?  
(Elkunchwar 39)

The above conversation states how a human is dependent on another human for survival. Every one needs to express themselves in one way or the other. People some time do not get that sense of comfort from the family. Like, in this case Bhau is busy with outsiders and hence he is able to release his suppressed emotions through his friends. Bhau also has a good relation with her daughter Leelu but Padma does not have that kind of luxury. Her existence which revolves around the aesthetical parameters faces conflict and crises arise once it starts to fade away.

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