

EVALUATION OF HAROLD PINTER'S *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY* THROUGH RASA THEORY

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Abstract

My aim through this article is to propagate the study of *The Birthday Party* in the light of *Rasa* theory. In this play Pinter shows his total capability in similar to human reality with that creative effort to capture the given moment. The play is essentially about terror and menace impressions. It is Pinter's one of the most satisfying plays, with the careful combustion of its language and moments of almost unbalanced humor. In Pinter's world, language has lost its semantic power and significance. Pinter's characters in *The Birthday Party* are neither capable using the language; language for them is like movement. His other strategy of questioning and avoidance fail, and he is taken away by his followers to some greater authority, already emblematically a dead man. So it is very clear that experience of *Bhaya* (Terror) *Jugupsa* (Disgust) *Vismaya* (Astonishment) is indeed recognized in the drama of Harold Pinter. So Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is perfect to study in the light of *Rasa* theory.

Keywords: *Rasa* theory, Theatre of the Absurd, Existentialism, *Nāṭyasāstra*

Bharata Muni articulates the eight *Rasas* in the *Nāṭyasāstra*, a prehistoric work of dramatic theory. Each *Rasa*, according to *Nāṭyasāstra*, has a leading divinity and a comprehensive colour. *Rasa* Theory embraces humanism as a whole. It does not leave out any of the emotions, which could produce *Rasa*. *Rasa* theory therefore is an all pervasive humanistic theory. The *Nāṭyasāstra* classify eight *Rasas* with eight consequential *Bhavas* (mood). These are known as *Sthayi Bhava* or permeating constant emotion. As *Rasa* theory studies human sentiments, minds and ideology; it is proposed to make the literary world conscious of such an all-pervasive humanistic approach in the globe of literary condemnation. *Rasa* theory moreover dwells on individual sentiments as vital part of any literary works. *Rasa*, the ancient Sanskrit Literary Theory is an Aesthetic Theory, a study of prettiness, beauty in natural world and life. It studies beauty in Art, and all the literary forms like Drama, Poetry and Fiction. *Rasa*, the Sanskrit Literary Theory is an exceptional critical theory that we should be at emancipation following certain rules to relate to drama, dance, music and poetry as well.

We can see all the eight types of *Rasas* in Bharata Muni's *Nātyasāstra* like *Rati* (Love), *Hasya* (Mirth), *Soka* (Sorrow), *Krodha* (Anger), *Utsaha* (Energy), *Bhaya* (Terror), *Jugupsa* (Disgust), and *Vismaya* (Astonishment). Bharat Muni who was the profounder of *Rasa* theory, advocates eight 'sthayibhavas' (eternal emotions) and thirty three 'vyabhicharins' (transient or brief feelings)--, discouragement, anxiety, greed, intoxication, elation, campaigning, trance, arrogance, sadness, irritation, sleep weariness, indolence, depression, recollection, contentment, depression, madness, death or dying experiences, terror, shame, unsteadiness, sleepiness, forgetfulness, coma, stirring, crossness, dissimulation, fierceness, self-assurance, analysis, temporary insanity, arguments, and reflection the particular *rasas* are produced. Experience of *Bhaya* (Terror), *Jugupsa* (Disgust), *Vismaya* (Astonishment) is indeed well-known in the darma of Harold Pinter's plays.

In the drama the main purpose of a creative writer is to portray emotions and supplementary feelings which direct actions of a character. Every dramatic presentation is aimed at reminding in the audience a scrupulous kind of aesthetic experience, which is described as *Rasa*. There has been great controversy over it but a predominance of writers has established it. My aim in this article is to study *The Birthday Party* in the light of *Rasa* theory. In this play Pinter shows his total capability in similar to human reality with that creative effort to capture the given moment. The play is essentially about terror and menace impressions. It is Pinter's one of the most satisfying plays, with the careful combustion of its language and moments of almost unbalanced humor. The *Birthday Party* is the first full length play written by Harold Pinter in 1958. It is known for themes of nameless menace, erotic desire, shattered family and mental disturbance. The play is developed in three acts. I will analyze each section and part of the play followed by the relevance of the *Rasa* theory. In this play, the character, Stanley Webber, spends his time inside a boarding house, outside of which is full of mysteries and fright. The play deals with the role of Stanley, an artist in the society who breaks away from society and begins to lead a life of his own. He does not like to mix up with the society. He believes that if he gets mixed up with society he might be drained back in to the conservative ways of societal life. Although Pinter's early drama is symbolized as an appearance of the feelings of fear, uncertainty, and agitation, it also embodies the element of absurdity. The tragic is often rendered comic by the use of ridiculous, musical and repetitive language. The initial comedies of Pinter often conclude in serious subjects. Dukore rightly comments:

Such comic passages also help create an atmosphere of menace, mystery, evasion, and matters deliberately concealed. Frequently Pinter's plays begin comically but turn to physical, psychological, or potential violence – sometimes, in varying sequences, to all three. (Dukore, 24)

By the use of the technique of the character, Pinter confesses his own responsibility in the process of versioning some of the common weaknesses of the modern man. The atmosphere of menace and terror introduce his works. The play *The Birthday Party* is difficult in its thought and structure and its suggestive force makes it complicated for the common person who reads.

In the first Act, Meg repeatedly asks a question to create laughter:

MEG: Is that you, Petey? (Pause)

PETEY-: is that you? (Pause)

PETEY: what?

MEG: Is that you?

PETEY: Yes it's me.

[*The Birthday Party*: 24]

So the Rasa *Hasya* (Mirth) is working here in the play. For example, Pinter uses replication as a mode to make laughter and also to ease the tension of the scene and divert the audience's answer faintly from the action. In this play we see that Stanley feels free from outside menace in his place of sanctuary, however, his sense of safety is soon busted into with the arrival of two unknown characters. When Meg informed Stanley of the surprising arrival of two men, he is ambitious into a state of panic. Here we see the *Vismaya* (Astonishment) Rasa has been used:

STANLEY: Who are they?

MEG: I don't know.

STANLEY: Did he tell you their names?

MEG: No.

STANLEY: (*pacing the room*) Here? They wanted to come here?

MEG: Yes, they did. (*She takes the curlers out of her hair.*)

STANLEY: Why?

MEG: This house is on the list.

STANLEY: But who are they?

(*The Birthday Party* 14)

Here Pinter presents an element of suspense in order to create a threatening atmosphere in *The Birthday Party*. The imprecise particulars and pieces of in sequence add to this sense of the threatening in the play. Stanley gives a piece of confusing information about his chasers:

STANLEY: They're coming in a van. ... Do you

Know what they've got in that van? ... They've got a wheelbarrow in that van. ...

They're looking for someone. A certain person

(*The Birthday Party* , 18)

Pinter describes individual breakdown, disappointment and decay through the linguistic fear unleashed by the two characters McCann and Goldberg. The two men Goldberg and McCann are the agents of society. They convey all kind of charges against Stanley. As the original name gives him a sense of failure, Stanley desires to assign to him another name. Terror is increased further with the appearance of two agents who start questioning and cross-examination in this play. They blame him of mysterious fault and sins and Stanley remains speechless and only makes the mumbling gurgling hums. His silence only indicates the steady vanishing of remembrance, the collapse of the human personality. Stanley is almost brain-washed through an overflow of perplexing questions. Goldberg asks so many questions to Stanley:

GOLDBERG: Webber! Why did you change your name?

STANLEY: I forgot the other one.

GOLDBERG: What's your name now?

STANLEY: Joe Soap.

GOLDBERG: You stink of sin.

(*The Birthday Party* , 44)

It is clear that the *Bhaya* (Terror Rasa) runs throughout the play *The Birthday Party*. The modern man is burning like his own passion. His state of mind and spirit is evaluated by the writer to the hustle-bustle of the society. As the matter of fact, he does not know himself sufficiently. He doesn't know in genuine sense what he is doing. The fusion of humor and tragedy is recognizable in Pinter's plays. During the cross-examination, Stanley is accused of a great number of crimes:

MCCANN: Why did you leave the organization?

[...]
MCCANN: You betrayed the organization.
[...]
MCCANN: He's killed his wife!
[...]
MCCANN: You throttled her.
GOLDBERG: With arsenic.
[...]
MCCANN: Where's your old mum?
STANLEY: In the sanatorium.
[...]
GOLDBERG: Why did you never get married?
MCCANN: She was waiting at the porch.
GOLDBERG: You skedaddle from the wedding.
[...]
GOLDBERG: You stink of sin.
(*The Birthday Party* 42-3)

Harold Pinter makes use of the comedy not to stimulate laughter but to give insight to his characters' private world. It is not just a chance that the individuals' most fearful and forceful experiences are often attended with a constituent of comedy, behind which the characters find a protection to hide their anxiety and real approach. It may induce the emotion of *Hasya*, but the nature of the words used in the play is grave and expectant with abstract meanings. The seriousness, in a sense is apposite to the emotion of laughter. Therefore, a mutual practice of questioning goes on between Stanley and McCann in an attempt to have power:

MCCANN: Where are you going?
STANLEY: I want to go out.
MCCANN: Why don't you stay here? Stanley moves away, to the right of the table.
STANLEY. So you're down here on holiday?
MCCANN: A short one. (STANLEY picks up a strip of paper.
MCCANN *moves in.*) Mind that.
STANLEY: What is it?
MCCANN: Mind it. Leave it.
STANLEY: I've got a feeling we've met before.
MCCANN: No, we haven't.
(*The Birthday Party*, 33)

Alambana is the addressee of the play that is the modern man. So, the disgust with the world (*Nirveda*) is the *Vyabhicaribhava*. The insight of menace goes hand in hand with convinced human feelings like fear, insecurity and hopelessness. These human attributes are typical Pinter subjects elaborated in his plays. Menace refers to an intrigue and menacing feeling as experienced by characters whose identities are endangered due to this irresistible logic. So here we see the *Bhaya* (Terror) in a very original mood. Pinter's concern is to shed light to the dilemma of modern man within his normal setting and occupations. His characters do not seem to be occupied with too high ambitions; in fact, theirs is simply a struggle for their own lives. He chooses for tiredness in his portrayal of characters often turn out to be homeless person and miserable people without a shelter or an job. The modern man has discovered too many things

and with that he has come in the state of utter confusion. He is unable to identify a thing and its proper use. Gradually, the two men start interrogating Stanley. All incidents happen so unexpectedly that his questions now become more anxious and repetitive:

GOLDBERG: Webber, what were you doing yesterday?
 STANLEY: Yesterday?
 GOLDBERG: [...] what did you do the day before yesterday?
 STANLEY: What do you mean?
 GOLDBERG: [...] why are you getting in everybody's way?
 STANLEY: Me? What are you –
 [...]
 GOLDBERG: Why do you behave so badly, Webber? [...]
 STANLEY: Me?
 GOLDBERG: Why do you treat that young lady like a leper? [...]
 STANLEY: What the – (*The Birthday Party*, 41-2)

The plans of questioning involve a desire for deliverance from menace in Pinter. Pinter's characters desire for a better understanding of his plight; however, they are neither clarified nor saved from their irreparable situation. He lives in the mechanical world where desires are satisfied artificially. In this sort of cross-examination, Goldberg and McCann are the inquisitors:

Goldberg: When did you last wash up a cup?
 Stanley: The Christmas before last.
 Goldberg: Where?
 Stanley: Lyons Corner House.
 Goldberg: Which one?
 Stanley: Marble Arch.
 Goldberg: Where was your wife?
 Stanley: In –
 Goldberg: Answer.
 Stanley: (*turning, crouching*): What wife?
 Goldberg: What have you done with your wife?
 McCann: He's killed his wife.
 Goldberg: Why did you kill your wife?
 Stanley: (*sitting, his back to the audience*): What wife?
 McCann: How did he kill her?
 Goldberg: How did you kill her?
 (*The Birthday Party*: 43)

Pinter's character speaks always keeping truth and falsehood side by side and his truth cannot remain pure. Here again, the play exposes the hollowness of modern man's life. In Pinter, the image of the room is closely linked to the idea of menace. Esslin states that for Pinter the outside world is frightening, and, hence, menacing for the individual:

Pinter's people are in a room, and they are frightened, scared. What are they scared of? 'Obviously, they are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room is a world bearing upon them, which is frightening ... [and] which is inexplicable and frightening, curious and alarming'.
 (Esslin: 35)

So, the second section evokes *Santa Rasa*. This peculiarity of modern man's life may lead one to disillusionment and therefore to *Santa Rasa*. The expedition of exposing the tricks

and pretences of the modern man continues in the play. Finally, Stanley Webber begins to shatter; he loses his self-confidence in the third act of play. He is no longer a whole individual; as the questioning of the two men overtakes his ability to respond them all, he starts to suffer from several disorders which indicate his disintegration as an individual:

Goldberg: Why did you come here?
 Stanley: My feet hurt!
 Goldberg: Why did you stay?
 Stanley: I had a headache!
 Goldberg: Did you take anything for it?
 Stanley: Yes.
 Goldberg: What?
 Stanley: Fruit salts!
 Goldberg: Enos or Andrews?
 Stanley. En – An – (*The Birthday Party*: 42)

In all these, there is the possibility of laughter. The realization of the truth of modern man's life is *Alambana*. Pinter expresses wonder at the modern man's destiny. So, here is clearly *Adbhuta Rasa*. Here again the writer expresses the sense of nihilism that has enclosed all spheres of life. Silence is one of the strategies of Pinter's characters and he use when they attempt to protect themselves from the menacing powers. Silence and avoidance often infuse Pinter's plays. Almansi has described it:

Once labeled 'comedies of menace', are chiefly comedies of elusion, avoidance, withdrawal, mendacity and guile. Because his language is a language of escapist maneuvering, which studiously avoids the commitment of a conflict or confrontation" (Almansi, 19).

Pinter's language typically consists of silences and pauses in the dialogs in which his characters aspire to avoid the fear of facing a stranger:

The Pinterian hero, especially in the early plays, is often as inarticulate as a pig, stumbling pathetically over every second word, covering a pitifully narrow area of meaning with his utterances, blathering through his life. Yet he does not seem to whine and grunt or giggle or grumble to give an outlet to his instincts, desires, passions or fears. He grunts in order to hide something else. Even when he grunts [...], his grunt is a strategic move, or a lie. (Almansi: 19-20)

In this regard, the sense of nihilism holds the possibility of disappointment with the world. So, here is *Santa Rasa* and *Bibhatsa Rasa* has been used by Pinter.

Pinter's character has no secure household. In such situation, the modern man has nothing to depend upon except thinking. These parts of play suggest the emotion of *Santa*. In Pinter's plays, too, the characters employ some approaches of delusion so as to protect themselves from menace. Laughter is used as a way of evasion from the dread of the outside world and/or strangers. According to Esslin:

Much of the laughter that accompanies his plays up to that point where they cease to be funny, is already the laughter of precaution against panic, the whistling in the dark of people who are trying to protect themselves against menace, the horror, which lies at the core of the action they are witnessing
 (Esslin: 51)

What lies beneath the ludicrous actions of the characters is their need for security and relief. Here in this section, *Srngara* is reversed into *Bibhatsa*. *Nātyasāstra* (VI. 73) writes about *Bibhatsa*:

Bibhatsa-rasa arises from seeing something one does not like, from unpleasant smells, tastes, physical contacts, words and from many violent trembling of the body (Masson and Patwardhan: 55).

The two agents use both cruelty and persuasion to force the musician Stanley back in to the society. The hollowness of Stanley's existence is emphasized in Meg's birthday gift of drum for him, which he beats wildly in a desperate attempt perhaps to announce his existence. So here is clearly *Raudra Rasa*. Anger is its *Sthayibhava* Disgust is *Sthayibhava*. The wrong-doings of the protagonist which are undesirable are the *Vibhavas*. Stanley undergoes a total transformation. He is physically assaulted for his alleged attempt at raping Lulu by Goldberg and McCann ironically enough as Goldberg rapes Lulu later and McCann usurps Stanley's place while flirting with Meg. Toward the end of the drama Stanley has undergone such inhuman torture that he is no more the person he had been. In fact he may be called dead-man- walking. Stanley is nothing more than a dead man; his figurative death is announced by Goldberg and McCann:

MCCANN: Who are you, Webber?

GOLDBERG: What makes you think you exist?

MCCANN: You're dead.

GOLDBERG: You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you.

You're nothing but an odour! (*The Birthday Party*, 46)

Stanley begins to collapse separately:

Stanley's hands clutching his glasses begin to tremble. [...] Stanley concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sounds from his throat. [...]

He concentrates. His head lowers, his chin draws into his chest, he crouches. [...]

Stanley's body shudders, relaxes, his head drops, he becomes still again, stooped.

(*The Birthday Party*, 78)

Stanley's condition was very pitiable in the scene. He cannot control his body and he loses path of his hands and his head. He was losing his physical capability indicates his slow death, and finally his loss of individuality. The Overall, impressions of the play imply *Jugupsa* (Disgust *Rasa* in the particular scene of the play. The fast attack of these messages renders Stanley totally tongue-tied:

Stanley concentrates, his mouth open, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sound from his throat

Stanley Uh-gug ... uh-gug ... eehehh-gag ... (On the breath.)

Caahh ... caahh. (*The Birthday Party*, 78)

In these lines we see the *Jugupsa* (Disgust *Rasa* and *Soka* (Sorrow) have been used very well. This depiction suggests that man's situation is absurd. In fact, the characters suppose the role of dumb actors more reserved and passive in the play. Pinter's characters definitely find themselves within a sense of setup; even though they struggle hard in order to get out of this confusion of an uncertain life.

It is the *Bhaya* (Terror) runs throughout the play. Sometimes Pinter's characters choose to struggle against the arrangement by questioning it; though, their queries often linger unanswered. Pinter's characters also fail in their attempts to manage with menace. In *The Birthday Party*,

Stanley Webber remains helpless from the outset of the play, when he tries to make the two strangers leave the boarding house he lives in. His disappointment in this first attempt leads to a series of further defeats. Harold Pinter's plays reveal our state of loneliness, nothingness, meaninglessness and isolation. In Pinter's world, language has lost its semantic power and significance. Pinter's characters in *The Birthday Party* are neither capable using the language; language for them is like movement. His other strategy of questioning and avoidance fail, and he is taken away by his followers to some greater authority, already emblematically a dead man. So it is very clear that experience of *Bhaya* (Terror) *Jugupsa* (Disgust) *Vismaya* (Astonishment) is indeed recognized in the drama of Harold Pinter. So Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is perfect to study in the light of Rasa theory.

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