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**A CRITICAL STUDY OF CHAOS AND EMPTINESS IN
THE AMERICAN DREAM BY EDWARD ALBEE**

Sirsat S. S.

*Lecturer in English
Government Polytechnic,
Beed, MS, India*

Abstract:

The American Dream by Edward Albee is a biting indictment of the American scene, denouncing the complacency, harshness, and emotional emptiness of contemporary society as well as the replacement of genuine ideals with fake ones. The drama turns the once-inspiring national ideal into a nightmarish nightmare by exposing the moral rot and "antiseptic passivity" that underlie it. Albee portrays a hollow life via an absurdist lens that is marked by a lack of connection, the dehumanization of family life, and the emasculation of the masculine sensibility. Grandma, who stands in for the distorted "original dream" of the New World, and the Young Man, a symbol of society's inner deterioration who is physically attractive but devoid of empathy, are central to the story. Ultimately, the play functions as a response to the spiritual vacuity and materialistic construction of contemporary American culture. In the end, the play serves as a reaction against the materialistic construction and spiritual emptiness of modern American culture.

Keywords: *Absurdism, Materialism, Emasculation, Vacuity, Dehumanization, etc.*

The play *The American Dream* is a masterpiece of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for the real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity. This play is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy. The intention was to offend as well as amuse and entertain. For Albee, 'every honest work is a personal, private yowl, a statement of one individual pleasure or pain'. The play *The American Dream* is something more than that. It transcends the personal and the private and has something to do with the anguish of us all. The play is Albee's frankest incursion into the theatre of the absurd in the manner of the French avant-garde. Daddy and Mommy keep on waiting. Their impatience and irritation lead them to conclude that it is impossible to 'get satisfaction'. Both sit opposite to each other in a well furnished room where Mommy babbles and Daddy is made to listen carefully, silently.

In the play, Albee introduces the hat exchanging incident with a purpose to offer a sort of parallelism with the adopted child. In other words, he wants to prove that the modern family does not make any distinction between an object like a hat and a living object like an adopted child. One can exchange things if one does not get 'satisfaction'. So, one can also exchange an adopted child if one does not get satisfaction. Albee establishes the fact that Mommy accepts the same hat as an adequate replacement. She also accepts the identical twin as being totally different from the boy she had rejected. *The American Dream* is an interesting projection of hollow existence. There is no harmony among the members of the family. The fundamental instincts have lost their values. There is no family hospitality and family culture. The theme of lack of communication and loneliness is extended from *The Zoo Story* to this play. The couple had not been released with a child so to fill the natural gap, they buy a child from the Bye Bye adoption society. Neither Mrs. Barker being one of the society's officials nor Mommy is tolerant. There is conflict between what he is and what he ought to be. Daddy



is always at the back and call of his wife. She plans to keep Grandma away from the family at the age eighty-six.

The conversation is ridiculous but in a frightening way. Mommy seems to have natural talent for asserting her indomitable will. She is the most egoistic woman in the family. The domination of Mommy is easily recognized by all but there is difficulty in understanding the main spring of the action. She succeeds in castrating theme of sex or repressed sex which is the main spring of the action. Daddy. There is the conflict which is shown between appearance and reality. Mommy is depicted as women who is obsessed with appearance, and she enters into marriage with mercenary motives. She treats Daddy or the child as instruments through which to gain satisfaction. They are essential to her because without them, she has no identity or purpose in life.

The play is a vision of the antiseptic passivity of American life and resulting death of the masculine sensibility that resembles a nightmare. The play *The American Party* is a response to the materialistic construction and spiritual vacuity of American culture. Albee sees that alienation and anxiety are the characteristics of absurd drama. As an allegory of American society, the play is significant fleshed to satisfy artistic demands. Albee is cantilevering out from private preoccupations into satire on the emasculating effects of matriarchal family life. Writing about dehumanization, the dramatist finds himself drifting towards the style of Ionesco who for different reasons had reduced his characters to puppet like automatism. The Young Man in the play is the existential question made of flesh. He is the symbol of the impossibility of human contact but their encounter proves some sort of communication. Grandma responds to him in a human way, but he does not participate in experience. After the appearance of the Young Man, the play collapses artistically and becomes flat and theatrical and an unrealised brain work. The Young Man reveals the history to Grandma because he thinks that 'old people have a perception'. The Young Man has the necessary physical structures like body, face but he has no brains. It is Grandma who recognizes in the Young Man *The American Man*. He has a human shell but no inner feeling. He is the twin of the bumble of joy. The Young Man is a symbol of inner decay of the American society. The unborn child is the exploration of the myth of the 'American Dream' which is an implicit theme of this play.

The Young Man is ready to do anything because he gets money. The American society has become money oriented. On the other hand, the society has lost humanity and all human values. The family of Mommy and Daddy is trapped by illusion and fantasies. The introduction of the second child at the end of the play becomes one more obstacle in the way of communication between husband and wife. Grandma is an anachronism. She represents the solid pioneer stock of which the American Dream might have gone, had it not been corrupted instead. Grandma is not merely an exceptionally spry eighty-six years old, she is Albee's conception of the Great American Earth Mother who recognizes deep within herself the memory of the original dream that the founding of New World gave to the human race. She remembers the real dream. Her boxes represent the emptiness around which Americans wrap their illusions. At the end of the play, the Young Man has freed Grandma from the parody of life as defined by Mommy who nips Daddy in the bud.

It is generally assumed that the theatre of Absurd is primarily preoccupied with the theme of lack of communication. The communication in a play starts way before it is enacted before the audience or put down on paper. Edward Albee externalizes human motivation and reduces it to a vivid clash of wills. All the characters represent a class of society. There is a discussion on the behavior with distortion, sometimes it is indicated by action which is surrealistically representative of it but it is never mirrored realistically. An acute sense of loss is a recurrent theme in Albee's work. There is cumulative progress from non-sense to logic, from depth to surface motivation, and from statement to ironic implications. The play *The American Dream* essentially dramatizes the transformation of the American dream into a terrifying nightmare.



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