

Invention and Reinvention of Reality: A Study of the Works of Mulk Raj Anand and Adward Albee

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ABSTRACT

*Anand's novels depict social, political and economic problems of early 20th century rural and urban India. He focuses on the untouchability, miseries, child labour, poverty, exploitation by landlords, dowry, and maladjustment in marriage, helplessness of women, class distinction, breaking of joint family system and caste system, which is an entirely indigenous phenomenon in our country but class system has universal dimensions. The play *The Play about the Baby* by Albee prove to be a step ahead in dealing with the concept of 'Life-Lies'. It unfolds the illusions in order to see the reality behind the blind-fold illusions. The play is about people as possessions, surrogate parents. The same persistency of lies as props can be seen in the theme of this play, but with a difference. Albee is focusing on the idea that "reality is created by our need for it" (qtd. in Gussow 389). Title of this play seems jokey. When Albee mentioned about this play in November 1995 and told that this play was *The Play about the Baby*, then people asked 'but what is the title?' Albee was very pleased at this because he always likes the confusion.*

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this play seems like a continuation of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. But this play deals with the idea of 'Life-Lies' in a different manner, as it deals with invention and reinvention of reality. Like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* this play has four characters in the form of two couples – an elder couple and a younger-innocent couple. These four characters have generic names – Man, Woman, Boy and Girl. For discovering a new concept of 'Life-Lies' Albee uses a new character – a "baby". The young couple (Boy and Girl) has the baby and the older couple (Man and Woman) comes to hurt them. As asks the Girl from the Boy, they have come "To hurt us? To injure us beyond salvation?" (PAB 487)

The play begins with Boy and Girl who are living in an erotic and Edenic joy. The very opening lines of the play show Boy and Girl's keenness about their baby:

GIRL. I'm going to have the baby now.

[. . .]

BOY. It's the miracle of life.

GIRL. Yes; yes; it is.

BOY. Did it hurt a lot?

GIRL. They say you can't remember pain.

BOY. A-ha. (PAB 461)

It indicates that the birth of a baby has taken place. We hear an offstage cry of their "miracle of life" (PAB 461), but throughout the course of the play "we do not see the baby" but only "it's blanket" (PAB 462). Boy and Girl are portrayed as one of the happiest couples of Albee. Their moments of love-making, recollecting the days of courtship, merry-making and

feeding their baby represent that they are living in great Edenic joy. They are innocent like the first man and woman i.e., Adam and Eve before biting the forbidden fruit of wisdom. Even the elder couple remarks, "How innocent they are" (PAB 474). At first, they seem enjoying in the Garden of Eden. This is why Man and Woman comment:

MAN. You'd think it was Eden.
Wouldn't you.

WOMAN. Yes. You would. (PAB 475)

The Boy and Girl are completely dissolved in one another, their love is "pure" and they have nothing to do with the outer world. They are madly in love with each other, thus pay no attention to the bitter realities of outer world. As Boy says: "I always aim for you: you are my destination – my destination. I remember when I saw you for the first time [. . .] I said – well, to myself, more than to anyone – That's the one; that's my destination" (PAB 480).

But how long one can live in this innocent world - without the sadness and wounds? One cannot imagine this kind of life without any challenges in Albee's drama. This is the reason; Man and Woman come to interrupt the peace and happiness of Boy and Girl's small world. They intervene in the Edenic joy of Boy and Girl in order to bring them down on the earth (reality) from the heaven of fantasies. This is the reason that Man and Woman "look like a lot of people" (PAB 477) who are intruders in the placid life of Boy and Girl. This interruption is a learning process for the young couple. Man rightly points out the importance of "wounds" and interruptions in order to be alive: "If you have no wounds,

how can you know if you are alive? If you have no scar, how do you know who you are?" (PAB 508).

Further the Man asserts:

MAN. Give me your heart, then; I'll break that. If you don't have the wound of a broken heart, how can you know you're alive? If you have no broken heart, how do you know who you are? Have been? Can ever be? (PAB 509)

So, Man and Woman have come to "reinvent" the reality of Boy and Girl's joyful world and life, and this is why they are the 'mischief-makers' in this play. Toby Zinman remarks,

Man and Woman are far more major and interesting characters than Boy and Girl. Albee has always had a certain measure of contempt for callow youth. Their innocence and its necessary loss is the play's plot and theme. (133)

The older couple dazzles the younger pair. The Man and Woman try to convince the younger couple that the baby has never existed. During this "reinvention" of reality from the already existed reality, Man gives us the idea of ever-changing and shifting reality. According to him, first we "invent" the reality and then we "reinvent" it for ease: "All fades, all dissolves, and we are left with . . . invention: reinvention [. . .] "our reality" [. . .] is determined by our need?" (PAB 468). This is the central idea of the play. This play does not deal with any lies or illusions, but it deals with the idea of reality and how reality keeps changing according to our need. So, this play focuses on the ever-shifting and changing reality which man uses as a prop in order to escape from the absurdities of life.

When the Girl notices these "strange people", she is surprised. At first the Boy and the Girl assume that these are gypsies who have "Come to steal the baby!" (PAB 486), Boy and Girl start discussing about gypsies and this discussion about gypsies leads to the idea - how people use "blind-faith" as a prop. They discuss about people's blind-faith in various ways – first of all they talk about how people believe in stupid ways in order to make 'easy-money'. The Boy tells how people go to gypsies for help and gypsies befool them by saying that they will double their money, foolish people go to these gypsies with all their life-savings and gypsies "switch bags" – they take others' bags full of money and replace it with another bag full of cut up newspapers, and say "you have to bury" so the magic can work. People, having accepted lies, become bankrupt. This discussion also points out that every person who has faith in these lies suffers. Boy says that ultimately nothing happens and they are looted by these clever gypsies. No magic happens because there is nothing like a magic in this world, magic is only an illusion or fantasy. Further the Boy explains that people "visit the old Gypsy" to ask about their "future" but these gypsies "lie". This

conversation of Boy and Girl about gypsies, and the people who believe in these gypsies is an attack on the people who use these fortune-tellers and magicians as a prop and screen to escape from the bitter reality of present and try to find solace in either past or future. This conversation indicates that though this couple is aware of lies, yet the bitter truth has not disturbed them. Thus, the older couple intervene in their life.

This is why when the Boy asks Man "What do you want?" (PAB 494) in response to this Man puts in front of him human beings' psychology of desiring endless things, and says:

What do we want. Well. I would imagine we want what almost everybody wants – eternal life, in great health, no older than we are when we want it; easy money, with enough self-deception to make us feel we've earned it, are worthy people; a government that lets us do whatever we want. (PAB 494)

This reply of Man makes it crystal clear that we all want to be happy for which we breed a self-deception, a lie or an illusion because what we want and what we get, there is always a sea-difference in both. And in order to fill this gap we use the shield of lies and fantasies. Thus, in order to escape from the bitter reality of expectation and achievement we create a world full of lies and illusions in which no truth can intervene and we are happy and contented. Then the frustrated Boy asks him "What do you want here?" (PAB 494), the Man replies "We've come to take the baby" (PAB 495), as if "somebody is saying I've come to take the sofa or I've come to clean your drains. Or it could be a brain surgeon, a schoolteacher, or a parental figure" (Gussow 398).

The battle for the baby begins between the two couples. Audience is baffled with this battle because we have not seen the root of this battle but have just heard its cry. This confusion piles up higher and higher when Man says "If you ever had a baby" (PAB 503), at this moment our mind goes back to the old illusion of baby presented in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, because this "if" makes the audience think – is there a baby or not? Is this baby is also an illusion or a lie of the life of the younger couple? And do Man and woman come to help them to free from this trap of fantasy? Further when Man says "You don't fool with me. Fool yourselves, fool each other"(PAB 505-06), at this moment, we are bound to think that Boy and Girl are befooling themselves or the child is not theirs. The question shifts from either the baby exists to either the baby belongs to Boy and Girl or to someone else, when the Man says: ". . . if there is a baby, who is to say it has ever been yours?" (PAB 520)

Up to this moment we have not seen baby save the offstage cries of the baby. When "Time's up" (PAB 529) for Boy and Girl's self-contented life, Man opens "the old baby bundle" and finds "Nothing! No baby! Nothing!" (PAB 530).

Now Man and Woman both try to convince the younger couple that the baby never existed. After this Man asks Boy and Girl about the baby's existence : "You have a baby?" (PAB 531), at first, the Boy and Girl reply "Yes"; when the Man asks second time Girl remains silent. When Man asks her again, she says "No", but Boy keeps saying "Yes" and when the Girl says "No", he is baffled and says "I hear it crying!" (PAB 534). Audience is left puzzled to think that either like

Martha's son in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the baby is only an illusion; or like Honey's baby, Girl has created a child on her own; or Girl, like George, has sorted out the necessity to kill the child, the necessity to come out from the trap of illusions in the world of reality? The last dialogue of the play leads us to a different perspective about this story, and gives us a completely innovative idea about reality and illusion or truth and lie.

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