

Pinter is able to handle the characters and situations with minimum usage of dialogues in the play *The Caretaker*

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Abstract- *The Caretaker* is one of mature full length plays of Harold Pinter running into three acts. The action though spread out into three acts, only three characters constitute the cast that play out the action of the play. And in spite of the fact that the play does not have any regular plot that can be sketched out, the action is engaged enough for the attention of the audience or the reader without losing the grip on it. The action begins almost randomly with a freak move of Aston, the elder of the two brothers, the other being Mick, when he notices a man being manhandled on the roadside by another in front of a restaurant and stops. He offers his help to the one who was the victim of the violence by taking him back to his room. The whole of following action of the play takes place in the same room. This room is a part of the flat, which is property of Aston's younger brother, who too sometimes comes to spend a night or two in the same room.

We learn about the situation and the characters as the action evolves. And as it turns out that out that, though there are just three personages involved in the action and interaction, it is typically a Pinteresque play in the sense of terse short pieces of dialogues; the tension, suspense apprehension is built and conveyed more in the silent breaks and what appears to be communication gap. And just as the beginning does not have any history before it, even the end of the play as it comes close there seem to be not a few strings left loose to indicate the general mystery of life, in which a certain segment of human existence is lived and may leave its imprint.

Index Terms- Pinteresque, violence, Silent breaks, Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Pinter was born on 10 October 1930, in the London Borough of Hackney, to "very respectable, Jewish, lower middle class," native English parents of Eastern-European ancestry; his father, Jack Pinter was a "ladies' tailor, Frances, "kept what is called

an immaculate house" and was "a wonderful cook". Correcting general knowledge about Pinter's family background, Michael Billington, Pinter's authorized biographer, documents that "three of Pinter's authorized biographer, documents that "three of Pinter's grandparents hail from Poland and one from Odessa, making them Ashkenazic rather than Sephardic Jews. His evacuation to Cornwall and Reading from London during 1940 and 1941 before and during the Blitz and facing "the life-and-death intensity of daily experience" at that time influenced him profoundly. "His prime memories of evacuation today are of loneliness, bewilderment, separation and loss: themes that are in all his works" (Billington, Harold Pinter 5-10).

His Education:

Although he was a "solitary" only child, he "discovered his true potential" as a student at Hackney Downs Grammar School, "Where Pinter spent the formative years from 1944 to 1948, partly through the school and partly through the social life of Hackney Boy's Club and there he formed a firm, almost like a religious belief in the power of male friendship. The friends he made in those days-most particularly Henry Woolf, Michael (Mick), Goldstein and Morris (Moishe) Wernick - have always been a vital part of the emotional texture of his life". He was significantly "inspired" by his English teacher, mentor, and friend Joseph Brearley, "Pinter shone at English, wrote for the school magazine and discovered a gift for acting". He wrote poetry frequently and published some of it as a teenager, as he has continued to do throughout his career. He played *Rome and Macbeth* in 1947 and 1948, in productions directly by Brearley. He especially enjoyed running

and broke the Hackney Downs school sprinting record (Gussow, *Conversations with pinter* 28-29)

Pinter's usage of dialogue is minimal and yet creates desired dramatic effect:

Brevity is the soul of wit, is a well-known quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which means distilling lifetime wisdom on any particular aspect of life into fewest of words. This faculty is natural in poets, who in brief, terse utterances can contain profound observations by the use of several rhetorical devices. In Pinter, who too is a poet besides being a first rate playwright, what must be noticed is that, he has deployed this natural gift of brevity into a craft, which when he uses in the form of dialogue for his characters, the common spoken language, even colloquial usages get loaded with extra dimensional purposes and meanings. Sometimes it is mere repetition of a routine utterance by a character or by the two characters in conversation that lends intensity to the common words. This he uses frequently. It is part of his craft of writing, use of language in common human situation, short, sometimes half – formed sentence, and repetition of words, phrases or utterances.

And then there are the pauses, and silent moments he discretely chooses to intersperse go on to heighten the effect of the what is said besides giving time for the characters to give a little more thought to the interlocutor and ponder the situation as well and plan strategy to tackle the situation or the person.

Consider of instance the first two words spoken by Aston to Davies after the two are safely in Aston room with Davies breathing hard from his late experience of having received a beating at the hands of his employer; 'Sit down', Aston says to Davies, and the words are repeated by Davies in the form of a question coming from a man, who is totally dazed by the offer. He has not been able to sit and relax even for a few moments for quite a while that it comes to him as a shock almost. It is when Davies looks around as though looking for a place to sit that Aston finds a chair for him.

What we notice quite unlike a situation like this in any other play, where a character asking his guest to sit down, has been handled quite in his own manner, without wasting stage- words and time. Commonly a

character would probably say: 'Well, there's that easy chair lying against the wall for you to sit down, and do make yourself comfortable in it'. He may even add a few words about the style of furniture and the wood out of which it was manufactured and the kind of superior polish used to give it that long lasting shine, which his guest seems to admire with his eyes. Not all this for pinter. He knows that the effect that he wishes to get from the situation is best derived from just two words and the rest is left to the expression on the face of the Aston and Davies and their gestures.

These two words quite shake him up, because he has only the history of getting his seat grabbed, whenever they could, by those who were smarter than him at his place of work. He has known only deprivation and aggression against him. He has hardly ever known politeness or polite etiquette of being offered anything he wanted. He knew only one way to get it, and that by grabbing it even if he had to resort to violence. So in turn he too has become violent and grabber. With such history it was no wonder that he stood struck dumb, he could hardly believe his ears, when Aston offers him a chair and tell him to sit down. For Aston it was his normal social behaviour to offer a seat to a guest. But we can imagine the expressions quickly changing on the visage of Davies: the shock and disbelief finally giving place to relief and not a little cunning, which he begins to deploy soon after in his dealing with brothers.

Aston is being matter of fact. He had brought someone to his room – for any reason maybe – he is doing the obvious in offering a seat him. Dealing with a stranger his expression would be straight, rather poker faced. Davies's face on the other hand would show the whole agony and suffering of his life past and present called up, when he is offered the kindness of chair to sit in and relax. That finally Davies does get a chair to sit is quite significant in respect of Davies as we learn from him in his response- his complain to Aston as part of the hard luck story he continues to tell, is that all those blacks, Poles, Greeks, his colleagues in the Cafeteria, deprive him of a chair to sit in and have his cup of tea during the brief break of ten minutes during his work in the – yet not so significant so far as the stage management is concerned. The room is supposed be stored and clogged with household things lying in sixes and sevens, which is in the process of

renovation and setting up the house in order. It is Davies who indulges in rather long and meaning pieces of dialogue, which is purely self-revelatory and self-pity pinter uses them more like soliloquy.

The action of the play is in the interaction of chiefly three characters and this happens more in their gestures and movements and less in their conversation or conventional dialogues. Davies in an attempt to conceal his foxy shiftiness takes recourse to talking too much. Aston doesn't ask him about his past or duplicity involved in name changing, or his relationship with his erstwhile employer, and yet he goes on and about it all and more, repeatedly, to establish his credentials as of a different class from his co-workers, whom he looks down upon and blames for all that is unmannerly, ugly and vulgar. He is planning to make a place for himself in the new, sophisticated place and atmosphere of his benefactor. Yet, seeing so much of household goods, 'Stuff', lying all over the room he comes up with his own demand of a pair of shoes. He begins to tell about his change of name, identity papers with a friend in Sidcup where he has been planning to go and get them or less than fifteen years. How he is constrained with bad weather and having no proper shoes in which to undertake the journey in.

It is all so absurd and funny. He launches on his tale of receiving maltreatment at the hands of the priest of the church in Luton, where he had gone to get a dole of food and a pair of shoes given away to the needy. We can imagine Davies during all this to having his head bent, but from the corners of his eyes observing the impression he is making on Aston. At the same time he is taking in the details of all the 'stuff' lying in the house to latter rummage it for anything of use to him, when he is left alone with a spare key to the room left with him by Aston in good faith. He even hands out some money and the keys before going out. More than anything that is said the gestures reveal the characters and movement of the play.

Davies on the other hand was caught red-handed nosing around opening suitcases and examining them under suspicious circumstances by Mick, when he enters the room unexpectedly. Mick straightway comes to the evident conclusion that the intruder was not good, when he finds him snooping around pulling out drawers of wardrobes, looking under the beds and every other place, where he thought something precious could be hidden that he could purloin for his

personal use. Mick therefore gets hold of his arm as soon as Davies turns his back to him and twists it hard and brings him down to the floor in pain. Not a word is said and yet the action of the play moves on.

Mick, a man of the world, is quick to understand the evil intentions of Davies whom he had caught red-handed searching the whole lot of things in the room for something precious to pocket for himself. His arm twisting and getting Davies down to the floor is symbolic of Mick's strategy of keeping the intruder his control throughout. We notice that he does it physically and later psychologically.

There is hardly a word that passes between them except from the grunts and groans from Davies. And when Mick starts his questioning it confined to asking Davies' name and the bed in which he slept the night before and how well he slept in the bed. Mick goes over and over the same questions in fewest of words : 'What's your name ? How did you sleep last night ?' 'Did you have to get up in the night ?' And then indirectly suggesting to Davies that he was the master of the place he goes on to ask : 'How did you like my room ? How did you like my bed ?' He asks him these questions repeating them quick and fast, leaving Davies out of breath both with physical pain from twisting arm and the pressure of the barrage of questions that baffle him and leaves him mumbling incoherences in return. He can hardly complete his question about Mick's identity.

Even the brother talk in monosyllables, when they come face to face, about the leak and how Aston was going to tar the cracks on the roof. They go about their business without saying much to each other. There is mutual understanding. Aston may be slow in doing things, but he is good at doing things with his hands. Also when Davies intrudes with his question as to what they do when the bucket gets filled the water from the leak. Both of them are surprised that a stranger besides them is there in the room with them. To them, there is an impostor and outsider; so that they seem to forget Davies' presence. They had never mentally accepted him as one of the establishment, in spite of the whimsical offer of caretaker's job to Davies. He is not a part of the household and not a part of their thinking. Even when Mick discusses the ideas that he has about renovation of the house, he tells Davies that he and his brother would live there, when they have finished renovating and furnishing and decorating it. In a shock he bursts out : 'What

about me?’ Both Aston and Mick don’t say much to each other or to Davies about the property, but a significant lot happens to eliminate him from house. Davies gets the message that he is an outsider. And the reply, Aston gives Davies to his query, ‘ What do you do ?’ in connection with the bucket to collect the drip from the roof, is like bushing him aside with just, ‘Empty it’ , the obvious thing to do. Over the bag that Aston brings for Davies too Mick creates a scene not allowing. Davies to get hold on it, grabbing it whenever Aston hands it over to Davies, just to tease Davies out of his wits claiming the bag to be familiar and to be his. The action that is played out in the form of the play.

REFERENCE

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