

## Unravelling the Absurd: A Critical Analysis of 'Pore Konodin'

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### Abstract:

Badal Sarkar's play 'Pore Konodin' (1966) is a masterpiece that showcases his unique blend of themes. Written during his time in Enugu, Nigeria, the play combines elements of English science fiction with his contemporary social commentary. This synthesis of ideas is reflective of the diverse literary landscape of the time, where various thoughts and influences are being incorporated into creative works. The play is also a response to the post-World War II Western theatrical tradition, which sought to portray the disillusionment, gloom, and emptiness of modern life. Absurd plays from the West often feature anti-heroes who are isolated from their surroundings, struggling with existential crises that render their lives aimless. As these characters navigate their existence, they are trapped in a cycle of monotonous busyness, unsure of their life's purpose or destination. Badal Sarkar's 'Pore Konodin' captures this sense of disillusionment and existential despair, exploring the human condition through the lens of absurdity. The play's themes and characters reflect the playwright's observations on the human experience, making it a powerful commentary on the search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

In Badal Sarkar's play 'Pore Konodin', the influence of Western absurdism is evident. Through the character of Sankar in this play, the playwright explores the complexities of human life, including hopes, despairs, and love. Sankar's life is marked by an unfathomable destiny, which is reflected in the play's events. The character of Clea brings a sense of despair into Sankar's life, highlighting the isolation and chaos that can characterize human experience. The playwright's own life experiences are woven into the narrative, creating a subtle stream of consciousness that permeates the play. The presence of enigmatic characters like Clea creates an atmosphere of uncertainty, and the other character becomes lost in the maze of life, reflecting the absurdity and disillusionment that can result from the search of meaning.

**Keywords:** Absurd, Destiny, Consciousness, Despair, complexity, emptiness

### Main article:

In absurd plays, playwrights often seek to break free from conventional theatrical norms, forging a new path that defies traditional disciplines. This search for a raw, uncharted path in life can render their plays absurd. Badal Sarkar's play 'Pore Konodin' is a prime example, as he weaves together his own anxious life experiences with the character's narrative, creating a complex and murky web of events that immerses the audience in a dark, absurd world.

Absurd plays have opened up new horizons in Bengali drama literature, earning him a prominent place in the contemporary theatrical landscape. Not only was he a skilled

playwright, but he was also a successful dramatist in his time. In 1967, he founded the theatre group 'Shatabdi', which further showcased his innovative approach to theatre.

Sarkar's travels abroad and exposure to Martin Esslin's concept of 'Absurd' drama after World War II significantly influenced his work. He observed that in the post-modern world, people seemed to be living in a disjointed, aimless reality, struggling to find meaning. Absurd drama emerged in Western countries as a response to this sense of disillusionment and existential crisis.

Drawing from his extensive travels and experiences, Badal Sarkar focused on the socio-economic deprivation of rural and urban poor in India, making it a central theme in his plays. 'Pore Konodin' is a testament to this, exploring the conflicts of modern life, the tensions between individual and societal aspirations, and the search for human existence amidst the chaos of conventional social stereotypes.

In 'Pore Konodin', Badal Sarkar's absurd vision of life is palpable, reflecting the influence of Western Absurd drama. The playwright aims to uncover the profound significance of life amidst the complexities of human experience, including hope, despair, and love. Through the character of Sankar, Sarkar weaves together fragments of his own life, creating an unfathomable destiny that mirrors his personal struggles.

Like the playwright, Sankar is a protagonist grappling with the absurdities of life. Clea's presence in his life serves as a catalyst, plunging Sankar into a deep despair that underscores the isolation, chaos, and desperation that can characterize human existence. Sarkar's rational and powerful thinking informs the narrative, crafting a complex atmosphere of ambiguity and uncertainty.

The playwright's use of a subtle stream of consciousness creates a sense of disorientation, as if the characters are lost in a labyrinth. In this context, the characters' existence becomes precarious, and they struggle to find meaning in their lives. The play's exploration of the human condition is marked by a sense of disillusionment, highlighting the absurdity and uncertainty that can define human experience.

The play 'Pore Konodin' can be considered as a representative play of the Badal Sarkar. This much-debated play has truly introduced a new theatrical trend in the field of modern Bengali drama. This new theatrical genre is known as 'Absurd' drama in the court of world drama. The main point of this absurd life-philosophy is to rebel against the harmony and meaning of life. But in spite of the inconsistencies and meaninglessness of life, there is also a deep true vision about life in the absurd drama. Badal Sarkar's play 'Pore Konodin' has given unprecedented prosperity to the treasure of Bengali drama and literature. He has been able to portray in this play how people's quest of life, emptiness and alienation make the light of his life dark.

The play 'Pore Konodin' was written by the playwright around the time of writing his play 'Baki Itihas'. As a result, a different adaptation of the play 'Baki Itihas' is noticed in this play. The playwright wrote the play 'Pore Konodin' in between May and August of 1934. At the time of writing this play, he himself was living a very painful life; so he wanted to encapsulate the belief in life within a small boundary. In this episode, he is repeatedly hesitated and devastated by the oscillation of hope and despair in life. He seems to have tried to present himself through Sankar-the protagonist of this play. Apart from this, the tiredness and frustration of the playwright's life is also seen in the nomenclature of the play. Not now,

but sometime after it's a kind of motionlessness; so he finds it difficult to accept the call to change in life and worries about the unborn future. At the beginning of this play, Sankar is heard uttering memories of the past. In the present play, the playwright uses a slightly different technique to make Sankar speak from a certain focus of the past, and the present-day reader community understands this. Sankar's utterance and the events of this play blend here. This play has been developed in the illusion of a light and darkness of the past, so three characters with the story of three different unknown life journeys can be noticed in this play. And from the words of these three people, the playwright finds the indelible history of the destiny. All three of them can leave at any time from the present to the past and at any time they can return to the present. They went to Charlemagne's coronation in Rome or to the Canterbury Tales at the end of the 14th century, or to a beautiful village called Mohanpur on October 25, 1926 where 816 people died when a beautiful meteorite struck. Sometimes they go back to an epidemic in the distant past, where two and a half thousand people died and sitting on top of that rubble, Shirin created his immortal creation. Excerpts from the third act of the play:

Sankar-- Anything more?

Shirin-- Nineteen years after your time, two hundred thousand people died in one place on this earth.

Sankar-- (Breathless) Two hundred thousand. In one moment?

Shirin-- Yes, Two hundred thousand. And then, years after years, countless people died from disease, lived with blindness, disability, and deformity... I don't remember the exact numbers.

Sankar-- Was it an earthquake?

Shirin-- No. It wasn't a natural disaster. It was an event created by human. " <sup>1</sup>

Again, the playwright's camera is seen returning from the ruins of the past to Hiroshima- Nagasaki--such incidents have destroyed the tradition and arrangement of the play 'Pore Konodin'. Therefore, this play can be classified as an absurd drama.

In the clear voice of the play 'Pore Konodin', a deep despair about human life has been uttered, characterizing the drama of despair, Clea has repeatedly said that in the past there has always been something like war, famine, epidemic or economic distress for which the beautiful days of her life have all been wasted. According to playwright, Man's life is like a wire cage hanging in the garden of orchid which constantly makes him torment. He is not free from the vortex of time and space. The ladder of life is very complicated. Someone can climb this ladder and someone's life disappears into the abyss of failure. And one day his life ended playing this complex game of life.

In fact, after the Second World War, ordinary people endangered by socio-economic shocks all over the world were living in a deteriorating world where they all were isolated from everything in the world. Without understanding the meaning of this world, they somehow lived aimlessly in this world. Apart from this, they were forced to live a very vague life and make themselves busy all the time for various difficulties of their life. In nineteenth century, under the influence of the theories of Darwin and Nietzsche, God also departed from the world permanently. As a result, in the second part of the twentieth century, the sense of religion and divine consciousness disappeared from the consciousness of the people and their world was torn apart. Through this thought people of that time got the first blow in their

consciousness. As a result, the impulse of irrationality beneath the rational level of consciousness has become much stronger to them and has created a deep despair in their mind. In the play 'Pore Konodin', Badal Sarkar has been able to portray the frustration of life through some characters of this play.

Sankar Dutta, the protagonist of the play 'Pore Konodin', is a medical college student. His elder brother, Shiblal Dutta, lives with him in their family house in Mohanpur, which has recently been occupied by a group of new tenants. The mysterious Clea and her associates appear on the scene, although their origins and intentions are unclear. Meanwhile, a group of people offers to buy the Dutta's house for Rs 25,000, prompting Shiblal to consult Sankar on how to evict the existing tenants. Sankar takes on the responsibility but fails to persuade the tenants to leave, despite his best efforts. This situation forms the core of the play's plot. Clea and her associates are enigmatic characters, and their conversations are ambiguous and seemingly random. The playwright intentionally uses their unclear behaviour to hint at the absurdity and non-existence of life's meaning. In the first act, the playwright introduces Sankar, the central character, as someone struggling to find hope and purpose amidst immense pain. For example:

"Sankar--Uh! uh! I... I'll say it!... I'll keep saying it! I will write it down! I'll inform everyone! If only I knew... I---If only I could have known...may be... I could have prevented it...stopped it... somehow. Or done something to make them understand... forced them to see so that...all this suffering... all this... wouldn't have happened...something...Oh! (Sankar tries to stand up, but falls. Tries to get up again) I... I will write it down. I...I'll make everyone know...This time...This time...nothing will happen. The people of today... Nothing will happen to them. But later...Someday...In the future.... They always...they always come...Throughout history...If only we can recognize them ...force them to stop...to change.... (Sankar crawls to the table on his chest and tries to hold on to it) It will work!... It will definitely work. We can force them... If we can recognize them...They will ...someday! They don't want to! We have to force them...If we can identify them.... At any time... In the future... That's why. ...that's why I will write it...I have to write it... I have to write it!... " <sup>2</sup>

The playwright explores chaotic issues, such as Sankar's promise, mental strength, and agony, through the conversations and interactions between Sankar and Clea. Clea's innocent and carefree approach to love, her constant movement between different places, and her disregard for social norms and relationships are presented as examples of existential absurdity. The playwright portrays Clea as an enigmatic character, making it difficult for Sankar to understand her. This ambiguity creates an atmosphere of uncertainty, reflecting the playwright's exploration of Essentialism or the non-existent philosophy of life. Clea and her associates arrive in Mohanpur to conduct a mysterious geographical experiment, but Clea refuses to reveal the details of their research or its purpose. Despite Sankar's repeated questioning, Clea remains silent, adding to the mystery surrounding her character:

"Sankar-- (suddenly with intense curiosity) Clea, where is your country?

Clea-- Don't ask, Sankar, I have no way to telling. We have no right to speak---. " <sup>3</sup>

Clea remains an enigmatic character throughout the play, revealing nothing about her. This is

a common trait in Badal Sankar's plays, where characters embody absurdity through non-existent philosophy. In 'Evam Indrajit', Indrajit navigates the complexities of contemporary society without losing himself, instead adopting the characteristics of others while remaining true to his own identity.

Similarly, in 'Pore Konodin', Clea maintains her mysterious persona until the end. She refuses to reveal herself to anyone, ultimately disappearing from Sankar's house on the night of the 25th without a trace. Sankar is left baffled by Clea's actions and the geographical experiments she and her associates were conducting, finding their behaviour ambiguous and unclear. When Sankar questions Clea about her activities, she responds with an enigmatic answer that sheds little light on her true intentions. For example:

"Sankar-- What did they say, Clea?

Clea-- Nothing. Don't bother yourself about it Sankar.

Sankar-- What kind of interference? What kind of harm ?

Clea-- Nothing, nothing, Sankar. Don't think about it. Sleep, I'm --leaving" <sup>4</sup>

Clea consistently keeps herself hidden from Sankar, concealing everything from him due to a deep-seated fear, despite being part of society and adhering to its rules. Sankar is caught off guard by the sudden distance that develops in their romantic relationship. This gap in human connection can lead people to become disconnected and isolated, jumping from one place to another in search of meaning.

This sense of disconnection and absurdity pervades the play 'Pore Konodin'. Clea seems unfazed by the death of 800 people in Mohanpur and the devastating epidemic that claims 2500 lives. She chooses not to share her thoughts with Sankar, carefully avoiding the topic. Sankar's conversation with Clea reveals his confusion and concern about their relationship and the mysteries surrounding her. Sankar said to Clea:

"Sankar- Clea! what's happened ,Clea?What is it? Tell me.

Clea - (Without looking up) No! No! Don'task! I Won't be able to tell!" <sup>5</sup>

Sankar is stunned by the news that his brother, sister-in-law, Khuki, Paltu, Sureswar, Anil, and his wife have all passed away in Kolkata. However, despite being aware of this tragic event, Clea chooses not to inform Sankar, leaving him in the dark. Excerpts from Clea's statement:

"Clea- Meteorite. A small meteorite. Don't worry, Sankar, Nothing will happen to us. Nothing will happen to this house.

Sankar- Elder brother? What happened to my elder brother? Sister-in-law? Khuki? Paltu?

Clea- Sankar!

Sankar- Tell me! Tell me! They-- What are they--

Clea- They—They are alive--

Sankar- (In disbelief screams) Alive? There?  
(Clea bows her head)

Clea. Oh! Sureswar! Anil! Oh! Clea—Clea, you knew. You knew, But you didn't tell me. You didn't warn me! Oh!

Clea- How can I change the past Sankar? I knew--but how to stop the meteorite?" <sup>6</sup>

Even by the final act of the play, Sankar remains baffled by Clea's enigmatic nature. Through

‘Pore Konodin’, Badal Sarkar introduces a cast of characters who embody the absurdity and uncertainty of life, presenting an existential philosophy that challenges the audience’s perceptions.

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