

CHAPTER: I



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Introduction

A) Brief Survey of the Theater of the Absurd:

The Term the Theater of The Absurd:

The Theater of the Absurd is a dramatic movement of the mid-twentieth century, concerned with the meaninglessness of the human condition in a world that defies rational sense. M. H. Abrams defines this term in his book *A Glossary of Literary terms*,

“The term is applied to a number of works in drama and prose fictions which have in common the sense that the human condition is essentially absurd and this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd”.(Abrams, 2007: 1)

In 1950's and 1960's dramatists produce the plays sharing a common philosophical background of Absurdism. These plays employed illogical situations, unconventional dialogues, and minimal plots to express the absurdity of human existence. Martin Esslin in 1964 has dealt with Absurd Drama in his book *The Theater of the Absurd*. The title of this book serves a cliché as it discusses the tradition and the practitioners of the Absurd Theater. The dramatists writing in absurd mode were hardly aware of the fact that these dramas would once become as a part of the movement known

as the absurdist dramatic trend. However, these dramatists share common philosophical ground and form the new school of theater, known as the Theater of the Absurd.

Social Background:

The 20th century was one of the most complex ages. English literature of this age has been influenced by social, political, economics, scientific and several other forces. The period witnessed radical changes in many areas of human endeavor. The traumatic experience of the horrors of the first and the second World Wars shook the validity of conventions and highlighted the precariousness of human values. The civilians of this century were living under the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Scientific development resulted in the disappearance of the religious dimension of contemporary life. The economic and political aftermath of two world wars and the great depression in 1930s left the new generation curiously empty and puzzled. The main proponents of Theater of the Absurd were influenced by the chaotic conditions of living of the early twentieth century. This chaotic state of the world was depicted in literature. The early twentieth century has been marked by the four main events that shape the absurd consciousness of the writers. They are - World War I, World War II, Freud's Liberalism and great Epidemics. Freud added new perspective to the human psyche. He introduced liberalization in the context of sex. This liberalization brought homosexuality out into the open in Europe. Post-war Europe accepted liberal ideals as new norms of life. Before the discovery, development, and production of penicillin and anti-biotics, Europe had to through the adverse conditions of diseases and epidemics that could not be

cured or treated. All these social factors shaped the absurd consciousness of the contemporary intellectuals, particularly the dramatists who wanted to write a drama of social purpose. Due to the wars, factions, assassinations, and political mess, there was a great muddle of ideas and values in the early twentieth century. In the aftermath of the post-second-war, it was no longer possible to keep faith on the conventional art forms and standards. All the traditional forms lost their validity and these values were substituted by radical ideas. This spirit of the age was depicted in the literature of the dramatists aspired to bring about these values through their works.

Definition of the 'Absurd':

Absurdism as a belief system was born out of the existentialists' philosophy. Existentialism began in France just before the Second World War and continued through the novels and plays of Jean-paul Sartre. Absurdism is closely related to the philosophy of Existentialism and Nihilism. This belief system has its roots in the nineteenth century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. He defines Absurdity as:

“What is the Absurd? It is, as may quite easily be seen, that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection, tell me: you can just as well do the one thing as the other, that is to say where my reason and reflection say: you cannot act and yet here is where I have to act... The Absurd, or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith ... I must act, but reflection has closed the road so I take one of the

possibilities and say: This is what I do; I cannot do otherwise because I am brought to a standstill by my powers of reflection.” (Dru, 1939: 48)

Søren Kierkegaard explores the theme of Absurdism through his famous books, *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness Unto Death*. His works anticipated many absurd themes and provided its theoretical background.

The first modern anticipation of the theater of the Absurd was found in Alfred Jarry’s French play *Ubu Roi* (Ubu the King). Alfred Jarry is often cited as a forerunner to the surrealist theatre of the 1920s and 1930s. His texts present some pioneering work in the field of absurdist literature. *Ubu Roi* (King Ubu) first appeared in 1896 and was extensively known as the theatrical precursor of the Absurdist, Dada and Surrealist art movements. *Ubu Roi* expresses the caricature, a terrifying image of the animal nature of man and his cruelty.

Albert Camus was the first French novelist and essayist, who stood independent in this existentialism. He made an attempt to move beyond what Sartre had defined. His writing for the first time describes the human condition as absurd; his texts express the philosophy of the twentieth century man. His great work the *Myth of Sisyphus* is known as a treatise on absurd philosophy. His novels *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947) have been written in the same strain. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus examines the term absurdity and shows how it arises. Sisyphus with his punishment of eternal work could only be happy in knowing that he existed. This anecdote

displays the absurdity of modern man and his labour of lifetime. His own absurd life shapes his character as an absurd writer and philosopher. Many critics believe that his idea of the absurd grew out of seeing unspeakable acts during the war. He defines the human condition as absurd, as the confrontation between man's desire for significance and the cold universe are at an eternal antagonism. In his book *Myth of Sisyphus*, he points out the specific human experiences that evoke notions of absurdity. According to him, realization of the absurd leaves an individual with a choice of three different ways, suicide, a leap of faith, or acceptance and he believes that only acceptance is the defensible option. In his works Camus tries to explore the three main ideas that are - life is absurd, and it is useless to find any reason or any regularity within it; man must accept life as the absurd like Sisyphus and must enjoy it; to disagree with absurdity one must face it.

The Theater of the Absurd was also anticipated in the dream novels of James Joyce and Franz Kafka. It uses the mythical, allegorical, and dream like modes of thought to project the psychological realities of modern man. Before the theater of the absurd such kind of use of myths, allegories and dream like visions were made by writers like James Joyce and Franz Kafka. Joyce's use of language in his novel the *Finnegan Wake* also anticipates the Theater of the Absurd's preoccupation with language.

Theater of the Absurd enjoys a considerable influence of Franz Kafka and James Joyce. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), and novels, *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926) depict the troubled modern man, in a

nightmarishly impersonal and bureaucratic world. Ionesco while writing about Kafka's theme comments:

“This theme of man lost in a labyrinth, without a guiding thread, is basic ... in Kafka's work. Yet if man no longer has a guiding thread, it is because he no longer wants to have one. Hence, his feeling of guilt, of anxiety, of the absurdity of history”. (Ionesco, 1957:4)

The directness of his narrative prose, the concrete clarity of its images and its mystery and tension proved as a shaping factor for the Absurd Theater. Silent film and comedy, the tradition of verbal nonsense in the early films of Laurel and Hardy, W.C. Fields, and the Marx Brothers also contribute to the development of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Present absurd movement is a post-war movement. Even Camus' theory of the absurd proposed in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, is actually the reaction to the disillusionment in Europe after the two world wars. Second World War was the vehicle, which set the movement of Theater of the Absurd in motion. This movement flourished with many renowned playwrights.

In short, as Martin Esslin says in his introduction to, *Penguin Play – Absurd Drama* about the tradition of the Absurd:

“A term like the Theatre of the Absurd must therefore be understood as a kind of intellectual shorthand for a complex

pattern of similarities in approach, method, and convention, of shared philosophical and artistic premises, whether conscious or subconscious, and of influences from a common store of tradition.” (Esslin; 1965)

Major Practitioners of the Theater of the Absurd:

A brief survey of the main proponents and works of the absurd philosophy and theater can lead one to an understanding of this epoch of absurdity. Martin Esslin in his book *The Theater of the Absurd* (1961) presented the five defining playwrights of the movement as Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter. Other writers whom Esslin associated with this group include Tom Stoppard, Friedric Durrenmatt, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee, and Jean Tardieu.

Arthur Adamov (1908- 1994):

Adamov was an important figure in the French theater of his time. Along with Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, he helped to shape the absurd idiom on the stage. He uses the stage space and the physical movement on stage as a language to communicate meaning to the audience. Adamov's dramas, therefore, are very complex to understand as we read them. They are basically meant to be performed on the stage. Adamov's career can be divided into three phases. He consistently strived to convey his view of the intensity of human isolation and of the loss of communication, which happens to be the most significant aspect of human community. He presents unrealistic characters. These characters often act like machines and speak in a mechanical language. His language is loaded with clichés. His

characters are trapped in a situation, which is beyond their control, driven to withdrawal. They are symbols of frailty and eccentricity which happen to be the natural depravity of mankind. The settings used are dreamy and nightmarish. The development of his dramatic career shows his disillusionment with social reality. He thought drama as an effective means to change the social system. He believed that an individual alone can't create meaningful values. Though, Arthur Adamov rejects the Theater of the Absurd as a heading for his plays that might be classified under this heading he is major practitioner of this trend.

Jean Genet (1910-1986):

Jean Genet was another prominent, controversial writer of this theatrical tradition, mostly associates with the Theater of the Cruelty. His famous plays are *The Maid* (1949), *The Balcony* (1956) and *The Screens*. He shook through his writings the traditional set of moral values. In his writings social identities are parodied and shown to involve complex stratification through exploration of the dramatic fiction. His dramatic fiction is famous for its inherent potential for theatricality and the role play. Martin Esslin comments about his writing:

“.....the image of man caught in a maze of mirrors, trapped by his own distorted reflections, trying to find the way to make contact with the others he can see around him but being rudely stopped by barriers of glass.”
(Esslin, 2001: 200)

Like the other Absurd dramatists his plays explore the futility of human life and the lack of communication and the sense of alienation. His plays are set in dream situations and erotic fantasies with their own rhythm, colour, and craftsmanship. His position and works are unique because he is not influenced much by the war. Instead, he is influenced by the new liberal ideas on morality and sexuality while traveling through Europe.

Eugen Ionesco (1909-1994):

Eugen Ionesco was one of the foremost playwrights of the theater of the Absurd. Ionesco depicts the solitude and insignificance of human existence. The social chaos of the early to mid-twentieth century influenced Ionesco's life and work's greatly. His plays depict the disgust for the tangible world, a distrust of communication and the inevitability of death. His plays were absurd sketches, which express the modern feelings of alienation and maintained the impossibility of communication by language. Much of his works demonstrate disgust for the tangible world. He wrote more than twenty plays including *Rhinoceros*, *The Chairs*, *Jack or The Submission*, *The Lesson*, *The Killer*, *Exit the King*, *Macbett*, and *Journeys Among the Dead*. He is famous for his plays *The Bald Soprano*, *The Lesson*, and *The Chairs* these absurdist sketches, parodying the traditional values of the bourgeoisie and conventional theatrical forms. Other characteristics of his plays are the thrilled exposure of beauty within a pessimistic framework and dehumanized world with mechanical, puppet-like characters. Ionesco rejected the logical plot, character development, and values of traditional drama. Instead of it he created his own chaotic form of the plays to convey the meaninglessness of modern man's existence in a universe ruled by chance. Echoes of this experience can also be seen in references and themes

in many of his important works. He struggled hard to understand the absurdity of human life and soon became one of the precursors of the Theater of the Absurd. He led absurd dramatists to a greater understanding of the concept of the absurd.

Harold Pinter:

Harold Pinter, Nobel Laureate was a world-renowned English playwright, screenwriter, actor, director and a poet. Pinter began his theatrical career in the mid-1950s with his first play, *The Room* (1957). Pinter has written 29 stage plays; 26 screenplays; many dramatic sketches, radio and TV plays, poetry, some short fiction, a novel, essays, speeches, and letters. He is best known as a playwright and screenwriter, especially for *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Caretaker* (1959), *The Homecoming* (1964), and *Betrayal* (1978). Pinter's dramas often involve strong conflicts among ambivalent characters fighting with past memories. He depicts this conflict with theatrical pauses and silences, comic and provocative imagery, witty dialogue, ambiguity, irony, and menace. His plays are thematically complex and difficult to understand, they depict the complex issues of individual human identity. Martin Esslin describes him as: "The world of his imagination is that of a poet under the shadow of Kafka, Joyce and Beckett." (Esslin, 2001:264).

Aspects of the Theater of the Absurd:

Though the term 'Theater of the Absurd' is applied to a wide range of plays, some characteristics coincide in many of the plays are: broad comedy, often similar to burlesque, mixed with dreadful or sad images; characters

caught in hopeless situations forced to do repetitive or meaningless actions; dialogue full of clichés, wordplay, and nonsense; plots that are cyclical or absurdly expansive. These plays are a parody of the concept of the "well-made play".

The Themes:

The Absurd dramas create a style of theatre, which presents a world, which cannot be logically explained. Life in this world is Absurd. The theme of the meaningless in life is fundamental in the theater of the Absurd. The themes explored in this plays always indicate the meaninglessness of the life and futility of traditional values. These plays project the static states of the human life. The theme of alienation in modern life is also seen as a common theme in this tradition. Absurd plays break the traditional conventions of the theater to make the audience leave the theater with the feeling that the absurdity they witness in the play is somehow more realistic than a realistic play. Through these plays the absurd condition can be loosely summed up as 'an attempt to find meaning in life when confronted with the omnipresent reality of death'. An Absurdist believes that 'life is fundamentally absurd, beyond human rationality and meaningless'. This belief was depicted through their plays. Dramatists of the Theater of the Absurd expose the limitations of logic and absurdity as the dominating force in the universe. They focus primarily on the mistrust of conventional values and transcendental reasons.

The Characterization:

In practice the Theatre of the Absurd departs from realistic characters. The characters in Absurd drama are lost in an incomprehensible universe.

Many of them appear as automatons stuck in routines speaking only in cliché for example the old man and old woman in *The Chairs* a play by Ionesco. As Martin Esslin rightly says about the Absurd Characters as:

“...characters that are in constant flux and often happenings that are clearly outside the realm of rational experience.” (Esslin, 2001:416) Characters are frequently stereotypical, archetypal, or flat character types. The plots of many Absurdist plays project characters in interdependent pairs, commonly either two males or a male and a female.

Characters in Absurdist drama also face the chaos of a world that science and logic have abandoned. Characters may find themselves trapped in a routine or, in a metafictional conceit. The characters are not aware even of their own identities. They are always disguised, frustrated and illogical in their action. In these plays two characters may be roughly equal or interdependent on each other for instance Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. Characters may have dominating nature and continue to be the scene suppressing the passive characters. The relationship between the characters may shift dramatically through the play, like Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*. These characters are always in crisis because the world around them is incomprehensible for them.

The Plot:

Absurd drama rejects the traditional plot structures. In, the Theatre of the Absurd Plots can consist of the absurd repetition of cliché and routine, as in *Waiting for Godot* or *The Bald Soprano*. Absence, emptiness,

nothingness, and unresolved mysteries are central features in many Absurdist plots, for example, in *Waiting for Godot* the action of the play is centered on the absent character named Godot, for whom the characters unendingly wait. In these plays the menacing outside forces remains a mystery. A good example of this characteristic is Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. The plot of this play may move around an unexplained metamorphosis or a shift in the laws of physics. In Ionesco's *How to Get Rid of It*, a couple deals with a corpse which is steadily growing larger and larger. In many of these plays meta-theatrical techniques are used in order to explore the role fulfillment, fate and the theatricality of theatre. In *The Maids*, two maids imagine themselves to be their masters. The plots of these plays are frequently cyclical. *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* explore the best examples of these characteristics. In the last phase of his literary career Samuel Beckett rejected many conventional features and confirmed what's left is a minimalistic scene.

Another aspect of these plays is the nonsensical use of language. Their works focus primarily on a mistrust of language as a means to convey the human situation. Their language is characterized by certain phonetic, rhythmic notes, almost musical quality meant to connote rather than to communicate. They use language to communicate the meaninglessness of the human communication. *The Bald Soprano*, for example, was inspired by a language book in which characters would exchange empty clichés that would never amount to true communication or true connection. In many Absurd plays, characters go through the routine dialogue full of clichés without the actual intention of communication or making a human connection. In many Absurd plays, the dialogues are purposefully indirect;

language becomes secondary to the objectified images of the stage. They communicate through the striking images. Many of Absurd plays devalue language for the sake of the striking tableau. Instead of dialogue they use the silence and pause. Harold Pinter was famous for his "Pinter pause". Dialogues from these plays reflect the inability to make a connection. Absurd playwrights demonstrate this disconnection through the nonsensical use of language. They also use it to achieve a comic effect, as in Lucky's long speech in *Waiting for Godot* when Pozzo says Lucky is demonstrating a talent for "thinking" as other characters comically attempt to stop him. Their language not only demonstrates the limits of language but also questioning or parodying the determinism of science and the knowability of truth.

Martin Esslin in his article *The Theater of the Absurd* comments on the time and setting of the Absurd plays: "In these plays some of which are labeled 'anti-play', neither the time nor the place of the action are ever clearly striking." (Esslin 1962: 3)

In *The Waiting for Godot* the two tramps were not sure about the time and even the place. The setting of the play was always the dreamlike, nightmarish, static state.

B) Brief survey of the lives and works of Samuel Beckett and Satish Alekar:

Samuel Barclay Beckett:

Samuel Beckett was born on April 13, 1906, in the Dublin suburb of Foxrock, Ireland. He was the second of two sons of a middle-class Protestant

couple. Beckett's father was the quantity surveyor and his mother was a nurse. He was educated at Miss Ida Elsner's Academy in Stillorgan, the Earlsfort House School in Dublin, and then joined for his further education at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland (1919-23). While there he first began to learn French, one of the two languages in which he would write. He had also a flare to be an athlete, and excelled in cricket, tennis, and boxing in his school days. He was energetic but unhappy in mood. Looking back on his childhood, he once remarked, 'I had little talent for happiness'.

The unhappy boy soon grew into an unhappy young man, often so depressed that he stayed in bed until mid afternoon. He continued with sports but his attention turned increasingly to academics when he entered Trinity College, at 17. He began his law studies at Trinity College in order to become an accountant in his family's architectural surveyance firm. But in his third year he started studying modern languages, particularly French. His studies improved so markedly that he won a scholarship to pass the summer in France before his senior year, and he graduated first in his class in modern languages in 1927. In his college days he enjoyed the vibrant theater scene of post-independence Dublin, preferring revivals of J.M. Synge plays. He also gets the opportunity to see the silent comedies of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin which influenced his interest in the vaudevillian tramp.

After his graduation, Beckett taught at Campbell College in Belfast (1927-1928) and the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris (1928-1930). During his stay in Paris, he established relationships with many important

literary figures of his day, including Thomas MacGreevy, Richard Aldington, Brian Coffey, Denis Devlin, George Reavey, Samuel Putnam, Nancy Cunard, and Sylvia Beach. Among these writers James Joyce's influence is direct on his literary career. As a student, assistant, and friend of James Joyce, Beckett is considered by many critics as one of the last modernist. At the age of 23, in 1929 he published his first work, *Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce* a critical essay defending Joyce's work, against the demand for easy comprehensibility. Thus, Beckett's writings were inspired by the vibrant Parisian literary circle of James Joyce.

His first short story, *Assumption*, was published the same year in Jolas' periodical *Transition*. In 1930 he won a small literary prize of 10 pounds for his hastily composed poem "Whoroscope", a poem of ninety-eight-lines and accompanied by seventeen footnotes. "Whoroscope was drawn from the biography of René Descartes that Beckett happened to have read in his early days. In this poem he deals with Descartes meditation on the subjects like time and the transiency of life. It was followed with a collection of essays, *Proust* (1931), an aesthetic and epistemological manifesto, which is concerned more with Beckett's influences and preoccupations than with his ostensible subject.

After writing an essay collection on Proust, however, Beckett came to the conclusion that habit and routine were the "cancer of time". He gave up his post at Trinity College and set out on a journey across Europe. In December 1931, he embarked upon a period of restless travel through

Ireland, France, England, and Germany, all the while writing poems and stories and doing odd jobs to get by.

His love for Paris and his periodic stays in Germany, France, and London, Beckett's financial condition repeatedly constrained him to return to live with his disapproving family in Dublin. In Dublin, he became subject to mental breakdowns and frequent, severe bouts of depression. Returning to Paris in 1932, he wrote his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Though the style of the novel suggests the influence of Fielding and Sterne, it was clearly an autobiographical novel, which was rejected by many publishers. But this work is a powerful indication that Beckett was emerging from Joyce's shadow and developing his own voice. It was finally published in 1992, three years after the author's death. Though this novel was not published in his life time, it did serve as a source for many of Beckett's early works. For instance his first full-length book *More Pricks Than Kicks*, the short story collection published in 1933. Out of money, he went back to Dublin and then moved temporarily to London, where he successfully published a book of his poetry, *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates*—simultaneously he was also working on his novel *Murphy* (1938).

Beckett's career as a novelist really began in 1938 with *Murphy* which he himself translated into French the next year. The opening sentence suggests the new sense of economy that characterizes his prose style in further books. *Murphy* offers a vision of creation as a huge verbal joke. In this book Beckett employs puns, paradox, allusion, repetition, inversion, all in an attempt to disrupt the predictable semantic effects of language. Here

Beckett reflects for the first time on the skullscape of consciousness that is to become the principal arena for his major work.

In 1937, he settled in Paris as a citizen of a country that was neutral in World War II. He was able to remain there even after the occupation of Paris by the Germans. In 1938, he was stabbed by a pimp to whom he had refused to give money. Having been survived through the accident he met Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, a piano student, whom he married in 1961. In August 1942 France was occupied by the Nazis, he fled with Dechevaux-Dumesnil to Southern France, where they remained in hiding in a village of Roussillon two and half years. Beckett worked as a country laborer. In this period he wrote *Watt*, his second novel, which was published in 1953. *Watt* was the last of his novels written originally in English. This novel was described as, "...the white whale of Beckett studies, a mass of documentation that defies attempts to make sense of it," (Ackerley, 2004: 35).

In 1945, after the Germans were defeated, he returned to Paris and began his most prolific period as a writer. Beckett's early writings such as *Whoroscope* (1930), *Proust* (1931), *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934), *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935), and *Murphy* (1938) won him neither fame nor money. After the World War II he began to write primarily in French, finding greater linguistic possibilities in the language.

His first postwar novel was written originally in French, *Mercier et Camier* (1946) which was one of the most accessible examples of Samuel

Beckett's dark humor. It was Beckett's first attempt to write the prose fiction in French. Beckett withheld the novel from publication until 1970. The English translation that followed in 1974 featured significant alterations and deletions from the original text. *Mercier and Camier* is the hilarious chronicle of its two heroes' epic journey. French language proved as an appropriate medium for his new realizations. Half-jokingly, he explained that in French one could "write without style."

In rapid progression he completed three novels, which slowly found publishers: *Molloy* (completed 1947; published 1951; translated 1955); *Malone meurt* (completed 1948; published 1951; translated as *Malone Dies*, 1956); and *L'innomable* (completed 1950; published 1953; *The Unnamable*, 1958).

Molloy was written in Paris, along with the other two books *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* of 'The Trilogy', between 1946 and 1950. In this trilogy he dispenses with all the conventional props of contemporary fiction, including exposition, plot, and increasingly, paragraphs. He turns his attention to consciousness itself. For the very first time the pain of existence was evoked. This trilogy projects the steady slide toward nonexistence, with garrulous accuracy. It marks the beginning of Beckett's most significant writing.

Two plays, *Eleutheria* and *En attendant Godot* (completed 1949; published in French in 1952 and in English in 1954) were also the products

of the same period. *Eleutheria* was his first play, which was published after his death and became a cause of great debate. *Eleutheria* reflects his own search for freedom. The story of the play moves around a Youngman's efforts to cut himself loose from his family and society. On January 5, 1953, *Waiting for Godot* was performed at the Theater de Babylone. Previously his novel *Mercier et Camier* predicts the concerns and form of *Waiting for Godot*. The play proved as one of the most influential plays of the post war period. In this context Martin Essline remarks,

“And against all expectations, the strange tragic farce, in which nothing happens and which had been scorned as undramatic by a number of managements, become one of the greatest success of the post-war theater”. (Martin Essline, 2001: 39)

It has been transferred into more than twenty languages and been performed all over the world. The play portrays two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, trapped in an endless waiting for the arrival of a mysterious personage named Godot. Throughout the play Beckett symbolizes the several biblical references.

The successful performances of *Waiting for Godot* opened a prolific career of Beckett as a dramatist. After this success he wrote many full-length plays, including *Endgame* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days* (1960) and *Play* (1965).

Another masterpiece *Endgame* was completed, in July 1956 and published in February 1957. It projects the static state of human life in between the life and death.

Krapp's Last Tape originally written in English is about Krapp's revelation. The play is set on the East Pier in Dun Longhaire during a stormy night. Many scholars show the similarity between Beckett's own revelation in his mother's room and Krapp's revelation, while his visit to the Dublin. *Krapp's Last Tape* depicts a single character of Krapp with the aid of a tape recorder. The recorded tape relives the past that has led him to his present, alienated state. In *Happy Days* (September 1961) Beckett's concern is again the meaninglessness of life which is extended in his next one-act play *Play*.

In the same period when he was emerging as a dramatist he also produced a considerable work in prose. In 1964 *How it is*, a novel was published in a form of monologue of unknown author who crawls through apparently endless mud. The endless mud appears to be a kind of purgatory.

His success as a playwright led him to new career as a theater director. In 1956 he produced his first radio play *All That Falls* for the BBC third Programme. It was written in English and completed in September 1956. Major difference between this play and the other of his plays is that in this play the woman is a central character. Along with the Irish words he pulls names, characters and locations from his childhood memories. In short, "The

events in Beckett's life leave their traces in the shape of his work, without necessarily leaving an inventory in its content." (McDonald, 2007: 6)

In 1969 Beckett was conferred upon with a Nobel Prize for literature. He was praised in the following words, "...for his writing, which - in new forms for the novel and drama - in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation".

He continued with his writing till to the end of his life. His later works in the decades of 1960's and 1970's become more minimalistic. His play *Not I* (1972), a twenty minutes dramatic monologue displays the disembodied mouth. In the later phase his works are characterized by an economy of words and a focus on surface description. Another excellent example of the minimalistic narrative technique is *Rockaby*. This play is not only praised for dramatic image but also for the poetic language he used in it.

In 1970's decade he wrote *Company* (1979) a novella published with *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* collectively in the volume *Nohow On* in 1989. Beckett's wife died in 1989. In this period he is also in the nursing home, after falling in his apartment. His last book printed in his lifetime was *Stirring Still* (1989). Beckett died, following respiratory problems, in a hospital on December 22, 1989.

Samuel Beckett remains famous for his minimalistic narrative technique, superb dramatic achievements and absurd themes. The uniformity

in the subject and form, which is expected in the tradition of the Absurd Theater, was exemplified by his works.

Satish Vasant Alekar:

Satish Alekar is one of the eminent playwrights of the contemporary Marathi Theater. He is very famous for his plays like *Mhanirvan* (1974), *Micky Ani Memsahib* (1973), *Mahapoor* (1975), *Doosara Samana* (1989), *Begum Barve* (1979), *Shaniwar-Raviwar* (1980). He is a practicing theater artist, writer and a director of many Marathi plays since 1971.

Satish Alekar was born on 30th January 1949 at New Delhi. Though, he was born at New Delhi, he was brought up in Pune. He lived with his family at Alekarwadha, Shaniwar Peth, Pune. He belongs to the well-read family. His father Vasant Alekar and Mother Usha Alekar are well educated and with genuine taste for literature. Both of them have contributed in the movement of Indian freedom. Satish Alekar's maternal grandfather Kakasahib Gadgil was one of the leading personalities of Marathi Literature. He was the president for the Satara Sahitya Sammelan. Satish Alekar witnessed even the Sahitya Sammelan in the early years of his childhood. He completed his education from Pune. He started his education from the Navien Marathi Shala, secondary education from New English School Pune; bachelor degree of Science from Ferguson College, Pune and the master's degree in Bio-chemistry from the Pune University. Thus, he was nourished in the literary environment of Pune, he himself agree that:

“जन्म जरी नवी दिल्ली येथे झाला असला तरी माझे सर्व बालपण मात्र पुण्यातच गेले. पुण्यमध्ये शनिवार पेठेतील आळेकर वाड्यात आम्ही राहत होतो, आजूनही राहतो जर काही संस्कार झाले असतील तर ते सर्व पुण्यातील वतावरणातीलच आहेत.” (Alekar, Oct. 1987:37,)

As a child, he saw many dramatic performances with his parents. He was very much impressed by the plays of Sai Paranjape and P. L. Deshpande in his school days. But, his interest in drama was shaped truly in the year of 1961. In this year, the Panshet dam bursts and its waters flood the city. In this flood, many well-known streets of the Pune city had come under water. Alekar's School also suffered in this flood. To form the new infrastructure and furniture the School management organized a drama performance. For this event he worked as a voluntary worker and served for backstage. In this event he got an opportunity to meet many well-known artists of the contemporary theater, and to see many famous performances. In his childhood he was influenced by one of his teachers Levankar Sir, who was very much interested in literature and creative writing.

After matriculation, his ambition was to become a doctor but due to the low percentage of marks, he could not confirm his admission for Medical College. He was admitted in Ferguson College for his college education from where he starts his literary career. During the course of B.Sc., unexpectedly he played a role in a farçical Marathi play *Dinu Chya Sasubai Radhabai*. This play was directed by Bhalaba Kelkar. Alekar was praised by the audience to a great extent and become popular person. The play confirmed his further progress in the field of Marathi drama especially the

theater: “नाटक हे आपले माध्यम आहे याची जाणीव त्या प्रयोगाच्या प्रतिसाधाने अधोरेखित होत गेली.” (Sane-Inamdar, 1999: 179)

With the success of this play, he was invited in the ‘Progressive Dramatic Association’ by Bhalaba Kelkar who is the member of this association. Thus, he started his dramatic career not directly as a playwright, but with the acting and back stage management.

He wrote his first play *Judge* inspired by John Mortimer’s *The Judge*. In fact, he wanted to translate Mortimer’s play into Marathi, but consequently it becomes a separate play. This play was published in 1970 in the periodical *Manohar*, and also was performed by one of his friends. While working with the ‘Progressive Dramatic Association’ he wrote his second play *Memory*. This play was published by Ram Patwardhan in the periodical *Satyakatha*.

In 1969, when he was working with Dr. Jabbar Patel for Vijay Tendulkar’s *Ashi Pakhare Yeti*, he wrote another one-act play *Zulata Pool*, which depicts the story of a middle-class young generation. *Zulata Pool* was performed in the drama competition ‘Purashottam Karandak’; and it won the first prize. Afterwards this play was published in *Satyakatha*.

In 1970, he completed his B.Sc. and was admitted for his post graduation at Pune University. In those days while studying Biochemistry, he remained very active in the field of theater. He read many books regarding the theater and art of performance, one of them is Stanislavski’s

An Actor prepares. In his college days, he was the fan of a few European playwrights like Bertolt Brecht.

In 1971 at the age of twenty-one he wrote his first two-act play *Micky ani Memsahib*. Many critics of the Marathi Theater relate this play with surrealism a literary movement. In this play, he depicts the man-woman relationship in an unconventional manner. In *Micky ani Memsahib*, the husband is totally under a mental and physical slavery of his wife, who is the professor in physics. In 1973, he founded the India's best-known theatre group Theatre Academy, Pune that he administered from 1973 to 92.

In the same period, he wrote another play *Mhanirvan* for the Diwali Ank of Mouj Publication. But due to the length of the play it could not possible for the Mouj Publication to publish it in the same book. *Mahanirvan* depicts the futility of human life and presents the death on the stage, which is supposed to be a taboo for the theatrical tradition in India.

His next play *Mahapoor* was published and performed in 1976. The play reflects the disaster of flood of 1961 in Pune. This play was translated by Urmila Bhardikar in English as *The Deluge*.

Begum Barve (1979) depicts the complex layering of human emotions and tensions. It reveals the effect of menace through the meaningless fears of Jawdekar and Bawdekar. It also reveals the futility of human relationships. He uses the Brecht's "alienation effect" to separate the audiences from the emotional effect of the play and relates it with the real problem. The play is also translated in English with the same title by Shanta Gokhale

His other plays including *Doosara Samana*, *Shaniwar-Raviwar* are equally famous as *Mhanirvan* in Marathi theatrical tradition. Many of his plays have been translated and produced in several regional languages all over India. In 2003, he completed his full-length play *Pidhijat* translated as *Dynasts*, which was staged in Bengali in Calcutta and in Marathi in Pune.

He won several National and State awards since 1973 for his contribution to the field of Theatre and Literature. In 1992, he received Nandikar Sanmann at Calcutta. He is also honored with the fellowships from the Asian Cultural Council, New York in 1983 to study Theatre in the U. S. In 1988, he got the scholarship of Ford Foundation to study Theatre of South Asia. He is conferred upon National Award for the playwriting in 1994-95 from Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. He has also won the Maharashtra state's Ram Ganesh Gadakari Award for *Mahanirvan*.

At present, he is working as Professor and Head of the Centre for Performing Arts, "Lalit Kala Kendra" at University of Pune, since, July 1996.

Significance and objectives of the study:

The present comparative study deals with Samuel Becket's *Endgame* (1952) and Satish Alekar's *Mahanirvan* (1972) with reference to the theme of absurdity.

Both Beckett and Alekar belong to different countries, different literary traditions, cultures and languages. But they have some similarities. Both writers are the significant writers in their respective literary traditions. They believe that absurdity of life can be explored only through the absurd medium. Human life is absurd and all the human actions are futile is the common theme in both the plays.

Generally, new literary movements emerging in the European literary scenario are not immediately absorbed in Indian literary tradition. It takes several decades. The theater of the Absurd first emerged in France. Alfred Jarry's French play *Ubu Roi* is known to have been the first play in this tradition. However, the present absurd tradition is the reaction to the traumatic experiences of World War II. It began to influence Marathi literature in the 60's. The Absurd movement did not affect Marathi writers much.

The Theater of the Absurd is a theatrical movement, which was prominent in Europe and America during the last decade of 19th and in the initial decades of the twentieth century. The movement aimed at depicting the absurdity of human life.

In this context, the first objective of the present study is to define the concept of the theater of the Absurd. However, the major objective of the study is to make a comprehensive statement on the absurdity depicted in the two selected plays namely, *Endgame* and *Mahanirvan*. Another significant objective is to have a comparative perspective of the absurdity of Beckett

and Alekar. However, in order to achieve these main objectives a brief survey of the theater of the absurd is also necessary.

The comparative study of the plays above will enhance the understanding and perception of the term 'Theater of the Absurd' and the vision of the two playwrights, Beckett and Alekar.

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