Chapter - I

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'Harold Pinta', 'David Baron' are the pseudonyms that Harold Pinter preferred to adopt during his twenties while writing poems and later as an actor and hack writer for the theatre. This early propensity to camouflage his identity under some fictitious name was a typical gesture, not of escape, but rather one of indomitable revolt. How this disposition to hide his own identity behind some fictitious name becomes a gesture of insurgency is a long complicated tale involving not merely several strands of the playwright’s personality, but a number of social, political, economic factors that repeatedly prowled upon an apparently conscientious moralist as well.

Legouis and Cazamian in their exceptionally brilliant history of English literature have remarkably summed up the oppressive forces that the English people had to endure during the war years:

Many were the trials, which English fortitude could face with undaunted courage, but not without severe shocks. Two World Wars at a short interval, with the dreadful sufferings, the losses of all kinds which they implied; the disruption of the European and the whole
international order, which altered the distribution and
the scale of historical forces; the crises that have
impaired the leadership and financial powers of Great
Britain; the breaking up, in part, of the bonds of
Empire; the clashes of rival civilizations, with the
anxieties of today and the threats of tomorrow; the
terrifying possibilities of the new weapons; lastly, the
social revolution which has thoroughly changed the
inner balance and the very life of the British people,
seem to have diffused an atmosphere of uncertainty
and deep-laid trouble, to which a half-hesitancy of the
mind would naturally correspond; while in the sub
consciousness of the people would probably be
maturing the conditions of a renaissance, which, if
not yet visible, might not be long deferred. (Legouis
& Cazamian: 1375-76)

This rather longish citation was regarded rather
obligatory because this passage highlights not only the
social, political, historical and economic background but
the impact of these developments upon the mind of the
sensitive people of the generation that had to endure all
these trying contingencies.

Prof. Cazamian’s concise but precise statement
regarding the overall situation obtaining in England
during the first half of the twentieth century should be
considered in two distinct parts for clarity. The first part hints at the socio-political developments consequent upon the two devastating World Wars, one closely following the other. The second part suggests the impact of these seminal changes upon the minds of the people. The two World Wars during the second and the fourth decade of the twentieth century have, in fact, totally altered the equipoise of the complacent Victorian zeitgeist. The 'severe shocks' that Prof. Cazamian referred to were indeed quite painful to the Britishers as their age-old position of superiority in terms of Political and economic powers seemed to have been losing grounds gradually but surely. Their unquestioned sovereignty over a vast Empire, in which sun was supposed to be ever shining without setting, was gradually sinking in terms of territorial expanse. Even the minor constituents started revolting against the British ways of life that were threatening to annihilate their indigenous customs and values. Though this political diminution did not matter much to the common men, its economic repercussions took heavy toll in terms of overall impoverishment and shrinking of liberal inflow from outer resources. For one thing, it substantially reduced the income from the colonial sources in terms of revenue and receipts resulting in
gradually increasing fiscal deficits affecting supply falling short of the demands. For another, the dearth of raw materials for domestic industries was suicidal for a non-agricultural country depending upon the export of its industrial products. In a nutshell, the crowning primacy of the British Commonwealth in the world was gradually dwindling and was on the wane. To crown it all not long after the end of the First World War Labour Government was sworn in for the first time in England in 1924. Though this political gesture was a healthy premonition for the future course of world events, the change from the imperial sovereign monarchy to the democratic concept of the rule of the masses was indeed a difficult turn around for the British ways of living. Like the three great R's: Renaissance, Reformation, and Revolution, that shaped the history of Europe by shaking the very roots of hoary antiquity, Englishmen took quite some time to come out of their cozy Victorian complacency.

These were the 'severe shocks' indicated by Prof. Cazamian. But he also admitted that the Britishers faced these shocks with undaunted courage. The fortitude and chivalry, one is tempted to trace these qualities back to the days of legendary mediaeval knighthood, mixed with the sense of pride and
confidence in their own tradition and heritage gave them the unique disposition to withstand the blasts of these restless times. Yet, as rightly pointed out by Prof. Cazamian, the recurring transitions stretching over three decades or more have no doubt sunk into the very depth of Englishman's being and have created tumultuous waves in the erstwhile calm surface of their subconscious minds. The two trenchant pregnant phrases used by Prof. Cazamian are "atmosphere of uncertainty" and 'half-hesitancy of the mind.' One is reminded of Matthew Arnold's analysis of a similar situation in his Culture and Anarchy, obtaining in the later half of the nineteenth century as a result of certain seminal changes in the material and scientific world. Industrial Revolution brought about the shift from the agriculture-based ways of life to the shift-based factory centered life-style. G.M. Trevelyan rightly pointed out that agriculture is not a profession but a way of life.

Soil-based homespun earthy livelihood of agriculturists had to be altered to tinned and packaged existence. This, indeed, was not merely a question of realignment but a painful adjustment as well.

To this annoying necessity of adaptation was added another concussion that shook the very fabric of common man's cozy oblivion regarding metaphysical
concomitants of his existence. This was the inevitable consequence of the publication of Charles Darwin's 'Origin of the Species' in 1849. Basing upon certain self-evident indubitable facts of observation Darwin established the irrefutable fact that Homo sapiens have emerged gradually from apes and chimpanzees that are our immediate ancestors. This was indeed a big slap on the face of the age-old ecclesiastic theory of man, the beloved creation of God, descending down from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The whole concept of Original Sin with its concomitant sex as taboo suddenly appeared as a hoax. The elevated position of Man as the revered beloved child of God as the apex of his creation was suddenly reduced to the inglorious disgraceful descendants of hairy apes. This was indeed sacrilege, as heinous as the ones committed by Socrates nearly two thousand and five hundred years ago or by Galileo in the later half of the sixteenth century. But fortunately for the onward march of human civilization the sacrifices of Socrates, Galileo or the stiff opposition to Darwin's theory did not hold ground. And the theory of evolution came to stay. Homo sapiens were animal rationale par excellence and this rationality saved them from sticking to dogmatic doctrines. On the surface this was no doubt a happy gesture; but deep beneath the surface of man's
conscious rational mind this acceptance of man's hairy ape parentage was creating real turmoil. Just the other day an article published in the famous Bengali newspaper Ananda Bazar Patrika on 25th November 2007 has clearly stated that even in the twenty-first century American parents do not approve of teaching the theory of evolution to their children as it is against the preaching of the Holy Bible.

During the later half of nineteenth century when Matthew Arnold was talking of the restless unquiet times as people tossing between two worlds one dead and the other powerless to be born, the Victorian common man was either blissfully ignorant of the new scientific discoveries or started believing in the new notion. They were complacent enough not to allow the disturbing questionings affecting their normal day-to-day existence. Yet deep beneath the smooth rippling surface of the mainstream, the sensitive minds could discern dark volcanic lavas groaning to erupt as and when the smooth crust cracked. Even such easy going writers like Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot betray signs of preoccupation with crime, guilt, death or disease. Browning's robust optimism was hollow and phoney enough to accommodate the irrational and immoral under the guise of conventional
day to day existence of the man of the street. Yet this very attempt to justify the immoral and the irrational lurking behind the apparent pious robes was indicative of a deep-seated rupture of the normal accepted gestures.

These ominous premonitions of decadence ultimately surfaced in the morbidity of the Edwardian decadence of the last two decades of the nineteenth and the first few years of the twentieth century. Thomas Hardy's cynic preoccupation with Destiny as the supreme power holding the reins of all human actions; Housman's sullen jaundiced worry about ever-approaching doom; Emily Dickinson's laconic lamentations culminating in Eliot's *Hollow Men* and *The Waste Land* all these remind us of the Georgian scandalous notoriety four hundred years ago. Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil* are typical examples of such perversions.

Such terms like 'disease', 'rupture', 'morbidity' and 'jaundiced' have been deliberately used in the above paragraphs in order to emphasize the physical nature of the agony involved in the delineation of human experiences by the decadent writers of the Georgian and Edwardian decades. The concern of this dissertation being the exposition of the traumatic convulsions caused
by the psychosomatic imbalance of the post-war generation, such terminology appears to be the only accurate and authentic way of depicting what one means.

Coming back to Prof. Cazamian's analysis once again in the light of above exposition, it is now incumbent upon the researcher to diagnose the 'confusing zeitgeist'. To call a spade a spade, the first half of the twentieth century was not merely perturbed by the two devastating World Wars but a series of internal commotions for the Britishers. Failure of the Governments to cope up with the domestic as well as colonial problems led to the floundering vacillations in public minds regarding the choice to vote for either of the two major political parties: Labour or Conservative. With the shrinking of the Empire came the inevitable pressure of gathering whatever modicum was left for rebuilding the nation out of the debris of the ravage caused by the wars in spite of the so-called victory. Impotency of the effervescent British Youth often burst forth as anger against not merely the world at large but against one's own self also. Such expressions like 'Protest', 'Paradox', 'Anger', amply exemplify the attempt to account for the type of drama that grappled with this confusing situation. Ultimately one is forced to accept the label 'Absurd' in such a whirligig. And such
a pointer like the 'Absurd' as applied to the plays of Harold Pinter needs necessarily to be qualified on two distinct counts: one is the extremely ambiguous nature of the relationships of the few characters that appear in his plays; and the other, the specific or confusing nature of their interaction with the world outside on which they have to depend for sheer survival or existence. Each one of these two segments relies heavily on the psychological imbalance created out of an impotent rage of an individual unable either to compromise or to change the circumstances to suit his own needs. Inevitable consequence of such a predicament was an exposition that may appear to be meaningless. But to say the least, the state of the art exists and stays put by virtue of its own vigour.

Before we wind up this introduction, we must clarify the title chosen for this dissertation "Inside Out: Harold Pinter's Treatment of Psychic trauma of Post-war Sensibility". The second part of the title need not detain us as it simply indicates the main thrust of the following pages. The first idiomatic expression 'Inside out' is not merely a catchy media jargon meant for glamorous fascination. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'turn (something) inside out' as 'to make a place very untidy when you are searching for something'.
Hence the idiom 'inside out' carries an implication of untidy and vulgar. Physically speaking, if we turn the human body inside out we expose the entrails full of faeces, urine, and other abominable substances. Even the very sight of the nerves, arteries, intestine, heart, liver, kidneys, uterus etc. is not very pleasant and agreeable to look at. Though the mechanics of our physiology are not merely delicately poised and meticulously metabolic, in no way the inner innards present an attractive spectacle. Yet the vulgar boorish innards sustain us as long as we live.

Analogically, if we extend this to the levels of our consciousness that forms our mental sphere, we may face almost a similar situation. Post-Freudian analyses of our mental process have made us aware of the unconscious, subconscious, and conscious layers of the mind. 'Stream of consciousness' have not only become a catchy jargon ever since the writings of Henry James and James Joyce, but have become an unavoidable feature of our literature touching almost all the genres: novel, drama, poetry, belles-letters, and the like.

This becomes particularly relevant for the present dissertation as Harold Pinter was enamored with the writings of modernist literature quite early in his life. In fact, Pinter was quite precocious as a boy or young man,
as he read and appreciated James Joyce’s Ulysses when he was aged fifteen.

His father was a tailor, with a successful firm in Stoke Newington, but no demands or expectations in that direction were made on the young Pinter and his early interest in poetry and literature was encouraged. What is perhaps remarkable about Pinter’s reading as a boy and young man is that whilst at school he developed an extracurricular inclination towards modernist literature in his choices of Dostoevsky, Rimband, Eliot and Joyce. (Batty, 2005:4)

Apart from James Joyce’s Ulysses which is rightly acclaimed as a stream of consciousness classic, Pinter was very much moved by Dostoevsky’s The Brothers Karmazov particularly as this novel made up of dialogue and monologue based on the spoken, not in the written word. (Ravivyas, 2000:X)

Delving deep into the unexposed recesses of our minds we often become ominously appalled to discover ugly instincts and abominable inclinations that impel our actions and behaviour. And the confusing nature of our apparent behaviour often baffles us as absurd and meaningless. Through the process of psychoanalysis...
subconscious or even unconscious layers of our consciousness can be made to come to the surface and face us squarely in such a way as to make our very existence meaningless.

Such unseemly, ill-favored, graceless absurdities are often exposed in the depths of our personality when our insides are out. And when we become even partly conscious of such absurdities of our own behaviour we are convulsed with trauma. This is the consternation or trauma that haunts us in many plays of Harold Pinter and presumably a number of other writers of the post-war generation as well.