

## Chapter 1.

### Drama : A perennial search for self fulfilment.

#### 1.1. Drama as a presentation of self.

The History of Drama, in the strict sense of the history of Western theatre, beginning from Greek times to the times of the Absurd theatre, has been reviewed by several scholars such as Sylvén **Barnet**, Morton **Berman** and William Burto (1972), Irving Deer and Harriet A. Deer (1975), James Calderwood and Harold Toliver (1969). Each of these scholars brought out the evolution of a particular aspect of the Western theatre (hereafter Drama) in this long history. But one theme, which needs to be elaborately traced through this history, is the one suggested by Irving Deer and Harriet A. Deer, in their book Selves : Drama in perspective (1975V The Deers, in this book, studied various forms of Drama from the point of view of 'the self.' The Deers use the word self to mean the human personality, the human object, the individual or in other words, human identity. After tracing this theme of the self in the history of Drama, the Deers have come up with a remarkable observation that the history of Drama presents the "individual's perennial search for self fulfilment" (1975 : vii). For the Deers, self fulfilment is self realization, i.e., the experience of one's idea of oneself. According to them, the playwrights create characters who seek an answer to the question 'Who am I?' This search of the self for an 'identity,' may or may not lead to a clear self knowledge. But still the self, i.e., the character, attempts to fulfill (realize) its idea of itself. The Deers review Drama from this point of view and conclude that all Drama has, perennially, been is a presentation of the individual's 'search for self fulfilment.'

The review of the Deers indicates that they restricted their analysis to the study of only those plays, which fall under the genres of Tragedy and Tragicomedy, which have always been considered 'serious' Drama, in contrast to Comedy, which mostly presents satires and farces

and is treated as "tragedy's poor sister, an inferior, unserious and essentially trivial form" (Watson, 1983 : 81). Aristotle too, in his poetics, considers Tragedy as 'serious' while he feels that Comedy "imitates characters of a lower type" (1951 : 21).

According to **the Deers**, though the theme of self and its fulfilment is common to all forms of Drama, different Dramatists have presented the individual's search for self fulfilment differently. In the preface to their book, the Deers **say** :

**"Those** playwrights who consider the self subordinate to the design of the universe tend to subordinate character to plot, as Sophocles does in Oedipus the King; while those who considered the self superior usually make character at least as important if not more important than plot, as **Ibsen** does in A Doll's House. Similarly, playwrights who see diminishing order in the universe generally create characters who, like the protagonist in Strindberg's Miss Julie, are in danger of losing their sense of themselves and their place in the world. Playwrights who see no immanent order in the universe or society - only an arbitrary one imposed by human beings - tend to write extremely subjective plays wherein the characters try to create order through their own imagination, as is demonstrated in **Giraudoux's** Madwoman of Chailloit..." (1975: vii).

As can be seen from the above words, for the Deers, what marks the presentation of each Dramatist is the **worldview** or a theory through which the Dramatist **tries** to analyse the self. This is indicated also when the Deers note that the answer to the question of 'Who am I?' sought by the Dramatists is "often factual, psychological, social, and even religious" (1975 : 1)

This notion of a '**search**' of course, reminds one of the investigative or exploring nature of science. In other words, Deers, here, can be seen to be talking about Drama in the model of science. This kind

of analogy of science to Drama is well established even earlier to Deers. For example, Arthur Millier says,

"...**Drama** is like other inventions of man in that it ought to help us to know more....The ultimate justification of a genuine new **form**...is the new and heightened consciousness it creates and makes possible - a consciousness of causation in the light of known but hitherto inexplicable effects." (1957 : 53).

Miller considers that (like science) the 'end of drama' is the creation of this 'higher consciousness' of the determinism or causation which is often explained in terms of 'laws of nature' (Deer, et.al., 1975:2).

Miller uses the word 'teaching' in reference to this creation of 'higher consciousness' (1957 :12-3). This 'creation of higher consciousness' has been intended to give prescription, in both science and in drama, to cure or solve the human problems. The word teaching or instruction is used in reference to Drama even in this sense of prescription. Mercier (in Dukore, 1974 : 138) and Johnson (in Dukore, 1974 : 408), using the word instruction, in reference to Drama in both the senses, say that Drama instructs in a pleasurable manner. Rapin, who uses the word instruction in the moral sense, agrees with this point and gives an analogy to show this. He says :

"In curing the maladies of men, [art] makes use of the same artifice that physicians have recourse to in the sickness of children : they mingle honey with the medicine to take off the bitterness....For no other end is [art] delightful than that it may be profitable." (in Dukore, 1974 : 265).

The notions of 'self', 'tragedy,' 'worldview' and 'heightened consciousness,' found in the above mentioned analysis of Deers and Miller, help to discuss the probe of self in various forms of Drama through the following four part structure : (i) the theory of 'nature,' such as religious, psychological, sociological and so on; (ii) the notion of the self (which exists in 'nature'); (iii) the diagnosis of the

predicament of the self or those qualities in the self which deny the self its fulfillment; and (iv) instruction. Taking a cue from the Deers, an attempt will be made here to use the four part structure to analyse different forms of serious Drama (Tragedy and Tragicomedy) from Greek to modern times. However, considering the richness and vastness of each of the forms under discussion, it is a difficult task to attempt a review of all of them elaborately. Hence a brief study will be made by providing a few examples from each of these forms.

## 1.2. Changing self in various forms of Drama.

### 1.2.1. Greek Theatre : Self under the control of gods.

The fact that the tragedies of Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus and others, written more than two millenniums ago, are staged and discussed even now, demonstrates the universality of the tragic actions that were presented on the Greek stage. The Greek Tragedy presented nature as governed by the gods. There is a direct intervention of the gods in the action of the plays. They either appear in the play to decide the fate of the selves, as in the case of The Bacchae by Euripides, in which the god Dionysus makes the selves act in the fashion he wants them to and punishes them for rejecting him; or their intervention may be indirect as seen in Oedipus the King (Sophocles) where the fate destined by the gods is revealed by the **oracle** at Delphi.

The self (chief character) of Greek Tragedy is of noble birth. It is shown as possessing a tendency to act against the gods, a quality which is called *Hubris*. This may be seen in The Bacchae, cited above, in which the citizens of Thebes do not accept Dionysus when he appears there as a new god. The self is depicted as being in the pursuit of the passions such as sex, power and revenge, and in the process it is shown to be disturbing the natural order by acting against the commands of the gods. The self is shown to indulge in grotesque actions such as incest, parricide, fratricide and **infanticide** Oedipus, for example, commits both incest and parricide in

the play Oedipus the King; the two sons of Oedipus kill each other in Antigone (Sophocles); possessed by a desire for revenge, Medea, in the play of the same name (Euripides), murders her own children; and Agave in The Bacchae (Euripides) dismembers her own son. Driven by the irresistible passions, the selves are often shown to be causing misfortune to themselves, sometimes to their family and sometimes even to the whole state. The Greek tragedy shows the hero falling down from his noble position and experiencing misery.

Upon experiencing this downfall, the self often comes to learn about its mistake and accepts the fate destined for it by the **gods**. An example of this can be found in Oedipus The King, where Oedipus says,

"And the man who called down these curses [of gods] on me was I myself, no one **else**" (Sophocles in Deer, et.al., 1975 ; 41).

This feature, in Greek Tragedy, of gaining of knowledge by the self about its mistake, is described by critics as *Anagnorisis* (Barnet, et.al., 1972 : 6-7) a word originally coined by Aristotle, which is often translated as recognition. This word had a simpler meaning for Aristotle. *Anagnorisis*, according to him meant,

"a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune" (1951 :41).

He gives the same example, given above, from Oedipus the King. Here, the meaning a change from ignorance to knowledge' is simple. Before the messenger informs about who Oedipus is, he was not aware that the king and queen of Corinth were not his real parents - this was his ignorance. After the messenger told him, he knew the reality - this is **knowledge**

Barnet and others, however, consider that the later critics gave a richer meaning to the concept of *Anagnorisis* and used it to describe the self's recognition of its own mistake (1972 ; 6-7). The

recognition of the self about its mistake is believed by the critics to bring about an elevation in its consciousness.

To depict the actions of the self in a well ordered world (governed by the gods), the Dramatists chose a well constructed plot. According to Aristotle, a good Tragedy must have "for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle and an end" (1951 : 34-5). This can be seen to be corresponding to a unity in the world governed by the gods. The Dramatists for their work, mostly borrowed the themes from legends, though they often improvised them.

By thus presenting the tragedy of the selves in a well ordered world, the Greek Tragedy reveals the following law of nature : the **self** which **disturbs** the natural **order maintained by** the gods, **due** to its passions, falls down as the natural order reasserts itself. In fact, this law of nature has often been directly revealed, either through the words of the characters or the chorus. The chorus in Oedipus The King, for example, says,

'The man who goes his way  
 overbearing in word and deed,  
**Who** fears no justice,  
 Honors no temples of the gods-  
 May an evil destiny seize him  
 And punish his ill - starred pride (Sophocles in Deer, **et.al.**, 1975 : 42)."

As it is popularly known, Aristotle and others who followed him, have evolved a theory of the purpose of Tragedy in terms of the effect it creates on the audience. Before dealing with the effect of tragedy on the audience, Aristotle first points out that the chief character in the tragedy should **be an** important person, almost virtuous, because the downfall of an important person evokes pity in the audience. The hero experiences misfortune because he makes an **error** which

Aristotle calls *Hamertia* (1951 : 45-6). He gives the example of Oedipus whose mistake is the assumption that Polybus and Merope are his parents. When Oedipus hears that he is fated to murder his father and marry his mother, he runs away from his state. The play shows that the very attempt of escaping from the fate leads him towards it. He runs away from his foster parents and kills his real father (Laius) and performs incest with his mother (Jacosta). For Aristotle, the mistake (*Hamertia*) that the tragic hero commits is accidental and therefore worthy of sympathy from the audience.

Aristotle holds that through the imitation of the actions of the tragic character which are pitiful and terrible, the poet (Dramatist) evokes pity and fear in the audience effecting the purgation or *Katharsis* (or *Catharsis*) of these emotions and which ultimately results in pleasure (Butcher in Aristotle, 1951 : 242-246).

In his discussion on Aristotle's theory of Tragedy, Pierre Comeille sees a moral element along with the *Cathartic* effect. Elaborating Aristotle's theory of *Catharsis*, he argues that when the audience watch the character suffering misfortune (which is undeserved), they pity him/her. This makes them fear a similar fate that may befall them, since they witness it happening to men similar to themselves on the stage. This according to him leads to a

" desire to avoid [the misfortune]; this desire to the wish to purge, to moderate, to rectify, even to eradicate in ourselves the emotion which, before our eyes, plunges persons that we pity into misfortune; for this ordinary but natural and indubitable reason : that to avoid the effect one must cut out the cause" (in Dukore, 1974 : 230).

In other words, according to Comeille's interpretation of theory of Aristotle, by revealing the laws of nature, Tragedy effects a desire for the eradication of passions that lead to the experience of misfortune.

### **1.2.2. Elizabethan Tragedy : Self as a victim of passions.**

The next major phase in the history of theatre, the Elizabethan **period**, also has several remarkable tragedies, written by Dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare.

The Elizabethan Tragedy too, like the Greek Tragedy, is the outcome of a religious **faith**. The world in Elizabethan Tragedy has a perfect order maintained by God (informed by Christianity). However, unlike Greek Tragedy, God does not appear directly in the play. The belief in His presence, as the one who controls the fate of the selves, is indicated through the speech of the characters in the play. For example, Lear in King Lear says,

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;

They kill us for their sport." (IV.i)

The chief characters in Elizabethan Tragedy were of high rank, as in Greek Tragedy, because their fall "evokes deeper **woe and wonder than the snuffing** out of a non entity" (Barnet, et.al., 1972 : 198).

Like the Greek tragedies, the Elizabethan tragedies such as Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear and Othello by Shakespeare, show how the characters disturb the world around them due to the presence of some evil' (Watson, 1983 : 76) in their personality such as excessive ambition (Macbeth), jealousy (Othello), confusion (Hamlet) and lack of discrimination (Lear). The self seeks the gratification of the passions such as power (Macbeth), love or sex (Othello), love of other selves (Lear) and so on. As in Greek Tragedy, the indiscriminate search **of** the self for the satiation of these passions destroys not only itself, but also its relation with the other selves as well as the natural **order**.

Macbeth, for example, shows the chief character as disturbing the order in the state by desiring

power through the murder of Duncan. The play describes the natural order as being "troubled with man's **[Macbeth's] act.**" (II. iv.5-6). It shows how Macbeth turned his castle, which was a Heaven's breath' (I.vi.5), into a hell' (II.iii. 2). Othello with his jealousy and Lear with his lack of discrimination are depicted as creating misfortune for themselves and for the ones they love. Similarly, Hamlet with his confused thinking fails to **cleanse** Denmark (a task assigned to him by the ghost of his father) and thus restore order in the state. He also destroys his relationship with his beloved Ophelia.

It may be noted that here too, as in the Greek Tragedy, the evil' in the self brings with it, downfall. Macbeth, for example, succeeds in gaining the power which he relentlessly pursued, but he does not enjoy this power and in stead, pays dearly with his life. Similarly, Lear also loses his life for wrongly trusting Regan and Goneril who cause his death.

As with the Greek Tragedy, the selves here, also recognise their faults in the end. Othello, for example, at the end of his life realizes that he "**loved** not wisely, but too well" (V.ii.348). Similarly, Lear (King Lear III.iv) confesses his former ignorance, which led him to reject Cordelia and take the empty words of Regan and Goneril seriously. This movement from ignorance to knowledge of their fault by the chief characters in the Elizabethan Tragedy is identified as **Anagnorisis** (recognition) by (the critics such as **Barnet** and others (1972 : 7).

However, unlike in the case of Greek tragedy, the focus is not on the fate destined to the self by the God, but on the passions of the self itself. If the self in Greek tragedy enacted the fate destined by the gods, in the Elizabethan tragedy, the self was directly responsible for its fate. The fate of the self **is** determined by the evil<sup>1</sup> it possesses. J.L.Watson notes that though a conception of moral order can be seen in Shakespeare, it "depends less on the supernatural sanctions and backing than on **Nature.**" (1983 :49). To give an example, if Oedipus is depicted as experiencing misfortune due to

the fate predicted by the oracle (which is destined by the gods), Macbeth is portrayed as **experiencing** the same fate due to the force of his desire.

Apart from this change in focus towards the 'evil' present in the character, there is also a change in the plot construction. Auerbach, for example, observes the following difference in plot construction between Greek and Elizabethan Tragedies :

"[In Greek tragedy] The essence of [the hero's] personality is revealed and evolves exclusively within the particular tragic action; everything else omitted... [Whereas in Elizabethan **tragedy**]...**The** course of events on the stage is not rigidly restricted to the course of events of the tragic conflict but covers conversations, scenes, characters, which the action as such does not **necessarilty** require" (1953 : 319).

Critics considered that like Greek Tragedy, in revealing the 'evil,' Elizabethan Tragedy also has a moral purpose. John Dennis, for example, considers that, by showing the characters such as Macbeth getting destroyed "for his lawless ambition and cruelty," tragedy instructs the individuals to follow their moral duty. He observes that

" It was the business of tragedy to exhort men to piety and the worship of the gods, to persuade them to justice, to humility, and to fidelity, and to incline **them** to moderation and temperance. And 'tis for the omission of one of these duties that the persons of the modern tragedy [which includes Elizabethan Tragedy] are shown unfortunate in their **catastrophies**" (in Dukore, 1974 : 368).

### **1.2.3. Realism : Self governed by heredity and environment**

The next **important** phase in Drama is Realism. If the Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy showed a belief in an orderly world controlled by the gods (God), the Realists such as Henrik

**Ibsen**, August Strindberg and Arthur Miller focused on a world which is controlled by the laws of nature discovered by science such as the laws of evolution and so on. The characters in Realism, were not noble heroes, but ordinary men. Realism claimed to be dealing **objectively**' (Deer, **et.al.**, 1975 : 266) with people in everyday life. The mode of presentation moved from verse (which is seen in Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy) to ordinary speech and great importance was given to create a setting that came closest to real life, in an attempt to appear 'natural.'

The **serious** plays in Realism too, were tragedies though the self is presented, in them, as the common man. Miller rejects the **argument** that it is only the tragic actions of noble heroes which are worth presenting on stage and says,

"... the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its higher sense as kings were" (in Dukore, **1974** : 894).

The self in Realism, at least as found in Ibsen's Realism, is a product of heredity and **environment**.<sup>1</sup> For this reason the fate of the self is determined by these same factors : heredity and environment, and is not governed by the gods as in Greek Tragedy. The causes of the tragic fate of the self did not lie within the self but outside : in the family and society.

Nora, in **A Doll's House** by **Ibsen**, for example, plays the role of a **'doll'** given to her by her father, husband and society. Though she tries very hard to preserve her marital relationship with her husband by playing a role that he wishes, she soon realizes that a relationship is impossible with a man who sees her just as a doll and not as **'human being'** (in Deer, 1975 : 219). This realization makes her feel that she is living with a **'strange man'** (in Deer, et al., 1975 : 219). When this realization dawns on her, she can no more live with a **stranger**' and hence slams the door on him, as well as on her **strange' self** as a doll. She enters into an unknown new reality to see everything, such as her **duties,' and 'religion'** (**Ibsen** in Deer, et al., 1975 : 217), which made her

to take on a particular role (of a doll), afresh, so as to acquire `self knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

The plays shows that self fulfilment is possible when the self and the society (here husband) transform completely so that their union becomes a "true marriage" (in Deer, **et.al.**, 1975 : 220). But the self in this play, possessed with the new realization about the **man-woman** relation, considers this as "the greatest miracle of **all**" (in Deer, et.al., 1975 : 220) and it no more believes in the miracles. Hence it sets out for the search for self fulfilment on its own.

Another play, which shows the self as experiencing misfortune due to the external factors, is the play Ghosts by **Ibsen**. In this play, Mrs. Alving sends her son Oswald away to Paris, in order to prevent him from inheriting any of his father's sinful (adulterous) life. Oswald goes there to experience the 'joy of life' (Ibsen, 1973 : 79), by living in a free society, where there is easy access to both sex and other sensual desires. But he already has, within him, the seeds of the destructive influence of his father in the form of the disease, syphilis. The play says that he was "worm-eaten from birth" (Ibsen, 1973 : 73) because "the sins of the father" had "visited the children" (Ibsen, 1973 : 74). The sin of the father **was to seek** the 'joy of life' through adultery (though secretly). Oswald suffers, both because of this tendency and the effect of this tendency which is syphilis. In this sense his tragedy is fatal. The play thus shows the self seeking the joy of life, an urge developed due to heredity as well as the due to environment in which it thrives, and thereby getting destroyed by this **search**. In this play **Regina** too goes out seeking the joy of life' and she too is likely to destroy herself (Ibsen, 1973 : 91). The self, in this play, is depicted as indulging in incest and in a great many things as a part of this urge for 'joy of life' without a sense of remorse, contrary to Greek Tragedy, where such an urge was considered punishable.

Thus, it may be noted that though, unlike in Greek Tragedy, the concept of gods as the dispenser of fate is no longer present, yet the concept of fate is preserved in notions such as heredity and

environment. The plots of Ibsen's plays were well made. In this way, the predicament of the modern man is strongly presented by Ibsen, so much so, that his themes take on the form of a different kind of tragic myths. Though Ibsen's plays seem to be dealing with specific day to day problems like corruption, women's rights and the destructive **inheritance** of syphilis from parents, in showing heredity and environment as determining factors of the fate of the self, Ibsen's mission was not just to bring contemporary problems to light, but, "to awaken the individuals to freedom and independence" (as quoted in Deer, **et.al.**, 1975 : 221-2); freedom and independence from the given situations to which the individuals in general are bound.' For example, Nora in A Doll's House can be seen as **bound** to the **situation/identity** of having to play a 'strange' role (a role not clear to herself). Thus, **Ibsen** in A Doll's House, by showing Nora slamming the door, intends to awaken individuals to the issue of freedom or independence from this bondage to situation.

Elaborating on this, by giving the example of A Doll's House, the Deers observe that in writing this play **Ibsen** was not particularly concerned with women's 'liberation'

"...but everyone's right to fulfilment ...**Ibsen** was concerned with a bigger issue - the permanent, universal problem everyone has in trying to find fulfilment" (Deer, **et.al.**, 1975:220).

#### 1.2.4. Expressionism : Self as a subjective entity governed by the psychological laws.

In the shift from Realism to **Expressionism**, can be seen a shift from the preoccupation with the depiction of the surface reality to the exploration of the depth dimension - into the realm of the psyche of the self. **Strindberg** and Miller, the Realists mentioned above (1.2.3), also occupy a prominent place in Expressionism. Apart from these, Eugene O'Neill is also an important Expressionist. In contrast to Realistic plays, which supposedly dealt with **the** objective reality,

Expressionistic plays were extremely subjective.

The self in Expressionism is presented predominantly as a psychological entity. According to the Deers, Expressionism presents the subjective experience of the selves which are "...caught in the nightmarish reality of a world fast losing its human **meaning**." (1975 : 267-8). The selves are seen no longer as having a fixed character. Living in an immoral world, the selves are seen becoming disintegrated. Discussing the Expressionistic play Miss Julie by Strindberg,<sup>2</sup> the Deers note that in his play,

"the world was fast becoming a place in which inherited absolute values and heirarchical schemes and structures no longer worked, leaving people without a function or the rules or conduct that allow them to develop an identity and a sense of **self**" (1975: 267).

Analysing the uniqueness of his characters as compared to the characters present in the earlier Drama, Strindberg (in the preface to his play Miss Julie) writes,

"Because they are modern characters, living in a period of transition more feverishly hysterical than its predecessor at least, I have drawn my figures vacillating, disintegrated, a blend of old and **new**" (in Deer, **et.al.**, 1975 : 258).

Miss Julie, in the play of the same name, develops an urge to escape from her previous chaotic and suffocating reality to a free world, outside of her home. Her **father's** valet, Jean, being as he is a man of the **street, symbolizes** freedom for her. Thus, she discerns in Jean, the possibility of the satisfaction of her urge. She equates her urge for freedom to the love for Jean, though, having her origins in nobility, she, fundamentally, has disrespect for a servant. But being guided by the urge for freedom coupled with the ignorance of his true nature (who sees her merely as a representative of success), she enters into sexual relation with a man whom she almost hates and

this finally leads to her destruction. Thus, if Ibsen shows the self as making a shift into a new reality, after slamming the door on a 'strange' reality, Strindberg shows that in its attempt to make a shift to a new reality without a proper understanding of that reality, the self becomes disintegrated and destroys itself.

As can be seen in the case of Miss Julie, the selves in Expressionism are filled with illusion and as a result of this, they move from one tragic situation to another. If the selves in the Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy knew the causes of their tragedy, the selves in Expressionism do not. Watson notes that the self in modern Drama, "makes love in blindness to that which destroys [it], and unlike Oedipus or Othello never come to see **the truth**" (Watson, 1983 : 128).

A good example of such a self can be seen in Arthur Miller's The Death of a Salesman. Miller, very effectively shows Willy destroying himself and his family, driven as he is, by an urge for success and power. Willy's hero is Ben, who "... walked into the jungle" (in Deer, et. al., 1975 : 361) when he was seventeen and when he walked out at twenty one, he was rich. Very soon Willy understands that the same type of successful heroes treated him like an orange, used him and threw him out like they "**throw** the peel away" (in Deer, et.al., 1975 : 378) when he no longer fitted in their power game.

And yet, it can be seen that Willy never becomes free from his fascination for success. This can be observed at the end where Willy plans to commit suicide so as to provide money for his son Biff. While doing this, Willy is contemplating the success of Biff. He does not realise that it is, in fact, his urge for success that had ruined his family relations. In order to externalize the mental struggle that goes on in Willy, where he constantly reverts to the past to explore the causes for his present predicament, Miller has introduced a plot in this play, which constantly moves between the past and the present.

The Freudian intervention, with his psychological discoveries, had a strong impact on Drama. The Expressionists such as O'Neill tried the application of the insights developed by Freud about the human psyche, in Drama. Following the psychoanalytic insights discovered by Freud, they even **experimented** with dream material to understand the dark forces of the psyche which guide the conscious life of the characters.

O'Neill, in his play Desire under the Elms, shows with great skill, the influence of the unconscious repressed incestuous desires on the conscious life of the selves. In this play Abbie, the step mother of Eben, seduces him into an incestuous relationship under the guise of mother's love. All she asks Eben is, to own up his incestuous desire for her, which he was repressing in the unconscious. She **says**:

" Hain't the sun strong an' hot? Ye kin feel it bum'n' into the earth -Nature- **makin'** **thin's grow** bigger `n' bigger - burning inside ye - **makin'** ye want t' grow- into somethin' else - till ye're jined with it - an' it's **your'n** - but it owns ye, too - an' makes ye grow bigger - like a tree - like them **elums**. (She laughs again softly, holding his eyes. He takes a step toward her, compelled against his will). **Nature'll** beat ye, Eben. Ye might's well own up f it fust's **last**" (O'Neill, 1954 : 164).

If Oedipus plucked his eyes out for participating in an incestuous relationship, the modern characters, Abbie and Eben, are not guilty of this act at all (O'Neill, 1954.:203). The play **shows** that desire for incest is a natural instinct in everyone. Commenting on this play, Joseph Krutch says,

" ...O'Neill is here interested less in New England as much than in an aspect of the eternal tragedy of man and his passions" (in O'Neill, 1954 : xvi).

The incestuous desires were thus shown as universal through this play.

Thus, like in Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy, the problem with the self is that it is filled with dark and irrational forces inside, which guide its conscious life. These forces, compulsively lead the self to indulge in **heroism**, aggression, sadism, self destruction, sexuality, incest, adultery, revenge, blasphemy, murder - themes, which the psychoanalysts have explored. The actions are often violent, leading to the expression of very powerful emotions. Following Miller, it may be said that the purpose of the Expressionistic theatre, in the presentation of the self as being acted upon by dark forces of the mind, is to create a 'higher consciousness' in the audience about these forces.

### **1.2.5. Epic Theatre : Self as a social entity governed by social laws.**

For **Brecht**, the world is not governed by a non-material God as in the classical Tragedy but by historical and social forces. The self in Brecht, is not a psychological entity as in **Expressionism**, but a historical and social one. Its fate too, thus, is governed by the historical and social conditions, of which it is a product. Terry Eagleton observes that Brecht, following Marxism, makes an attempt to present "the social relations of the character, and the historical conditions which makes him behave as he does" (1976 : 65). Unlike in Greek Tragedy, Elizabethan Tragedy and **Realism**, in Brechtian theatre, the self is not fixed but changes constantly as in Expressionism. But if Expressionism focuses on the subjective states of the self while giving less **prominence** to the changing social conditions (which effect the change in the personality), Brechtian theatre concentrates on the changing social conditions that change the self. In other words, the self has a particular nature being part of a particular society and it undergoes changes along with the society.

The self in **Brecht's** plays too possesses 'evil' (1.2.2). But the self takes to 'evil,' not because it is inherent, but because of circumstances. In the Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy, the

self causes chaos because of some tragic fallacy present in it, here, the social conditions make it participate in violence. The self would be better, if the conditions did not force it to be **evil**. This is illustrated by Brecht in The Good person of Szechwan, where he shows how the good Shen Teh had to become ruthless Shui Ta for a living. Further, in Brecht, the influence of 'evil' in society on the self, is so overpowering that it can hardly escape its influence and take to morality. This idea is expressed by **Peachum** in The Three Penny Opera (2.ii.33) as he says,

"Let's practice goodness : who would disagree?

But sadly on this planet while we're waiting

The means are meagre and the morals low.

To get one's record straight would be elating

But our condition's such it can't be so" (1979 : 33).

Following the same line of historical and social determinism in Mother Courage and other plays, Brecht shows how the **material** conditions such as war, have the power to alienate the selves from themselves and also from others selves.

In order to create an awareness in the audience about the impact of the changing social conditions on the self, Brecht felt the necessity to change the existing forms of theatre, which have a neat plot construction, because, he felt that, such a design generated the impression that the reality is fixed. Brecht further argued that a strong emotional involvement which the earlier forms of Drama elicited from the audience made them take the happenings on stage as natural, unalterable truth. In order to change this passive involvement of the audience to an active one, he designed a **new** form called **Epic Theatre**. The 'Epic Theatre' was aimed at making the audience observe the action critically. In other words, it may be said that through this form Brecht wanted to disentangle the frozen relation between the audience and the performance.

In the **Epic Theatre**, Brecht introduced **Verfremdungseffect** or Alienation effect to effect in the

audience a detachment that prevented the emotional involvement. He substituted the well knit plot, with a number of episodes that showed the **self's** reactions to **various** situations. Placards were hung on the stage, the audience was addressed directly, songs were used, and a narrator provided the sociohistorical outlook to the spectators to dislodge their familiar ways of perception. Brecht often felt the necessity to use different branches of science such as "Modern psychology, from psychoanalysis to **behaviourism**," and especially the "**findings** of sociology... economics and **history**" (Brecht in Dukore, 1974 : 853) to give a scientific perception of the self and its predicament to the audience.

Even though Brecht placed primary importance to reason over feelings, critics observe that many of the scenes in his plays like Mother Courage and Caucasian Chalk Circle are quite emotional.

Discussing the emotional impact created by Brecht's plays, James Redmond says,

"... how would audiences be emotionally distant from his Gruche, Kattrin, or **Shen Te**, when they have deeply cared for Antigone in a fixed mask, **for a** boy actor Ophelia, **for Phedra** in Racine's **Alexandres...**" (1980, xvii).

However, Eagleton observes that Brecht himself did not totally discard the idea of emotional response. He quotes Brecht's statement "One thinks feelings and one feels thoughtfully" (1976 : 67) to substantiate his point. Thus, in Brecht, feelings are evoked in the audience only to make them strongly identify the conditions that mould the self and alienate it from its setting.

Brecht holds that his purpose of inquiring into the predicament of the selves is "... not just to arouse moral objections to such circumstances [such as hunger, cold and oppression etc.] ....**but** to discover the means for their elimination" (in Dukore, 1974 : 854). This elimination of the problem in society was aimed by Brecht, through a revelation of the social laws of nature. According to Brecht, since the fate of the self is determined by the social conditions, the predicament of the self can

be solved only through a radical change in the society. By showing the problem in the society which causes the alienation of the self, Brechtian theatre motivates the audience into eradicating this problem. Brecht contends that when the audience observe the **sufferings** that his characters undergo on stage, they become aware of the cause of the suffering, and feel a strong necessity to change the social conditions prevalent in the outside world that cause such suffering (in Dukore, 1974:851).

### **1.2.6. Tragicomedy : Self as a dispassionate subject trapped in the involuntary processes of time.**

The next important form of theatre that we find in the West is Tragicomedy. Tragicomedy has a different approach than Comedy in the delineation of the comic characters or the characters of 'lower types'(1.1). As the name suggests, Tragicomedy evolves from and takes the elements of both Tragedy and Comedy. Tragicomedy probes into the life of the selves who mix with the crowd and who pretend to be happy as is the case with Comedy, but at the same time they express their **lack of** a sense of identity, which is characteristic of Tragedy. This approach of Tragicomedy, to the life of the comic characters, probably, results from a sense of disbelief among the modern **playwrights**, who appear to question the idea that happiness can ever result in the lives of the characters (depicted in the comedy) who too, as noted by Cyrus Hoy, 'lack self knowledge' (Hoy in Bamet, **et.al.**, 1972 : 770). It may be noted that though there is a positive attitude towards the purpose of Comedy which is considered to be to identify the follies of the characters, make fun of **them**, and thus aim at amending the faults of the public (Rapin in Dukore, 1974 : 68), the happy ending in Comedy, however, is hardly been taken seriously by the critics and is considered less plausible' (Bamet, et.al., 1972 : 11).

Arthur Schopenhauer, for example, while accepting that the Comedy shows life to be thoroughly

good and especially always amusing, expresses his disapproval of happy ending in Comedy as he says,

"... certainly [the comedy] must hasten to drop the curtain at the moment of joy, so **that we may not** see what comes after..." (in **Dukore**, 1974:521-2).

A similar opinion is held by Thomas Hardy when he says,

"**Tragedy** is true guise, Comedy lies." (as quoted in **Barnet**, et.al, 1972 : 13).

Further, in **critics** like Hoy, there is a pessimistic tone about the nature of the happy ending in the Comedy. Discussing the difference between Tragedy and Comedy, Hoy observes that the lack of self knowledge in the case of the self in Tragedy brings about its **destruction**, while **the self** in the Comedy continues to live with its lack of self knowledge. Hoy holds such a fate of the self in the Comedy to be worse than death. He notes,

'This at least is true of the protagonists of the greatest comedy : plays that probe so deeply into the irony of human fate as to bring them close upon tragedy (in **Barnet, et.al.**, 1972:770).

He gives the examples of Jonson's Protagonist in Volpone, Shakespeare's Angelo in Measure for Measure, Moliere's Alceste in Le Misanthrope, and the Protagonists from Chekov's Uncle Vanva and Pirandello's Henry IV to substantiate his observations.

It may be noted that what is common in the observation of Schopenhauer, Hoy and Hardy is a disapproval of the happy ending presented in the Comedy. Probably, the playwrights, who also held the opinion that such a happy ending is unrealistic, tried to explore what comes **after** the dose of curtains which fall after depicting the moment **of** joy in the life **of** the **characters** They tried to present that the happiness displayed by the comic characters is a 'lie.' They showed **how** the fate of the comic characters, who continue to live with the lack of self knowledge, is dose to that of tragedy. This form came to be known as Tragicomedy.

However, the selves in this form neither experience great suffering caused by committing great

mistakes as in the Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy, nor do they live happily in the company of others. In other words, in Tragicomedy, the selves are neither entirely tragic nor comic as portrayed in the genres of Tragedy and Comedy respectively. They often **experience** their anguish at the lack of self knowledge, a situation akin to tragedy. But unlike in Tragedy, here, this anguish is expressed in a comic fashion. In other respects, they behave like comic characters, making fun of everything or join the crowds easily, as in the case of Comedy, but unlike in Comedy, they clearly reveal their deprivation. For this reason, as **Barnet** and others observe (in their discussion of an example given by Pirandello in his essay **Umanismo**), the Tragicomedy evokes "**..our** laughter [which] is combined with **pity**" (1972 : 15). Tchechov, for example, shows his characters, sometimes, expressing a deep identity crisis due to lack of self knowledge. For example, **Charlotta** in his widely discussed play, The Cherry Orchard laments about her condition and says,

"**Where I** come from and who **I** am **I** don't know" (in Calderwood, **et.al.**, 1969:511).

But, after this profound questioning, she goes on to a rather trivial activity - that of eating a cucumber. The cause of her lack of seriousness is that she does not get any answer to the question of her identity, when she tries to search for one. She continues,

"I don't know .... Who my parents were - **perhaps** they weren't married - **I** don't know. . . . **I** don't know **anything**. (pause.) **I** do want to talk, but **I** haven't anybody at all" (in Calderwood, **et.al.**, 1969: 511).

Thus, it is the confusion about their origin and about their relation with the other selves that deprives the selves the self knowledge. As a result, they develop no particular attachment for a particular reality. This makes the selves shift their identities, as well as their setting, very easily.

In other words, like in Expressionism and in Brechtian theatre, the self is not fixed but changes along with the changing social conditions. But unlike in Expressionism and in Brechtian theatre, the self is dispassionate and changes very easily without much resistance, because, as mentioned above,

it does not have deep attachment for any particular reality. Tchechov depicts this in the same play discussed above. The Cherry Orchard shows **Mme. Ranevsky** losing her home, The Cherry Orchard, to which she is seemingly very much attached because it is intrinsically related to her past. But she doesn't show much resistance when it is sold, because, on the one hand, she realizes that times are changing **and on** the other hand, she already **has** an alternative life. In this way, in **Chechov's** plays, the selves sometimes are dissatisfied when their desires are not satiated. But they are also aware of the impossibility of such attainment as they realize that they inhabit a world where things are constantly changing. Hence they chose to move along with the **tide with** no fixed identity of their own, and in the words of Tchechov, they do nothing but "...eating, **drinking**, running after women or men, talking non - sense" (as quoted in Watson, 1983 : 135).

Senelick explains the phenomenon of flux in **Tchechov's** plays in terms of time. In Uncle Vanva he notes the "... motif of lives eroded by the steady passage of time" (1985 : 96). Speaking of The Cherry Orchard, Senelick observes that the play shows "...**human** beings trapped in the involuntary processes of time" (1985 : 125). Similarly, discussing a production of the Three Sisters, he says,

'The tone of the production was epic, showing the wind of history blowing through the characters' lives, their hopes shattered by the passage of time" (1985:140).

Though, in this way, Tchechov, depicts the determining factor of time in the lives of the selves, unlike the other Dramatists, Tchechov insists that he is not particularly interested in providing any instruction. According to him, the job of an artist is just to give a correct presentation of the problem, not its solution. He says,

"In my view it's not the **writers** job to solve such problems as god, pessimism and so on. The writer's job is only to show who, how, in what context, spoke or thought about god and pessimism. The artist must not be the judge of his character and of what they say : merely a dispassionate observer..." (as quoted in Watson, 1983 : 133).

While discussing his notion of instruction, noted earlier (1.1), Arthur Miller does not agree with the view that a Dramatist can be totally dispassionate without making any attempt to teach. Though not exactly in reference to Tchechov, he says,

"... there will never be a satisfactory way of explaining that no playwright can be praised for his high seriousness and at the same time be praised for not trying to teach; the very conception of a dramatic theme inevitably means that certain aspects of life are selected and others left out, and to imagine that a play can be written disinterestedly is to believe that one can make love **disinterestedly**" (1957 : 12-13)

The words like 'no playwright can be praised for his high seriousness and at the same time be praised for not trying to teach' remind Tchechov more than any other playwright. If Miller is really counter arguing Tchechov here, it is not certain how far either Miller or Tchehov is right. Because, probably when Tchechov says that he is not interested in presenting a solution to the problem, he means to say that he does not 'instruct' in a moral sense like Ibsen, **Brecht** and others and what Miller means by saying 'every dramatist teaches' is, as quoted **earlier** (1.1), **that** every Dramatist (including Tchechov) brings a higher consciousness.' Following Miller, it may be said that the fact that Tchechov presents the characters whose hopes are shattered by the passage of time, itself reveals that he teaches something : he brings to awareness time, as the determining factor of the fate of the self.

### 1.27 Theatre of the Absurd ; **Self** as an isolated subject divorced from its **setting**.

The last of the forms chosen for analysis, here, is the Theatre of the Absurd. Though this form of theatre is considered to be a kind within the genre called Tragicomedy, it has been **dealt**

separately, because of certain distinctive features it contains in comparison to the plays of Tchekhov and others playwrights writing in the genre of Tragicomedy. At the time of the Theatre of the Absurd, the creation of serious scripts in theatre multiplied enormously and the articulation of the predicament of the self at this stage found an amazingly variegated expression. This is commensurate with the diffusion of discourse developed by that stage.

The nature, in the Theatre of the Absurd, is absurd. It has no meaning, or rather, it can neither be understood in terms of a God nor through the application of the laws of science. The self has long rejected the religious worldview in search of an empirical meaning promised by the science so that it may conquer nature. But Eugene Ionesco shows in Exit the King that in spite of the invention of so many things such as the wheel barrow, telephone, telegraph and the aeroplane, the self can neither save itself nor the world, from disintegrating. Marie, in this play, tries to save Berenger (the king) from death and places her hope in science and technology. She says,

"The younger generation's expanding the universe ...Conquering new constellations"

but the king keeps saying,

"I'm dying... I'm dying" (1963 :67).

Thus, this play symbolizes the continued misfortune experienced by the self, in spite of science. In **fact**, the play shows that with the new tool called science now made available to the self, it only succeeds in creating more and more chaos in the world and causes further disintegration of **itself**

In other words, the acquisition of scientific knowledge did not free the self from the tendency to be destructive. Due to the destructive forces present in the self, all its actions result in the destruction of the world. As a result, the self in the Theatre of the Absurd lost hope in all ideals, whether scientific or religious. **Its** existence in the world became absurd, as, on the one hand, it rejected the religious ideals and lost the homeland and on the other hand, it lost hope of the land promised

by science, for, science too never gave it self knowledge. This left the self in an exile divorced from its **setting** Albert Camus describes the self in the absurd world, as follows :

"His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, **truly** constitute the feeling of Absurdity" (as quoted in Esslin, 1973: 5)

Like in Expressionism and in Tchecov, in the Theatre of the Absurd as well, the self has no proper sense of identity, because, like in those forms, neither can it look into the past nor into the present to develop an idea of itself in relation with other selves. Like Hamlet who becomes confused about his identity, because of his **mother's** relationship with his uncle, immediately after his **father's** death, here too, and to a greater degree, the self is totally confused when it **tries** to contemplate its origin. Jerry in Zoo story by Edward **Albee** expresses this confusion, when he describes his mother, by saying,

"...she [his mother] embarked on an adulterous tum of our southern states" (1961a: 24).

Similarly, the Cardinal in Tiny Alice (by Albee) may be sure about his spiritual '**Father**' in the Church, but when it comes to his physical father he is not so sure. In this play, Lawyer reveals this, as he says (to Cardinal),

"Considering your mother's vagaries, you were never certain **of your** true father... were you?" (1961b: 11).

Due to this loss of identity, the self manifests a desperate urge to communicate with other selves. But having lost hope of ever finding the long lasting relationships, it has, indeed, no one to communicate with. For example, Jerry in Zoo story has two empty frames. To Peter's inquiry as to

**why** they are empty, Jerry replies,

"I don't see why they need any explanation at all. **Isn't** it clear? I don't have pictures of anyone to put in them" (Albee, 1961a : 23)

Elsewhere in the same play, Jerry expresses a similar lack of hope in finding something' to communicate, with as he says,

"A person has to have some way of dealing with SOMETHING. If not with people ... if not with people... SOMETHING. With a bed, with a cockroach, with a **mirror**...no, that's too hard, that's one of the last steps. With a **cockroach**,... with **a..with a...carpet**, a roll of toilet **paper**...no, not that, **either...that's** a mirror, too; always check bleeding. You see **how**hard it is to find things?" (Albee, 1961a : 34)

This lack of a proper identity and failure to communicate with other selves, makes the self experience extreme isolation. Samuel Becket in Waiting for Godot presents this isolation, by depicting two tramps beside a withered tree. They wait for Godot, to change their condition, but he never comes. Commenting upon the conditions in this play Kenner (quoted by Javed Malick) notes "nothing synchronizes nor harmonizes" (as quoted in Becket **1989** : 10) in the absurd world, as represented in this play.

If a lot of action is found in the plays of Expressionism, as the self there, is still, on a passionate search for the gratification of its urges, here, there is not much action. One of the significant features of Absurd plays is the presentation of certain characters as totally submerged in inaction. The most popular examples are the two tramps in Waiting for Godot Apparently, this inaction may be similar to that of Hamlet. But it may be seen that Hamlet is depicted to be intensely willing and ready for action. His inaction is depicted to be due to the hurdle of identity **crisis**, coming in the way of implementing his will and plans. But the tramps here, have a feeble will to act and they

resign themselves to inaction repeatedly.

Becket in his Waiting for Godot depicts this impotence of the self, in a symbolic manner. Estragon, in this play, suggests hanging, losing all hope of finding a meaning in his life. To this Vladimir says: **Hmm. It'd** give us an erection!

Estragon: [Highly excited]. An erection (Becket, 1989 : 47).

It may be noted that the word 'erection,' here, is symbolic of inspiration or potency for action. The selves in this play are talking of a physical erection, whereas (**considering** the fact that the Theatre of the Absurd uses a lot of symbolism), the word suggests an abstract feeling. The excitement over the possibility of an 'erection' shows their desire for inspiration for action. But being divorced from their setting, the tramps make no serious attempts for action. They wander aimlessly around a withered tree, waiting for the Godot, for there is "nothing to be done" (Becket 1989 : 39). In other words, they do not get any erection.'

Thus, if Brecht shows the self becoming alienated from itself and from otherselves due to social conditions, this form goes a step further and shows that alienation is all that is there in the world. And as a result of this extreme alienation, some of the selves in the Theatre of the Absurd are seen engaged in meaningless action. As Ionesco points out, since the self in this theatre is cut off from its "religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots" (which gave meaning and purpose for its actions), all its actions became "senseless, absurd, useless" (as quoted in Esslin, 1973 : 5).

There are some other selves who, due to their inability to experience relationship with each other in any other way, end up playing games. This is illustrated in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf. The play shows that the games played by Martha and Graham themselves have a crisis, after which, they no longer work and they decide to try new ones. But in the process of playing these

games they end up destroying each other. This attempt at playing games by the selves is depicted in a great number of **plays** Jean Genet, for example, in The Balcony, depicts selves playing illusory games. After showing this, Genet, **at** the end of the play, makes Madame Irma say the following to the spectators :

"...You must **now** go home, where everything - **you** can be quite **sure** - will be **false** than here" (1957: 96).

Through this line, he indicates that all identities and relations in this absurd world are illusory. No relations last. The selves change their partners very easily. If the issue of adultery is seen becoming the cause of a lot of action in the previous forms of Drama, in this **form**, as exemplified in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, there is nothing strange about it to warrant any **serious** action as a response to it. Because, in the words of Graham in the same play, "Musical beds is the faculty sport..." (Albee, 1966 : 34) in the University (symbolizing the society),.

Cutting off from transcendental roots does not lead to the total absence of the notion of God in Absurd plays. Sometimes, as the **self** loses all hope of trying to find, on its own, a meaning in its existence, it looks to God to provide a meaning. A lot of plays in the Theatre **of the Absurd**, depict the self making a constant reference to God. But when it looks at the chaotic condition **of the** world, it sees God as a riddle which can never be solved and so, it ends up mocking at Him

This is well illustrated by Becket in the End Game. Nagg, in this play, tells a story, in which an Englishman gives a pair of trousers for **stitching** to a tailor, **who** never gives it on time. When he finally returns it, he leaves a few patches here and there. The customer gets angry and scolds him by saying that God made the world in six days, whereas the tailor is not capable of making a pair of trousers even in three months. To this the tailor replies,

"But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look **-(disdainful gesture, disgusted)** - at the world - (pause)-and look (loving gesture, **proudly**) - **at my TROUSERS**" (Becket, 1958 :

21-2).

Becket, here, seems to say that self is unable to reconcile the notion of God representing perfection with the chaotic world around him. For this reason, as Becket depicts in his End Game, even though, like Marlowe's Faust, it seeks God in desperation, unlike Faust, the self does this with a total lack of faith and goes about its search awkwardly and in desperation, finally gives up.

**Hamm**, in this play, says

"..Let us **pray to** God

[He tries awkwardly for some time and says **disgustedly**]:

"**The** bastard! He doesn't exist" (Becket, 1958 : 37-8).

Thus, if in the Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy, the self considers God as someone **who** is to be revered, in the Theatre of the Absurd, the self sees God as someone to be ridiculed. As can be seen from the above example from End Game, there is a tendency to deliberately use such expressions which for religious Christian mind would be **damagingly** blasphemous. An instance, of such a tendency, can be observed in the following speech of Lawyer in Tiny Alice :

" When Christ told Peter - so legends tell - that he would found his church upon that rock, He must have had in mind an island in a sea of wine. How firm a foundation in the vintage years..." (1961b: 149).

Further, having lost faith in the existence of God and religion, the self does not see any reason to follow morality. If Realism and Expressionism show the self as easily losing the values, here, the self is shown as being totally bereft of values. In order to portray the selves who have lost all their moral values and humanness, Dramatists depicted the features of animals in **them**. Ionesco, for example, shows Jacques laying eggs in The Future is in eggs and people becoming rhinoceroses in the play Rhinoceros. In Rhinoceros, he shows selves becoming thick skinned

indicating their lack of sensitivity to other selves and to the degenerating condition of the world. In the same vein, the Countess in The Mad Women of Chaillot by Giraudoux equates selves **who** have become power mongers and who would do anything for the sake of money, to **animals**. **Describing** such people, she says,

" Men are changing back into beasts. They know it. They no longer try to hide it...**Just** look at them snuffing their soup like pigs, tearing their meat like tigers, crunching their lettuce like crocodiles| A man doesn't take your hand nowadays. He gives you his **paw**" (in Deer, **et al.**, 1975 : 307).

However, the selves are not bothered about this change. **Contrarily**, they even take pleasure in their animal condition. Jean in Rhinoceros by Ionesco displays least surprise when Berenger tells him that one of his colleagues has changed into a rhinoceros. He replies,

"It obviously gave him great pleasure to turn into a rhinoceros. There's nothing extraordinary in that" (1960a : 66).

Very soon, he follows suit with pleasure and takes part in the destruction **of the** world.

In this way, the Theatre of the Absurd depicts playing only one game : that of breaking all the rules' to seek every pleasure. In its search for the attainment of its irrational desire, the self is shown threatening not only its relation with the other selves but the existence of the world itself. There is a threat that the world may collapse any **moment**, as a result of its destructive tendencies. There is every chance of globicide and extinction of the human race. Becket expresses this idea in the End Game. **Hamm**, in this play, says that by the time one closes his eyes and opens them up he may find an infinite **emptiness**' all around him **with** no one **left** to pity (Becket 1958 : **28-9**).

There are other plays too which subscribe to this point of view. The Countess in The Mad Women of Chaillot laments as follows :

'There are people in the world who want to destroy everything. They have the fever of destruction. Even when they pretend that they're building, it is only in order to destroy. When they put up a new building, they quietly knock down two old ones. They build cities so that they can destroy the countryside. They destroy space with telephones and time with airplanes. Humanity is now dedicated to the task of universal destruction" (Giraudoux in Deer, et.al., 1975 : 307).

The protagonists of some of these plays are moved by a strong desire to change the condition around them. But they fail in this attempt, because they are confused and hence lack faith. For example, Berenger in Rhinoceros, discussed above, wants to save people from becoming rhinoceroses. But, he doesn't know how to communicate with them. He is confused about everything including the language that he speaks. In the end, he can not even understand his own speech (Ionesco, 1960a : 106).

Similarly, Berenger in the The Killer tries to convince the killer to stop destroying the city. But, as the killer starts arguing with him, Berenger becomes very weak in his **arguments** and shows utter loss of hope of the possibility of a beautiful city. He says,

"Listen, I'm going to make you a painful confession. Often, I have my doubts about everything **too**.. I doubt the point of living, the meaning of life, doubt my own values and every kind of rational **argument**" (1960b: 106).

Thus, this lack of faith in the selves leads to their inaction.

Like the Realists and the others who follow them, the Dramatists of the Absurd theatre too experimented with the form to best represent the world as absurd. Martin Esslin, a prominent critic of the Theatre of the Absurd, notes that in the Absurdist plays, all the characteristics of a good play such as cleverly constructed story, 'subtlety of characterization and motivation,' fully explained

theme,' and pointed dialogue' are found entirely lacking. In their place, the dramatists show the characters as unrecognizable who are almost mechanical puppets' The plots have neither a beginning nor an end<sup>1</sup> and the dialogue consists of incoherent babblings' (1973:3-4).

But though, apparently, Theatre of the Absurd seems to be a rejection of all seriousness, scholars have recognized this form of theatre to be the most genuine religious quest of this age. Esslin notes that "in expressing the tragic sense of loss of the disappearance of ultimate uncertainties," the Theatre of the Absurd becomes a "genuine religious quest of our age" (1973 : 351) in the sense that like the Greek and other religious forms of theatre, it too is concerned with "the ultimate realities of the human condition, the relatively fundamental problems of life and death, isolation and communication" (1973 : 353). But unlike these religious forms, this theatre expresses "the absence of any .... generally accepted system of values" (1973 : 353).

The purpose of the theatre of the Absurd has been analyzed differently by different scholars. On the one hand, Antonin Artaud, the playwright and the critic of the Theatre of the Absurd sees a purpose for this theatre. In his critical essay "No more Master pieces," he discusses the purpose of his theatre called the Theatre of Cruelty (which is identified by the critics as part of the form of the Theatre of the Absurd) and says that people in the modern world are mad, desperate and sick and the Theatre of Cruelty (the Absurd) has been created to teach, "We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads" (in Dukore, 1974 : 764). He adds that through such a theatre,

"...we will be .... capable of attaining awareness and a possession of certain dominant forces; of certain notions that control all others and...capable of recovering within ourselves those energies which ultimately create order and increase the value of life, or else we might as well abandon ourselves now, without protest, and recognize that we are no longer good for anything but disorder, famine, blood, war, and epidemics" (in Dukore, 1971 : 764).

It may be noted that unlike **Ibsen**, who clearly depicts the forces of heredity and **environment**, and Brecht, who equally clearly shows the social forces that control the fate of the self, Artaud does not clarify **what the 'dominant forces' are**, whose knowledge helps in 'recovering within ourselves those energies which ultimately create order and increase the value **of our life.**'

On the other hand, Esslin (like Tchechov) holds that the Theatre of the Absurd is not "concerned with telling a story in order to communicate some moral or social lesson, as is the aim of **Brecht's** narrative, 'epic' theatre" (1973 : 354). But nevertheless, it may be said that it instructs in the sense of Miller, i.e., it creates the higher consciousness<sup>1</sup> of the causation of a different kind. As noted earlier, according to Ionesco, the Theatre of the Absurd shows that cut off from the "religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots" (which gave meaning and purpose to the existence), all the actions of the self became "senseless, absurd, useless" This sudden feeling of the non-existence of the transcendental reality is the cause of the predicament recognized here. This is the higher **consciousness' brought** out here.

### **1.3. Tragic nature of Drama explained in terms of the depiction of lack of fulfilment of the self.**

From this brief study of the Drama in the West, based on the four part structure discussed earlier (1.1), it may be observed that each Dramatist presented the self and its predicament differently in accordance with his own perception of **self's** relation with the universe. The change in the perception of the self resulted in a change in the forms which revealed the respective **worldviews** of the dramatists during different periods in history (see table 1).

Table 1.				
	Analysis based on the four			Dart structure.
Form of Drama	Theory of nature	Notion of self	Diagnosis for failure of self.	Instruction: (i) asking to do. (ii) to enlighten.
Classical Greek Tragedy	governed by gods	in the control of gods.	hubris and hamertia	(i) to eradicate the emotion [passion]. (ii) laws governed by gods
Elizabethan Tragedy-	perfect order maintained by God (informed by Christianity)	passionate entity	overpowered by passions.	(i) to incline to moderation and temperance (ii) laws governed by God.
Realism.	governed by scientific laws in the form of heredity and environment.	product of heredity and environment.	victim of heredity and environment	(i) to seek right for self-fulfillment. (ii) laws of heredity and environment.
Expressions im.	governed by psychological laws.	guided by psychological forces.	victim of psychological forces	(i) not clear. (ii) psychological laws.
Epic Theatre.	Governed by social and historical laws.	product of social and historical forces.	victim of social and historical conditions	(i) eradication of social evil/problem. (ii) social and Historical laws.
Tragicomedy.	Governed by involuntary processes of time.	dispassionate and moving with the flux of time.	victim of involuntary processes of time	(i) clearly no. (ii) involuntary processes of time.
Theatre of the Absurd.	Uncomprehensibly absurd.	Stupefied and bewildered by the absurdity of nature.	cut off from transcendental roots.	(i) not clear. Some clearly no. (ii) non-existence of a transcendental reality.

The common feature of all these forms of Drama, namely the tragic nature, has been explained variously by various scholars such as Hoy, the Deers, Schopenhauer, Lawson and others. Self knowledge' (Deer, **et.al.**, 1975 : 3 and Hoy in **Barnet**, et.al., 1981 : 770) discussed in the earlier **section (1.1) is the key concept in the explanation of the tragic nature of both Deers and Hoy.** But the Deers identify three different levels of lack of self knowledge. In the words of the Deers,

"..a man's sense of his identity is deeply dependent not only on his knowledge of himself but on his perception of his relationship to his society and to the universe" (1975:2).

In other words, the self knowledge is in the form of (i) who am I? (ii) who am I to the other selves? and (iii) who am I in nature? The tragedy experienced by the self in Drama, is shown by the Deers, to be rooted in the lack of self knowledge at all these three levels. For example, the Deers note that Oedipus is not sure whether he is governed by passion or by the reason. **Similarly, in A Doll's house.** Nora does not know her actual identity in relation to her family. Here, the Deers say that family is a metaphor for nature and the universe. Deers' analysis implies that she lacks self knowledge in terms of her relation to nature and the universe.

Apart from the concept of 'self knowledge' two other concepts, namely, '**conflicts**' and 'misfortune' used by Lawson and Schopenhauer respectively, are particularly helpful in understanding the tragic nature of the self in Drama. According to Lawson,

'The essential character of drama is social conflict in which the conscious will is exerted: persons are pitted against other persons, or individuals against groups, or groups against other groups, or individuals or groups against social or natural forces" (in Dukore, **1974 : 880-1**).

It may be noted that the conflicts mentioned above by Lawson can be basically classified into two kinds, namely, the self (individually or in groups) in conflict with others selves (either individuals or

groups) and the self (individually or in groups) in conflict with nature. The examples of these two kinds of conflict are abundant in Drama. Nora (in A Doll's House), who **experiences** conflict between what she expects her husband to be and what he actually is, can be seen as an example of a self that experiences conflict with another self. Similarly, Oedipus, who considers himself a saviour of Thebes, but who is condemned as its destroyer by nature (fate), is an example of the self that experiences conflict with nature.

The two kinds of conflicts, namely, conflict with other selves and conflict with nature correspond exactly to two of the three levels of self knowledge recognized by the Deers, namely, the lack of knowledge of self about its relation with others and the same with nature. The view of Lawson and the Deers put together, leads to an idea that lack of knowledge of one's relation with others causes one's conflict with others and the same with nature causes conflict with nature. The other level of lack of self knowledge mentioned by the Deers, namely the lack of knowledge of oneself, also can, on these lines, be expected to be causing a conflict, namely, conflict with oneself. In fact, the Deers talk about such a conflict with an illustration of Othello. They note that Othello sees the battle of two selves within **himself**: A

"Christian self that he has come to understand too late and a pagan self that has proved treacherous both to him and to Venice. In his final speech he tells the parable of a Christian slaying a **Turk - of one self destroying the other**" (1975:158).

Schopenhauer, who uses the other key concept for the explanation of the tragic nature in Drama, namely, misfortune, also does his analysis through a three fold structure. Giving examples from Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy, he talks about the '**three** causes of misfortune': The misfortune (i) caused by **self's** own wickedness as in the case of Richard III, **Iago** in Othello, Shylock in the Merchant of Venice, Franz Moor (in The Robbers of Schiller), Phaedra in the play of same name by Euripides, Creon in Antigone; (ii) caused by '**blind fate**' as is the case in Oedipus

Rex and Romeo and Juliet; or(iii) caused by other selves (in Dukore, 1974 : 517). Though this conclusion arrived at by Schopenhauer is based on his study of Greek Tragedy and Elizabethan Tragedy, this may be seen to be applicable even to modern Tragedy and Tragicomedy. The characters such as Nora, Oswald, Julie, Jerry, Berenger and others, who have been discussed above, may also be seen as experiencing the threefold misfortune mentioned by Schopenhauer. However, as can be seen from the above discussion, the third kind of misfortune which the self experiences, i.e., the misery resulting from 'fate' is depicted differently by different dramatists depending upon their respective **worldviews**. If in Ibsen, 'fate' appears in the form of heredity and environment, in Brecht, it appears in the form of social conditions and so on.

Incidentally, **Schopenhauer's** three causes of misfortune are also related to the **same** three levels as those of self knowledge and conflicts discussed above: one's own self ("own wickedness"), other selves ("others"), and natural forces (in the form of 'blind fate').

Apart from the concepts of self knowledge, conflicts and misfortunes mentioned above (see table 2), there is another notion through which the tragedy in Drama can be understood. It is the notion of the 'urges' of the self. A careful analysis of the discussion on different forms of Tragedy done in the earlier sections indicates that the action of the self presented in these forms of Drama, quite often, revolves around the 'urges,' or more precisely, the instincts of sex and power. For example, ambition in Macbeth (1.2.2) revolves around the urge for power. Similarly, jealousy in Othello (1.2.2) and revenge in Medea (1.2.1) revolves around the urge for the opposite sex. From this point of view, even the issues of conflicts and misfortunes discussed above, can be seen to be centered around the urges for sex and power alone. In other words, the above analysis may be restated as - it is in the process of striving for sex and power that the characters experience conflicts and **misfortunes**. For example, Othello and Julie experience conflicts and misfortune as they strive for the opposite sex. Similarly, Macbeth experiences conflicts and misfortune as he strives

**Table 2.**Three theories of threefold tragic **nature** of Drama.

Theorist.	source of <b>tragedy.</b>	Threefold <b>structure.</b>	<b>Example.</b>
Deers	<b>lack of self-knowledge</b>	(i). knowledge of himself. (ii). <b>knowledge</b> of one's relation with society (iii). <b>knowledge</b> of one's relation with universe or nature.	Oedipus in Oedipus the King Nora in A Doll's House. Nora in A Doll's House.
<b>Lawson.</b>	conflicts.	(i). conflict with one self (ii). <b>conflict</b> with other selves. (iii). <b>conflict</b> with nature.	Othello in Othello. Nora in A Doll's House. Oedipus in Oedipus the King.
Schopenhauer	<b>misfortunes</b>	(i) caused by one's own <b>wickedness.</b> (ii) caused by others. (iii). <b>caused</b> by 'blind fate' or nature.	Creon in Antigone. Oswald in Ghosts. Oedipus in Oedipus the King

for power.

In fact, the analysis of the various forms of Drama reveals an urge in the self to get over these conflicts and misfortunes also. Based on the three kinds of conflict mentioned above, even the urge to get over the conflicts can be classified into three types, namely, conflict free identity, conflict free relation with others and conflict free relation with natural forces. The third one can also be called as an urge for natural order or moral order.

The examples for these three urges can be shown in Drama. The urge for a conflict free identity **is seen** in the case of Nora (1.2.3) who slams the **door** on her previous identity as a doll in order to become a true 'human being' (in Deer, et.al., 1975 : 217); a conflict free relation with the other selves, in the case of Nora again, who urges for a **true marriage with** her husband (1.2.3); and an urge for a conflict free relation with the natural forces' can be seen in the case of Oedipus (1.2.1). Oedipus' agony can, in fact, be seen as his agony **out** of his conflict with natural forces and all the attempts by him in the play are in the form of trying to overcome this conflict.

The urge to overcome misfortune can be seen in Oedipus, **who** tries to escape his misfortune, in the form of the killing of the father and marrying the mother, destined to him by the fate (Sophocles in Deer, et.al., 1975 : 40); in Nora who tries to avoid the misfortune in the form of the breaking up of her relation with her husband (Ibsen in Deer, et.al., 1975 : **Act 2) and so on.**

Thus, it can be seen that parallel to the perennial search for self fulfilment that the Deers identify, there is a perennial search for the fulfilment (in the sense of the attainment) of urges like the urge for sex and power, the urge for a conflict free identity, the urge for a conflict free relation with others, the urge for natural order and the urge to be freed from the threefold misfortune, by the self, through out the history of Drama.

Whether there is a relation between these two searches, namely, the search for the fulfilment of the knowledge of 'who am I?' and the search for the fulfilment of the urges, is not clear from the examples from the Drama reviewed here, i.e., whether (i) self realization leads to the fulfilment (in the sense of the attainment) of the urges **or** (ii) the search **for** self fulfilment **is** the search of the **self** for the fulfilment (in the sense of the attainment) of its urges, is not clear.

The tragedy in Drama can also be explained as an ultimate failure in the fulfilment of these urges. In the plays discussed above (1.2), it may be seen that either (a) the urge is not attained at all (for example, Oedipus [1.2.1] does not attain liberation from misfortune, Nora [1.2.3] does not attain a conflict **free** relationship, Harriet [1.2.2] and Berenger [1.2.7]; the order, Willy [1.2.4], power or money); or (b) the fulfilment of the urge, especially in the case of sex and power is not ultimately retained (for example, Othello [1.2.2], though gets the hand of **Desdemona**, ultimately loses her and similarly Macbeth [1.2.2], though achieves power, it makes no sense, as he, later, dies in the hands of Macduff).

The causes for the failure in the fulfilment of the urges by the selves depicted in the various forms of Drama, can be understood, on the basis of the **description** in these plays, as follows: Othello fails in his urge for achievement of a relation with Desdemona because of his jealousy (1.2.2). Macbeth is unable to fulfill his urge for moral order since passion or ambition for power overpowers him (1.2.2). Similarly, Hamlet has a desire to establish moral order by **'setting'** [things] right<sup>1</sup> in Denmark (ll.v. 190-198, 275-283). **But** his inaction which results from confusion prevents him from fulfilling this urge (1.2.2). The same is the case with Berenger in Rhinoceros and The Killer. Both the plays mentioned above show how Berenger has the urge for the natural order, but he fails in his attempts, because he is confused, his confusion, in turn, resulting from a lack of faith and so on (1.2.7). Similarly, in The Killer, **Berenger's** urge for moral order is subdued by his

ignorance, confusion and so on (1.2.7). **Similar** is the case with Nora (1.2.3) and others, whose urge for a conflict free identity and conflict free relation remains **unattained**, because of the presence of similar qualities.

From the above analysis, it may be seen that the self is depicted as being 'bound' to certain qualities such as ambition, illusion and confusion, identified above, as the causes for the **self**'s failure in getting over the **various** conflicts and misfortunes. **If**, in Greek tragedy, the self is depicted as 'bound' to **Hubris** or **Hamertia**, in Elizabethan **Tragedy** and **Expressionism**, it is portrayed as being bound to the passions, in Chechov and the Theatre of the Absurd, **it** is (mostly) shown to be bound to insensitivity and inaction or meaningless action. Similar is the case with the self in other forms of Drama as well. In fact, Tragedy and Tragicomedy can be differentiated, to some extent, based on the depiction of the predominance of bondage of the self to passions and **inaction/insensitivity**, respectively, in these **forms**. Though the characters such as Macbeth, the tramps in Waiting for Godot, Berenger in Rhinoceros and The Killier, are often depicted as showing a strong urge to get liberated from these qualities to which they are bound, they can not do so, as they are overpowered by **them**.

**In** each form of Drama, the urges of the self, its striving for the fulfilment of the urges and its failure or ultimate loss of the fulfilment of the urges, is presented within the framework of certain laws of nature or forces of determinism (see table 1). Thus, each form of Drama instructs how a given set of forces of **determinism**, act upon a particular kind of self. Wherever the instruction is considered to be in the form of telling what to do, as is done by Pierre **Comeille** and John Dennis (1.2.1 and 1.2.2), it may be said that the play instructs the individuals to be liberated from the qualities to which the **self** is bound. When it is believed that the gods control the universe, as in Greek Drama, the liberation from passions which break the rules of these gods, can be seen to be the instruction suggested as a solution for the failure of the fulfilment of the urges by the self

(1.2.1). When it is believed that the causes for the failure are social in nature, as in Brechtian Drama, then the prescription can be seen to be the attainment of liberation from the social evil through social reform (1.2.5). In this way, different forms of Drama can be seen as inferring different kinds of liberation from different qualities as a prescription for the attainment of self fulfilment and the fulfilment of the urges.

#### 1.4. Search for self fulfilment as essential for Drama.

The fact of all 'serious' Drama in the west remaining Tragedy, **can not** be inferred as an indication of viewing nature as tragic by the authors of these serious' plays. It can, at the most, be seen as a choice of these authors, and it can be safely be said that these authors rather chose to depict only those selves (probably among the selves observed by them) who 'lack self knowledge and fail in self fulfilment'(1.1) or in the language of bondage to qualities and fulfilment of the urges, only those selves which are bound to certain qualities coming in the way of their fulfilment of the urges. Drama's not presenting selves successful in self fulfilment can thus be seen to be **only** out of choice and need not be inferred as the non-recognition of the possibility of such **selves**

As mentioned above, many Dramatists like Ibsen, Miller, Brecht, Esslin and others provide justification for the presentation of (or, rather, choice of) tragic characters and find a positive element in such presentation (or choice). Eugene O'Neill says that,

"The noblest is eternally the most tragic. The people who succeed and do not push on to a greater failure are the spiritual middle **classers**. Their stopping at success is the proof of their compromising insignificance. How petty their dreams must have been| The man who pursues the mere attainable should be sentenced to get it - and keep it. Let him rest on his laurels and enthrone him in a **Morris** chair, in which laurels and **hero** may wither away together. Only through the unattainable does man

achieve a hope worth living and dying for - and so attain himself. He with the spiritual guerdon of a hope in hopelessness, is nearer to the stars and the rainbow's foot." (as quoted in **Bamet**, et.al., 1981 : 307).

If O'Neill justifies the presentation of failing self as a presentation of a heroic self which "pursues the unattainable," Miller looks at this choice as a method of exploration of the limits of forces of determinism, which cause the failure of a self. He connects this presentation of newer and newer types of failing self in later and later forms of Drama, which for him is a method to explore newer and newer laws of nature, to man's general enquiry **about** the laws of **determinism** and says,

'The history of man is a ceaseless process of overthrowing one determinism to make way for another more faithful to life's changing relationships' (1957 : 54).

For Miller, this process of overthrowing one determinism after another, is true for Drama too and this process has to be essentially ceaseless. Arthur Miller goes to the extent of saying that once a final answer is found in this search, Drama would cease. He says,

"Determinism, whether it is based on the iron necessities of economics or on psychoanalytic theory seen as a closed circle, is a contradiction to the idea of drama itself as drama has come down to us in its fullest developments. The idea of the hero, let alone the mere protagonist, is incompatible with a drama whose bounds are set in advance by the concept of an unbreakable trap. Nor is it merely that one wants arbitrarily to find a hero and a **victory**" (1957 : 54).

These words of Miller seem to be able to bring out the spirit behind the history of Drama being the individual's perennial search for self fulfilment."

## End notes:

1. It may be noted that heredity and environment, as factors of determinism, are limited to only the realist plays of Ibsen, especially the plays of Ibsen discussed here. The other plays of Ibsen might have other such factors. The choice of plays of **Ibsen** is only for the convenience of general discussion of changing factors of determinism from one major form to the other form of Drama. The same is the idea behind the choice of only a few plays of other playwrights.

2. Miss Julie is generally treated as a Naturalistic (Realistic) play. But it may be noted that scholars like the Deers have noted in Miss Julie the depiction of subjective states of the self (the Deers, 1975 : 267-8), which is the characteristic of Expressionistic plays.

3. The discussion on Drama might not have been exhaustive, in the sense that some forms of Drama **might** have missed the attention. But, it goes without saying that exhaustive coverage of plays was not intended in this discussion. The analysis is based on the generalizations and theorizations already made by well known theorists of Drama and Dramatic critics like the Deers, Lawson, Schopenhauer, and Esslin among others, who based their generalizations only on some significant plays. Though there is a part of the analysis substantiated directly from the plays, sometimes not cited by these theorists, even these plays are selected only from among the most popular representatives **of** the most well known forms of Drama.