CHAPTER – 3

CRITICAL APPROACH TO THE 20TH CENTURY

BRITISH THEATRE
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The 20\textsuperscript{th} century, in real sense, is an age of a great shift. It’s the time when the deep rooted political, sexual, social and artistic ideologies faced questionings; resulted in the transgressions in the Western philosophical thinking that was termed as postmodernism. However, the term was coined and the reactions were recorded against the concept, preceded in times - that of modernism (also referred to as modernity). Modernism had its roots in the Renaissance; attained its height by the Enlightenment of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and reached at its peak with the turn of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Modernism strongly supported the concept of questioning. It grounded the belief that there must be a rational and scientific explanation for every existed identity in the universe believed to be created by the divine being called God. To put it in other words, there was a dire need of an absolute truth, an expressive language and a definite set of rules for harmonious and peaceful life.

The emergence of science raised disputes and tensions with the obvious reason that faith and science could never coexist in harmony; however, there was an underlying understanding, order, confidence and certainty about the meaning of life. There used to be a purposeful existence along with the peace of mind. However, with the advent of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, this certainty, purposefulness, peace, all began to disappear because the very root of them was cut off. The beliefs and the values that had shaped the Western society till date began to be challenged and uprooted. The century came up with such circumstances that shocked the human in all sphere.
The horrors of the First World War (1914-18) diminished the religious certainty and broke down the consensus of faith. 1917 witnessed the bloody revolutions in Russia as a strong reaction against Class divisions, extreme poverty and social unrest. The widening of the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ resulted out of the economic collapse in Europe and the United States during the mid-1920s and early 1930s (that gave rise to the workers’ theatre movement).

The Second World War (1939-45) and the rule of Hitler changed the whole scenario in Europe. The feeling of nationalism throb in the hearts of the Germans but that led to quite negative consequences resulting into genocide, massacre and barbarism. The last, major stroke was hit when Stalin turned Russia into a totalitarian tyranny and the disillusionment grew within – and with - the Soviet Union.

The current of spiritual emptiness underwent the outwardly prosperous and affluent societies of Western Europe in the 1950s and 60s. Social unrest, famine and genocide resulted out of the racial and ethnic tensions, together with struggles for sexual and gender equality in many parts of the world. The inherent social order was challenged due to the social and philosophical shifts and a new theory emerged was named postmodernism that engendered pristine perspectives.

The sensory experiences subdued all clear or fixed truths. The till date beliefs were rotten down and all to be accepted is what is felt, touched, seen and not what is believed. No ‘big story’; no Meta-Narrative and indeed nothing to explain the existence or gives it a purpose. There is nothing like a substructure of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and nothing exists outside of human life that can furnish a set of values by which to live that life.
The humans have created a world of images themselves but those images do not provide any substantial explanation to apprehend ‘what it’s all about’. The world is a bloody place where humans are engaged in the business of exercising power over one another and only concerned with oppression and preservation of ‘the self’.

In his sensational work called *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1855), the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, outlined an ideology, believed to be the essence of postmodernism. He is remembered for his dictums that: ‘there are no facts, only interpretations’ and that: ‘this old God liveth no more. He is dead indeed.’ (Nietzsche, 66)

The early part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century was a time of great change not only from social or philosophical perspective but also in its representations through literary devices. Theatrical activities, to be precise, had suffered steep decline during the Victorian Age, as compared to novels and poetry, while it revived with great force with the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and the course of time witnessed many trends and currents in the theatrical movement. While tracing those new forms, it is necessary to make a note that a few writers and practitioners had a burning desire to change their artistic world but there were other few, who simply continued with the production of well-crafted light entertainment. There was (and still is) an audience for both.

In tune with the rational structure of modernism, the well-made play turned out not only aptly named, but also quite suitable as a means through which playwrights like J B Priestley, Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan not only entertained mainstream (the conservatives) audiences, but also informed and moved them. Just as J B Priestley conveyed through *An Inspector Calls* (1945):
We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are all responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. (Priestley, 54)

A very important concept to bear in mind is that the evolution of any theatrical form or change never occurs at a neat time section. At the same time, new forms or styles do not automatically wipe out the forms that existed prior to their appearance; neither do they often exist independently of one another (citations can be borrowed from Tradition and Individual Talent by T S Eliot).

Tracing the same line of argument, Realism and naturalism had a significant impact on the 19th and the early 20th century theatre but that did not mean that the forms that had evolved and existed in the 18th and the early 19th century suddenly died or disappeared overnight. Rather, the truth to be realised is that the old and the new styles of writing or performing plays do exist side by side and often blend into one another.

The same is seen with concept of the ‘well-made play’ which basically involved in France but adopted so perfectly throughout the English writings that it was difficult to challenge when the new phase of writers like the realists and the naturalists endeavoured to alter the present theatrical scenario. It proliferated throughout the Western countries and still exists in mainstream theatre, cinema and television.

Leaving aside the mainstream theatre, the 20th century witnessed a major digression called the fridge theatre or experimental theatre where writers of the post war ages tried to convey the modern issues through their writings. In fact, Bernard Kops, a leading playwright and critic of the time mentions:
We write about the problems of the world today because we live in the world of today. We write about the young because we are young. We write about Council flats and the H-bomb and racial discrimination because these things concern us and concern the young people of our country so that if and when they come to the theatre, they will see that it is not divorced from reality; it is for them and they will feel at home. (Kops, 19-20)

These playwrights voice out the agonies of the people through their works and there seems an underlying sense of menace and disturbance in the presentations of major writers of the times. To cite up the theatre critic Harold Hobson about the work of Harold Pinter:

Mr Pinter has got hold of a primary fact of existence. We live on the verge of disaster. One sunny afternoon … a hydrogen bomb may explode … Mr Pinter’s [threat] is of the subtler sort. It breathes in the air. It cannot be seen, but it enters the room every time the door is opened. There is something in your past – it does not matter what- which will catch up with you. ((Elsom, 86)

The theatre groups, termed as “fringe theatre” or “free theatre”, broke through the conventional ways of writing and experimented on each and every level. These fringe theatres came upfront nearly about the mid-1960s. Recording the views of John Elsom: ‘two major events saw the seeds of modern fringe theatre from the years 1963-64: the
establishment of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh and the Theatre of Cruelty seasons at LAMDA’ (Elsom, 141).

Fringe theatre mostly exists at very small venues, performing only highly experimental dramas, addressed to those audiences who would avoid mainstream theatres and are interested in breaking through the traditions and accepted norms of the classics.

To understand it precisely, it is necessary to record these facts into a definite framework that can deal with all the fundamental theatrical aspects thoroughly. The examination would go through the following substitutions:

3.1 Structural Imperfections: Fragmented but Informant
3.2 Presentational Deviants: “Theatreland” to Poor Theatre
3.3 Linguistic Variant: Political rather Poetic
3.4 Characterization: Embodiment of Anger and Depression
3.5 Breaking the Fourth Wall: Recording the Audience Reactions

To gear up the analysis, it’s indeed necessary to pass through the roots and the discussion of theatre or theatrical elements can never be commenced without the one name - “Aristotle” and his landmark definition of tragedy:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language, embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear, effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (Butcher, 23)
The definition provided by Aristotle talks of the six major aspects of tragedy: spectacle, melody, diction, character, thought and plot. The further discussion would involve all these major aspects and the elements will be prioritised in accordance with the most important to the least from the perspective of the modern writings and stage performances. Aristotle considered Plot to be the most important and spectacle to be the least but the 20th century has changed the scenario.

3.1 Structural Imperfections: Fragmented but Informant

Aristotle’s explanation goes on with the description that this plot ‘must connect the various incidents in such a way that the whole will be disjoined and dislocated if any one of them is transposed or removed’ (Butcher, 17). Even though, with a few exceptional, this concept of sequential plot structure has been accepted universally and became a predominant requirement of British theatre; later on supported by the late 19th century cult of ‘well-made play’; engendered by the writers like Ibsen, Shaw, John Galsworthy and many more. Consequently, the playwrights of Manchester School, namely Stanley Houghton and Harold Brighouse produced works that embodied and enliven Emily Zola: ‘either theatre will become modern and real or it will die’ (Schumacher, 72).

To deal with the modern concerns and to highlight the psyche of the modern man, the playwrights dealt with multitude of literary devices. The practitioners had motley of divergent intensions and aesthetic projects that resulted into the plays that were never plotless; instead, full of multiple and at times conflicting plot fragments. To describe the intensions in the words of a literary figure, one can quote the explanation of the Radio Announcer in Louis MacNeice’s 1937 play Out of the Picture:
Aristotle insisted on unity and dignity. Further, Aristotle liked to know where he was. He liked to know whether he was in a tragedy or a comedy. But in these plays of Tchekov and many other plays which have succeeded them, who is to say? One moment you are laughing at the foibles of the characters and the next moment you find they have shot themselves. Terribly inconsequent: but ladies and gentlemen, terribly true to life. (MacNeice, 29)

Reflecting the complications of the times, genre emerged as a complex notion to engross the audience with sudden jerks and plunge into a tangled world where the relationship between the cause and the effect or logic and action was altogether challenged. The narrative structures of the modern theatre began to replicate the uncertainty of the times.

Superficially, these experimentations and the various moments as a whole appear to be consolidated in terms of what they are against; additionally, in the reference of performative structures, this certainty seems to be upheld. Still, instead of branding these performances under one banner of ‘fragmentation’ or ‘episodic sequences’, it would be appropriate to extend a sense of unity by proclaiming that all these plays of the modern British writers challenged Aristotelian linearity. The concept of narrative interruption is itself an important scholarship and indeed central to theoretical interpretations.

Eventually, confronting the contemporary comes down to be the central motivation for the British theatrical activists. The preoccupation of capturing the current socio-political scenario through theatre, evidently affected form as well as content and supplemented for the development of a wide range of new structures. Critic Chris Baldick strives to summarise it as follows:
Rejecting the frivolity of intricately plotted romantic intrigues in the nineteenth-century French tradition of the 'well-made play', it favoured instead the form of the 'problem play', which would bring to life some contemporary controversy of public importance—women's rights, unemployment, penal reform, class privilege—in a vivid but responsibly accurate presentation. (Baldick, 116)

One such form was the Living Newspaper, a documentary genre that blurred the boundaries between the fact and the fiction. The two leading groups, which were active and successful during the initial stage of its British incarnation involves the names of: Theatre Workshop and Unity Theatre.

The form, Living Newspapers turned out to be quite controversial, provocative and evidently triggered minor but significant ruptures. The subjects involved and engaged were quite off-bit and instigated abusive reactions. Ibsen's "A Doll's House", premiered at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Denmark, on 21 December 1879 and provoked great controversy because of its feminine conclusion.

In 1939, Last Edition, which discussed about the Munich Agreement and the political reasons behind that, was restricted and sealed; the police arrested MacColl and Littlewood under the charges of creating disruptions. They were both fined and barred from taking part in any kind of theatrical activity for the next two years. (Goorney and MacColl, 47)

These were the plays that had no hero, or heroine; had no great figures or fanciful characters; these were the plays about commoners. On the occasion of the inauguration of
the Unity Theatre Club, which brought the independent Unity groups together, O’Casey gave the opening night message:

I hope the Unity Theatre Club will smash the myth that culture and the enjoyment of art are confined to what is sometimes called the better classes. (Chambers, 112)

Originated in New York and adopted throughout, the form, Living Newspaper, put forward those burning socio-political issues that readers might encounter in the news only. Instead of illustrating these problems through narratives with the assistance of one or two plot lines, typically consisting a beginning, middle and end where the audience comes to know and empathize with particular characters; Living Newspapers, like Can You Hear Their Voices (1931 play by Hallie Flanagan and Margaret Ellen Clifford, based on the short story "Can You Make Out Their Voices" by Whittaker Chambers), followed Bertoldt Brecht's notion of epic theatre.

These plays were not meant for arising cathartic emotions like empathy in the viewers, rather they complicated viewers with multiple viewpoints with quick secession drawn from various sources, involving photographs, graphs and charts to educate, unsettle and call audience members to action. With its presentational aspects, it shattered the fourth wall that typically used to separate representational actors from audiences using dramatic devises like lighting, sets, props and costumes and by acknowledging, instead of ignoring, the spectators. Like Can You Hear Their Voices, each Living Newspaper addressed the historical roots of a contemporary problem and advocated for reform.

Consequently, the form was seen as dangerous being evidently quite powerful and connected to a larger mass with its bitter but direct engagement with the contemporary
burning issues of the times. The evolution of Workers Theatre can be reviewed as the result of such writings.

Arise, ye Masses, seize the hour:
The world needs turning upside down,
We slaves shall grasp the reins of power. (Toller, 171)

Darek Paget explores that ‘the documentary mode occupies a different position on the ‘fact-truth axis’ from most other drama, and it is it this which makes it (potentially) dangerous to a hegemony under threat’ (Paget, 29). The presentation of ‘fact’ as ‘truth’; was the fundamental understanding turning out the form to be a controversial one. Categorically, it’s not a theatre of entertainment but a theatre utilised as a challenging informant.

The social evils occupied the descriptions and radical views of the social reformers initiated to challenge the orthodoxy of the contemporary mindset. Feminism also came to the front and issues like individuality, freedom of choice, prostitution were dealt through theatrical presentations. Shaw, being a leading realist, exposed the issue of prostitution in *Mrs Warren’s Profession*. The play was banned for quite a long time. In the author’s apology Shaw mentions:

*Mrs Warren’s Profession* has been performed at last, after a delay of only eight years; and I have once more shared with Ibsen the triumphant amusement of startling all but the strongest-headed of the London theatre critics clean out of the practice of their profession. (Shaw, 01)
Not only the theme but the dialogues too remained controversial for quite a long time; a dialogue of Mrs. Warren smashed the critics of prostitution and prostitutes of the times:

If people arrange the world that way for women, there is no good pretending it’s arranged the other way. No: I never was a bit ashamed really. I consider I had a right to be proud of how we managed everything so respectably, and never had a word against us, and how the girls were so well taken care of. Some of them did very well: one of them married an ambassador.

(Shaw, 109)

To be precise, the 20th century was loaded with socio-political and economic controversies and a number of scripts were written and performed to voice them. It happens sometimes that playwrights put forward a few matters that breaks down the acceptance level of the current audience and the performances turn out highly controversial. But at the same time, one has to accept that an older generation's controversy has always been the next generation's banal standard and the fire of controversy often fades away as the time goes by.

When theatre endeavoured to expand the boundaries, it definitely evoked heated conversations, debates and public outrage but at the same time, it turned out to be a call for societal changes or rather awareness. Through such strife, theatre helped to create a society where each and every subject has come to the theatre. Nothing is taboo or nothing is censored under the pressure of controversy.

The way thematic preoccupations went through drastic revolution from the class to mass; the same happened with the structural. The 20th century theatre journeyed from the
structural perfection to the fragmented imperfections. The Absurd theatre, theatre of cruelty, kitchen sink drama; all being variants of In-yr-face theatre, challenged the roots of the Aristotelian understandings. The linearity of the storyline; cause and effect reasoning of the action; dramatic justice or poetic devices; all were lost in the horrors of the world wars.

Second World War was the catalyst that triggered the writings of the Theatre of the Absurd: the encompassing emptiness and the universal conflicts; the wide spread trauma of life under threat of nuclear annihilation; the suppressive disasters put into stark perspective the essential precariousness of human life. One simply never needed to be an abstract thinker to enable himself/herself to contemplate upon absurdity; rather, the experience of absurdity turned out to be a part of an average person's daily existence.

This called for a jerk against the traditional forms and the demand was answered by a guy, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), who rejected realism and called for a return to myth and magic and to explore the deepest conflicts within the human psyche. He had a vision for such a theatre that would reimagine the archetypes and give birth to a modern mythology. He argued that the traditional forms and standards were invalid and least convincing when it came to the modern perspectives.

Absence, emptiness, nothingness and unresolved mysteries occupied the attention of the postmodernist writers. Mostly the plots are cyclical as in Endgame; it begins where the play ended – the play starts from the very dialogue of Clov where he says, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (Beckett, 1) – and throughout the play, the centre of concern remains the idea of repetition and boring cyclic routine.
In the play, *The Chairs*, an old couple welcomes a large number of guests at their home but these guests are invisible so what is seen in the whole play is empty chairs; representing the emptiness of values and purpose in the lives of modern men. The same kind of absence is evident in the play of Becket *Waiting for Godot*; the whole play revolves around an empty road, having only a tree and two chaps waiting for a man named Godot and killing their time with meaningless actions and structureless dialogues.

Ionesco titled such works as “anti-theatre”: “Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots … lost; all his actions become senseless or absurd or rather useless” (Esslin, 23). These plays were not only surreal but also illogical, conflict-less and plotless. The dialogues uttered by the actors were most times meaningless and gibberish. Nothing to surprise, that the immediate reaction of public for the new genre was incomprehension and rejection.

Traditional theatre strived to create a photographic replication of life while the Theatre of the Absurd targets to represent the human world a ritual-like; mythological, archetypal, allegorical; close to the world of dreams. It narrates the happening as a kind of dream where the character is completely confused and in this blank state the distorted mind evolves questions regarding the basic existence: the reasons behind life and death; the injustice and cruelty and so on. Leaving far behind the social concerns and majestic involvements typical household issues, petty fights, unemployment, anger, frustration and other humane aspects occupied theatres.

Existentialism, typically interpreted through the minds of Sartre and Camus, can be understood as a cynical and disruptive replica of man lost in an alien universe; where exists no human truths, no meaning, nothing like value system, no heroism, no altruism, no dignity and the only expected possibility is anguish or defeat. Absurdity results as the
sole outcome for the reverse effects of lost hopes, expecting for a positive rebirth, as it expresses irrationality as a sound voice against nothingness.

“Nothing happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes. It's awful.”

“Let's go." "We can't." "Why not?" "We're waiting for Godot.”

(Beckett, 30)

To conclude it in the words of Kandinsky: ‘form is the outer expression of inner content’ (Kolocotroni and Taxidou, 271), that the very structure of any literary piece is determined by its subject. The nothingness and the void in the lives of human being turned them into depressive or frustrated individuals and such depressions received their voices and expressions in the works of these Absurdist writers.

3.2 Presentational Deviants: “Theatreland” to Poor Theatre

Aristotle considered spectacle to be of least important as he strongly believed that stage decorations can’t turn a bad story or acting into a successful drama. However, the modern playwrights imparted dew importance to these aspects as they firmly believed that they added up to the meaning of the story.

Stage decoration is the central part of the spectacle. To define it, one may say that the Spectacle is theatrical effect presented on the stage. The costuming of the actors, the scenery, the lightings, the music, the technical assistance and all other aspects that contribute to the visual experience of the play can be called the additional properties of spectacle.

So, broadly, Spectacle is broken down into four categories:

- Set (including props and technical assistance in the modern times)
• Costumes
• Lighting
• Sound

Analysing the historical evidences, the western theatrical culture is a gift from ancient Greece. The huge outdoor amphitheatres are the monuments that narrate the tales of the Golden times of theatrical presentations in places like Greece, Italy and Turkey.

These theatres were designed with such a technique that there might be least hindrance of communication between the stage and audience as they knew the importance of these presentation elements. Theatre was believed to be very important element of society as this was the place to unite for every citizen at various occasions and participate in the serious discussions regarding major issues and contribute in understanding and solving them.

Not only the structure but the constructions of these ancient amphitheatres were so excellent that they allowed literally thousands of spectators to watch or listen or exchange the ideas regarding the onstage action that was so important to their daily lives, without any kind of audio amplification.

In fact, the ancient theatrical performances were mainly depended on story and characters as there was least possibility of the actual “set” designs and supporting crew the way one thinks of it now. The success mainly was result of the execution of story, dance and dialogues by the actors. Costumes used were nothing but a prop to highlight the actors. The bright hot Mediterranean sun was used as Lighting.

Interweaving the threads of the theatrical innovations, these hundreds of years have brought substantial changes in the both place and presentation. Theatre, now a days doesn’t need a large installation or proper sitting arrangements; rather it can be performed
at any randomly available space: on streets or closed houses; in hospitals or factories; in castles or churches and even in train stations. From the times of Thespis, the stage sets were used to be movable, carried along at various places in movable objects like wagons but gradually the Greeks prepared huge structures for the performances and initiated the trend of preparing a building for performance, called theatre.

The modern gigantic indoor theatres that are seen today – magnificent and highly equipped with the latest technology – are indebted largely on the evolution that happened over the centuries. The best example of this obligation is the Teatro Olimpico, a late 1500s theatre, architect by the Italian Palladio. It is considered to be the oldest surviving enclosed theatre in the world whose design was persuaded by a Roman architect’s plans many centuries earlier.

The 20th century witnessed the emergence of new thinking and conceptual understandings regarding the spectacle (theatrical sets/designs). Along with the majestic sets, the “designers”/set developer of theatre also came to the front in the early 20th century. The scene designs, costumes, lightings were listed in the theatre programs as a production role till the end of 1920s.

During these times, lightings were still not a common property and were still in its rudimentary stage with lots of scope for improvements. Sound modification or audio amplification was still in the infancy. Costumes were subsidiary object usually provided by actors themselves with least consideration of colour co-ordination, texture or aesthetic beauty.

The beginning of the century enlivened many of these aspects. Designers innovated at the levels of painting, lightings, stage architecture and evolved with a completely renovated
structure of theatre. Influenced with the Bauhaus Movement (a German Art School Movement, active between 1919 and 1933) and a few other influences in the field of visual arts, theatre design carved its way towards a distinct discipline and developed conventions for what would be seen on the 20th Century stages.

3.2.1 Stage art of the 20th Century:

The reaction against the excessive clutter of archaeologically authentic detail resulted out of the naturalistic movement on stage encouraged simplicity or even sometimes austerity. With the use of excessiveness, the plays rose above the superficial dressing highlights and mirrored the actual spirit of the times. One of the leading names in advocating this view was of the Swiss designer Adolphe Appia, who exploited the latest technology at its best and employed the electric lighting to point out a completely new direction in stage design.

Appia forwarded his views very effectively that the setting needs to serve to focus attention on the actor rather than drowning him in two-dimensional pictorial detail. It was his belief that the creative use of light on a few well-chosen forms—simple platforms, flights of steps and the like—was pretty enough to project the changing mood of a play.

Due to his radical thoughts, Appia could hardly get opportunities to materialize his theories. But the beginning of the century witnessed strong application of his ideas with one name, Edward Gordon Craig, an English Director and designer who adopted the concepts of Appia and brightened the abstract forms with sharp lightings. He was of the opinion that a suggestive reality could gear up the imagination of the audience more than a physical reality: explaining with an example he says: ‘a single Gothic pillar, designed to stand alone and carefully lit, can suggest a church more effectively than a paint-and-
canvas replica faithful to the last detail’. (Rea) Unfortunately, same as Appia, Craig could hardly become a practitioner and remained a theorist only.

Craig mentioned his idea of a “total theatre” within his noteworthy contribution, On the Art of the Theatre (1905), where a stage director is solely responsible for harmonizing each and every aspect of theatre production including acting, movement, music, design, colour, makeup and lighting, resulting into a perfect unified effect. Craig’s ideas of depersonalization of the actor into what he used to call the übermarionette (“super-marionette”) turned out to be more controversial as it was based on a new symbolic form of movement and gesture where the actor’s identity would be least engrossed with the production’s aesthetic concept. Even though both Appia and Craig could hardly found a practical way of transpire their vision, they deployed an enormous influence on the next generation of directors and stage designers, specifically with their principle of ‘painting’ with light.

The one who could get the chance to put into the practice the ideals and imaginaries of Appia and Craig was an Austrian director Max Reinhardt. He happened to be quite close to many of Craig’s ideals, specifically with the power that he exerted over almost every aspect of theatrical production. Initiating his career as an actor in Otto Brahm’s company at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, Reinhardt achieved praise for his innovative stagecraft of Shakespeare’s Midsummer Night’s Dream in 1905 and afterwards dedicated himself solely to direction. He ruled over the European theatre for almost 25 years. His instinct for bold theatricality earned him many enemies among the realists but it also brought a sense of freshness, colour and richness to the theatre of the time.

Reinhardt was innovative and imaginative in his approach towards acting: dejected with the idea of “one style”, he stipulated for a modern style that might be realistic in feeling
but certainly avoided the drab exactness of realism. Even with the classics, he attempted to bring liveliness through supple speaking altering the slow, ponderous delivery of the traditionalists. He insisted his actors to think afresh regarding their characters instead of adopting ready-made characterizations.

Accepting the necessity and the vital role of the *Spectacle* in any theatrical presentations these new stage designers precipitated a few changes at almost every level that changed the complete scenario of the 20th century theatrical presentations:

### 3.2.2 Architecture:

The early 20th century theatre architecture brought awareness regarding the needs and suitability of the audiences and the actors in creating better acoustical, visual and spatial arrangements. Fan-shaped auditoriums came into the trends leaving behind the cylindrical one. The major reason being the clear sight-lines and favourable acoustics for the audiences and actors preferred it since it helped them to adopt natural style of acting, turning out to be more popular for smaller venues.

The newness also revived the freshness of earlier forms such as the thrust and arena stages (the circular theatres). However, Olivier Theatre used to be the most favoured by the contemporary audience. The reason being quite obvious that the structure permitted everyone to have the same view of the stage through the Proscenium arch providing a picture frame surrounding the stage and framing the play. The Proscenium arch ranged from an embellished or shiny masterpiece encompassing the curtain at the beginning of a show to the ordinary black walls hindering the sights of the audience from peeping through the wings of the theatre.
The structure drastically altered the performance style as well as the entry and exit criteria of the actors. Analysing the major aspects of difference: in a Proscenium theatre, the action usually happens either behind the Proscenium or slightly in front of it - known as the apron of a stage, while in a thrust theatre, the action conventionally occurs almost completely in front of the 'Proscenium arch'. In thrust, the audience is seated on three sides of the stage but the arena stages used all the four sides deploying the best use of entrances and exits by the hallways through the audience. Another recycled theatrical convention is called the Found Space. The term 'Found Space' indicates streets, personal homes, grocery stores or any random space that is not specifically designated as a theatre.

3.2.3 Set:

Within theatrical context, a set can be defined as: “representation consisting of the scenery and other properties used to identify the location of a dramatic production” (Farlex). It can be understood simply as the background upon which the story is told. It can range widely from a very detailed box set to absolutely nothing; a kind of physical platform or walls for projection on sheets.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the realistic plays utilized the box set or three walls designs which looked like the interior of a house, complete with doors, windows and furniture. The Naturalistic plays furthered the implications as the ‘set’ was considered more important to provide ‘naturalistic’ feel received by the audiences. ‘The Absurdist’ abandoned the necessity of it utilizing minimal props to universalize the experience while the Kitchen-sink brought it to home utensils.
In fact, to summarize it in brief, the journey can aptly be described from gigantic music hall opera with majestic presentation to the absurdist poverty. It witnessed the extremes of presentational strategies and the audience’s reception of those both.

3.2.4 Lighting:

The year, 1879 was a remarkable one in the history of theatrical world as it brought electric light bulb replacing the gas or carbon arc lamps (which were prone to fire). The first public building which was completely operated through electricity was Savoy in London in 1881. In the following year, Munich Exposition exhibited an electrified theatre, embarking a general change-over to electricity-lit theatres. To spread out the wires for the electric lightings, the gas lines were used to insert the wires and light the bulbs were put at the end of the gas jets.

However, electricity too had quite a few drawbacks. As the set designers or scenographers were least accustomed to the new medium, they could hardly create sets that were suitable for electric light placement. Another obvious drawback was of availability of electrician. Simultaneously, one has to accept that electricity might not be as dangerous as gas but there still stands the chances of fire. Plus, the front boards/control panels were live, with handles that were in an 'on' or 'off' position that had no protection and if the operator got even a bit careless, he or she could die. Consumption of a lot of power can also be listed as one of the major drawbacks of electricity. Many a times, theatres needed to own the generators to supply power to the theatres.

The contribution of Gordon Craig, the British actor, director, producer and scenic designer is believed to be commendable. He very strategically substituted the lighting positions from the foot of the stage (footlights/floaters) to the hanging lighting
instruments above the stage. Along with Adolphe Appia, Gordon Craig also conceptualised the dramatic prospective of lighting, playing with colour and form. Appia entrenched the first goals of stage lighting in his books: *La Mise en Scène du théâtre Wagnérien* (1891), translated as *The Staging of the Wagnerian Drama* (1982) and *L'Oeuvre d'art vivant* (1921) or *The Living Work of Art* (1960).

However, the 20th century had remained quite unique for all its literary forms as it assimilated conflicting trends everywhere. Analysing the theatrical spaces, there can be seen three major theatrical trends of performances. At the first place, there are West End Theatres which are at the heart of London and are completely commercial; while on the other, there are four major subsidized theatres: English Stage Company, National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company and Mermaid Theatre; the third included the fringe or alternative theatre which provided space for the innovations, new talents and upcoming stars and directors.

3.2.5 The Commercial Theatres of the London West End:

"Theatreland" is regarded the hub of the mainstream professional theatre and as it is situated near the West End of London, the term West End theatre is commonly applied to these huge theatres. The West End theatres are considered as one of the two leading commercial theatre hub in the world; the other is the Broadway theatre of New York City. Watching one of the West End shows is among the major attractions for any tourist in London. “Theatreland", branded as theatre district, includes almost forty venues in the very heart of London. The Drury Lane and the Shaftesbury Avenue along with The Strand are among the leading theatre streets. These commercial theatre mostly include straight plays, entertaining comic works, gigantic musicals and evergreen classics.
3.2.6 The Leading Subsidized / Non-commercial Theatres:

Besides these leading commercial theatre companies, even non-commercial theatres of London enjoy great artistic prestige. These non-commercial or subsidized theatre companies too entertain audience at their best. The predominant are: the Barbican Centre, the Old Vic, the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, the Royal National Theatre and the Shakespeare's Globe theatre.

These companies provide advantage to upcoming artists and amateur playwrights with impressive scripts. They also premiere classical plays as well as modern creative writings. The selected few who excel on this level are promoted for the upgradation and performed at the commercial West End theatres.

Another most leading name of publically funded theatre company of London is National Theatre; mostly known as The Royal National Theatre. It is so prominent and internationally acclaimed that it’s mostly mentioned as Great Britain’s National Theatre.

Sloane Square is the venue of The Royal Court Theatre, which is one more non-commercial theatre company, exactly situated at the Royal Borough, Chelsea; in the very heart of London. Contemporary theatrical writings are indebted to the great contribution done by the Royal Court Theatre. In 1956, English Stage Company used to procure it being a resident company. One more company located alongside (Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire) is the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC).

The Royal Opera House, usually known as Covent Garden (being located at the place of that name) is internationally famous as the leading opera house, inviting performances from all around the world; a hub of the Royal Opera and Royal Ballet and a prestigious
residence of symphony orchestra. The Royal Opera House is considered to be the lap of major innovation in the form of opera, ballad and musical performances.

3.2.7 The Theatre of the so-called Fringe / Alternative Theatre:

The term *Fringe Theatre* came into existence in the late 1940s, when approx. eight theatre companies emerged at the Edinburgh International Festival, aspiring to achieve recognition from the mass gathering, a Scottish journalist Robert Kemp (coincidentally a playwright too) narrated the situation: "Round the fringe of official Festival drama, there seems to be more private enterprise than before ... I am afraid some of us are not going to be at home during the evenings!" (Shrum, 65)

Edinburgh Festival Fringe was initiated in 1947. The first movement in Britain started in the 1960s and is considered at par with the United States' Off-Off-Broadway theatres and Europe's "free theatre" groups. The word, Fringe theatre was on the tongue of every youth by the late 1950s, specifically after the premiere of *Beyond the Fringe*, at Edinburgh in 1960. Its huge popularity helped it to get space in the Broadway as well as the West End. Some of the early innovators in fringe theatre were an American bookseller, James Haynes, who in 1963, created the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. Also noted in this period is the La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre of 13 Rows and Józef Szajna's Studio Theatre in Warsaw.

3.2.8 Poor Theatre:

Poor theatre became a worldwide fashion during the late 1960s and early 1970s, even though critics complained that most groups that attempted it produced only self-indulgent imitations that tended to exclude the audience. Convincingly, 1976 onwards, Grotowski
implemented his ideas and initiated to perform behind the close doors. The same spirit and concept was better discussed and conveyed in the ideas and discussions of Brook. In 1968, Brook left England and established International Centre of Theatre Research in the heart of Paris. With the help of this research lab, Brook produced *Ubu roi* in 1977 which is a modern adaptation of *Carmen* (1982); an opera written by Georges Bizet. One more noteworthy production was *Le Mahabharata* (1985) which was a nine-hour long performance on the Hindu epic Mahabharata.

In the 20th century, three people defined actor and acting in quite supreme level and stretched the boundaries of performance. The names included, Brecht, Stanislavsky and Jerzy Grotowski, the leading Polish director. Grotowski achieved world-wide fame with the establishment of his Laboratory Theatre in Opole, Poland, in 1959. He successfully performed at different places throughout Europe and United States in the mid-1960s. His influence was further enhanced by the publication of his theoretical pronouncements in *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968).

Grotowski shared his ideas to Artaud regarding the concept of performance and the vision of presentation. He strongly believed that the purpose of theatre is not to entertain and definitely not to illustrate, rather it is to awaken. Theatre is a ‘secular religion’ and the performer is a ‘holy actor’. These actors should achieve spontaneity through consistent practice and confront the audience without the support of any other instrumentation.

Rejecting the paraphernalia of the “rich theatre” and to emerge with the concept of ‘poor’ theatre, Grotowski rejected all the unnecessary supplements of costumes and props and the scenic designs; rather he emphasised upon the focal point of theatre; the actor. His productions included adaptations of the 17th century Spanish playwright Pedro Calderón’s
Príncipe Constante (The Constant Prince) and the early 20th century Polish writer Stanisław Wyspiański’s Akropolis (Acropolis).

Present is always built up on past but with the important difference of accessible and steadily advancing technology. These technical advancements helped to create wonderful imageries and mesmerizing lighting effects; moveable floors and sliding walls; rise and drop of the curtains and props; almost everything with just a touch. Time and technology have emerged with a stage design that is quite innovative and has stunning visual effects.

3.3 Linguistic Variant: Political rather Poetic

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul; see where it flies!—
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for Heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena. (Marlowe, 5.1.97-103)

One of the most memorized and quoted lines of Marlowe from his work Dr. Faustus; the crown of poetry and the peak of Romanticism.

"Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing." (Shakespeare, 5.5, 24-28)
Again an excellent piece of poetic writing with the wider understanding of life and described in such a beautiful way by William Shakespeare in his work, *Macbeth*.

These lines are one of the benchmarks of the Golden Era of the Western theatre. The university wits and Shakespeare created an aura that nobody can escape till date. The majestic language truly infused life in it. The language of Shakespearean plays was a real attraction. Terry Eagleton mentions that Shakespeare’s plays reflect a kind of language that has ‘power to bend the world to its own will’ (Eagleton, 8); quoting the words of MacColl: ‘hadn’t Shakespeare teased and manipulated language till it fitted the hands like magic gloves?’ (Goorney & MacColl, xlvii)

As been discussed quite from the beginning, the 20th century has been a hub for conflicting trends and theatre was obviously not an exceptional one. Every aspect of theatrical writing was affected by the time and as a result, there emerged a way of writing that rejected every accepted norm.

The experimentation and the freshness brought to the theatrical land in the sphere of structure and thematic concerns had been the core of the discussion in the previous points. However, the change was not only confined to the outer periphery, rather, had great deal of innovations in the area of linguistics too. Analyzing the linguistic preferences, keeping aside a few exceptions and disagreements, overtly there can be two clear sides: the Political and the Poetic.

The emergence of WTM (Workers’ Theatre Movement), Unity Theatre and Theatre Workshop resided such writers who strongly adhered to the political roots and slashed the social evils through their writings. Definitely the language used by these writers was political, real or can be described as ‘day to day’ language.
Take an agit-prop sketch like *Four Proletarian Dialogues* by John Davidson, in which a Boy and a Girl discuss the theoretical foundations of Communism:

GIRL: what do you mean by class war?

BOY: the class war is the struggle between the working class and the capitalist class, and it arises out of the economic conditions of society. (Davidson, 372.4)

While on the one hand, there were the Group theatre dramatists like Auden, Isherwood, MacNeice, Eliot and Spencer, imbued with a keen sense of syntactic originality and creativity. Such overt discriminations might seem arbitrary till the discussion of the thematic or subjective level; but one would definitely expect a complete opposition where language is concerned.

They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.

They know and do not know, that acting is suffering

And suffering is action. Neither does the actor suffer

Nor the patient act. But both are fixed

In an eternal action, an eternal patience

To which all must consent that it may be willed

And which all must suffer that they may will it,

That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action

And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still

Be forever still. (Eliot, 182)

*Murder in the Cathedral*, one of the best known verse dramas depicts these lines where Eliot very effectively used the dichotomy between acting and suffering. The concepts of
the wheel of God, inevitability of future and the human suffering have been interwoven quite poetically in the lines. The imagination and the innovation in the verse or the writing style has remained the hallmark of the poetic dramatists while the political playwrights explored declamation and everyday speech patterns.

In reality, these assumptions too, are not again completely accurate. Although, as already discussed, there were discernible differences; both had a great deal of similarities in this area than one might assume. The further discussion in this particular point would attempt to explore new linguistic methods across the British theatrical playwrights to emerge with new impact of performance, specifically after the World Wars.

Citing here, one of the leading Canadian police bureaucrat Herb Darling, on Communism and intelligence; who in 1931 co-authored the internal RCMP report, put forward a case against the Communist Party for being an illegal organization and provided the rationale for the arrest of the Party’s top leaders because of the subject matter of the play, *Eight Men Speak*.

Simultaneously, Darling chanced upon to witness a performance of *Lefty* that completely depressed him. He had written in his report that it was a full house and that “judging from the looks of some of the people in the audience … I would say some of them were quite decent respectable men and women” (*Waiting for Lefty*). As for the play itself, it was,

… In many parts of the play the language is worse than you would hear in any cheap sporting house, but at that the class of actors and actresses in the play seemed to get a thrill out of using it. (*Waiting for Lefty*)
The unconventional, non-sensible and weird writings of the major writers like Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty and Eugene Ionesco's absurdist drama gave birth to more disturbing, savage work of N. F. Simpson, Joe Orton and David Rudkin. This was a kind of anti-middle class drama for the upsurging middle classes; involved in utmost mobility, portrayed the most satirical pictures of English society with a kind of language that surprised, rather shocked the conventional minds.

In the foundations of the postmodern literature and arts in general, one can simply find a sense of absurdity, humorous criticism, radical surprise, distortions, disruption and devastating moralities. These aspects embodied its most paradigmatic works; evolving out of the chaos left by World War I and II.

Western post-war societies clearly emerged as a consequence of a few typical economic and political conditions of the life that usually assumed as a rebellious outcry against all formations and foundations; all established definitions of pain, suffering, poverty and death; all beliefs of man being rational or intellectual; all metaphors of divinity, of metaphysics, of intelligibility and order.

The mid 1950s resulted into emergence of various new trends with the second wave of dramatists, dominating the English stage still in the 21st century. Tom Stoppard tuned up with the experimentalism initiated by Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (premiered at the Edinburgh Festival Theatre in 1965), reacting against the Aristotelian concept of language “*in language, embellished with each kind of artistic ornament...*” (Butcher, 23) with their minimalism of a rich, luxuriant use of dialogue.
The theatre of the Absurd has its own way to deal with the subject matter. Initially, it had mixed response from the audience but gradually, its way of deconstructing reality and using scattered pieces to provoke numerous suppressed feelings tied up the human existence from the deepest core of hopelessness and ultimate absurdity. However, the essence of the Absurd Drama or Theatre relies firmly on the basis of deconstructed, abused, perverted but still poetically admitted literary language system.

Estragon: Don’t touch me!
Vladimir: Do you want me to go away? Gogo! ...
Estragon: Don’t touch me! Don’t question me! Don’t speak to me! Stay with me! (Beckett, 53)

Unreliability of language as a carrier of ideas or thoughts is at the core of one of the most important aspects of absurd drama. It strongly advocates that language is nothing but a means for conventionalized, stereotyped or useless exchange of words which hardly mean anything. Even Dr Culik supports the idea that:

Words failed to express the essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. The Theatre of the Absurd constituted first and foremost an onslaught on language, showing it as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. Absurd drama uses conventionalised speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon, which it distorts, parodies and breaks down. By ridiculing conventionalised and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday
speech conventions and communicating more authentically.

(Culík)

The Absurd Drama and Theatre strongly opposes realism on the basis of its settings and thereby deconstructs reality with the consistent application of nonsense and absurd language that mirrors the existing scenario of irrational reasoning, underlining the complete system of plot, characters and stage organization. Absurd drama demolishes the logic structures of language from its roots. It celebrates the impossible, illogical, unexpected and sometimes weird. Connecting the concept of Sigmund Freud here; ‘there is a feeling of freedom one can enjoy when one is able to abandon the straitjacket of logic’ (Gerould, 73). As Dr. Culik points out, “Rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite.” (Culík)

Vladimir. Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (Pause. Vehemently.) What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come… (Beckett, 59)

The metaphorical placement of the words like waste represents the hard core fact that the same sublime lyrical resonance which Eliot’s paradigmatic writings had is missing in both poems and plays of these modern or postmodern times, rather it consists in itself the actual face of absurdity; where not characters but clown move about on the empty stage carrying an imaginary road.
However, this Absurdity was not as if enough, so Osborn entered with a big blow in the theatre land. Alan Sillitoe mentions Osborn’s contribution in the introductory section of *Look Back in Anger*:

John Osborne didn’t contribute to British theatre: he set off a landmine called *Look Back in Anger* and blew most of it up. The bits have settled back into place, of course, but it can never be the same again. (Osborn, 1)

*Look Back in Anger* unarguably paved new path for the upcoming talents through its blazing immediacy, corrosive vitality and linguistic exuberance that completely diverted British theatre in a new direction. Recording a review from the Observer of Kenneth Tynan who claims that Osborne, unequivocally, represented all the disaffected youth and that declared along with: “I doubt if I could love anyone who did not wish to see *Look Back in Anger*” (Ellis). Harold Hobson, the Sunday Times, in a little restrained manner claimed Osborne to be “a writer of outstanding promise”. (Billington)

The play, in those times considered to be an authentic social document with an eloquent testament of alienated youth; depicting the psychological concerns of the times: Alienation and Loneliness, Anger and Hatred, Apathy and Passivity, Class Conflict, Identity Crisis, Sexism and so on. Each and every dialogue, depicting these aspects is quite straight but at the same time, intensely sharp. Just as when Alison, Jimmy’s wife, tells her father: “You’re hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same” (Osborn, 55). She directly connects the grievances of both the generations where the colonialist Colonel grieves over an Edwardian paradise lost while Jimmy is an angry romantic nostalgic for a world he never knew.
I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. ...There aren't any good, brave causes left. (Osborn, 68)

In fact, the alienation and the identity crises made the youth of those days full of anger where they could not find any reason to live. Jimmy calls it ‘pain of being alive’ (Osborn, 96). They now and again revert to the imaginary world of animals and even at the end they escape from the real world as they could hardly face the harsh, cruel reality.

There are cruel steel traps lying about everywhere, just waiting for rather mad, slightly satanic, and very timid little animals.

(Osborn, 77)

The major contribution made in the theatrical world by Osborne is liberating the language. Osborne has expressed the despair of a youth, the anger and the fire. He has indicated that theatrical prose could attain its own distinctive language.

One day, when I'm no longer spending my days running a sweet-stall, I may write a book about us all. It's all here (slapping his forehead). Written in flames a mile high. And it won't be recollected in tranquility either, picking daffodils with Auntie Wordsworth. It'll be recollected in fire, and blood. My blood. (Osborn, 43)

The movement to liberate the linguistic usages in the theatrical world got fire in the late 1960s when the stage censorship brought to an end with the abolition of the rule of the Lord Chamberlain in 1968. The younger generation of theatrical writers received a
greater freedom of language and moved quite ahead than the Angry Young Men or the working-class dramatists with their aggressive and harsh social criticism.

The next decade emerged with a rather grey shed. The Heath government (1970-74) took charge with raising chaos: the ratio of crime and unemployment went to its heights. Undoubtedly, theatre was used as a political weapon. David Edgar's *Destiny* (1976) dealt with the rise of British fascism. David Hare, in *Fanshen* (1975) and *Plenty* (1978), anatomized the pros and cons of Chinese revolution and Britain's post-war disappointments.

John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil* (1973), one of his best known plays with the principal of radical popular theatre, reflected and supported Scotland's sense of identity. The last, but believed to be the most mature political comedian who re-established the importance of the form, comedy, to bring about the desired changes was Trevor Griffiths with his renown plays, *The Party* (1973) and *Comedians* (1975).

The 1980s brought dramatists on a more satirical mode where Howard Brenton and Tony Howard's *A Short Sharp Shock* (1980) made the arts minister to apologise to the Commoners while Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982) tries to differentiate between the American individualistic feminism against British social feminism taking into consideration the question of success for woman.

However, the next decade exploded with writing of Stephen Daldry at the Royal Court. This was the time of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, Joe Penhall's *Some Voices*, Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* and Nick Grosso's *Peaches*: a combination
of a few playwrights who gradually emerged with an umbrella term called *In-Yer-Face* theatre.

Bringing out the essence, one may summarize the whole journey of theatrical language in these words: The journey of British theatrical language initiated with the embellished and flowery usage of the Greeks dramatists; took a beautiful turn with the Romans; got ornamented and adornment in the hands of Shakespeare and Marlowe; while the Victorians used it to mock up ironically to the social snobbery; the Modern age saw the scornful and sarcastic turn with the world wars and broke down in the hands of post moderns. The language not only lost its stature but its meaning too. The embellishment turned to slangs and sometimes, silence...

### 3.4 Characterization: Embodiment of Anger and Depression:

In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger … deprived of memories of a lost homeland; he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life … constitutes the feeling of absurdity. (Camus, 102)

The modern and the postmodern British theatre strived to make sense of a world where humanity was fractured by two World wars, poverty, unemployment, subdued class war and clashes between the gender relations; the breakthrough of the established narratives and accepted forms. Undoubtedly, this strife embodied the characterization of the times and the play turned out an outlet of the anger and the depression being faced by the youth.

Again moving ahead with the same line of argument and connecting the further discussion with Aristotle’s concept of tragedy, the form must include action; not narration
and one need a character to do that. So, one has to admit that characters do have a major part in success of a theatre. In the modern and the postmodern times, character has not remained only a puppet to serve specific political and/or artistic projects rather the character has turned out to be an outlet of personal frustrations, hatred and anger which equally got reflected from the audience and successfully fulfilled the Aristotelian concept of Catharsis (for actors and spectators).

Commenting on the technique of characterization, Yeats opined that a theatrical focus on the individuality of a character is actually a modern invention as ‘when we go back a few centuries and enter the great periods of drama, characters grow less and sometimes even disappear’ (Yeats, 240). There are a number of examples of such stock characters: The Financier in Auden and Isherwood’s *The Dog beneath the Skin*, Fortune in MacColl’s *Joan Bullion*, Crabbe in Herbert Hogge’s *Cannibal Carnival*, etc. Definitely, Yeats never meant that theatre history lacks good character depiction but development of any character through the depiction of psychological analyses had little scope in the previous times.

A search for simplified, reflective and impressive characterization added up with conceptual understandings of Edward Gordon Craig. His thought provoking idea of the Ubermarionette suggested an upside down change in the presentation of the protagonists that differs from theme-centred characterization.

The actor needs to stop impersonating and turning out someone else. He need not cry to the audience "Watch me; I am now pretending to be so and so and I am now pretending to do so and so;" and proceed to imitate as exactly as possible. Craig emphasised on creating a new form of acting including symbolical gestures; to impersonate, to interpret; to represent and to recreate. This way of working might help them to get back to the way
that is expected. At the same time, a number of other older traditions were revived. Group Theatre, for example, reused the concept of mask.

The face of the actor carries no such conviction; it is over-full of fleeting expression – frail, restless, disturbed and disturbing

... the mask will return to the theatre; of that I grow ever more and more assured. (Craig, 21)

The actors needed new techniques because of the kinds of characters created by the playwrights of the times; resulting out of the complex changes happening in the society. Reasons behind that were many, including the World Wars, the problem of Suez Canal, American pressures, loss of power and the major one, economic collapse. These all issues contributed at various levels in subverting the scenario of the times.

The relationship between “servants” and “masters” turned out to be a question; Women rebelled to gain equality with men; Religion was challenged with the writings of Charles Darwin questioning the whole base of Creation Philosophy. The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka and others changed the nature of thought and belief. The writings of Sigmund Freud challenged the psychological patterns of human behaviour; all these got reflected through various characters in theatre with various modes of presentation including, political theatre, social theatre, woman’s theatre, absurd theatre, even gay/lesbian (LGBT) theatre and many more.

The turn of the century saw an attempt to rescue the character from the crises of mimesis. Leaving aside the projection of the true “human image”, there come down the representation of the human situation in the theatre. The commoners took place of prince
and kings and acting turned out to be an outlet of human cry. Instead of being a silent observer, audience turned out to be an insider of the performance.

Writers like Ibsen, Shaw and Chekov provided a human attitude towards standard principles, social norms and family values in their dramas that enriched the stories with crucial truth regarding life. They very consciously dealt with the changing social and individual concerns and importance; specifically the female characters progressed from the downtrodden, depended, and subsided creature to an emancipated, liberated and powerful. Many female characters were attributed with masculine attitudes and their due importance in society.

Coming to the front, women had initiated to express the reality of their lives and initiated Suffrage movement. A thousand of actresses participated in the movement and fought for their rights; the centre was ‘to vote’. A few indirectly supported the movement by writing plays; to mention a few: Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St John wrote *How the Vote Was Won; Votes for Women* by Elizabeth Robins was quite impressive; Beatrice Harraden spoke of *Lady Geraldine’s Speech* and *A Chat with Mrs Chicky and Miss Appleyard’s Awakening* was very interestingly written by Evelyn Glover. However, the fight was finally rewarded in 1918, which officially imparted women, the right to vote and participate in the decisions of the nation. G. B. Shaw and Ibsen created roles of real women. *Mrs Warren, Major Barbara,* and *Pygmalion* all have strong female leads.

The 1930s attained peaks of Social Realism in plays. These writings were engrossed in expressing the harsh reality of life. It dealt with the issues of poverty, the banalities of capitalism, the depression and the effects of poor economy. During these times, a few forms emerged that again concentrated on the negative consequences of the issues emerged at those particular times. The political theatre like Agitprop, inspired by
women’s liberation movement, emphasised upon propagating workers’ issues. They also imparted views on war and it’s after effects. These plays influenced larger mass; replaced characters from mythological hero to depressed workers; the royals and the prince to an employee or a jobless frustrated youth.

In fact, till 1930s, The English Theatre was engaged with commercial *Loom shire Plays* that were in least concern with the issues or problems of daily life. They were in least connection with the issues of the times. But the new trends of 1950s were Drama of Commitment and Social Protest, the Absurd, The theatre of Angry Young Men, the Kitchen sink, Theatre of Ideas. In brief, the times were of protest and the theatre was chosen as a form to overthrow everything that hampers the heart to breath. It was a form of emancipation.

3.4.1 The Rise of Anti-hero:

The term, anti-hero, being a bit complicated and ambiguous, needs a clear understanding as it opens the doors of various interpretations. So, before analysing the characters, it is necessary to clarify the term.

M. H. Abrams explains the term in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* as:

The chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that which we associate with the traditional protagonist or hero of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual or dishonest. (Abrams, 11)
While Cuddon depicts it as:

The history of literature is full of fictional heroes who have been granted noble qualities and virtuous characteristics. However, the antihero is usually the one who is given the ability of failure (Cuddon, 43).

To mention a few ‘New wave’ social realist playwrights who initiated the working-class theatre in Britain are John Arden, Arnold Wesker and Shelagh Delaney. These dramas were primarily a kind of emotional protest and expressed the emotional mood of the English youth after the World War II.

These youth, being the protagonist of the play hardly “fit in” the definition of the medieval heroes. They all lack the typical heroic features: as they are neither strong nor brave; they are completely self-centred; they fight for their own sake (sometimes even not for the self), but certainly not for others; and last but not the least, they are not brave young men rather they are “angry young men”. Most of the times, they immediately turns out to be a villain from these inferior, sarcastic and cynical “anti-heroes”. They are dissatisfied frustrated youths who lack dreams or love and the power to control the situation they are in.

*Look back in Anger*, one of the most popular plays of 1950s, successfully captured the mood of despair, anger and frustration of the post-war young generation. It’s a complex work of art with many themes and ideas which turned it stand out. It’s a story of a marriage between two different classes and a study of class conflict and the frustration caused with it. The play expressed contemporary issues and problems quite convincingly.
Jimmy Porter, a very complex individual character whose personal failures and obsessions expressed predominant concerns of his time; represented the dissatisfactions and frustrations of the English Society being a spokesman for the Post-war generation. The character indicates a strong connection between the individual psychological problems and the problems of the whole generation of people.

‘Anger’ is certainly the essence of not only Look Back in Anger but most plays by Wesker and other plays of the later 20th century. It is not definitely any propaganda declared in Shaw or in Ibsen’s Enemy of the people; rather it is an emotional protest, scarsely articulate, with intensity beyond its nominal causes; but the cry was recorded in this form and responded by its immediate audiences.

These plays are often connected with the title of “Angry young men”; the concept derived from Leslie Allen Paul’s autobiography with the same name, published in 1951. The term later on used to refer John Osborne as his main character, Jimmy, shared similar characteristics as rebelliousness, criticism and contempt towards the society in which they lived, typical of the post war period. It depicted the monotony, mediocrity and injustice being a part of their existence.

The “Angry Young Men” movement is also known as “Kitchen-Sink-drama” with the simple reason that their personages most of times belong to the middle-class and often kitchen provides place of scene, as in Wesker’s The Kitchen.

Osborne’s Look back in Anger along with Wesker’s The Kitchen represents rebellion through main characters. In Look back in Anger, Jimmy is a nonconformist person same as Peter in The Kitchen. Both of them disagree with the ways of the world. They feel hatred and enmity towards the people who believe work and money to be the sole
purpose of life. Jimmy keeps on arguing with Alison and Cliff because of the differences of opinion they have regarding their environment and the situation around them. Similar is with Peter; his companions don’t dream while Peter doesn’t want to waste his life living in that Kitchen. They get money there but money is not everything. These frustrations and the people around them turn these authors into “Angry young men” and sow the seeds of such writings.

These writings dealt with petty social and personal issues that turned the younger generation into live bomb that might blast at any fleeting moment. Arnold Wesker’s *Chicken Soup with Barley* deals with the dissatisfaction of the working classes with mass culture; *West of Suez* (1979) by Osborne muddled panorama of family life in an outpost of the collapsing British Empire; Osborne’s *A Sense of Detachment* (1972) and *The End of ME Old Cigar* (1975) are satirical rather charade but *A Place Calling itself Rome* (1973), a modern reworking of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, is a sober political drama.

As a matter of fact, the principle that defines Existentialism is that “man makes himself” and the 20th century was the time that challenged this very existential question which turned character into a profoundly complex on-stage presence, battling with mental fragmentation, the inevitability of death and an overwhelming sense of powerlessness.

If you had seen a dead man, you would not
Think it so beautiful to lie and rot;
I’ve watched men writhing on the dug-our floor
Cursing the land for which they went to war.

(Auden and Isherwood, 72)
In fact, these World Wars directly hit the human essence and broke something deep inside. The war and its consequences stressed on this crucial aspect that is Death; certainly inevitable but violent and gruesome. As a reaction, new methods of characterization come to front without the typical rules of space, time or logic where an actor need not inhabit the same role throughout the performance. In the words of Strindberg: “Time and space do not exist ... the characters spilt, double, multiply, evaporate, densify, disperse and assemble” (Strindberg, 175).

If the Russian Revolution can be considered as one of the root to drive theatre into Realism then the World Wars and specifically the nuclear bomb attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki can surely be put forward as reasons for the emergence of the Absurd theatre. These inhumane incidents not only questioned the humanity being alive or not; but it also wondered about the meaning and even necessity of life itself. The absurdity evolved out of the conclusions derived from such events that put a full stop on human lives just with a blast or slaughter.

A few playwrights created a group in around 1950s with a concept of writing drama in a different way. The group included: the Irishman Samuel Beckett, the Rumanian Eugene Ionesco, the Russian Arthur Adamov and the Spanish Fernando Arrabal. They had a common vision to express through their series of writings and their writing was labelled as “Absurdist Plays”. These plays strongly reflected the anxieties and the troubles of the times; man trapped in a universe that is devoid of any happiness and hope; where a man could hardly find any essential purpose to live.

Regardless of such analysis, these playwrights hardly mentioned any group of them or never emphasised on creating any school of thought. Rather, in contrast to that, Martin Esslin writes in his *The Theatre of the Absurd*. 

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It must be stressed ... that the dramatist whose work is here discussed do not form part of any self-proclaimed school or movement. On the contrary, each of the writers in question is an individual who regards himself as a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in his private world ... with his own personal approach both to subject matter and to form, with his own roots, sources and background. (Esslin, 22)

The characters in Absurdist drama lack rational thinking and logical actions as these concepts are inadequate in this incomprehensible universe. In fact, the names itself sometimes are so abrupt, like Didi and Gogo from Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. These are floating characters, lost in their own world, behaving as automatons and disappear at any fleeting moment. The messenger boy/s of Godot, coming at the end of both acts hardly disclose identity in the play.

These characters reside in an incomprehensible world where they face crisis that are inescapable. Most of Pinter’s early and later works predominantly discuss the theme of characters in a safe space manaced by an outside force and the consequences are hardly understood or treated logically by these characters. *The Room*, the play that introduced Pinter as a writer, deals with the theme of menace. The central character, Rose, is in threatened position because of Riley, a character who breaks through her ‘safe space’. But the way, the play deals with further happenings it turns out to be mystery as actually what is the source of menace. Same is with *The Birthday Party* and a few other plays too.

Characters in Absurdist drama also face the chaos of the world, a dilemma of mind that science, logic or calculations failed to understand or accept. One of the best examples is Ionesco’s *The Killer*. Here, the character, Berenger, confronts a killer who kills everyone
without any motif or reason but Berenger could hardly convince him with his logical arguments that killing is wrong. One more illogical imagination comes in *Rhinocéros*, where again Berenger is the central character and he is the only human on Earth who hasn’t yet happened to convert into a rhino but then the question really arose is what actually needs to be done? Even sometimes, characters are trapped in such a story whose end is already written; just as the characters in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* find themselves in a story (*Hamlet)*.

The iconic play of the movement is *Waiting for Godot*. A play that speaks about a world that lack divinity; a place where man keeps on waiting for something to happen, something that provides meaning to his life and revive him from the absurdity of death but the waiting never ends and the hope never comes true. Godot is the Hope; towards the end of both the acts, a boy comes with a message of his arrival but it never actually happens. Their life turns into meaningless waiting. Beckett's characters are crushed and broken with the burden of choice, responsibility and anguish. They keep on struggling with the basic questions: Who am I? What are time and space? What is the purpose of being alive?

Indeed, it’s quite a bit difficult to identify with the characters of the Absurd theatre as it does not approach to critical or intellectual understanding of the audience. Absurd theatre goes to a deeper level of understanding and awareness; with the staging usually very funny but terrifying. It pushes the audience forward to confuse them; compel them to develop an individual reaction and offer options that multiply confusions of their minds. It challenges the audiences to make sense of non-sense facing the predicament of life consciously rather than feeling it vaguely and perceive the absurdity with laughter.
Leading works in the Theatre of Absurd include the major writers of the times who set out a complete new variant of writing: Albert Camus’s *The Outsider*, Jean Paul Sartre’s *In Camera*, Arthur Adamov’s *Professor Teranne*, Jean Genet’s *The Maids*, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker*, N. F. Simpson’s *A Resounding Tingle*, David Campton’s *The Lunatic View*, James Saunders’s *Next Time I'll Sing to You*, Arthur Kopit’s *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma Hung You in the Closet, and I’m Feeling So Sad*, Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guilderslern Are Dead*, Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story*, Eugene Ionesco’s *The Bald Prima Donna*, Luigi Pirandello’s *Seven Characters in Search of an Author*, etc.

### 3.4.2 Gay, Lesbian and Women’s Theatre:

The 20th century brought extraordinary change in social and cultural environment for the downtrodden; the early 1970s witnessed the rise of ‘gay theatre’; work by, for or about lesbian women as well as gay men. With the end of censorship, there was an explosion of fringe and alternative theatre, political theatre, feminist theatre, gay theatre and community theatre.

Caryl Churchill became the face of the late 20th century where the depth of Britain’s social problems of 1980s like class division, feminism and socialism received very effective treatment in his plays like *Top Girls* (1982). Marlene, a working woman who rises to the top is analogous to the rise to power of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979. Affected with the patriarchal system, she achieves her success at the cost of others; her daughter, her sister and her employees. *Cloud Nine* (1979) deals with the experimental performance of the cross-cast sexes; men playing female roles and vice versa.

Alongside, a tolerance for the sexual freedom began to replace Victorian restraints. In London a few groups were created with only homosexual (both gay and lesbian) writers. One such was The Bloomsbury Group that consisted a few blessed writers, talented artists and intellectuals of the times.

The plays of Noel Coward, particularly *The Vortex* (1924) and *Design for Living* (1933) had an underlying context of homosexuality. However, his lyrics are more explicit such as “*Mad about the Boy*”. But the initiation of Coward grew up with the writings of later times; John Hopkins’s *Find Your Way Home* (1970) and Simon Gray’s *Butley* (1971) have more explicit and honest presentation of homosexuality.

To conclude in precise, the World Wars not only exploded the places or the people but it wounded the humanity. It hit deep something inside which broken the slumber of those who have been habituated with pain and silence since long. Theatre turned out to be instrumental in expressing those so-called tabooed issues. The heroes till then belonged to the majestic, royal or at most upper class but the 20th century gave rise to anti-heroes who are workers, beggars, prostitutes or belonged to LGBT groups. Censorship came to an end and theatre became a free place to express the depressions and anger. Characters again, in real sense, reflected the social scenario.
3.5 Breaking the *Fourth Wall:* Recording the Audience Reactions

The turn of the century and the socio-political scenario of the times brought conceptual changes in the theatrical writings as well as theatrical presentations. *The New Wave* gave a way to a new form of drama that arose in the late 19th century as part of the wider movement of realism in the arts. The revolutionary ideas and writings of Henrik Ibsen that primarily embodied the controversial social / collective matters through debates among the characters on stage; symbolically mirrored the conflicting viewpoints within a realistic social context.

The initial writings of the Greeks, Renaissances and the Romantics with the concept of well-made plays involving the kings and the princes needed a kind of audience who adhered to the concept of “willing suspension of disbelief”, where they were supposed to assume the role of passive listeners. Technically getting to the understanding, the distinguished aspect had been termed as “the Fourth Wall”.

The fourth wall, primarily, is a performance convention where, an imaginary wall separates actors from the spectators. As per the assumptions/understandings, the viewers would see through this supposed "wall" but the actors will enact as if the audience doesn’t even exists. Finding the data from the roots, the illusionism in staging practices culminated out of the practice of the realism and naturalism in the theatre of the 19th century.

Basically, the metaphor, fourth wall, indicates a relationship to the mise-en-scène behind a proscenium arch. While a scene is being performed on set, indoors and three of the walls of its room are visible on stage (usually imagined as a box, having three sides visible, the forth being imaginary, technically termed "the proscenium") and the last is the
one that divides audience from the performance space (stage). Still, the "fourth wall" is a convention of acting not of set design.

The actors, ignoring the audience, completely focused on their dramatic world and kept themselves engrossed with fiction. In the words of the theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski: it’s called "public solitude" (to simplify, the ability to behave normally as one would in private, despite, knowing the fact of being watched intently by many). So, basically, the fourth wall is a psychological creation of the actor-audience understanding, regardless of any actual walls on the set or the physical arrangement of the theatrical premise or the space for performance; to maintain the distance to create the ‘illusionary effect’.

There was an imaginary wall between the audience and the actors which they were not supposed to break; but the new subject demanded a break through. Wording the leading 20th century theatre director and playwright, Peter Brook; the task is to build "… a necessary theatre, one in which there is only a practical difference between actor and audience, not a fundamental one." (Brook, 166)

Fundamentally, audiences, till date, were perceived as passive observers. But the 20th century broke the myth. Many playwrights experimented and challenged the concept with a few dramatic techniques and to the extent of changing the theatrical space of performance. To name a few of them and recording their way of applications: Bertolt Brecht used to mobilise his audiences with the use of a character in a play who breaks through the invisible "fourth wall," with asking questions directly to the audience and not providing them with answers and thereby involving them into the thinking process for themselves; Augusto Boal emphasised on the direct reaction of the audiences towards the
action while Antonin Artaud intended to penetrate through the subconscious level of the receiver. (Bermal, 15)

Peter Brook symbolizes the relationship of audience and performers in the pyramid structure with the three layers: the performers’ internal relationships, the performers’ relationships to each other on stage, and their relationship with the audience (Nicolescu and Williams, 23). The British experimental theatre group Welfare State International identifies it with a ceremonial circle, emerging during the performance; the actors providing one half, the audience completing with another and the energy resulting in the middle. (Coult, 91)

To enhance the participation of the audience, the structural designs of the theatrical space itself, put under the re-think. The idea of proscenium arch put under the question and its use subverted for the more engaged audience. Consecutively, the scenario went through a drastic modification with the performances venturing into non-theatrical spaces and encouraging the audiences to participate in the action on a highly practical level.

Analysing the physicality of theatre, it adopted various shapes and structures; practitioners re-defined advanced techniques for the presentations and a large number of modifications and innovations happened to reshape the Elizabethan and the Greek theatrical structures. These changes were amalgamated with the mainstream; the National Theatre in London, for example, has a highly flexible, somewhat Elizabethan traverse space (the Dorfman), a proscenium space (the Lyttelton) and an amphitheatre space (the Olivier) and the directors and architects deliberately broke away from the primitive proscenium arch. Jacques Copeau was among the leading names in field of stage design and was quite desperate to get away from the excess of naturalism to get to a more pared down, representational way of looking at the stage. (Callery, 16-17)
The participation of the audience ranged from inviting them as volunteers to appear onstage and to face the screams of the actors on their faces and with such active participation schemes, the performer enforces the audience to enliven certain reactions; to feel typical behaviour and by doing so they endeavour to change their attitudes, values, thoughts and beliefs regarding the topic imbibed in the performance. The theatre, being a perfect venue for social commentary and exposure, many playwrights exploited it to share their beliefs on various issues affecting their respective times.

3.6 Theatre for All:

With the emergence of new entertainment sectors like the cinema, theatre attendance ratio dropped down. The impressive visuals and sound effects brought newness for the spectators and that made negative impact on theatre. The next blow was television that again diverted many away from theatres. The last and the final blast was videos/DVDs that rejected altogether the necessity to go outside the houses as the television or video/DVD certainly provide everything at home only. The illusion of the screen trapped the spectators completely.

This situation compelled theatre for a change. Playwrights like Brecht and Stanislavski came up with new ideas of writing as well as performance. People realized the lack; something that was not the perfect, the missing aspect of liveliness; a live performance, the appreciation of the actor, the designer sets, the costumes and the live reactions and interactions. Here emerged the ‘outside theatre’ that allowed more skills for the live performances, dealing with even jugglers, acrobatics, puppets, parades and using less scripts to pave way for more creativeness. This, certainly, was not only restricted within Britain only but quite famous throughout the continents. This also revived street theatre that became quite popular in later part of the 20th century.
Street theatre has always been the form for ‘the Mass’. It is not a new form that evolved in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, rather, it attained a height in those times as it turned out to a tool of working class that reinforce their fight against the powerful established structures. The form was very effectively used in India during the time of freedom struggle, primarily by the leftist theatre activists.

Although the roots of street theatre was laid with folk theatre or the tradition of storytelling, it’s more of a social communication process with a participatory approach than a simple art form. Arguably, it’s one of the oldest art form and most effective for the social revolution as the targeted audiences are direct in touch and most engaged and involved during the performance; dealing with the issues that affect them a lot and need reformation.

Last decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century turned out to be quite crucial with the emergence of many new theatre companies. The Companies that evolved in the late 1990s and 2000s include the names of: Joint Stock, Gay Sweatshop, Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Talawa Women’s Theatre Group (established in 1974 and renamed as Sphinx Theatre Company in early 1990s). These companies are trying to reinvent theatre to speak about the times they live in and inspire audience across the UK.
Reference:


