Chapter I

Introduction
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INTRODUCTION

Life in this world continues to be in its evolutionary process. It is an endless struggle that makes man a restless animal. From time immemorial intellectuals and artists maintain that human character and social actions are not contingent on actions or endeavours of individuals. Theology and Ecological manifestations have strengthened this perception. The ancient Indian philosopher Gosāla calls it "determinism". His philosophy as grasped by the Japanese Orientalist Nakamura insists that, "there is no cause, either ultimate or remote for depravity of beings; they become depraved without reasons and causes" (1992, 157). The ancient Greek and Roman thinkers too have believed in the supremacy of destiny over all living things. The Greek philosopher Democritus affirms that "everything happens in accordance with natural laws and human purpose does not matter" (qtd. in Nakamura 1992, 159). The Stoics too have conceived the crux of this idea and maintain that virtue consists in the will that agrees with nature.
During the nineteenth century the civilized society was in turmoil. The Romantic Revolution of the previous era was in fact defunct. Reason and Faith were in conflict. The myth of creation was rendered fallacious by Charles Darwin by the second half of the century. August Comte's *Systém de philosophic positive* (1824) had provided with a scientific view of man in the universe. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), Taine's *Historie de la litterature Anglaise* (1964) and Claude Bernard, the Physiologists' *Introduction a l'étude de la Medicine Experimentale* (1865) together reversed man's notion of the God-guaranteed world order.

Modern man is thus engrossed with the insoluble, cruel dilemma of existence. Owing to the inundation of speculative, scientific and psychological dogmas, waves of hysteria and depression perplexed him. Karl Marx's economic analysis of society in *Das Capital* (1867) added to the volatile environment. It called for social change and predicted power struggle between the two opposing classes called the Capital and the Labour. Thus, by the end of the century there was political, social, moral, religious and intellectual unrest throughout the Western World. Decadence had set in and the symptoms of the cultural malaise were evident in literature as well as in other arts.
Literature that mirrors society is concerned with this peculiar predicament of the human situation. Ever since drama developed as a literary genre, it has been a forum for raising challenging queries about the condition of man's existence. The great classics of the past engage our attention on the miracles of creation and mysteries of life in this world. Yet, these remain unintelligible to ordinary minds. The Elizabethans and the moderns too have continued the probe. Dramatists of these periods constantly engage our attention on these questions iterating that man tragically stumbles from great heights owing to his own flaws and inadequacies. What dawns at the end of each dramatic representation is that it is man's inability to recognise himself that pulverizes him. What is worth relating in this context is that "know thyself" is the message of the Delphic Oracle.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a more realistic vision of life in this world has been demonstrated by playwrights of the Continent and America. Emile Zola, the French novelist and playwright has called upon writers to opt for the naturalistic depiction of life. According to him, human beings are perpetually haunted by a sense of depravity and determinism. In *La Naturalisme au théâtre*, he urges the playwrights to discover Naturalism by representing living people in the "hurly-burly of life" (1998, 86). Stating further, he adds that for such a depiction the dramatist,
“would have to examine mankind too deeply, learn about life, aim at
real greatness and portray it powerfully” (1998, 87). Zola’s
Naturalism in literature is broadly “social realism laced with the idea
of determinism” which considers human beings living in a
“biologically and socially conditioned world” (Pizer 1982, x).
Adding substance to this view, Valency states that “Naturalism is a
quest for facts” (1980, 6). Dramatic works of the late nineteenth and
the early decades of the twentieth centuries in the Continent and
America broadly depict life faithfully.

Writing about the historical context of Naturalism, Innes states
that this philosophic formulation was a product of the influence of
Darwin’s theory on evolution, Claude Bernard’s scientific
observation of human physiology, Karl Marx’s economic analysis of
society and Freud’s interpretation of dreams. David Baguley says
that Naturalism takes a direction “towards reconciling, even to the
point of assimilating the natural world and human experience” (1990,
44). The elements of assimilation and reconciliation are ingrained in
the philosophical notion of “Non-teleological thinking” which has
been subsequently propounded by John Steinbeck and Edward
F.Ricketts.

The twentieth century man stands at “dangerous crossroads”
(Lipsitz 1994, vii). Disparity and unfairness all over the world create
and spread turbulence and uprisings. Wealth and authority in the hands of a few, bewilders the vast majority. Colonial subjugation, materialistic evils, atrocious wars, anarchy and the nightmare of fascism have "tied man to a cart like a dog" (Russel 2000, 254). Against the ruthless onslaught of these tyrannical and destructive forces man has been struggling with his own superstition, ignorance and imperfection. The hope of the aggrieved to have a say in political and economic power continues to be elusive.

Sean O'Casey the Irish playwright and his American contemporary, Clifford Odets have given artistic expression to this predestination. Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), living in the most turbulent times in Irish history, visualized life to be at the mercy of forces beyond man's comprehension and control. His Dublin plays depict man in hostile environments and his struggle to survive under such conditions as pitiable and tragic.

O'Casey insists that his characters are deeply involved in elusive problems that even sustained efforts could not root out those problems. Hence, he is not offering "simplified solutions for the sake of neat endings" (Mitchell 1980, 39). He views them as they are. The individuals in his plays are seen as "overshadowed by the conflict of impersonal forces of which he is more and more the victim" (Lindsay
1969, 192). Commenting in the Catholic Herald, Speaight views that O’Casey’s continual theme is man’s struggle against fate and he seldom wins peace, as the combat is unequal.

Clifford Odets (1906-1963), the American dramatist who presented the Depression plays in the thirties, dramatised the life of people who were thwarted and battered by the “Great Crash”. Commenting on Odets and his characters, Weales consider them as, “vacillating between a home which turns out to be a trap and a promised land that fails to keep its promise” (1971, 187). Odets has been a witness to the disintegration of individuals and families due to the appalling conditions of the time. His characters in the Depression plays are pitted against powerful forces. On the stage, their life is seen in its fundamentally ridiculous and animalistic level. In his own admission, Clifford Odets attempts “to find out how mankind can be helped out of the animal kingdom into the clear sweet air” (qtd. in Miller 1989, 1).

As playwrights, O’Casey and Odets have no pronounced affinity with any of the philosophic movements that swayed their era. Yet, a closer analysis of the plays under consideration show that they subscribe to naturalistic facts. These works also realistically depict life. The people in these works are seen struggling to adopt to their environment and in
this struggle, it is only the fittest who survive. The group that struggles also belong to a distinctly less fortunate class than the usual bourgeois. In this context, it is pertinent to realise through this study how far ‘is thinking’ guides some characters survive, in the select plays of O’Casey and Odets.

‘Non-Teleological’ or ‘is thinking’ is an extension of Naturalism. It is a philosophical idea propounded by the American novelist John Steinbeck and his Marine Biologist friend Edward F. Ricketts. In The Log from the Sea of Cortez, a record of their voyage in the Pacific (1940), Steinbeck explains ‘is thinking’ as follows: “Non-teleological ideas derive through is thinking, (is) associated with natural selection as Darwin seems to have understood it”. It implies that life is a struggle and only the fittest can survive that. Those who survive do so by adopting themselves to the environment and by “seeing beyond traditional or personal projections. They consider events as outgrowths and expressions rather than as results”. Once reaching such understanding, they deem “conscious acceptance as a desideratum, and certainly as an all important prerequisite” (1995, 112).

This pronounced formulation implies that one capable of thinking non-teleologically, accepts life without questioning. He also
strives to understand the "what" and "how" of things and events. Once answers to these difficult questions are arrived at, one realises that it is futile to ask "why" events and situations are so. Simplifying this concept, Pizer says as follows: "the non-teleological thinker accepts the fatuousness of man's belief that his will can control events and thus concentrates on understanding experience rather than on judging men" (1982, 66). In the broadest sense, this attitude admits the following position: "As determined products of environment, in the broadest sense, individuals sometimes cannot help themselves, cannot be otherwise" (Hart 1986, 48). One examining life using 'is thinking' does not look for why; he looks at life as it is, without looking for the reason or cause for its present state.

Zola's theory of Literary Naturalism as propounded in his work *La Roman Experimental* (1880) also urges the writer to imitate the scientist by observing reality (the how) without enquiring into its ultimate causes (the why). Therefore, the non-teleologically thinking attitude is considered as "modified or philosophical naturalism" (Hart 1986, 43).

John Steinbeck (1902-68), the proponent of this philosophy through his works constantly engage the readers' attention on the
intensified colour, violence and quickness of life, like O’Casey and Odets. “The fateful division of man and man” (Lewis 1959, 125) as depicted in Steinbeck’s works disturb man’s progress. Through his works, he takes the position that there is “something in the world itself which will always prevent human beings from achieving their dreams” (Thody 1996, 142). Like the playwrights under consideration, he has been devoted to his work and life. Steinbeck always strove to understand the inner life of man and was ever concerned with the struggle for survival in which man is constantly engaged.

It is this survival drive that speaks for the violence, disturbances, and fateful division that hold the characters to ransom in these artists. Ironically, the forces operating in society work against the interest of man and slows him down. It is also apt to note that like O’Casey and Odets, Steinbeck too “permitted his education in the field rather than the radical drawing room” (Cook 1986, 359). The observation of life in the “Great Tide Pool”, the deep jungles and the human terrain has enabled him affirm a rational attitude to life. His musings over non-teleological thinking is therefore a holistic vision of observation and understanding all aspects of life. These connections appear strikingly relevant to interpret the plays of O’Casey and Odets in the light of non-teleological acceptance.
A brief outline of the trends and the attitude to life shown in the works of some prominent dramatists of the modern times shall place the present study in the right perspective.

The nineteenth century saw the decline of drama as a social force in England. Industrialisation and the resultant issues saw the proliferation in the cities of a new class of population called the labour and the middle-class. The gloomy tragedies, stereotype comedies and melodramas have no longer catered to such people who wanted their problems shown on the stage. The novel, a new literary genre, aptly filled the gap.

By this time in other parts of the Continent, drama was emerging as a vibrant literary force. Henrik Ibsen (1823-1906), the Norwegian dramatist and theatre artist took the theatre by storm with his realistic social problem plays. He insisted that the dramatist "must possess some experience of the life he was trying to create" (qtd. in Styan 1981, 18). By drawing substance from life, he consciously dramatised the forces and frictions of human life. Defying convention, he put forth a set of values which were personal and truthful, in a perfectly natural dialogue. His masterpieces like A Doll's House and Ghosts, with explosive subject-matter, enabled the audience experience as if they were viewing their own lives on stage.
Through his plays, he bursts out at irrationality at every threshold of human activity. Ibsen had become a household name in the theatrical world by the turn of the nineteenth century.

Ibsen's influence on drama was very much visible. Brecht in Germany, Chekhov in Russia, Synge in Ireland and Zola and his contemporaries in France were striving to prove through their plays that life is a struggle for honour which engages the will of the individual. Though Chekhov (1860-1904) liked the Norwegian playwright, he was more inclined towards the realistic depiction of life. His concern was with the breaking-up of relationships in natural world and the stillness that is at the centre of life. Thus, life as he saw appeared more difficult in the world than to Ibsen. Therefore, he wanted dramatists to depict life as it exists in real life.

John Millington Synge (1871-1909), a contemporary of Ibsen and Chekhov, realistically staged the social problems. The Irish playwright believed that human beings “feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with winds and seas” (1911, 52). Through his plays he enabled playgoers discern life as a mixture of sweet and sour. He is credited to have brought revolution in the Irish stage by showing the peasant life with its oddities and peculiarities.
Lorca the Spanish playwright resembles Synge in many respects as many of Synge’s central concerns are treated in his plays. His conviction is that external forces coerce human beings to the destined end. His vision of life as shown in plays like Blood Wedding demonstrates that “man is inescapably caught up in the world” (Gaskell 1972, 107). Pirandello’s play, Six Characters in Search of an Author is credited to have caused sensation among the Roman audience. He has depicted that human nature is inconstant and we are a society of actors who perform pathetically to live. By the force of realistic characters and situations, he skillfully converted the stage as the stage of the world where one can see himself.

In England it was left to George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) the greatest Dublin “debunker of social conventions” (Hunt 1978, 20) to restore the vitality and force of the largely lifeless English stage of the nineteenth century. He manoeuvred the stage effectively so as to penetrate to a hitherto inaccessible middle-class audience. Shaw’s unconventionality, reason and truth were shocking to his audience as he felt that all members of society are culpable and must accordingly suffer their consciousness to be smitten before leaving the theatre. Hence, in his plays there are no “conscious villains on whom the audience can fix the blame and absolve themselves of complicity” (Barnet 1975, 641). Besides penetrating the citadel of drama with
inimitable, unique techniques, he had converted the stage into a forum for debate on vital questions of existence.

T.S.Eliot maintains through his plays that individual actions are determined and man must see the existence of the past in the present. In portraying sufferings due to defilement and lovelessness, he too indicates to the agony of man from birth till death. Beckett's *Endgame* is a study in human sufferings. The play seems to indicate that human will cannot alter life in a meaningless world. Brecht the German dramatist through the theatre of illusions, "encourages the audience to accept life as it is, to respond with pleasure to people and events instead of trying to grasp why these events took the course they did" (Gaskell 1972, 147).

Through their works, these modern dramatists have rendered individualism very vulnerable. The image of man as depicted, presents him as one potential for values as well as a detestable waste. Dramatists between 1880 and 1930 have also shown that the "bounds of theatre" could be "stretched to their limits and sometimes beyond"(Goscoigne 1965, 10). It is by stretching the theatrical horizon that they depict life in this material world as full of pain. In their conviction, none could come to terms with the evils. The pathetic fact is that "all through life we have to make choices which
limit us further” (Boulton 1988, 199). The irony is that in his brief life man always makes the wrong choice. This speaks for the troubles and tribulations of life. The view about man’s condition one has to draw from these playwrights is that man is “no more than a poor, bare, forked animal” (Gaskell 1972, 21).

To be precise, in the modern stage one can witness his problems, conflicts and contradictions as well. It also shows the urge in everyone to be lifted and transported from life in this world “to live in to the world elsewhere” (Reising 1986, 191). The sad reality is that one has nowhere else to go. It is for the audience to arrive at their own answers. Through their objective and realistic portrayal of life in this world some of these dramatists encourage the audience to “accept life as it is” (Gaskell 1972, 147). The significance of the present study lies in unraveling of such an attitude implied in the plays under consideration.

The present work is a study in comparison of the select plays of Sean O’Casey and Clifford Odets. As these playwrights under consideration belong to almost identical cultural, linguistic, religious and historical backgrounds, a study of their plays does not fall strictly under the genre of comparative literature. Yet, as playwrights O’Casey and Odets have more in common and hence a
study of their works in terms of thematic affinities, attitude to life, characters and the pattern of their struggle will be of some value to scholars of British and American drama.

The plays selected for the study are the first three plays of O'Casey, produced by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin and the three early plays of Odets produced by the Group Theatre, New York. O'Casey's first three plays are, *The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars*. These plays are called the Dublin trilogy because the subject-matter and characters have been drawn from the Dublin tenements with its tragi-comic idiom. Affinity of themes, treatment and attitude to life draw them closer than any other plays of O'Casey. The plays selected from Odets are *Waiting for Lefty, Awake and Sing!* and *Paradise Lost*, which are generally called the Depression Plays. They also share identical themes, situations, characters and attitude to life and bear close resemblance to the Dublin trilogy.

These plays depict the tragi-comic nature of life. Characters and situations are mostly treated objectively. The concern of the dramatists seem to be man's struggle against hostile forces of society, how he reacts against them and manages to survive. Stindberg said that literary depiction in the naturalistic vein enables
the spectator, "observe with indifference the harsh, cynical and heartless drama that life depicts" (1998, 91). Dispassionate viewing of these plays unequivocally enlighten on the audience such an effect. Arthur Miller has said that "a writer of any worth creates out of total perception" and "the very impulse to write springs from an inner chaos, crying for order .. and ... meaning" (1998, 112). It is this complete perception and innate desire to express themselves that enables O'Casey and Odets hold the mirror up to nature. In the creative process they affirm reality too.

The characters in the select plays are real men and women either from the slum or shopkeepers' environment. There is a tragic element in their day to day existence. While confronting mighty forces arrayed against them, they are also pitted against each other. Their environment, to a large extent, condition them. Hence they are fated to undergo sufferings of every kind.

While the slum life in Dublin during the civil war, war of independence and allied catastrophe are dramatised in the Dublin trilogy, Odets's plays have been written under the influence of the "Great Depression" that played havoc on human life for a brief period in America. Moreover these early plays have catapulted O'Casey and Odets to fame and established them as leading
playwrights of the respective period. Above all the underlying non-teleological thinking in these plays is stronger than in the other plays.

A brief analysis of the life, background, formative influences, and affiliations of these playwrights shall enable a proper understanding of their concerns and attitude to life.

O'Casey (1880-1964) was born in a Dublin tenement, the worst slum in the West at that time, as the thirteenth child of a poor Protestant family of whom only five survived childhood. With him, almost one third of the Dublin population lived in about five thousand tenements, most of them declared unfit for human habitation. "It's chief victims, the working people lived a near-starvation existence in disease-ridden, over-crowded slum tenements" (Krause 1960, 4).

O'Casey braved the turmoil of living in these tenements with poverty under dehumanising conditions. These early days of undernourishment impaired one of his eyes. Until the success of his second play Juno and Paycock at the age of forty-four, O'Casey was destined to work as a manual labourer and undergo pain and isolation that left deep scars on his young mind.
Though denied of formal education, he was committed to self-education. His concern for social, trade union, political and literary causes induced him to embrace Jim Larkin, the trade union leader as his early hero. The Irish Citizen Army (ICA) and the Gaelic League in which he evinced keen interest, helped him get first hand experience of nationalist politics. Under these influences, he Gaelised his name as Sean O’ Cathasaigh and later changed the family name as O’Casey. Even while struggling to earn his livelihood, he was a witness to the principal conflicts in Dublin between the Socialists and the Church and the Colonialists and the Nationalists.

Getting disillusioned with the politics of anti-trade unionism of the ICA, he resigned from it as its secretary in nineteen fourteen. The terror of Easter Rising and civil war in Ireland alienated him further from the politics of the nationalists. Being estranged, he spent his evenings in reading Shakespeare, Shelley, Dion Boucicault, Ruskin and other great English writers and the Authorised Version of the Bible. Gradually he got himself actively involved with amateur theatricals and opted for playwriting as a career.

Recognition came to him through the first play produced by the Abbey called *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), after the rejection of the three earlier plays by him. “During the run of the play”,
O’Casey was still “mixing cement on a road repair job” (Krause 1976, 37). He never turned back after receiving a royalty of twenty-five pounds for his second play, *Juno and the Paycock* (1925). His third Abbey production, *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), led to disturbance in the theatre. The Abbey again rejected the next play, *The Silver Tassie* (1928). These events led him to settle down in England from where he wrote eight more plays, six volumes of autobiography, few one act plays, a number of articles and other works until his death at the ripe age of eighty-four.

During the nineteenth century Ireland’s position was so complex within the United Kingdom as a “metropolitan colony” (McCormack 1985, 7). Denis Donoghue aptly mirrors the plight of the Irish in the *Sewanee Review* as follows: “The real trouble in Ireland is that our national experience has been too limited to be true. Since the plantation of Ulster there has been only one feeling: one story, the English, how to get rid of them or failing that to circumvent them, cajole them, twist their tails.... We have no industrial revolutions, factory acts and no trade union movements. A limited history, correspondingly intimidating mythology, a fractured language, a literature of fits and starts and gestures... No challenge of a tradition” (1976, 153). To compound this situation further, there was the Easter Rising, War of Independence and civil war by the
'Act of 1921' in the divided country. A large minority wanted to see a reunited country but the troubles communalised and squeezed the masses. It was dangerous to move inside Ireland as crossfire, raids, street wars and encounters became the order of the day. O'Casey acquired this bequest when he turned to dramatise Dublin life.

The Irish literary genius has been manifesting itself in England since the seventeenth century, after the Glorious Revolution. Profoundly affected by the continuing crisis, most of the Irish intellectuals have migrated and settled down in England and elsewhere. The hostility between the two countries has not dampened their spirits as the very fact of their contributing to the literary might of the English language enabled the British welcome them into their fold. Lack of a literary tradition in Ireland till the nineteenth century is another factor that prompted the Irish men of letters to settle down and write from England.

Swift, Burke, Goldsmith and Sheridan are some of the early dramatists to be followed up by Shaw and Wilde, to settle down in England. These early expatriate writers have expressed the Irish experience, its crisis, corruption, insecurity and exploitation. Yet, they have not lived and written from Ireland and hence their works could not be called 'Irish literature' in this context.
Notable among the Anglo-Irish dramatists like Farquhar, Steele, Macklin, Murphy, Goldsmith and Sheridan also presented this distinction between the ‘natural Irish’ and ‘artificial British’. Farquhar and Steele were prominent Restoration comedians. Goldsmith has brought to perfection the sentimental drama and remains “the most beloved of English writers” (Rousseau 1974, 69). Through his plays Sheridan exposes corruption of all forms, moral callousness and sentimentality. By the turn of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, Shaw and Wilde were exploiting the medium of drama to expose society and individuals of falsehood and affectation.

When Ireland was made an integral part of England by the Act of Union (1800), the search intensified for an Irish literary language, its own literature and its independence. Dion Bouccicault had earlier established the ‘stage-Irish tradition’. Through his plays, he “rendered the violence and instability of life in Ireland in such a way that these features did not entirely destroy the enchanted pastoral quality...” (Deane 1986, 104). The inherent Irish genius and need of a tradition to tap it prompted W.B.Yeats to revive the movement for the Irish Literary Nationalism by the turn of the century.

Yeats, a native literary titan exploited the existing lore. From the fragments of the fragile Irish ‘National Theatre Society’, he established
the Abbey Theatre (1904) with Lady Gregory and others. It was to become “the most articulate, original and vigorous theatre to have existed in the British Isles since the Elizabethan’s” (Gille 1975, 171). It’s aim was to revive the Irish peasant culture with the real vitality of the native speech. Though Yeats contributed twenty six plays, he could draw substance from Irish myths and legends and not from the peasant culture. With the “stylized” characters, he could only revive the poetic drama in the language with its symbols and images. Though by his plays he could not convert the Abbey into a public theatre as desired, he motivated the native genius in Synge to exploit it.

Synge is credited to have resurrected the Irish popular idiom by exploiting the peasant life of Aron Islands. His plays, like that of Chekov, defy comic and tragic distinctions, but pose challenge to critics as it challenged the audience with its realistic representation. By the dignified depiction of the suffering of the simple peasants, their superstition, credulity, drunkenness and ignorance, he has enabled the Abbey to emerge as a popular theatre frequented by the common man. He left the scene abruptly so as the Dublin slum dramatist O’Casey could take up the challenge from where he left.

As a product of the Dublin slums, O’Casey successfully staged the simple, ignorant city folk through his plays. A brief survey of his plays will be of relevance to this context.
The first play of O’Casey to be accepted and produced by the Abbey Theatre, *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) was written when he was still working as a labourer, with the handicap of partial blindness and pain in his eyes. The historic situation while writing it was that not a night passed without the sound of gunfire disturbing Dublin. On the date of its staging, the Abbey Directors were forced to print a warning in the programme of the play to the apprehensive playgoers, to assure them that the sounds of “lorry and rattle of machine-guns were merely harmless stage effects” (Ayling 1985a, 11). The abject condition of the city and the pathetic plight of its citizens are realistically portrayed in the play. The play photographically presents the escalating violence, ambushes, crossfires and raids and a host of slum dwellers caught in it; their pathetic plight, illiteracy, poverty, drunken exuberance, heroic pretensions and artificial life. It is a tragi-comic vision with neither a hero nor a villain among them.

O’Casey’s second play, *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), with its more cohesive plot and comic vitality has been successful than the first. It takes one back to the days of the Irish civil war (1921). Unlike the first play, it presents a more domestic situation. The play’s main focus is the suffering, hatred and irresponsibility, amidst the terror of a divided Ireland at war with itself. It shows how its
tragic impact is felt on a slum family and the way the inmates encounter it.

_The Plough and the Stars_ (1926), set on the happenings of the Easter Rising (1916), created riotous scenes in the theatre. Its hero Jack Clitheore, a dissenting IRA bricklayer, once appointed as commandant, leads the Volunteers to the rising, defying the genuine protestations of his young, beautiful wife. In the process he is killed and unable to withstand the agony, his wife goes insane. Its sub-plot, with a prostitute on the stage and a host of drunkards and boasters, help expose the myth of heroism, luxury and unity in a largely divided country.

The Irish intolerance and apathy to witness their own self on the stage has created riots and invited criticism to the play from every quarters. This, and the subsequent rejection of his next play, _The Silver Tassie_ (1928) have coerced the beleaguered O'Casey desert Ireland and settle down in England. O'Casey's experiment with a different theme and characters proved disastrous to his dramatic fortune. _The Silver Tassie_ has neither been a critical nor a popular success. Unlike women in the earlier plays, here the universal motherhood is shown heartless and dangerous. Its deviation from realistic depiction to expressionism makes it more subjective.
The latter plays with strange settings in an English idiom lack force and conviction of characterisation and therefore failed to create the desired effect on the audience. O'Casey's next play, *Within the Gates* (1934) is a picture of life in London, the microcosm of modern life. It is largely a struggle of forces totally opposed to each other, to possess a joyous, homeless, young, illegitimate prostitute. Her father, a repentant Bishop, strives to convert her to a life of prayerful song while a young poet-dreamer offers her a life of joy, dance and sex. An Evangelist vies with them offering her his way of salvation. Torn between the conflicting forces, the young girl, now sick, dies dancing, which is a victory for the dreamer. Conflicting values, poverty, unemployment and bitterness of religion are not convincingly presented as in the Dublin trilogy.

*The Star Turns Red* (1940) is seen more of a propaganda play. It exposes evil and expounds virtue. There is confrontation between the communist workers and the fascist storm troopers with a section of the Church supporting each. In the final confrontation the workers win the struggle, though the struggle takes its own toll. The ire of the play seems to be against the Catholic Church.

O'Casey goes back to the Dublin setting in *Red Roses for me* (1943). The subject of the play is autobiographical. Ayamon, its
hero, is living in a dilapidated house in the working class locality with his old mother. The Irish transport-worker’s strike (1913), in which O’Casey took part is recreated with Ayamon taking sides with the workers. The Irish life with accompanying poverty, pettiness and quarrel, places man’s life at the mercy of hostile forces in the play. Still, it lacks credibility of characterization as seen in the earlier Dublin plays.

*Oak Leaves and Lavender* (1946) is set in the war background with unreal settings and archaic language. *Purple Dust* (1949) is also out of touch with real life and speech. *The Drums of Father Ned* (1959), with the sentimentalised stage Irish hero attests to O’Casey’s credo for opinion rather than exploring real characters. *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949) seems to be O’Casey’s favourite play. It has a symbolic hero and a fantastic cock at its centre of action. It is largely farcical with supernatural elements and therefore removed from the earlier realistic plays. *Behind the Green Curtain* (1962) is more of a social satire and a sensual exposure of cowardice.

During the last days of his career O’Casey appeared to have regained a firm grip with the Dublin life. This finds expression in his short unproduced plays like *The End of the Beginning, Figaro in the Night, Time to Go* and *The Hall of Healing*. While in the first one
he ridicules religiosity, in the other pieces he graphically presents the indecisive, ignorant, ineffectual humanity. Thus the plays of the Dublin days are perceived as objective depiction of life as it is. The playwright's subjective handling of the theme, his flair for opinion, unreal characters and artificiality of the language in the subsequent plays tend one to believe that the plays demonstrate what life should be rather than viewing life as it is.

Odets is seen as a product of the Depression. It is pertinent to see in this context how the crisis rocked the society and invariably manifest itself on the artist and his works.

America of the twentieth century was more of a country in the making. Though the early drama dwelt on the theme of alienation, as the cities developed and rural life faded, a sense of breakdown in relationships became its theme. During the last decade of the nineteenth century it was a quest for man's relationship with fellow human beings and with nature. Its idealism built on increasing affluence, democratization, romantic notions, want of social and economic determinants were exerting pressures on the individual mind. The weight of materialism and its ramifications cast a sense of social and moral alienation that formed the substance of the drama of the early decades.
The Economic Depression due to the stock market crash (1929) caught the nation unawares. It was like a bolt from the blue to a hitherto prosperous nation which was never prepared to tide over such a crisis. As it was least expected and was not used to such magnitude of poverty and unemployment in its past history, the crisis left everyone baffled. The American aristocracy, hitherto enjoying prosperity and related security, suddenly found themselves being plundered by forces that were beyond their control. The victims were the middle class and the working class, who were left orphans one bad morning.

The millions of dispossessed, displaced and disoriented were engaged in soul-destroying trivial labour. As they could no longer choose the way, they went through the motion, as their destiny had already been fated. Jack Conroy sums up the era in his novel, *The Disinherited* this way: "Things that seem solid as a rock may be fragile enough to collapse at a pinch. But you have got to pinch first" (1982, 288). Knowing what to pinch and when to pinch was also no small matter. This was a legacy and contemporaneity that Odets inherited and belonged to. This American crisis over the years gets reflected in his plays.
Clifford Odets (1906-63) was born in Philadelphia to Jewish immigrant, working-class parents. Odets dropped out of school in nineteen twenty-three and affiliated himself with Drawing-Room Theatre Groups and finally joined the Left Wing’s, Group Theatre on the year of its inception, to pursue a dramatic career. The Great Economic Depression of thirties ruined many a family and Odets found it increasingly difficult to live on. He was sharing a poorly heated room with several other Group Theatre members. He saw many individuals and families disintegrating with over fifteen million youth unemployed and people fighting for a morsel of food on the breadlines. The starved worker, financially ruined businessmen and many of Odets’s friends “were increasingly terrified, as if soon the walls would disappear, and they would remain naked and alone on the cold empty streets of a night without a morrow” (Clurman 1966, 114).

The Depression gave Odets the subject. The Group Theatre gave him the propensity for lively characters through its integrity. While serving as a model for “Workers Theatre”, its optimistic socialism and social enlightenment influenced him to associate briefly with the Communist party. This helped him aware of the politics of the day. With these formative influences, Harold
Clurman, the Group's director and life long friend, motivated this small time actor to compete for a one-act play contest. Thus, Odets's first play, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) was born. He finished it in three days, won the prize and subsequently the heart of the theatre going public.

A cursory glance at his major dramatic works may assist in understanding the major themes and concerns addressed by Odets. It may also further the idea that the plays selected for discussion stand unique as far as the struggle, estrangement, conflicts and attitude to life are concerned.

Though his first play is apparently about the taxi-cab men's strike, its theme has become the symbol of the entire generations' protest. It gives a realistic picture of the 'Great Crash' with its accompanying poverty, breakdown, unemployment, homelessness and the sense of depravity. Though labeled as an agitation-propaganda play, its forthrightness and original fire makes it one of the most popular American plays. Odets's projection of a system of values that robs men of their personal worth and destroying of relationships is skillfully portrayed with innovative technique. Like *Waiting*, his next play *Awake and Sing!* (1935) is also a critical and commercial success. Conceived two years earlier, it pictures the
plight of a family caught in the Depression. Like O'Casey's *Juno*, the thwarted ambitions of its members, their frustrations and effort to escape the environment are shown on the stage with force.

*Till the Day I Die* (1935) is an anti-nazi play depicting the plight of a communist trapped by the Nazis. He is tortured and taken out as a traitor, which his family and former comrades were made to believe. This led to his suicide. By treating a contemporary political problem, the play fails to present the issues affecting the common man and hence is limited in appeal.

These three plays have taken Odets to new heights. Critics have acclaimed him as the “Hope of America”. His next play, *Paradise Lost* (1935), reverts to the theme of the first two. Despite fame and affluence, Odets's concerns have been still with the suffering humanity. In this play, the middle class becomes the victim. They are bewildered to see that everything they want and believe in life is denied to them. Leo Gordan is a helpless witness to the ruin of his own family. While his son Ben, a former Olympic champion is robbed of his wife and life due to unemployment, his second son Julie, a promising young boy, becomes a wreck with encephalitis and his classical pianist daughter looses her lover. His own business collapses by the wickedness of his own partner and at
last his home is repossessed. Thus his family is evicted and thrown on the street. Leo Gordon moves out to live with the working class and accepts this life.

Odet’s first phase of artistic activity ends with this play. Inspite of financial success, and artistic acclaim, his concern for the suffering common man continues through out the latter plays. Since their subjects and form is away from the realistic purview, the study is limited to the three early plays that generally view life as it is.

The Group’s next production, *The Golden Boy* (1937) was a spectacular success. It appeared as if Odets got back his stings. The play presents a talented violinist becoming a boxer for money. At the peak of his career he unwittingly kills his opponent. When success comes he buys a luxury car, gets a girl and thus deserts genuine values of his family. The boxing world trades him as a commodity. He later realizes that by killing his opponent he has killed himself. He hates himself, drives down with speed and crashes to death. The audience viewing it are left aghast and relate this to the fate governing human condition. Its subjective plot and incongruous situations show the play as far removed from the plight of every man.

The subsequent three plays are products of Odets’s ‘personal turmoil’. Married to a successful Hollywood actress Louis Rainer
(1938), Odets has been divorced from her within three years. The first play of the period *Rocket to the Moon* (1938) is aptly concerned with the question of marriage and love. It is a triangular love and the quest for love proves difficult due to the conditions of the time. *Night Music* (1940) again harps on economic insecurity haunting young lovers. The play is experimental and didactic and thus lack the warmth and tenderness of the early Depression plays.

*Clash by Night* (1941) is also about love. Like *Rocket to the Moon*, it presents a love triangle. Odet's personal agony due to the break in marriage and the falling apart of the Group Theatre (1941) have been weighing heavily on him. The national agony, due to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour has diverted people's attention away from theatres by this time. The lack of connection between the psychological fixation of the principal characters to the social problem around makes the play a private tragedy.

The failure of the play made Odets move again to Hollywood, thus ending the second phase of his dramatic career. Though Odets was well established as a playwright by then, he could not withstand the fall of his marriage. Above all, the Group Theatre, a symbol of his artistic value was no more there to cater to his needs and extract the best from him. In Hollywood he married another actress named
Beny Gayson (1943). Though well paid with six-figure income, he was disenchanted and he confessed that his vision and landscape had been made thinner.

Odets has retired back to New York and wrote *The Big Knife* (1949), focusing on the exploitation and ruthlessness of Hollywood life. The theme is built around a popular Hollywood star involved in a hit-and-run accident; blackmailed to sign a contract. After signing, he loses his self-respect. His agony is furthered when the company pays to kill a starlet who was the sole witness to the accident. Unable to withstand it, he commits suicide. *The Country Girl* (1950) is the most commercially successful of Odets’s plays. Here again Odets exploits the falsehood of the theatrical world. The psychological complexity of the play is stronger than that in *Clash by Night* or *Rocket to the Moon*.

Another crisis struck Odets in nineteen fifty-two. Testifying before the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HCUAA), he was believed to have mentioned the names of his former comrades. When the famous actor John Garfield was blacklisted, he died, unable to withstand the label of a traitor. Though Odets did not identify him, the guilt tormented him.
In this background he wrote his last play *The Flowering Peach* (1954), a pessimistic play of affirmation. Here Odets revived the family unit pattern of *Awake and Sing!*. The play is a Biblical adaptation of the story of Noah and the deluge. Warned of God's intended deluge, Noah takes his family with a pair each of other living beings in his ark. The initial comic nature of the play turns serious when his son Japeth poses a rational argument and challenges God as the killer. Noah, a staunch loyalist of God is forced to knock him down and carry him in the ark. Inside the ark Japeth insists on a rudder to steer the ark, while Noah is firm that God will steer it. When it strikes a submerged object and leaks, Noah is forced to admit that God also admits human assistance. Noah's wife maintains her cool throughout.

Of his other two sons, one is portrayed as an opportunist, hoarder and a playboy who loves Goldie, a girl brought for Japeth. Japeth, in turn loves his brother's wife Rachel. Noah, though initially objects to the wife swapping arrangement is forced to agree after the girls have become pregnant and his wife dies. The ark too lands on a mount in April, the season of joy and birth. There is a change in Noah from blind adherence to that of maintaining order through love. Japeth is no longer a rebellious son at the end of the play. The play ends in Noah's affirmation as follows: “... Now it is in man's hand to make or destroy the world...” (FP 21).
Noah's last words are fitting valedictory to the mysterious life of Odets.

A view of his plays reveal that the earlier plays have force and conviction because of the social problems of every day life and his later plays lack this force due to the largely private problems focussed in them. Yet, Odets has always been writing about the individual's struggle to maintain his dignity and identify in a largely inimical world. Concern with the universal human problems give a lasting value to his Depression plays. This makes three of the Depression plays ideal for a study of objectivity in the light of the non-teleological acceptance of life.

O’Casey and Odets as portrayed, have lived through the vastly deteriorating native cities. They have also witnessed the struggle and turmoil of the humble folks around them. Hence, whatever attitude to life as seen in their plays is due largely to their adherence to such environment.

Some of the critics of O’Casey and Odets maintain that there is a Chekhovian vision of life in their early plays. J.L. Styan states that in O’Casey’s best works, he “achieved a Chekhovian objectivity” (1981, 104). In another work entitled Dramatic Experience, he compares Synge with O’Casey and states that O’Casey’s plays are
tragi-comedies and naturalistic in the sense that he "came very close to reporting the true sensation of living like Ibsen and Chekhov on the continent" (1998, 109). David Krause finds a similarity in the vision of life of O’Casey and Chekhov and holds them as naturalists. He further comments that "both possesses the tragi-comic sense of life" (1960, 53). The realistic presentation of the brutal facts of life, the mixture of laughter and tears, detestation of idealism and opinion and judgement bind them together, according to Krause.

To Gabriel Miller, the Chekhovian vision is what is all-pervasive in Odets’s early plays. Like the matured dramas of the Russian playwright, these plays also "centre on ordinary people living quite unremarkable lives. They are not complex characters.... As in Chekhov, the sense of personal seems all pervasive:.... while the present... consists of dreams of escape, like going to Moscow for Chekhov’s three sisters... the concept of future is only a mirage" (1989, 32). Odets himself has admitted to the Chekhovian connection in an article to the New York Times (1935) and wrote as follows: “our confused middle class today—which dares little, is dangerously similar to Chekhov’s people, which is why the people in Awake and Sing! and Paradise Lost (particularly the latter) have what is called a Chekhovian quality” (1935, 15).
From Chekhov’s plays what is relevant to relate to this study is not merely the form but the “conception of the world” in terms of “what is real in human experience” (Gaskell 1972, 15). Other factors that bind the plays of O’Casey and Odets to that of Chekhov’s are the deteriorating environmental settings, their plotlessness, focus on the seemingly irrelevant, the futility, vacuum, frustration of characters and the tragi-comic nature of their life. Also, like in Chekhov’s plays, a few characters brood over the meaning of life, understand the conditions around them and accept it as it comes down. These observations also help to establish the significance of these plays and the attitude to life recommended in them.

Ever since the production of the Depression plays of Odets, the Group Theatre directors, eminent drama-critics and scholars on O’Casey and Odets have been indicating areas of similarity between O’Casey’s Dublin trilogy and Odets’s Depression plays. In their view Odets’s treatment of themes, characters, milieu and language in these plays resemble that of the Irish master’s early plays.

Harold Clurman is the first major theatre artist and critic to cite parallelism between the early plays of both O’Casey and Odets. In his article titled, “Three Introductions”, to the *Six Plays of Clifford Odets* (1939), he urged on the critics to be cautious while
bringing in the Chekhovian connection to the early plays of Odets. Adding further, he states: "if at all comparisons are --- helpful in defining the nature of a playwright's talent, perhaps the name of Sean O'Casey may fit better in this connection. Not only do we find in *Awake and Sing!* some of the special tenement tenderness that lends warmth to all the cold facts of O'Casey's Dublin dramas, but there is also a certain quality of improvisatory spontaneousness, a tendency to give to all the occurrences that are part of the character's lives, the same importance and sympathy, whether they be intense suffering or work a day routine" (1939, 421). Clurman continued to maintain the same view in his article on *Paradise Lost*. This has resulted in the spurt of critical observations connecting the early plays of both the dramatists.

Odets himself has acknowledged his indebtedness to O'Casey in his Journal entitled *The Time is Ripe* (1940). His candid admission is a true revelation and it reads as follows: "in a small way I have been influenced in my own playwrighting by O'Casey, but it is mostly because we must be similar men: he lives physically, not with the noodle" (1988, 16). Odets has been maintaining that his own loss of dramatic talent after the Depression plays is akin to that of O'Casey's lack of dramatic vigour after the Dublin plays. Both have strayed into strange terrain after the early plays. The lack of realistic
characters, naturalistic backgrounds and their experimentation with expressionism and symbolism in an unfamiliar idiom speak for most of the later plays running out of favour with the audience.

Deriving substance from an unpublished preface written by Odets to the plays of O'Casey, Miller comments in these words: "Like O'Casey, Odets is no longer an impulsive artist, for he recognizes that his writing now must be the result of the conscious mind marching along side feeling and intuition" (1989, 237). Odets himself admitted in the journal that he was writing about people who are battered, trapped and living a miserable, blasted life. His affiliation with the people, the place and their life are complete and his early plays thus produced are swollen with the events of the time. It is this similarity that Miller too points out in Odets's Depression plays and thus his "themes" too, like that of O'Casey, "emerge naturally out of a situation or a feeling" (1989, 237).

Eric Bentley, while reviewing Odets's last play, compares him to O'Casey and designates both as poets of the theatre. Adding further, he states that the real merit of these playwrights lies in the fact that their plays have been "set down in living language... imaginative use of dialect, which in turn is a matter of (their)... inner identification with the people who speak that dialect" (1968, 210).
What is laudable in both is that the words are aimed straight at the heart of the audience with more jazz and punch. The vitality of the language, the realistic depiction of incidents, characters and objective portrayal of subjective experiences show that these poets have mastered the art of theatre.

Harold Cantor, in affirming Odets as a playwright-poet, compares his language to that of O’Casey. According to him Odets “added the indirect and contrapuntal dialogue of a drama by O’Casey or Chekhov” (1978, 115). Ralph Willett, writing in the South Atlantic Quarterly comments that “Odets’s dramas are formally conservative like the best known plays of O’Casey” (1970, 71).

Like Clurman, Mendelsohn also sees similarity in theme, characters and language in Awake and Sing! and O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock. The critic states thus: “Awake and Sing! appears in retrospect to contain much of the ebullience of O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock, and the Odets play suggests O’Casey’s in other ways as well. There is, for example, the remarkably astute use of idiomatic language, qualities for which both playwrights have been justly admired. But beyond that is the mood, the state of chassis, that exists in both worlds; O’Casey’s Ireland and Odets’s New York are equally out of joint” (1969, 33). Commenting on the dialogue of both the
playwrights he adds as follows: "Odets's ear for the cadences of first
generation and immigrant New Yorkers... was comparable to
O'Casey's ear for Irish rhythms" (1969, 103).

Una Ellis Fermor, in her article "Poetry in Revolt" comments
that within twelve years of O'Casey's fourth play, "all his material
had been used and used memorably by Odets and Anderson in
America" (1969, 108). In her view, the deteriorating standard of slum
life which strife and wars activate in O'Casey's plays invariably find
dramatic treatment in Odets's plays too. Dispassionate view of these
plays also reveal that both are bitter about politics and man's
inhumanity to man and hold that these factors hamper man's
progress.

Inspite of the spurt of critical activity showing glimpses of
similarity in these plays, scant attention has been paid for in-depth
study of these plays in comparison. In focusing on areas of likeness,
the analogues attitude to life shown in these dramas have not been
consolidated upon. Hence, the attempt to study the plays in the light
of non-teleological acceptance of life may be of value to scholars of
drama. The following aspects are extensively discussed under
characteristic sections so as to bring home the hypothesis under
consideration.
The first task is to present the causes and forms of the struggles. The desperate struggle for existence amidst overwhelming odds as presented in these plays pictures this world as a battleground. In O’Casey’s plays, the characters hail from the death-trapped tenements of the Dublin slums. Sufferings due to lack of food, raiment and shelter are unique in the Dublin plays. In Odets’s plays the economic crisis force the characters to struggle to have the basics and also to have a life of love, dignity, freedom and normal human relationships. While external forces wreck individuals and families, the characters’ own inadequacies enhance their struggles in these plays.

Next, the discussion turns on how far the sense of alienation increases their sufferings. The growing insecurity of being alone dissociates these men and women from their fellow beings in these plays. In Odets’s plays, people stand baffled as the Depression struck the society unexpectedly. The resultant conditions are insecurity, dispossession and disillusionment, all of which bring disorder. The indifference of money-minded capitalists to the plight of the poor working people frustrate them. All these lead to loss of faith, bickering, isolation and breakdowns.
In O’Casey, it is the strife-torn society that is at war with the poor tenement population. The Easter Rising, civil war and the guerilla warfare hold the entire civil society to ransom. Their moments of bravado and posturing are not born out of conviction. Narrowness of their idealism too is in conflict with the practical realities around them. As a result, alienation disorients individuals in O’Casey’s plays. Almost all the characters experience a sense of isolation either because of personal or social conditions.

Consequentially, the next focus is on the conflicts in these plays that are caused by man’s self-love and his inhumanity towards fellow human beings. The forces that are in conflict with the interest of the individuals frustrate him. While economic forces are in conflict with the characters in Odets’s plays, they are the politico-religious forces in O’Casey’s plays. In Odets the entire society is divided into the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’. People with power and authority are seen blocking the genuine aspirations of the dispossessed characters. Material comforts and happiness for the lower classes stay as illusionary as dreams. Hence they are cynical of the affluent sections of society in these plays. Economic decline of the middle-classes also makes sure that they slide down with the marginalised proletariat.
In O’Casey’s plays, there is a nexus between politics and religion. While religion splits the society vertically as the Catholics and Protestants, the poor among the Catholics are deluded into embracing militant nationalism, which is an offshoot of bourgeois Catholicism. Instead of relieving the poor from want and misery, it hampers their progress and destroys them. It is further stressed that it is the poor who suffer indignity under dehumanising conditions and are forced to have moral compromises either to live or to attain petty gains.

Following this, we analyse pacifism as a solution to the problems faced by these people. During the points of conflict between opposing forces in these plays, few characters strive to know the reality of the conditions. They understand that instead of abetting the strife and war, it is sagacious to advance peace. The awareness that one must live with minimum friction with the environment augments their role in these plays. They either stand aloof and watch or act to ameliorate other’s sufferings. They know that it is not reaction but recognition that is important at moments of deep crisis and conflicts. Hence they endure indignities and show enormous courage in reconciling themselves with the environment.

We also highlight the fact that when dissension, strife and war deeply divide society, it is futile to fight with or win against an
unequal army. The disgruntled, dispossessed masses embrace illusion as reality. On the other hand, those who are aware of themselves keep aloof from fanatical movements, promote harmony and construct life around them.

Next, the analysis turns on how understanding, awareness and recognition of themselves guide them towards acceptance of life as it is. The pacifists in these plays are those who accept life non-teleologically. This life accepting characters are analysed in the light of the philosophical base of non-teleological thinking, propounded by Steinbeck and Ricketts.

It is also highlighted how the non-teleologically thinking characters are forced by the wickedness of the world to live in a brawling, quarrelsome and dehumanising environment. They have neither the materials nor the means to encounter the days to come. Yet they gladly accept these conditions, neither cursing nor blaming others. With the willing hands to work and reach out, they resolve further to attend to humanity and activate life.

Finally, we turn to the question of the relevance of the vision of life of the two playwrights to the present context. The playwrights' view of life as seen by some major critics as well as the light shed on their attitude to life in their non-dramatic works is
pointed out to strengthen the argument of the present study. It would be ideal to begin looking at the causes and forms of the struggle in the ensuing section.