CHAPTER - 4

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The study of two literatures is ever a beneficial act. This study, technically known as comparative study is likely to help one and all. Comparative literature, as a study or research, is likely to help two literatures, enriching them in the deal. As we know, comparison and contrasting are the two tools of study to understand and appreciate different literatures. The act of comparison and contrasting helps us to judge the worth of any literature. It helps us to arrive at a universal phenomenon. Speaking of the study of literature, particularly comparative literature, Prof. M. K. Bhatnagar observes, “A study of literature is an appreciation of the litterateur’s perception of life in a context where the critical heritage, the cultural values, the philosophic predilections and the individual, social, geographic and other related dimensions are either subsumed as given or are implicitly accepted as part of the context whereto the text is bound. Comparative study of literature is difficult in some key respects. It involves the lumping together of two texts or more which are perceived by the critic to have significant similarities of theme or style through which their dissimilarities are sought to be probed into and accounted for and the artistic intent of the authors spelt out. In such appreciation of one literary text through such texts, the critic has to consciously cultivate multi-faceted awareness of all those factors which could have gone into shaping all the texts under scrutiny
obviously. Such studies involve a higher degree of preparedness on the part of the comparative critic as compared with his traditional counterpart."

Comparative criticism of literature can assume a number of dual awareness studies—inter-genre or intra-genre, inter-cultural or intra cultural, inter-authorial or intra-authorial or a specific permutation and combination of these. Obviously such studies entail a painstaking perusal of all relevant literary and extra literary components of the texts. Even comparative study of literature incontrovertibly involves a much more thorough planning on the part of the researcher. Prof. Bhatnagar comments comparative study yields much more wide-ranging and fruitful results.

A comparative study of literature may be undertaken carefully. For example, one may do a comparative study of two works: most probably of the same genre, and more importantly based upon a similar kind of theme, characterization, language and the like. On the contrary, works with little thematic or stylistic kinship and little difference of the cultural, historical or social milieu have little scope for insight.

A comparative study of absurd theatre is rather an interesting phenomenon. It is interesting because absurd theatre as such has aroused the interest of the people across the world. Absurd theatre, as an expression of man's anguish and trauma has, over the years, attracted the attention of the people particularly in Europe. Of course, what is important for Europe is also important for the rest of the world. As we can understand absurd theatre is based on man's existentialistic anguish and concern. This dread in man arose as a reaction to the
global phenomena like industrial revolution, the resultant urbanization and its horrible problems, Hitler’s totalitarian regime and the ensuing two World Wars. Science and technology caused a heavy loss to man’s faith. These reasons, in fact, led to man’s spiritual loss and emptiness. As we find in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Franz Kafka and other existential writers and philosophers, life appeared to them as meaningless. This was because, these writers found out a proper attitude and perceptive for understanding and living life. Accordingly existence precedes essence. It is being and becoming. Man lost his faith in God ever since Nietzsche said we killed God. His work Thus Spake Zarathustra heralded a new and shocking revelation for man. Sartre’s work, particularly his novel Nausea portrayed modern man’s absurd life. Albert Camus’s novel The Outsider gives a graphic picture of the absurd in modern man’s life. Meursault’s misery and doom are enough to show modern man’s evils. The hero suffered for none of his faults. And Camus termed it as absurd for the first time.

Martin Esslin, the celebrated author of the book The Theatre of the Absurd, observes, “There can be little doubt that such a sense of disillusionment, such as a collapse of all previously held firm beliefs is a characteristic feature of our own times. The social and spiritual reasons for such a sense of loss of meaning are manifold and complex: the waning of religious faith that had started with the Enlightenment and led Nietzsche to speak of the ‘death of God’ by the eighteen eighties; the breakdown of the liberal faith in inevitable social progress in the wake of the First World War; the disillusionment with the hopes of radical
social evolution as predicted by Marx after Stalin had turned the Soviet Union into a totalitarian tyranny; the relapse into barbarism, mass murder, and genocide in the course of Hitler's brief rule over Europe during the Second World War; and, in the aftermath of that war, the spread of spiritual emptiness in the outwardly prosperous and affluent societies of western Europe and the United States. There can be no doubt: for many intelligent and sensitive human beings the world of the mid twentieth century has lost its meaning and has simply ceased to make sense. Previously held certainties have dissolved, the firmest foundations for hope and optimism have collapsed. Suddenly man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical – in a word, absurd. All assurances of hope, all explanations of ultimate meaning have suddenly been unmasked as nonsensical illusions, empty chatter, whistling in the dark. If we try to imagine such a situation in ordinary life, this might amount to our suddenly ceasing to understand the conversation in a room full of people; what made sense at one moment has, at the next, become an obscure babble of voices in a foreign language. At once the comforting, familiar scene would turn into one of nightmare and horror. With the loss of the means of communication we should be compelled to view that world with the eyes of total outsiders as a succession of frightening images."²

Based on the tenets of existentialism, absurd theatre or the Theatre of the Absurd heralded a new trend in art, theatre and philosophy in the mid twentieth century. Of course, absurd theatre is a combination of so many things like the tradition of miming and clowning of ancient Greece and Rome, the commedia
dell arte of Renaissance Italy, music hall tradition of Britain, nonsense poetry, the tradition of dream and nightmare literature, allegorical and symbolical drama and the ancient fools and mad scenes in drama. In addition to this, nightmare humour of Charlie Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, W. C. Fields or Laurel and Hardy added their own might for the growth of absurd theatre. Still importantly, the Dadaists, the surrealists and the Parisian avant-garde facilitated the absurd drama. Great writers like Alfred Jarry, Guillaume Apollinaire, Antonian Artaud and Roger Vitrac have contributed much in their own way.

The absurd theatre is a post-World War phenomenon. The same expresses man's anguish and dread. What we see in an absurd play is the expression of man's purposeless life or his nothingness. For this the writers make use of certain devices or methodology. That way absurd play depicts a situation rather than a clear-cut event or incident. Here we do not find any plot, characterization, dialogue and description. Here we do not find plot and characters as well motivated. The characters are hardly human beings compared to a well-made play. The absurd play does not have a beginning, a middle or an end. It does not even deserve the name of a drama. In fact, 'The Theatre of the Absurd' has become a catch phrase, much used and much abused. As Martin Esslin says there is no organized movement, no school of artists, who claim the label for themselves. For each of the playwrights seeks to express his own vision of life. Yet all these writers bear certain similarities in their use of theme, adoption of dramatic approaches and parodying of language. Even when we say absurd
theatre does not depict reality it depicts certain reality, which is the reproduction of reality.

As for language, the absurd theatre has devalued language. For them language has become a kind of ballast filling empty spaces. Language has become useless in a world of emptiness. Language has ceased its logicity and structure. Therefore, absurd playwrights have not used the traditional kind of language. In fact, they parody the use of language as they parody the use of traditional themes. For example, Beckett parodies and mocks the language of philosophy and science in Lucky’s speech. Harold Pinter tells that the bulk of everyday conversation is largely devoid of logic and sense. The same is true of all absurd playwrights even in other countries. The Kannada absurd theatre has similar positions in terms of the use of theme and language.

A comparative study of British and Kannada absurd theatre may be analyzed as follows. As we know the British ruled India for over 200 years. They bequeathed upon us their language as well as their culture. So the West started fascinating as well as helping the Indians. The Indian renaissance benefited from the British vision of life. Once the country got its independence the people continued their imitation of the west. One of such imitations is the Kannada absurd theatre. Of course, this imitation is not so hard. In other words, Kannada playwrights created their own kind of drama. This is to say that there are some marked differences between the British and Kannada absurd theatres.
The Kannada theatre is an offshoot of Sanskrit theatre of the old times. So full-night plays, three hour plays and small plays existed here as ever before. The Kannada plays had Puranic as well as folk dimensions. Lately it received some western plays in translations and performance. Such western plays like Elizabethan plays of Shakespeare, restoration plays of Dryden and some of the modern plays of absurd theatre helped the people to understand the western attitude towards life and art. As so Adamov’s play *The Prima Donna* translated into Kannada by Samutindra Nadiga in 1966 influenced the Kannada playwrights as well as audience. This was exactly like Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* getting a similar fascination for the jail audience of Poland in 1956. Thereafter, advanced playwrights like Girish Karnad and Chandrashekhar Patil who had English education in England started writing absurd plays. Girish Karnad’s plays particularly *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana* made a marked impact upon the minds of audience. His plays were a great success both in India and abroad. Chandrashekhar Patil, himself a Professor of English, and a Protest writer began writing such plays in earnest. His plays like *Appa, Gurtinavaru, Kodegalu* and *Gokarnada Gaudashyani* aroused the interest of the audience. Similarly P. Lankesh with his play *Teregalu*, Chandrashekhar Kambar with his play *Chalesh*, Chandrakanth Kusnur with his play *Vidushaka* created a sort of mystery and thrill. Still many more writers such as Na. Ratna, Chaduranga, Jadabharata and M. S. Channayya attempted their hands at absurd theatre. These plays just like Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* generated considerable suspense and dramatic tension in spite of being called silly or ordinary plays. They made use
of silly situations and laity as their capital. Just like their western counterparts they laughed at the language. Most of their plays made fun of life. Of course, they had some degree of seriousness depicting life’s faith and failings.

Kannada critics think that Kannada absurd theatre is an imitation of the western theatre. For example, Chandrashekhar Patil and Kusnur have heavily borrowed from Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. However, Kannada absurd theatre has not produced as great plays as the plays of Samuel Beckett or Harold Pinter. Of course, there are some reasons for this lapse on the part of Kannada theatre. Firstly, Indian society is traditional without Europe’s richness of wealth or knowledge. So, as a backward nation, it is grossly traditional. Secondly Europe witnessed all the major events of the world such as industrial revolution, world wars, and the growth of science and technology. India did not witness any of this for sure. So Indian or Kannada absurd theatre could not rise equal to the magnitude of the western absurd theatre.

Here an attempt is made to compare the Kannada absurd plays with the British. The study aims at probing the nature of reasons for the Kannada theatre’s attempting to write absurd plays and the resultant productions. An effort is made to illustrate the similarities and differences between the two theaters.

As we know the British absurd theatre has two phases. In the first phase, writers like Malraux, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus wrote works—both plays and novels—depicting modern man’s failure to realize his cherished aims and objectives. They did it employing the traditional theatre. That is to say they
made use of plot, characterization, dialogue and description. Their plays had a
beginning, a middle and an end. Their plays had a clear-cut plot though they
intended to express something meaningless as in the case of Malraux's *The
Voices of Silence* (1951). For example, Malraux was clearly interested in ideas,
but he was not a philosopher and therefore was less committed to the logic of
discourse and more to a passionate, even poetic presentation of ideas. In *The
Voices of Silence* he has depicted a general survey of the decline of Christianity
and the loss of absolutes in the western world. Destiny is Malraux's word for all
we want to escape but cannot, and since all our actions are directed against the
inevitable, they are 'absurd.' Likewise, the opposition of the east and west is
seen in *The Temptation*. Here man is portrayed as though not able to establish a
harmonious relationship with others. Sartre's works have a similar approach to
life. His novel *Nausea* can be studied this way. Camus did it wonderfully well in
his novel *The Outsider*.

In a like manner, some of the Kannada absurd playwrights have written
plays, which make use of traditional dramatic devices. They have plot,
characters, dialogue and description. The traditional language is employed for
communicating the theme. Yet the plays show the absurd of life.

As we know Jean Paul Sartre's two plays *The Flies* and *Huis Clos* depict
the theme of the absurd in man's life. The situation in *The Flies* is the return to
Argos of Orestes to avenge the murder of his father, Agamemnon, by killing his
uncle Aegisthus and his mother Clytemnestra. French audience were accustomed
to seeing contemporary events presented in a classical tale, and in 1943 the play
obviously referred to the occupation of France by Germany. But Sartre wished to show a man assuming responsibility for his actions good or ill. Likewise in his another play *Huis Clos* Sartre depicts the theme of human identity crisis. For example, here are three characters seeking definition in the eyes of one another. It is summed up, “Man, then, is the *sum* of his acts. The idea that he does something because he is that sort of man is replaced with the idea that a man is or makes himself that sort of man by doing such and such an act. He is Nothing, and in action becomes conscious of that original Nothingness—the result is anguish because he can no longer justify himself through faith or morals. He can, of course, fall back into blindness or Bad Faith, or he can assume his acts and his life, fully aware of the world’s absurdity, and accept the crushing responsibility of giving the world a meaning that comes from himself alone.”

Just the same Albert Camus illustrates his vision of the absurd as expressed in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and in his novels and plays. His two plays *Caligula* and *Cross Purpose* illustrate the absurd in man’s life. The first play *Caligula* interprets the sudden reversal of character, which turned a good emperor into a monster after the death of the emperor’s sister, Drusilla, as a revelation of the absurd.

The play depicts the tragedy of the emperor. Caligula had an affair with his sister. She died one day. The king became sorrowful. Even he disappeared. When he came back he spoke of a simple truth: ‘Men die; and they are not happy.’ The emperor thinks the world is full of Bad Faith. So he tries to show the absurd of life. Although he is neither evil nor tyrannical he takes his ideas to

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their logical conclusion. Thus his new rule is cruel. Later he finds an enemy Cherea who fights the king for his survival. In Act II he repeats this, that he cannot live in a world where the absurd can ‘transfix their lives, like a dagger in the heart,’ and when Caligula accuses him of shrinking from the truth of absurdity he replies: “Because what I want is to live, and be happy....As you see, I’m quite an ordinary sort of man. True, there are moments when, to feel free of them, I desire the death of those I love, or hanker after women from whom the ties of family or friendship debar me. Were logic everything, I’d kill or fornicate on such occasions. But I consider these passing fancies of no great importance. If everyone set to gratifying them, the world would be impossible to live in, and happiness, too, would go by the board. And these, I repeat, are the things that count, for me.”

Camus’s another play Cross Purpose depicts a dream-like theme. Like Orestes, the hero Jan returns to his mother’s house after several years. Now she cannot recognize him. Still the old woman and her daughter Martha live on exploiting the rich clients. Though Maria, Jan’s wife warned against this, Jan is hard about it. So he stays a night at the house. Unfortunately the woman and her daughter kill him for his money. When the old woman knows this she dies. But Martha speaks of her anguish: “I hate this narrow world in which we are reduced to gazing up at God. But I have not been given my rights and I am smarting from the injustice done me; I will not bend my knee. I have been cheated of my place on earth, cast away by my mother, left alone with my crimes, and I shall leave this world without being reconciled.”

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So Sartre and Camus’s plays speak of how human beings are caught up in the absurdity of existence and doomed to separation and exile.

Just the same way Kannada absurd plays depict the theme of the absurd in man’s life. Girish Karnad’s play *Tughlaq* is at its best in this regard. The play opens with a court scene in which a disguised Muslim Aziz (as a Bahaman) cheats the king Tughlaq. Amirs and Sheik Imam-ud-din speak of king’s wrestling powers from his father in a foul play. There is a prayer. The amirs conspire to kill the king just the same way as he killed his king-father. But they fail. Then the king’s order of shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad provokes the people all alike. The king invites the Sheikh for an open discussion of religious problems. The Sheikh arrives there but he does not find any audience. Soon the king asks him to stop the Awadh’s governor Ain-ul-Mulk’s plan to invade Delhi. The Sheikh stops but he is killed in the deal. Then Tughlaq’s plan of shifting succeeds. People suffer in their travel to Daulatabad. Aziz is shown as cheating several people. Finally Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, the descendent of Khalif is said to visit the people at the new capital. That is to revive the people’s prayers. Yet Aziz kills the holy visitor and disguises himself as Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid. The king finds out it but fails to punish the rascal. The Thirteenth scene evidences this,

MUHAMMAD. Who are you?

*Silence. For a moment as no one speaks. AZIZ is obviously frightened.*

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Who are you? How long did you hope to go on fooling us with your masquerade?

BARANI. But your majesty—

MUHAMMAD. Answer me. Don’t make me lose my temper.

AZIZ. I am a dhobi from Shiknar. My first name was Aziz. There have been many others since then.

BARANI. But—what about His Holiness?

MUHAMMAD. Do you know the punishment for killing a saint like Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid? And for deceiving my subjects and me?

AZIZ. (Bolder). No. your Majesty, though I have never underestimated Your Majesty’s powers of imagination. But it would be a grave injustice if I were punished, Your Majesty.

BARANI. What’s happening here?

AZIZ. ‘Saint’ is a word meant for people like Sheikh Imam-ud-din. I doubt if your Majesty would have used it for Ghiyas-ud-din. I know I am a dhobi and he was a descendant of the Khalif. But surely Your Majesty has never associated greatness with pedigree.

MUHAMMAD. Be careful, dhobi. Don’t overreach yourself.

AZIZ. I daren’t. but since Your Majesty came to the throne, I have been your most devout servant. I have studied every order, followed every instruction, considered every measure of Your Majesty’s with the greatest attention. I insist I am Your Majesty’s true discipline.

MUHAMMAD. Don’t try to flatter me. I am accustomed to it.
AZIZ. It’s hardly flattering you, Your Majesty, to say I am your discipline. But I have watched Your majesty try to explain your ideas and acts to the people. And I have seen with regret how few have understood them.

BARANI. *(Who is just beginning to comprehend)*. Your Majesty, this scoundrel is trying to spread a net of words around you. It’s dangerous even to talk to him. He must be punished at once.

AZIZ. Come, sir, let’s be sensible. You know His Majesty will never do that to me.

MUHAMMAD. Won’t I?

AZIZ. Forgive me. But Your Majesty has publicly welcomed me as a saint, started the public prayers after a lapse of five years in my honour, called me a saviour. Your majesty has even—forgiven me for pointing it out, but I wasn’t responsible for it—fallen at my feet, publicly.

BARANI. Villain—

Tughlaq’s complex personality dominates the play. The various ambiguities of his character lend a puzzling quality to it. All the other characters are only dramatized aspects of this complex personality. Tughlaq’s character is presented in a three-dimensional way with all his idealism, good intentions and contradictions. The play appears to be a political allegory. The play dramatizes the hell-like atmosphere.

Just like Sartre’s Orestes or Camus’s Caligula Tughlaq projects the theme of the absurd in life. Tughlaq wrests power unfairly; he awards justice to a cheater; he shifts the capital when it was not necessary; he introduces copper
coins just to deceive himself; and he trusts a scoundrel as Ghiyas-ud-din. Finally he even does not punish him though Barani insists upon it. Then what kind of a king he was? This is a serious matter for consideration. Like the French who liked Orestes as an allegory about the Germans’ occupation of France, Tughlaq has a comment on the goings on of the Nehruvian era. The play is an attack on the scatter-brained politicians of today. Like Camus’s Caligula Tughlaq is wise as well as stupid. So he has his own Cherea in the person of Aziz.

Girish Karnad’s another absurd play *Hayavadana* depicts the theme of existential crisis. The play has two friends Devadatta and Kapila. The former marries Padmini. Yet the lady has an eye upon Kapila. One day they go to some fair and they stop for rest on the way. Devadatta finds a temple of his deity and offers his head to her as he had promised it for getting Padmini. Kapila, as a bosom friend does the same when he feels he cannot live without the other. Padmini, when she wishes to die the same way, gets a boon from the deity. Yet she either deliberately or by chance puts the people’s heads wrongly. Critics think she put Devadatta’s head on Kapila’s body as she wanted to enjoy the best of them. Troubles start for them. The two friends brake away for long. Once they meet and think of living together. They speak of wife-sharing:

Devadatta: I wanted your power but not your wildness. You lived in hate—I fear.

Kapila: No, I was the one who was afraid.

(They laugh.)

Tell me one thing. Do you really love Padmini?
Kapila: Yes.
Devadatta: So do I.
Kapila: I know.

(Silence.)

Devadatta, couldn’t we all three live together—like the Pandavas and Draupadi?

Devadatta: What do you think?

(Silence. Padmini looks at them but doesn’t say anything.)

Kapila: No, it can’t be done.\(^7\)

So they cannot agree upon this and they die. The lady too dies. In the sub-plot a man with a horse head (of course, with human voice and understanding) is in search of perfection. He even achieves it but by becoming a complete horse. Yet his human voice is still there. Once he returns to the stage, the child of Devadatta comes there. Both the plots are combined here to show a dramatic unity. Finally Hayavadana in touch with the boy loses his human voice and the child, dumb before, gets its voice. Karnad depicts the incompleteness in the bodies of Devadatta and Kapila. He says Padmini could not have complete control on her desires. M. K. Naik observes, “Padmini’s plight suggests woman’s vain attempt to unite Man as intellect and as flesh in order to further her creative purpose.”\(^8\)

Camus’s *Cross Purpose* and Karnad’s *Hayavadana* have some similarities. Both make use of dream-like situations. Camus’s Jan wants some kind of perfection by joining his kith. Yet he is misunderstood just like Padmini.
Martha and her mother wanted money for settling down abroad. But they failed miserably. So much so that Padmini failed to achieve full happiness even by recreating man. Thus the two plays depict man’s existentialistic aspirations.

**SAMUEL BECKETT**

The second phase of absurd playwrights like Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter differ from Sartre and Camus in so far they do not write like them. For example, they do not use plot, characterization, dialogue and description as Sartre and Camus did. Sartre and Camus wrote plays as their predecessors. They wrote plays as well-planned and motivated. The only thing is that their plays projected the absurd of life. Whereas Beckett, Pinter and others wrote plays differently. They did not use the traditional kind of plot and characterization. Beckett, for his part, thought that the absurd must be expressed in the absurd way. He learnt this perfect fusion of structure and content from his masters Proust and James Joyce. He wrote of Joyce’s *Work in Progress*: “Here form is content, content is form. His writing is not about something: it is that something itself." Even he devalued language. He thought when human thought, choice and action are absurd, the medium of expression cannot be meaningful. Therefore, his plays are formulated in such a way that there is certain emptiness precisely at those places—such as plot, character, dramatic speech, setting and the like, where one would look for meaning traditionally.

When we look for theme in the play what we notice is nothingness. There are two tramps Vladimir and Estragon, waiting for a man called Godot. Who is
Godot? Where he comes from? What is his position or relation with the tramps? Does he really come? Or whether he will help them? Everything is uncertain. Equally who are the tramps? Where they come from? Why they wait for Godot? Is he a God or tyrant? Everything is unknown. Critics say no one comes and nothing happens in the play. The subject of the play is just the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of human condition. As we know we wait for things throughout our lives. So the theme of the play is waiting. Of course, this waiting is not an event but a situation. This proves the fact that absurd plays do not depict any theme as traditional plays did but they depict a situation.

The tramps in the play wait for Godot. Vladimir is strong physically as well as mentally. They wait doing this and that. They speak, chat, use music hall speech, or syllogisms, or call each other with names. When they pass some time there arrive two more tramps, Lucky and Pozzo. Lucky is a slave and Pozzo is his master. The master exploits the slave. If Pozzo symbolizes man's evil nature, the other stands for servitude. Lucky, as a mysterious character, parodies the very man-made progress. Surprisingly Godot does not come at the end. Just a boy brings the message that Godot may meet them the next day. Still they want to wait for him endlessly as the modern man waits hoping for something:

Estragon. And if he doesn't come?

Vladimir. We'll come back tomorrow.

Estragon. And then the day after tomorrow.

Vladimir. Possibly.

Estragon. And so on.10
It is said, while life is there, hopes are there. Likewise, man’s act of waiting goes on forever.

Act II repeats the whole thing. Certain changes that are seen in Act II are that the roadside tree has developed some leaves and Lucky and Pozzo have undergone critical changes. Now Pozzo has gone blind and Lucky leads him. Lucky dances and acts as a wit. He shows that human language is insufficient for a meaningful communication. Actually the play speaks of hope and despair. Beckett’s play stands for man’s timeless waiting and despair. The play is quite serious that way. Arnold Hinchliffe observes, “Beckett does not probe quite so deeply, but the themes persist: the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to incessant change, and the limitations of language as a means of arriving at or communicating valid truth.” 11 While Martin Esslin thinks “The play is a poem on time, evanescence, and the mysteriousness of existence, the paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity.” 12

In Beckett’s another play Endgame two characters Hamm and Clov stay in a bare room. Hamm is a blind man, always sitting. He is paralyzed. So he cannot stand. His servant Clov is unable to sit down. Their room has two windows and there are two ash cans. Hamm’s parents are legless and they are in the two cans. The four characters think that some grave catastrophe has finished the world. So they think they are the only survivors. The text alludes to the room as a ‘shelter,’ outside of which is death. So we can imagine a fallout shelter, perhaps and the last hours of the last morsels of human life, after perhaps an H-bomb explosion. The bomb was much on the mind of Europe in 1957 when
Beckett wrote the play. It is observed the world of Genesis called up by Hamm’s name and the desolation of the earth outside the shelter, which is the little world of Hamm, will only operate partially as metaphor.

The main characters Hamm and Clov resemble Pozzo and Lucky. Hamm is The master while Clov is his servant. Hamm is selfish, sensuous and domineering. Clov hates Hamm and wants to leave him though he has to obey his orders: “Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?” Clove does not have the courage to desert his master and the same is the source of dramatic tension. The very desertion is likely to cause Hamm’s death. Clov, however, wants to go. Yet he fails to go as the tramps of the play Waiting for Godot. G. C. Bernard observes, “Endgame harks back rather to Godot than forward to the plays of the sixties. The four characters of Godot are here condensed into two, Hamm and Clov. Hamm is in many ways a fusion of the tyrant Pozzo with the poet Estragon. Like Pozzo he is cruel, tyrannical, devoid of pity, and blind. He is a self-conscious actor, composing and declaiming a story with an artificial narrative voice and in Pozzo-like phraseology. However, he also has elements of Estragon, being imaginative and inward looking, constantly wanting to sleep and dream romantic dreams. At one point he tells Clov ‘‘I was never there…absent, always. It all happened without me. I don’t know what’s happened.’ This is very like Estragon denying that he was ever in the Macon country with Vladimir and then adding ‘It’s possible. I didn’t notice anything.’ Neither Estragon nor Hamm are fully alive to the outer world.”
Likewise Clov resembles Vladimir. He assists him for everything practically. The material dependence of the two couples in *Waiting for Godot* is, naturally, carried on here.

Critics say Hamm is childish. True he plays with a three-legged toy dog. Clov serves him as his sensory mechanism. At regular intervals he is asked to survey the outside world from the two tiny windows high up in the wall. The right-hand window looks out on land, the left-hand onto the sea. But the tides of sea are stopped.

Hamm and Clov's purposeless existence can be seen in the following dialogue:

Clov. Then I'll leave you.

Hamm. You can't leave us.

Clov. Then I shan't leave you.

Pause

Hamm. Why don't you finish us? (Pause). I'll tell you the combination of the larder if you promise to finish me.

Clov. I couldn't finish you.

Hamm. Then you shan't finish me.

Pause.

Clov. I'll leave you, I have things to do.

Hamm. Do you remember when you came here?

Clov. No. too small, you told me.

Hamm. Do you remember your father?
Clov. Do you remember your father?

Clov. (wearily). Same answer. (pause.). You’ve asked me these questions millions of times.\textsuperscript{15}

Beckett’s other play \textit{Krapp’s Last Tape} is about a man who passes the rest of his life in remembering his past. He is depicted as a lonely and melancholic person. This is to know that man’s life a sordid affair. It is observed: “Krapp indeed is Beckett’s Peer Gynt. His birthday tapes enshrine a series of discarded false selves, like the layers, which Peer stripped off the onion in the vain hope of finding the central kernel. But Beckett does not allow the Solveig whom Krapp rejected to be found waiting faithfully for him in old age. Krapp will die as he has lived, alone.”\textsuperscript{16}

Beckett’s radio plays are an extension of his full-length plays in piecemeal. They depict numerous situations of life where the absurd is inherent. It is ever mind-boggling. The first of his radio play \textit{All That Fall} is about a journey. Mrs Rooney, elderly and childless, makes a laborious progress to meet her blind husband and bring him home. In the journey she comes across a variety of neighbours who help or harass her; there is a talk of the race meeting others, some are travelling to and fro, speaking of the inexplicable lateness of the expected train. When they return they are almost to themselves except Jerry, a boy sometimes with them. Jerry brings a mysterious object he has dropped and tells the reason for the train’s delay, a child’s death on the line. This is the bare detail. The play sounds like a Gothic soundscape. The play sounds that life is full of tempests of wind and rain. Beckett’s \textit{Embers} depicts the hero Henry’s frantic
search for his father who has already died. Here the sea imagery is very powerful. The play projects the point that man is mad after something in life. *Words and Music* expresses still obscure kind of a human situation. *Cascando* has characters like Opener, Voice and Music -- all abstract kind of people. In fact, all of them are different aspects of one character. Here too is seen a character called Woeburn never appearing in the play. Yet the three speak of him as the two sets of tramps speak of Godot. *Rough for Radio* is similar in motivation. *Eh Joe* focuses on human suffering. Here a character called Joe waits in oblivion. Beckett’s play *Happy Days* is about two old couple, Willie and Winnie. We find Winnie being hidden up to the breast in a mound, while her husband Willie dwells in a hole. They try to kill time by chatting and philosophizing. Winnie is more dominant than Willie. She has a bag in one hand and a revolver in another. Critics think the revolver indicates of the lady’s frustrations. So she thinks of committing suicide at times. The play depicts man’s abusing of women. *Play* is unique in the sense that it is set in limbo and its characters are the psi-components of the deceased people. All action, movement, gesture and facial expression are abolished; the three actors are imprisoned in funerary urns with their heads visible and they are instructed that their faces are to remain passive. Why passive one wonders. It seems Beckett wants to use the technique of depersonalization for the sake of exposing pseudo-people. Beckett’s play *Film* opens with the statement: “*Esse est percipi. All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being.*”17 *Come and Go* depicts man’s hesitation to act in life. The
play is a fantasy and it is about silence. *That Time* abounds in moments of one and the same voices A B and C. *Not I* is still worse in stating that human language is useless for proper communication. *Footfall* has a similar kind of perspective. Beckett’s old play *Eleutheria* concerns with a young man’s efforts to cut himself loose from his bed, apathetic and passive. The play is about man’s alienation.

As the British ruled half of the world their culture and civilization influenced the world. The English language had its own impact upon the world populace. It did the work, which no other language can ever do. The people who studied English as a language also acquainted with its literature. Not to speak of English literature inspired and helped the writers across the world to write works as English writers did. For example, Indian writers started writing plays and novels as their counterparts did in England. Shakespeare’s plays, Dickens’ novels and Eliot’s poetry were to inspire countless of writers. The so-called Theatre of the Absurd influenced the world audience as well. Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* surprised the playgoers. Of course, people liked it as they liked Shakespeare’s plays. *Waiting for Godot* made many writers write similar kind of absurd plays.

And one such instance is Kannada absurd theatre. As we know the British absurd theatre began in the 1960’s when Paris was facilitating the new theatre. Beckett’s plays were to surprise and inspire people to write such plays shortly. At the same time, some playwrights in Karnataka staged European absurd plays.
sometimes in their originals and sometimes in translations. Samutindra Nadiga translated Ionesco's *The Bold Prima Donna* into Kannada and the play was a success with city audience. Then the local writers who had their education in England or who taught English literature started writing absurd plays much the same way. Even those who did not have any of these two benefits also began writing such plays. It was a matter of popular taste. D. R. Bendre one of the earliest Kannada writers, had sensed this. His play *Sayo Aata (A Play of Dying)* can be an instance of the absurd. Here we find a thief dying when in the act of stealing. The house owner creates a scene in which the city mayor, the king and his retinue come to solve the late man's anguish. We know that a thief is an outcome of a society's impoverishment. So the whole society has to become a cause for it. The play evinces this sharply. Na. Ratna's play *Gode Beke Gode* depicts a Beckettian situation where we find two tramps waiting on a roadside trying to sell a freely found glass wall. There is no information about the tramps' background, address, occupation and the purpose of their selling it. Their dialogue is as absurd as Vladimir's; and their way of talking is akin to the music hall comedy. The following is an evidence:

One. D'you want the wall?
Other. Wall, wall.
One. D'you want the wall?
Other. Wall, a tasty wall.
One. What' re you calling?
Other. Why? A tasty wall?
One. Is that an eatable?

Other. Otherwise it can’t be sold.¹⁸

The tramps call each other with names; they use syllogisms; they indulge in gestures and they speak of nonsense. This is just time passing for people who have no work to do or who do not know how to live. Na Ratna’s another play *Bonthe* bears a similar kind of situational show.

Chandrashekhar Patil is a prominent Kannada writer. He is an established absurd playwright today. Some of his plays like *Kodegalu, Appa, Gurtinavaru, Kunta Kunta Kuravatti* and *Gokarnada Gaudashyani* are perfect absurd plays resembling Beckett’s masterpieces. For example his play *Kodegalu* is a fine study of absurdity in life. The play has characters like Ksha (X) and Ya (Y). This reminds us the characters of W1 (Woman), W2 and M (Man) in Beckett’s radio play *Play*. The dialogue is interesting:

Ksha. Come we’ll talk of this and that. Or d’you have any work?

Ya. My work is just talking... What shall we talk of?

Ksha. We’ll speak of something.

Ya. What something? What is that?

Ksha. Something means something.

Ya. That’s good. Then... See you’ve held the umbrella closely. Where did you purchase this?

Ksha. O! This umbrella? I bought it years ago. I think... I bought it in 19--

By the by what is this year?

Ya. This is the previous year of the next year.
Ksha. The previous year of the next year! Or the next year of the last year!...See the umbrella how it’s so old and good. This’s my father’s, his father’s his father’s...

Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* has a similar dialogue:

Vladimir. Well? What do we do?

Estragon. Don’t let’s do anything. It’s safer.

Vladimir. Let’s wait and see what he says.

Estragon. Who?

Vladimir. Godot.

Estragon. Good idea.

Estragon. A vague supplication.

Vladimir. Exactly.

Estragon. And what did he reply?

Vladimir. That he’d see.

Estragon. That he couldn’t promise anything.

Vladimir. That he’d have to think it over.

Estragon. In the quiet of his home.

Vladimir. Consult his family.

Estragon. His friends.

Vladimir. His agents.

Estragon. His correspondents.

Vladimir. His books.
Estragon. His bank accounts.

Vladimir. Before taking a decision.20

When Ksha asks ‘What is life?’ Ya replies It’s life.’ They never settle upon such riddlesome questions at all. There is a lot of intricacy and subtlety in the play.

*Appa*, another play with a serious intent is like *Oedipus Rex*. Here a boy, born to a prostitute, wants to know his father. The mother does not know who begot him. The boy, through his several childish plays, asks the mother for an answer. The play is full of mystery as we find the same about the boy at the end of the plays in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*.

*Kunta Kunta Kuravatti* projects a similar motif. Here are three handicapped people—all curious to not to show their defects. The man who is limping wants to use shoes and run; the second fellow who is blind wants to know colours; and the third fellow who is deaf wants to listen to a radio. This is funny.

In the play *Gurtinavaru* we find certain instances where the owner of the house just called Ganda (Husband) cannot identify a guest. This kind of instances abound in *Waiting for Godot*. For example, when a set of tramps, Lucky and Pozzo arrive as wayfarers, Vladimir and Estragon are surprised. They think one of the two must be Godot.

*Tingar Buddanna* makes use of magic for highlighting modern man’s self-ruin. This is a play with a lesson. Here a boy understands a craft from his mother and uses the same to kill his enemies, his parents and himself. The play
resembles Wolfgang Hildesheimer’s play Onkel, Onkel where two characters kill the character Bollin who wanted to kill the other two.

Patil’s play Gokarnada Gaudashyani makes use of Chaplinesque dialogue. There we find a lot of clowning and joking. There we find a lot of reality mixed up with mythology. Ravana’s act of installing a linga at Gokarna and Gauda’s desire to cohabit a lusty lady go wasted. The play is a farce as that of Chandrashekhar Kambar’s play Jokumaraswami. Here the law of earth triumphs over the law of man.

Chandrashekhar Patil’s plays look like Beckett’s plays in several ways. Patil makes use of situations to write a play. He devalues languages as well. He uses the devices of music hall comedy, short dialogues, silly incidents, miming, parodying, clowning, jokes and mystery. This is how he shows modern man’s futile efforts for self-glorification.

Another important Kannada absurd playwright is Chandrashekhar Kambar. His plays Chalesh, Narcissus, Jokumaraswami and Rushyasringa depict man’s callousness, lust, monopoly and duplicity. Look at the following dialogue in Chalesh:

Shankar. Whose’s this house?

Nanjayya. My father’s, mine.

Shankar. Who says so?

Nanjayya. Who’d say. There’s a court and police station.

Shankar. Who is to judge it in the court?

(Nanjayya sits silently)
(to Govinda) who’s it?

Govinda. (surprised). Shall I tell it? It’s a judge!

Sarasu. Who’s above the judge?

Govinda. The Government.

Sarasu. Whose’s that government?

This dialogue can be compared with Beckett’s dialogue in *Waiting for Godot*. Kambar’s plays speak of man’s dehumanization. There are nightmares. They are about man’s metaphysical anguish. Kannada critics think that Kambar depicts life as insensible.

Chandrakanth Kusnur’s plays *Vidushaka, Idake Samsayavilla, Anti Minti Chaval Chinti* and *Halla Kolla Neeru* stand a good comparison with Beckett’s plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. What is common in Kusnur’s plays is that they depict a stereotypical dialogue, which is akin to Beckett’s. Equally important is the fact that Kusnur makes use of silly situations. For example, his play *Vidushaka* speaks of a man who does not turn up even at the end of the play. He is referred to a ‘bloody fellow.’ See the dialogue between Man1, Man2 and Man3.

Man 1. (*Scratching his head*). The bloody fellow hasn’t turned up.

Man 2. Yes, he hasn’t turned up. I don’t know whether he’ll come.

Man 3. We’re sitting as though attached to a fixed position. We shall talk something.

Man 2. Who can speak?
Man 1. I don’t know what to speak.

Man 3. It’s difficult to sit without any talk.

Man 1. It’s like standing before an old fort wall.

Man 2. We’ll talk until the bloody fellow comes here.22

There is a reference to the ‘bloody fellow’ throughout the play. And the three men, as in the case of Beckett’s play *Play* where we find characters like W(woman)1, W2 and M (man), chat for passing their time. Just like Beckett, Kusnur depicts the three tramps waiting for a man. When the ‘man’ does not come in time, the tramps pass their time by chatting about a mountain. They speak of a king. Their chatting is akin to Vladimir and Estragon’s chatting about the thieves. In Kusnur’s play *Idake Samsayavilla* we find characters like Ta (A), Cha (B) and Pa(C). this reminds us Jean Tardieu’s play *Theatre de Chambre* where the names of characters are A, B and C. In fact, both the plays are word plays. All the characters are tramps. *Anti Minti Chaval Chinti* bears a comparison with Beckett’s *Endgame*. In both the plays we find heroes at mischief. If Hamm is sadistic and tortures not only Clov but also his parents, the three tramps Ram, Shyam and Bhim torture Rangayya and his wife Kaveramma. They ask the couple as to who they are. The couple guess about their (tramps’) identify. Still the tramps do not agree with their answers. So they go on harassing. Rangayya when enraged of this bursts in metaphysical anguish: “See many people do not say what they are. They say what they are not. They say this and that. The people who lie say they are the followers of Harishchandra and the
people who are thievish, say they are honest. They say many more things.\textsuperscript{23}

Even P Lankesh's play \textit{Teregalu} has a similar purport.

Likewise, Kusnur's play \textit{Halla Kolla Neeru} has characters like Aa (A), Ba (B) and Ka (C). they resemble Beckett's characters A, B and C in \textit{That Time}.

A dialogue of the play shows man's loss of faith so consistently:

Ka. What's your name?
Aa. First you tell me your name.
Ka. No. You tell me first.
Aa. Who says first does not matter. So you say.
Ka. That's what I mean. Please say it.
Aa. If you don't say your name later! No please you say first.
Ka. That means you don't believe me.
Aa. Don't you believe me?
Ka. How can I believe you?
Aa. Why do you need recognition for telling names?
Ka. Then you tell me with a belief.
Aa. No no that can't be.\textsuperscript{24}

In both -- Beckett's play \textit{That Time} and Kusnur's play \textit{Halla Kolla Neeru} -- the absurd comes to the surface. For example, Ba in Kusnur's play tells the other tramps that this world is like a thread roll where one has to strive to find out the end of the thread. Kusnur's play has a lot of imitation, parodying, play and fun as in Beckett's \textit{Endgame}.
M. S. K. Prabhu’s play *Kadegalli, Kademane* has waiting as its theme. The play has characters like A. Aa and I. It is just like A, B and C as in the western plays like Jean Tardieu’s *A, B, C of Our Life*. The following dialogue of the play can convince us:

B. Why must be the dinner?

Aa. Whose?

J. What?

Aa. Celebration.

J. May be about the father’s death anniversary.

B. Or,

Aa. May be about the mother’s death anniversary.

J. It doesn’t matter. We should wait.

A. Yes, we should wait.25

Even Chaduranga’s play *Ilibonu* seems to imitate Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.

**HAROLD PINTER**

Harold Pinter’s plays depict modern man’s identity crisis, dominance, pressure for conformity, cheating, lust and the like. His first play *The Birthday Party* is about a tragedy arisen out of insecurity. As Martin Esslin thinks the play combines some of the characters and situations of *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*. *The Birthday Party* has three acts and three characters, Meg, Petey, Stanley and two tramps Goldberg and MacCann. The couple Meg and Petey run
a boarding house and Stanley is their first boarder. He eats there and also pokes his nose into Meg’s affairs. Later the two tramps arrive there just to disturb Stanley. This is explicit in Act 2. Martin Esslin comments that “The Birthday Party has been interpreted as an allegory of the pressures of conformity, with Stanley, the pianist, as the artist who is forced into respectability and pin-stripe trousers by the emissaries of the bourgeois world. Yet the play can equally well be seen as an allegory of death – man snatched away from the home he has built himself, from the warmth of love embodied by Meg’s mixture of motherliness and sexuality, by the dark angels of nothingness, who pose to him the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg. But as in the case of Waiting for Godot, all such interpretations would miss the point; a play like this simply explores a situation which, in itself, is a valid poetic image that is immediately seen as relevant and true. It speaks plainly of the individual’s pathetic search for security; of secret dreads and anxieties; of the terrorism of our world, so often embodied in false bonhomie and bigoted brutality; of the tragedy that arises from lack of understanding between people on different levels of awareness.”

In The Caretaker we find man’s misuse of situations. Two brothers Mick and Aston employ a foundling Davies. But the latter blackmails the brothers. So Mick tells it to Davies at the end: “You’re stinking the place out. You’re an old robber, there’s no getting away from it. You’re a skate. You don’t belong in a nice place like this. You’re an old barbarian.” Pinter’s Old Times presents Deeley, a husband caught between his wife Kate and her friend Anna. His play No Man’s Land has the theme of survivalism.
Harold Pinter’s radio and television plays like the *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *A Slight Ache*, *A Night Out*, *The Dwarfs*, *The Collection*, *Family Voices*, *The Lover*, *Night*, *Landscape*, *Silence*, *Night School*, *Tea Party*, *Basement*, *The Homecoming*, *Betrayal*, *The Hothouse* and *Moonlight* delineate modern man’s dread, insecurity and survivalism. Pinter makes use of man’s isolation, insecurity and angst. His *The Room* is about Miss Rose’s anxiety about her husband. *The Dumb Waiter* is a mixture of tragedy and farce. *A Slight Ache* is about the terror of the unknown. *A Night Out* is about a depressed clerk who goes wrong. A wrong move spoils his life. *The Collection* depicts the theme of adultery. So is the theme of *The Lover*. *Landscape* is about the theme of elusiveness of human personality. *Basement* is about the image of a room. *The Party* exposes inferiority complex. Pinter writes about pimping in *The Homecoming*. And man’s cruelty to man is shown in *Moonlight*.

It is well observed, “‘We see Pinter’s characters in the process of their essential adjustment to the world, at the point when they have to solve their basic problem – whether they will be able to confront, and come to terms with reality at all. It is only after they have made this fundamental adjustment that they will be able to become part of society and share in the games of sex or politics.”

Pinter’s two plays *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker* influenced some of the Kannada writers like P. Lankesh. For example, P. Lankesh’s *Teregalu* speaks of man’s helplessness. The same is the theme of Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* where Stanley is helpless against the tricks of two tramps Goldberg and MacCann.
Then there is an exchange of heat between the visitors and Stanley:

“GOLDBERG: You’re in a terrible humour today, Mr Webber. And on your birthday too, with the good lady getting her strength up to give you a party.”

Stanley finds all this strange. He brakes out:

“STANLEY: Let me – just make this clear. You don’t bother me. To me, you’re nothing but a dirty joke. But I have a responsibility towards the people in this house. They’ve been down here too long. They’ve lost their sense of smell. I haven’t. (A little less forceful.) Anyway, this house isn’t your cup of tea. There’s nothing here for you, from any angle, any angle. So why don’t just go, without any more fuss?”29

Lankesh’s play _Cranti Bantu Cranti_ has a similar motif as that of Pinter’s. In Pinter’s play Mick and Aston want a caretaker and they have one in Davies. But Davies, making use of weak situations, sets the brothers against each other. The result: the sin recoils the sinner. So much so that Dinakar, a Naxalite in _Cranti Bantu Cranti_ cheats his own master. As is evidenced in Pinter’s play Davies plays a double game and ruins himself. Martin Esslin thinks “The _Caretaker_ achieves the quality of universality and tragedy without any of the tricks of mystery and violence that Pinter used in his earlier plays to create an atmosphere of poetic terror. Even Davies’ myth of the impossible journey to Sidcup remains within the bounds of strict realism. It represents simply a form of self-deception and grotesque evasion on Davies’s part. Anyone can see through it, but Davies is too self-indulgent a character to notice how the rationalization of apathy and inability to help himself deceives no one except perhaps himself.”30
Similarly, Dinakar seeks a shelter in the house of his teacher Bhagavan though the latter’s wife protest against it. He gives company to a thief and when time comes he is unable to convince the master. So he is shot dead.

Even Chandrakanth Kusnur’s plays *Anti Minti Chaval Chinti* stands as if another version of Pinter’s plays. As in *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker*, the motif of harming others is dominant. In Pinter’s plays we find Goldberg and MacCann disturbing Stanley Webber and Davies disturbing Mick and Aston. So here three tramps Ram, Shyam and Bhim torture a couple Rangayya and Kaveramma. Even Lankesh’s *Teregalu*, as evidenced above, shows a similar motif.

*Teregalu* opens with the Man. Soon three fellows meet him at his home. They ask him whether he recognized them. When he fumbles they start to abuse him. They ask a volley of questions about how he lives and what he does. The Man cannot understand them easily. Kanthi is heavily bent upon grilling him. The other two support Kanthi. Finally the Man is tired of their ill behavior. In fact, they beat him. So he thinks he is guilty of having killed somebody, may be the former owner of the house, or resigning to his lecturer post. The scene is worth mentioning,

Kitti. D’you want to say anything before you go?

Man. …I think what I did is right. I might have earned some money; found some friends, built some houses; nothing wrong in it. I don’t know who are you—whether loafers, fools, police, CBI sleuth, --whoever you may be --you must believe me.
I am the citizen of India. I’ve written poetry on the country. I’ve lived a life of my own; I’ve helped soldiers in war. I’ve won elections. Let there’s any to defeat me. Are you hearing me?

Kitti. All right you can go.31

The three fellows press him for death. So the play ends in tragedy.

N. F. SIMPSON AND TOM STOPPARD

N. F. Simpson has attempted several absurd plays. His plays are philosophical fantasies. They are also comedies.

If Beckett and Pinter’s plays are about urban people, Simpson’s plays are about suburban people. His well-known play *A Resounding Tinkle* is a comedy. Its characters are First Comedian, Second Comedian, Technician, Producer and even an Author. They remind us Pirandello’s play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The major characters are Mrs and Mr Paradocks. They want to pass their time. So they buy toy-animals. They invite some comedians. They ask the latter, “‘Let us laugh with those we tickle…Let us weep with those we expose to tear gas. Let us throw back our heads and laugh at reality, which is an illusion caused by mescaline deficiency; at sanity, which is an illusion caused by alcohol deficiency; at knowledge, which is an illusion caused by certain biochemical changes in the human brain structure during the course of human evolution…Let us laugh at thought, which is a phenomenon like any other. At illusion, which is an illusion, which is a phenomenon like any other…”32 There is a producer and
a critic. Even the author comes there speaking of his weak play. Accordingly
repetition and materialism emerge as the sources of comedy for the characters:
BRO PARADOCK. Oh! The fundamental law of life...is a complete negation of
repetition! But I find that a certain movement of head or arm, a movement
always the same seems to return at regular intervals. If I notice it and it succeeds
in diverting my attention, if I wait for it to occur and it occurs when I expect it,
then involuntarily I laugh. Why? Because I now have before me a machine that
works automatically. This is no longer life, it is automatism established in life
and imitating it. It belongs to the comic.
MRS PARADOCK. Good. And what does he say on page fifty-eight?
MR PARADOCK. He says, We laugh every time a person gives us the
impression of being a thing. You’ve marked it. But where does all this get us?
MRS PARADOCK. You’ll see. These two are Bergson trained.
MR PARADOCK. They’ll be like that for hours yet.

The two comedians begin to stir.

MRS PARADOCK. Will they?

The two comedians look around them as though coming out of a trance.
Second Comedian leaves around his chair and advances to the front of the stage.
First Comedian follows:
SECOND COMEDIAN. You could call this intellectual slapstick.
FIRST COMEDIAN. We are, metaphysically, the Marx Brothers.
SECOND COMEDIAN. Presenting the custard pie comedy of the abstract.
FIRST COMEDIAN. Quintessentially.
SECOND COMEDIAN. And working to a blueprint.

FIRST COMEDIAN. The fundamental law of life is a complete negation of repetition! But I find that a certain movement of head or arm, a movement always the same, seems to return at regular intervals....If I notice it and it succeeds in diverting my attention, if I wait for it to occur and it occurs when I expect it, then involuntarily I laugh. Why? Because I now have before me a machine that works automatically. This is no longer life, it is automatism established in life and imitating it. It belongs to the comic."33

Simpson's second play *The Hole* is about man's vision of the world. The theme of the play is that there is a hole in a street. All characters look at it and speak of it differently. The people chat of everyday life. As Martin Esslin thinks the discussion "...starts with sports, ranging from dominoes to cricket, boxing, and golf; proceeds to nature, turning the hole into an aquarium housing a variety of species of fish that can be discussed with expertise; then turns to crime and punishment and violent demands for torture, execution, and revenge; and, having aroused the emotions of all concerned, culminates in fantasies of a political nature—the violence of both chauvinism and revolutionary action. After all this, a workman emerges from the hole and informs the bystanders that it contains a junction box of the electricity supply."34

Although Simpson's other play *One Way Pendulum* is a full-length play it is less interesting. The play owed its success to the sustained inventiveness of its nonsense. It is a parody of the British legal system.
Tom Stoppard’s one best play is *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. It is partly a plagiarism and partly a parody of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Still critics call it a ‘theatre of theatre.’ The play speaks of the absurd of man-made law. For example, Claudius plots Hamlet’s death at the hand of the English king. But Hamlet escapes facilitating Ros and Guil’s death in his stead. Stoppard projects the view that Ros and Guil’s beheading is absurd. Indeed, they are beheaded for none of their crime. In fact, so many deaths in the play *Hamlet* are absurd. The play makes use of all kinds of devices used in absurd theatre. For example, we find devaluation of language, music hall comedy, syllogism and clowning. Look at the language:

GUIL (seriously): What’s your name?  
ROS: What’s yours?  
GUIL: I asked first.  
ROS: Statement. One—love.  
GUIL: What’s your name when you’re at home?  
ROS: What’s yours?  
GUIL: When I’m at home?  
ROS: Is it different at home?  
GUIL: What home?  
ROS: Haven’t you got one?  
GUIL: Why do you ask?  
ROS: What are driving at?  
GUIL: What’s your name?\[35\]
Rosencrantz bears a comparison with Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Roger Sales says the two tramps-like sentries who are content to wait passively for instructions and believe that they will be punished if they do not do so, may represent the absurdity of the so-called 'ages of faith' rather than that of a secular society.

Kannada absurd theatre has the kind of plays which N. F. Simpson and Tom Stoppard have attempted. Kannada writers like Chandrashekhar Patil, Chandrashekhar Kambar and Chandrakanth Kusnur have written plays which are meant for laughter as in the case of Simpson's A Resounding Tinkle. For example, Patil's play Gokarnada Gaudashyani creates a peel of laughter from the beginning to the end. The Bhagavata's introductory speech aims at laughter:

Bhagavata. Ha...ha...I'll start the play. As some have come here with free passes I'll do some lecturing. They won't object as the others. I'll say a few words about the play today. As you know the play is Gokarnada Gaudashyani. Gaudashyani means Gauda' wife. Ho..ho...Excuse me...I too know some English. Even Mysorians call her Gaudti. Then Gokarna is called the heaven upon the earth. The priests, years ago, helped their clients see heaven. Of course, you've seen heaven in films. That story is here. Then why Gaudashyani with Heaven here. I too wondered at it. So I asked the playwright why. I tell you that this playwright is a peculiar fellow. But you don't speak of it to him. Once he told me that when he had gone to England or Netherlands he sighted a book. Its author was Mr Anonymous. I think the name is comic, isn't it? It may be Greek.
Mostly Greeks were the wise people. That means this play is not original. Actually our playwright was on the track till recently. He used to write his own plays. Now he copies or imitates others. That is a mixture…

Chandrashekhar Patil’s play *Kodegalu* has a similar scene as that of the one quoted from *Rosencrantz* above:

Ksha. What should we speak?
Ya. We’ll speak something.
Ksha. Something means what?
Ya. Something means something.
Ksha. Then what’s your name?
Ya. My name is Name, what’s your name?
Ksha. My name is Surname.
Ya. There’s nothing in name. I think someone has given a saying. What’s his name?
Ksha. His name is some Object.
Ya. Then we are one fraternity—Name, Surname and Object.  

A similar kind of dialogue is explicit in Kusnur’s play *Halla Kolla Neeru*:

Ka. What’s your name?
Aa. First you tell me your name.
Ka. No. You tell me first.
Aa. Who says first does not matter. So you say.
Ka. That’s what I mean. Please say it.
Aa. If you don’t say your name later! No please you say first.
Ka. That means you don’t believe me.
Aa. Don’t you believe me?
Ka. How can I believe you?
Aa. Why do you need recognition for telling names?
Ka. Then you tell me with a belief.
Aa. No no that can’t be."38

Chaduranga’s play *Ilbonu* creates a similar kind of mystery as that of *The Hole*. Here the Digger and Climber speak of a rattrap. The rattrap is a trap for men when they marry and live in the enclosure of family life. A lady who pokes her nose in their affairs poses a grave problem for the two. Likewise, M. S. K. Prabhu’s *Tappisikondiddare* depicts two characters in search of their missing people. The play is full of suspense and thrill as that of *The Hole*. A dead boy poses such like menace in Tejeswi’s *Yamala Prashne*.

As for the absurd of Stoppard’s Ros and Guil we can see P. Lankesh’s play *Teregalu* where the teacher suffers ignominy. The three tramps grill him over his life and works. The play records man’s assault upon others. Here one has to suffer unnecessarily.

Thus we find that the British absurd theatre and the Kannada absurd theatre bear a close comparison with each other. The British absurd theatre, as the European absurd theatre, has finely depicted modern man’s failure to realize his aims and objectives. Similarly, Kannada absurd theatre highlights man’s
helplessness in the face of his own ignorance, incongruity and bad faith. So both
the theatres look alike in their theatrical projections.
REFERENCES:


