CHAPTER - 2

BRECHT'S CONTEMPORARY: A THEATRE SCENARIO OF 20TH CENTURY
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2.1 HISTORY OF THEATRE: THE JOURNEY SO FAR

The history of theatre maps the process of analytical study of the field for about 2500 years from now. To understand this progression, one has to consider theatre as an autonomous artistic activity, and not merely a lifeless historical evidence. During these years of evolution, the drama has witnessed numerous ages of creative transformations. This journey of drama from the ancient past to the modern times is discussed, in brief, in the segments to follow.

2.1.1 ANCIENT THEATRE

The genesis of Western Theatre can be traced to the commemorative music of 6th century BC Attica, the Greek region centered on Athens. From limited sources available about the time, it appears that the poet Thespis developed a new musical form in which he impersonated a single character and engaged a chorus of singer-dancers in dialogue. As the first composer and soloist in this new form, which came to be known as tragedy, Thespis can be considered both the first dramatist and the first actor. Of the hundreds of works produced by Greek tragic playwrights, only 32 plays by the three major innovators (Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides) in this new art form survive. Aeschylus (525 -456BC) created
the possibility of developing conflict between characters by introducing a
second actor into the format. His seven surviving plays are richly
ambiguous inquiries into the paradoxical relationship between humans
and the cosmos, in which people are made answerable for their acts, yet
recognize that these acts are determined by the gods. After Aeschylus the
next best known playwright was Sophocles. Sophocles wrote plays where
the chorus was less integrated into the action, and this innovation was
continued by his younger contemporary Euripides, the last great writer of
Greek tragedy. Euripides used a prologue, accelerated the diminishing
importance of the chorus, and was skeptical in outlook. Meanwhile
comedy was also developing. Aristophanes who lived between 440BC
and 380BC was the best known writer of comedies. Certainly in his work
the devout nature of unquestioning religious ritual has gone, replaced by
satire, invective, personal criticism, buffoonery and obscenity.

2.1.2 MEDIEVAL THEATRE

Medieval drama, when it emerged hundreds of years later, was a new
creation rather than a rebirth, the drama of earlier times had almost no
influence on it. The reason for this creation came from a quarter that had
traditionally opposed any form of theater: the Christian church. In the
Easter service, and later in the other Christmas services, bits of chanted
dialogue, called tropes, were introduced into the liturgy. Priests,
impersonating biblical figures, acted out miniature scenes from the
holiday stories. Eventually, these players grew more elaborated and
abandoned the inside of the church for the church steps and the adjacent
marketplace. Worldly elements crawled in as the artisan guilds took
responsibility for these performances; although the glorification of God
and the redemption of humanity remained prime concerns, the celebration of local industry was not ignored.

2.1.3 ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

The Renaissance was a transition from the Middle Age to the Modern. It was a revolt against the ecclesiastical traditions, the authority of the church, prejudices and superstitions. During the age, the drama made a swift and wonderful leap into maturity. With Humanism and use of imagination at the centre, the drama, during the age, was gradually progressed in the masterly hands of Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson and above all William Shakespeare. Marlowe’s tragedies proved to be the robust foundation for Elizabethan Drama. He introduced some revolutionary themes, characterization and dialogues in the genre, which was later on mastered and popularized by Shakespeare. Shakespeare brought enchanting freshness to the theatre and through immense production of tragedies, comedies, tragic-comedies, masques, etc. Ben Jonson’s merit lies in his satire and the satirical exposure of the foibles and weaknesses of his times. Being a classicist by temperament, he stood against the romantic comedy and advocated the practice of realistic comedy. Thus, through the efforts of these maestros, who are also known to be the trend setters of several dramatic techniques, and many other playwrights, the Elizabethan Era turned out to be the nest of the performing art.
2.1.4 RESTORATION THEATRE

The theaters established after Charles II's return from exile in France and the Restoration of the monarchy in England (1660), thus known as Restoration Theatre, were intended primarily to serve the needs of a socially, politically, and aesthetically harmonized class. The themes, language, and dramaturgy of Shakespeare's plays were now considered out of date, so that during the next two centuries the works of England's greatest dramatist were never produced intact. The new kind of comic theatre was established known as 'Comedy of Manners' or 'Restoration Comedy' which replaced the status of Elizabethan Theatre. Owing much to Moliere, the English comedy of manners was typically a witty, brittle satire of current mores, especially of relations between the sexes. Among its leading examples were She Would if She Could (1668) and The Man of Mode (1676) by Sir George Etherege; The Country Wife (1675) by William Wycherley; The Way of the World (1700) by William Congreve; and The Recruiting Officer (1706) and The Beaux' Stratagem (1707) by George Farquhar. Satire enjoyed a brief revival with Henry Fielding and with John Gay, whose The Beggar's Opera (1728) met with phenomenal success. Their wit, however, was too sharp for the government, which retaliated by imposing strict censorship laws in 1737. For the next 150 years, few considerable English authors bothered with the drama.

2.1.5 ROMANTIC THEATRE OF 19TH CENTURY

In its purest form, Romanticism concentrated on the spiritual, which would allow humankind to transcend the limitations of the physical world and find an ideal truth. Subject matter was drawn from nature. The
Romantics, focused on emotion rather than rationality, drew their examples from a study of the real world and glorified the idea of the artist as a mad genius unfettered by rules. Romanticism gave rise to a vast array of dramatic literature and production that was often undisciplined and that often substituted emotional manipulation for substantial ideas. Romanticism first appeared in Germany, a country with little native theatre other than rustic farces before the 18th century. By the 1820s Romanticism dominated the theatre of most of Europe. Many of the ideas and practices of Romanticism were evident in the late 18th-century literary movement of Germany led by Goethe and the dramatist Friedrich Schiller. These plays had no single style but were generally strongly emotional, and, in their experimentation with form, set the groundwork for the rejection of Neo-Classicism.

2.2 BRECHT'S CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

The English Theatre, which had suffered abrupt decline during the Victorian Age, has been revitalized with a great delight in the beginning of the 20th century. All the conditions operating against the blossoming of drama during the Victorian Age were gradually removed, and more interest was taken by writers, directors, actors, and playgoers in popularizing drama and making it a force to reckon with in the field of literature. The two world wars, Freud’s theories on psychology, Avant-garde, Dadaism, and other factors played a vital role in the formation of various theatrical movements. The contemporary trends explored the more violent, grotesque aspects of the human psyche, creating a nightmare world onstage. Distortion, exaggeration, and a suggestive use of light and shadow typified Expressionism. The modern dramatists took
the theatre seriously and attempted various dramaturgical experiments, coping with contemporary ideologies.

2.2.1 THE REALISTIC THEATRE

Realism is considered to be one of the most complimentary terms in late 19th century literature. It has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral aspect in the dramatic complications. Realism in drama is a kind of writing in which fictional events and people are presented in language that resembles mundane external reality and human experience.

Realism is the movement towards representing reality in art as it actually is. Realistic drama is an attempt to portray real life on stage, a movement away from the conventional melodramas and sentimental comedies of the 1700s. It is expressed in theatre through the use of realism in character development, stage setting and storyline, and is exemplified in plays such as Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*. The arrival of realism was indeed good for theatre as it promoted greater audience involvement and raised awareness of contemporary social and moral issues. It also provided and continued to provide a medium through which playwrights could express their views about societal values, attitudes and morals. Margot Berthold remarks:

To understand the times and their reality meant also seeing man in his everyday life, in his environment and social commitments. As Alexander Dumas puts it, it was the business of realist theatre to
uncover social abuse, discuss the relationship between the individual 
and society and, in the literal as in a higher sense, to prove itself a 
'theatre utile'. (Berthold: 1972, 555).

The Realist theatre was meant to be a direct observation of human 
behaviour. It began as a way to make theater more useful to society, a 
way to hold a mirror up to society. Because of this thrust towards the 
'real', playwrights started using more contemporary settings, 
backgrounds and characters. Where plays in the past had, for the most 
part, used mythological or stereotypical characters, the realists involved 
the lower class, the poor, the rich; they involved all genders, classes and 
races.

It is useful to keep in mind a distinction between the 'realist' and the 
'realistic'. The 'realistic' has always been active in literature since 
classical times, throughout a number of genres and styles. It consists in 
the accurate rendition of persons and objects. 'Realist' art, on the other 
hand, is a radical new aesthetic that emerges in the 19th century and 
subjects the representations of reality to a demanding aesthetic 
discipline.

One of the main contributors to this style was Henrik Ibsen. For the first 
half of his career, Ibsen wrote mainly poetic and historical dramas but it 
is the Realist Cycle (twelve plays of modern life) that made him famous. 
These realist dramas continued the themes, perspectives and often the 
situations and characters of the poetic and historical dramas. Today, we 
come to Ibsen's Realism not from the Romanticism from which it 
emerged but from later realistic traditions that have discarded the
ambitious perspectives of Romantic art. Despite the consensus of traditional Ibsen commentary, he never set out to reproduce the appearance of the world around us. Ibsen’s realism inherits from Romanticism the idea of the human condition as one of multiple and deep alienation. We are alienated, not only from the inherited social world that mutilates our collective human identity, but also from our own personal identities that are severed from their natural authenticity. Ibsen's realism offers, instead, a radical deconstruction of the false reality we confidently occupy.

The nineteenth century stage was Ibsen's canvas on which, he radically reconfigures our idea of reality to expose its inadequacy. He then infiltrates into it historical and cultural perspectives the modern world has lost sight of. His realist method consists of two main strategies: 1). The dialectical subversion of given reality's claim to truth. 2). The summoning of archetypal perspectives into this 'reality'.

Ibsen, therefore, did not imitate contemporary reality as it is, but reinvented it as a metaphoric and histrionic stage space that only existed as aesthetic actuality. The great difficulty Ibsen's art set itself was not to get his dramatic characters to act and speak like modern men and women, it was to get them to embody a new kind of plays where archetypal characters and actions from our cultural past invaded and agitated scenes of modern life. The urgent and convincing modern events on his stage obscured the fact that they were recreating, in modern terms, events that had occurred before in our culture. This fact has been a traditional practice in European literature and art from the time of the medieval
times to the present, where a classical or biblical subject is rendered in the likeness of the period of the artist.

Thus, the concern of Realist literature is to reveal modern reality as layered with the accumulations of the past. Modernist writers such as Ezra Pound, James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, by including perspectives from the past in their images of the modern world, were continuing, in new terms, traditional strategies of Western art. In a way, Ibsen can be seen as one of the first and the most ambitious Modernists.

Social Realism began showing up in plays during the 1930s. This realism had a political conscience behind it because the world was in a depression. These plays painted a harsh picture of rural poverty. The drama began to aim at showing governments the penalties of unrestrained capitalism and the depressions that sloppy economies created. One of the main contributors to this style was G. B. Shaw. Like Ibsen, Shaw also tried to demonstrate the contemporary social reality in his works. But the common element of anguish was missing in his creations, as he preferred wit and comedy to exploit the situations. He didn’t believe in mere representation of problems, on the contrary he advocated solutions to them as an end result. Hence a writer of *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *Man and Superman*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Man of Mode* executed the serious role of a social realist in a hilarious manner. Talking of Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*, J. L. Styan writes,

"*Arms and the Man* was also made to the formula for the well made play, and its comparative success proved one thing to its author, that, like Moliere, a playwright could teach a better lesson in the theatre
by exploiting the traditional methods of the theatre, a chief of which is comedy. Lucidly, Shaw was a born jester.” (Styan: 1981, 68).

Besides Ibsen and Shaw, the 20th century Realism owes lot to many other stalwarts like Strindberg, Chekhov, Arthur Miller, John Osborne, Eugene O’Neil and Tennessee Williams, who have nurtured the movement with equal sensibility.

### 2.2.2 THE NATURALISTIC THEATRE

Naturalism is an imperative movement of late 19th century which continues to influence the literary scene of early 20th century. It has been designated as having close paradoxical relationship with Realism, specifically considered to be the more extreme form of Realism. The movement was initially focused by Emile Zola in his 1881 essay *Naturalism in the Theatre*.

Emile Zola was the legitimate promoter of Naturalism in literature. He was mainly a novelist, but advocated the use of Naturalism in theatre too. Like many of theatrical movements, it was a revolt against the concept of ‘well-made play’. Zola detested the distortion of psychology which was necessary to create sympathy for a character in the well-made arrangement of exposition, intrigue, complications and satisfying resolution. On the contrary, he suggested plays which would avoid the complications and startling reversals typical of the 19th Century and alternate the portrayal of human beings trapped in vicious circle of life.
“Naturalism is sometimes claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism. But naturalism is not only, like realism, a special selection of subject matter and a special way of rendering those materials; it is a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a particular philosophical thesis...that a human being exists entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul nor any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond the natural world; and therefore, that such a being is merely a higher order animal whose character and behavior are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment.” (Abrams: 2003, 261).

The naturalists were remarkably influenced by Darwin’s theory of Evolution, as they believed that self of being is determined by one's heredity and social environment determine one's character. Whereas Thus, Naturalism attempts to determine scientifically the underlying forces (the social environment or heredity) influencing the actions of its subjects, contrary to Realism where subjects are described as they really are. Naturalistic works are opposed to romanticism, in which subjects may receive highly symbolic, idealistic, or even supernatural treatment. They often include uncouth or sordid subject matter; for example, Emile Zola's works had frankness about sexuality along with a pervasive pessimism. The naturalists dealt directly with darker aspects of life, including poverty, racism, sex, prejudice, disease, prostitution, and impurity. This way of looking at the vicious realities of life so analytically often made them face robust criticism, but as men on
missions the naturalists took it as a challenge and continued to foster the movement.

In theatre, it refers to the movement which attempts to create a perfect illusion of reality through a range of dramatic and theatrical strategies like comprehensive settings, rejection of metaphysical action, an exclusive focus on subjects that are contemporary and native, the emphasis on characters from relatively common class, and a realistic acting style against that of the popular melodramatic one. Their advocacy for using extreme reality in theatre productions can be easily traced from their main objective to promote the audience to experience the bitter reality of life and not only the dramatic performance, and to understand social, political, psychological and historical truth. Zola urged that theater be brought closer to social reality and called for the creation of individualized, lifelike characters. To support such an objective of naturalism, Styan says,

"The scientific naturalist tried to show that powerful forces governed human lives, forces of which we might not be fully aware and over which we might have little control...His play bore witness to the instinctive behavior of men and women, and his characters and their situations had to seem representative of their class or age group, sex or economic group, with the consequent loss of that essential individuality we know to be characteristic of life." (Styan: 1981, 6).

The most prominent representatives of naturalism, except Zola, were Ludwig Anzengruber, Henri Becque, August Strindberg and Gerhart Hauptmann. Anzengruber's plays were not highly regarded during his
lifetime, but during the 1890's they were considered important forerunners of Naturalism. His famous naturalistic plays are The Kirchjield Priest and The Fourth Commandment. Strindberg, who didn't confine to any single movement and had been a promoter of realistic, expressionist as well as experimental theatre in his plays, also produced some naturalistic tragedies like The Father, Miss Julie, Comrades, and The Creditors. Hauptmann, who also moved on to explore other dramatic forms like Strindberg, marked naturalism with two of his striking plays Vor Sonnenaufgang (Before Sunrise) and Die Webern (The Weavers).

Against the traditional methods of portraying imaginative and romantic aesthetic visions of life on the stage, these naturalists preferred the use of naked facts of life to be performed in non-romantic manner. However, this type of theater poorly revealed the social character of phenomena. Naturalism was also projected in theatre as antirealist, biological approach to life. Its most typical features were a biological interpretation of actions and a heightened interest in the morbid phenomena of the human mind. The term “naturalism” also became associated with a fondness for excessively detailed depiction of extreme reality, especially scenes of cruelty, violence, and the repulsive details of sexuality. Such excessiveness can be justified in a concluding manner as a derivative of transforming aesthetic romanticism into realistic stagecraft.

2.2.3 THE SYMBOLIST THEATRE

Symbolism is a literary and artistic movement which was originated in the late 19th century, and influenced the 20th century literature to varying degrees. Symbolist artists sought to express individual emotional
experience through the subtle and suggestive use of highly symbolized language. It was first identified as a literary movement by Jean Moreas in the Symbolist manifesto *Le Figaro* in 1886. Like many literary movements, symbolism also began elsewhere, but had its first extensive revelation in the theatre. The whole movement entered the theatre platform as a reaction against Realism and Naturalism. Bamber Gascoigne remarks,

"The movement which prepared the way of for modern theatrical symbolism was Naturalism. The determination of Zola and his followers in the second half of the nineteenth century to give the stage-setting the complete appearance of reality brought into being that modern maestro, the props-man. Suddenly furniture, tea-cups, waste-paper baskets, lamps and stoves flooded on to the stage—all the bric-a-brac of real life, and every piece of it a potential symbol."

(Gascoigne: 1962, 76).

The late 19th century literature was influenced a lot by the theory of realism which magnified the aesthetics of contemporary human life and deteriorated its metaphysical reference. Symbolism challenged realism's visible spiritual lacking with a form that explored, through images and metaphors, the inner realities of human experience that could not be directly perceived. A focus on traditional aesthetic values and their symbols reflected the importance of purity of vision over observation, abstraction and extension over the ordinary. The symbolists generated the belief of fetching meaning from every single aspect presented on the stage, which was favoured by the rationalism of the day. And so, the movement spread quickly and affected the modern theatrical productions.
The movement had radical roots in France, where the element was transformed to theatre from poetic creations, and had broad acceptance instantly. In addition to the plays of French writers, they produced adaptations of works by Edgar Allan Poe, which had recently been translated by Mallarme, and of Oscar Wilde’s Salome, which he had written in French during his exile from Britain. Plays by the Belgian symbolists Maeterlinck and Rodenbach were also performed. Mallarme was a French exponent of symbolism. He opposed the domain of Realism and called for a poetic theatre that would evoke the hidden mystery of man and the universe. He was of the view that drama was a sacred service in which the dramatist revealed the correspondences between the visible and invisible worlds through the suggestive power of his poetic language.

The Symbolists believed in ‘detheatricalizing’ the theatre, meaning stripping away all the technological and scenic hindrances of the 19th century and replacing them with a metaphorical meaning expanding through language and the acting. The performances were full of symbolic imagery and suggestive. The aim was to stir up an unconscious response rather than an intellectual one. In the plays of Chekhov and the later works of Ibsen and Strindberg, the symbolic elements got reflected in the most authentic manner. Their plays fashioned and sustained the popularity of symbolic movement in theatre of 20th century. Such elements had also been noticed in the works of some later playwrights as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Harold Pinter. The symbolic influence didn’t constrain to language and acting, but expanded up to every possible parts of dramaturgy.
“For the symbolists the photographic approach of the drama of naturalism was a screen obstructing the view to deeper insight. The stage was not to depict a real milieu, but to explore zones of feeling. Its task was not description, but incantation. Lighting acquired an important function, and the word was aided by music and dance. In a few lucky instances the symbolists did succeed in transposing inner moods rooted in lyricism to the public realm of the stage.”

(Berthold: 1972, 589).

Adolphe Appia, a Swiss scenic theorist and Edward Henry Gordon Craig, the English designer, caught the spirit of symbolism in scenic and lighting design. They both reacted against the realistic painted settings of the day, recommending suggestive or abstract settings that would suggest, through light and scenic elements, more than an illusion of a real place. In 1896 a Symbolist theatre in Paris produced Alfred Jarry's Ubu roi, for its time a shocking, bizarre play. Modelled vaguely on Macbeth, the play depicted puppet-like characters in a world devoid of decency. It was perhaps most significant for its shock value and its destruction of virtually all-contemporaneous theatrical norms and taboos. Ubu roi freed the theatre for exploration in any direction the author wished to go. It also served as the model and inspiration for future avant-garde dramatic movements and the absurdist drama of the 1950s.

Thus, Symbolic drama, as an antirealistic theatre, did not reject reality but enhanced it with symbol and metaphor, illuminated parable and allegory, and refurnished subjects through language, scenery and lighting. The symbolists raised their voice against all traces of naturalistic or imitative
acting, and all romance and melodrama. In theatre, they advocated the extensive meaning of symbols beyond what was visible on the stage.

2.2.4 POETIC DRAMA

In the early years of the 20th century, the dramatists were more interested in the presentation of the social and economic problems of their times in a realistic manner than in making excursions into a land of poetic enchantment. But the extreme love of realism led to a reaction against the current trend, and a change was noticed with the passage of time; the disciples of Ibsen began to be overshadowed by the disciples of Eliot. The new dramatists were fascinated by the glamour and enchanting loveliness of poetic plays.

The revivers of poetic drama hold a significant place, because they are the pioneers and the torch bearers of the new form. It was J.M. Synge who took the speech and the imagination of the Irish people, and first tried to restore a new artistic vitality to modern English drama. It is a paradox that Synge himself wrote in prose, but his ideology led to the development of poetic drama. In his preface to *Playboy of the Western World*, he announced his theory of drama in 1907:

On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy that has been given to them in place of rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a
nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who have shut their lips on poetry. (Synge: 1998, 14).

Thus, Synge ascertained that all great drama tends towards poetry because in the final analysis, only poetic speech can reveal character, and for real and living poetry, the dramatist should go to life tap the resources of poetry and imagination that are found in the speech of common people. After considerable period of his recognition of use of poetry in drama, the dramatists sincerely started producing plays in poetic manner.

Many had tried to define this new type but none served the purpose in the contemporary situations. To specify the genre, Eliot’s quote proved to be the best option:

It should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess to be conscious of; it must reveal, underneath the vacillating or infirm character, the indomitable unconscious will and underneath the resolute purpose of the planning animal the victim of circumstances, and the doomed or sanctified being. (Eliot: 1944, 13).

This ‘deeper consistency’ of which Eliot speaks is not a matter of character only but also of the total work of art. Body and spirit, intellect and imagination, work and play, design and scenery, laughter and
seriousness, life and art, and poetry and drama are fused together in a poetic drama to produce a deeper consistency and unity of effects.

The modern poetic plays are different from the ancient poetic plays. They are neither purely on the models of the classical drama nor entirely on the models of Shakespeare or Marlowe. They own certain essential features which must be carefully noted. These plays are not intended to be read in the study like closet dramas, they are meant to be performed. The modern poetic drama desires to make the audience participants sharing a common myth while remaining spectators. Its vehicle is verse, its mechanism is imagery, its substance is myth, and its binding force is musical pattern. Poetic playwrights believe that drama should draw the dramatist and the audience into a unity of community feeling.

Basically, the poetic drama is the combination of the tradition and the experiment, a mixture of the ancient and the new. Its ancestry can be traced back from the old morality and miracle plays onwards to Marlowe and Shakespeare. The modern poetic drama is not being written in any other verse form than the blank verse or free verse. There are few plays of Eliot and Fry which try to mix prose and poetry in one and same play in the manner of Shakespeare. A genuine poetic drama is a picture and music, a poetic image and a ritual, an illumination and a catharsis, an excitement in life and serenity above it, a re-enactment in sense and liberation in idea. Its impression upon the audience spreads out slowly like some moon brightened sea. Its author is unquestionably a poet, but not a poet of words merely, but a poet of words acted, of scenes-set, of roles-performed. Many of the modern poetic dramas, while aiming at the poetic atmosphere, are naturalistic in characterization and dialogue.
The poetic drama is one in which poetry and drama are perfectly fused. Poetry, here, is to be looked through, and not locked at. It should be no more decorative but integral to a structure of a play, hence what can be equally said in prose must not be attempted in verse. The purpose of the poetic drama is to excite our emotions, to make us ecstatically self-conscious. It reveals the innermost reality through characters that are powerfully simplified and exaggerated, with everything redundant scrupulously cut out. The prose play skins the surface of life, whereas the poetic play illuminates and reveals the great vicinity of the unknown self. In poetic drama, the dramatist tries to pluck his individual from the mass and sets him against the background of life itself. It is the desire of the poetic dramatist not to bring his characters near to the audience. Therefore, individualism, emotionalism, absence of acts, introduction of novel experiments in theme, style and language, emphasis on internal conflict and psycho analysis of characters are some other important features of poetic drama.

It is a general misconception about the poetic drama that it is something divorced from the daily life of men and far removed from the living reality. Eliot dispels this notion and emphasizes the fact that poetry makes the drama more intense for the audience and becomes a living and inseparable part of the play by irradiating the world of reality. He says,

“What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns-when it leaves the theatre, not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike its own, an unreal world in which poetry is tolerated. What I should hope might be achieved by a generation of dramatists having the
benefit of our experience, is that the audience should find, at the moment of awareness that it is hearing poetry, that it is saying to itself: 'I could talk in poetry too'. Then we should not be transported into an artificial world; on the contrary, our own sordid, dreamy daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured.”

(Eliot: 1951, 27).

Among many promoters of poetic drama, the contribution of Yeats, Eliot, Fry and Auden are most remarkable. They are the stalwarts who have nurtured the form to reach to a significant status. W.B.Yeats has written around twenty six plays, among which *Deirdre* and *On Baile's Strand* are his finest creations. His plays are mostly allegorical, remote and ideal as he is more interested in spiritual than the real or the physical. W.H.Auden occupies the place for his unique style of presentation. He wrote two plays alone of which the more important is *The Dance of Death*, and three plays in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood- *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, *The Ascent of F6*, and *On the Frontier*. The two most prominent personalities, T.S.Eliot and Christopher Fry, have been the centre of attention and attraction among the critics. Fry's love for mystical hints and philosophy is noticeable from his plays. *The Boy with a Cart*, *Thor with Angels*, *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, and *The Lady's Not For Burning* are some of the important plays credited to his name. Eliot's contribution to the poetic drama is of immense value. He has explored the drama of the Elizabethans and the ancients, and has put into a new sense of renaissance wonder and greatness. Five of his plays are considered to be the landmarks in the history of poetic drama- *Sweeney Agonistes*, *The

The poetic drama emerged as a broadly received theatre genre of the 20th century. Irrespective to its contest with some of the most famous movements of theatre history, it succeeded to draw the attention of both the critics and common theatergoers. Although the popularity of the type didn’t sustain longer and very few dramatists showed interest in producing plays in such manner after Eliot, the poetic drama has attained exceptional status for its uniqueness in style and presentation.

2.2.5 THE THEATRE OF ABSURD

The Theatre of Absurd was the most popular and influential genre of the 20th century. Absurdist dramatists saw man as lost in the world, all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless. It was Martin Esslin, who first coined the term ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ and made it the title of his 1962 book on the subject. The term refers to a particular type of play which first became popular during the 1950s and 1960s and which presented onstage the philosophy expressed by French philosopher Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, The Myth of Sisyphus. It is a term applied to a group of dramatists in the 1950s who did not regard themselves as a school but who all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of the man in the universe. Albert Camus first realized the absurdity of existence during the Second World War and gave a loud expression to the meaninglessness in his novels and dramas. In The Myth of Sisyphus, he defines absurd as the tension, which emerges from man’s determination to discover purpose and order in a world, which steadfastly
refuses to evidence either. Awareness of this lack of purpose in all we do produces a state of metaphysical anguish, which is prominently the central theme in the absurd plays.

Hence the Theatre of Absurd can be "...a term used to describe plays where the main feeling of the audience is one of the bafflement as they face a world on stage where there is no logic to events or human behavior: human life seems absurd in its disjointedness and meaninglessness." (Peck & Coyle: 2002, 272).

World War II was the catalyst that finally brought the Theatre of the Absurd to life. The global nature of this conflict and the resulting trauma of living under threat of nuclear annihilation put into stark perspective the essential precariousness of human life. Suddenly, one did not need to be an abstract thinker in order to be able to reflect upon absurdity: the experience of absurdity became part of the average person's daily existence. During this period, a prophet of the absurd appeared. Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) rejected realism in the theatre, calling for a return to myth and magic and to the exposure of the deepest conflicts within the human mind. He demanded a theatre that would produce collective archetypes and create a modern mythology. It was no longer possible, he insisted, to keep using traditional art forms and standards that had ceased being convincing and lost their validity. Although he would not live to see its development, The Theatre of the Absurd is precisely the new theatre that Artaud was dreaming of. It openly rebelled against conventional theatre. It was surreal, illogical, conflictless and plotless. The dialogue often seemed to be complete gibberish. And, not surprisingly, the public's first reaction to this new theatre was
incomprehension and rejection. Whereas traditional theatre attempts to create a photographic representation of life as we see it, the Theatre of the Absurd aims to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams. The focal point of these dreams is often man's fundamental bewilderment and confusion, stemming from the fact that he has no answers to the basic existential questions: why we are alive, why we have to die, why there is injustice and suffering.

The absurdist playwrights believe that the existence of human being is absurd because he is born without asking to be born, and dies without seeking death. He lives between birth and death trapped within body and reason, unable to conceive of a time in which he will not be for nothingness is very much like the concept of infinity. All his creations are doomed to decay, as he himself is doomed to death. The more he strives for definition and permanent distinction, the more absurd he is. Yet, the only value he can affirm with certainty is a self-defeating complex that he does not understand his life. If he despairs of definition, of ever achieving a sense of permanence, and he contemplates suicide, he is put in the absurd situation of sacrificing his only concrete value, life for a dream of power and permanence that no man on this earth has ever experienced. On the other hand, if in despair he turns to religion or illusion, he betrays and denies only means of perception—his reason. If it is impossible for him to act with complete efficacy, to perceive with complete accuracy, to create anything definite and lasting that expresses exactly his intension. The man, thus, must remember that it is impossible for him to stop acting as long as he dies. This condition of man is called
Absurd. It is this complex of self-defeating paradoxes, this even check and balance of power and impotence, knowledge and ignorance, attunement and alienation that is the subject of the absurdist playwrights of all ages no matter what form or style they may have chosen to express it. Martin Esslin comments,

“A term like the Theatre of the Absurd must therefore be understood as a kind of intellectual shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in approach, method, and convention, of shared philosophical and artistic premises, whether conscious or subconscious, and of influences from a common store of tradition. A label of this kind therefore is an aid to understanding, valid only in so far as it helps to gain insight into a work of art.”

(Esslin: 1965, iii).

If the philosophy itself looks so unconventional so the medium of its expression has to be unconventional in order to express its content. The Absurdist drama tends to eliminate much of the cause-and-effect relationship among incidents, reduce language to a game and minimize its communicative power, reduce characters to standards, make place nonspecific, and view the world as alienating and incomprehensible. Monotony as a prominent feature prevails almost everywhere in the absurd theatre. The sarcastic look at life force the absurdists to portray the changelessness of the modern life, which is always resulted into lack of action in the plays. The most famous, and most controversial, absurdist play is probably Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot. The characters of the play are strange caricatures who have difficulty communicating the simplest of concepts to one another as they bide their time awaiting the
arrival of Godot. The language they use is often ludicrous, and following the cyclical patter, the play seems to end in precisely the same condition it began, with no real change having occurred. The absurdists have a skeptical attitude towards the language because one of the most important aspects of absurd drama is its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language, they believe, has become nothing but a vehicle for conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. That's why in absurd drama often we find short dialogues, sometimes only monosyllabic words and sometimes silences and pauses.

It is significant that three of the most important absurdist playwrights are exiles by choice, while living in Paris they write in a language other than their native tongue. They are Samuel Becket, an Irishman, Eugene Ionesco, a Roumanian, and Arthur Adamov, an Armenian - Russian. These men have chosen to emphasize the sense of alienation. The plays of Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, and Adamov puzzled and outraged most critics as well audiences when they were performed first. These plays broke all the standards by which drama had been judged for many centuries, and that experimental heritage was maintained popularly by many playwrights thereafter. Pinter, who is also classed with the absurdist Playwright, combines realism with an intuition of the absurdity of human existence as his experience to life differs from the other playwrights of the Theatre of Absurd. Being a Jew he experienced the world from the two perspectives, those are the prejudice and the discrimination, which forces him to perceive the world as an absurd and the things, which he encountered are manifested by him in his plays. His plays, such as The Homecoming and The Birthday Party present milestone philosophy of
life’s worthlessness, and hence seem darker, impassable, and absurd. The impact, with which the Absurdist movement thumped the 20th century theatre scenario, was so vigorous that it immediately captured the world of Realism and enjoyed the artistic supremacy for many years.

Thus, the modern era witnessed the series of new ideologies established in the theatre fraternity. For many decades, the world had waited for realistic treatment in literature and, when it entered, there arose strong instant reaction against it, which promoted several antirealistic movements influence the drama of 20th century. Besides the theories talked above, Dadaism, Expressionism, and Surrealism are some of other parallel iconic theatre movements that created the experimental environment in performing arts and thus shouldered the responsibility of cherishing the modern theatre.
WORKS CITED


