CHAPTER – VII

CONCLUSION

Now we can re-assess the observations made by me on the search for Identity in Pinter’s plays as the total sum depending upon his psychological, economical, sociological, ethnical and political views to reach out the conclusion. As it is obvious in the chapters discussed previously that Harold Pinter through a dynamic process of transforming his plays into a mine, rich with psychological and other constituent elements impart a dynamic characterisation of self-fulfillment. The dynamic attribute of self fulfilment in his dramas is in a symbolic relationship with the mode of consciousness of the audience. The audience is drawn to the theatre with certain expectation and an awareness that the past identities of the characters portrayed by the dramatist are mere puppets in the hands of the circumstances or obsessed psychological anxiety. Their incomprehensible self-
annihilation and destruction is marked with passivity and ambiguity. It is an attempt by the dramatist to depict the conflict of the generations, or a class of society. Because as a modern dramatist Pinter does not allow the audience to make up its mind so easily and keeps the audience in a constant state of tension by bringing its mind into a dialectical opposition to its feelings. The moment we begin to settle down with something familiar on the stage, we have the sudden invasion of the unknown which turns our world topsy-turvy and obliges us to review our sympathies. Again, the hidden face which reveals itself in the familiar becomes dramatically significant as it is conspicuous in The Birthday Party.

In The Birthday Party Pinter takes stock ingredients of popular drama and invest them with political resonance. As its very simplest, the play shows an obstinately reclusive hero being obliged to conform to the external pressures of conventional society. It is simply a play about a pathetic victim brain washed into social conformity. It is a play about the need to resist, with the utmost vigour, dead ideas and the inherited weight of the past. Pinter's Stanley Webber - a
palpably Jewish name, incidentally – is a man who shores up his precarious sense of self through fantasy bluff, violence and his own manipulative form of power-play. He affects a wanton grandeur with his talk of a European concert tour. He projects his own fear on to Meg by terrorizing her with stories of nameless men coming to abduct her in a van. In his first solo encounter with McCann, he tries to win him over by appealing to a shared past and borrowed patriotism.

Stanley: I know Ireland very well. I've many friends there. I love that country and I admire and trust its people... I think their policemen are wonderful.

(Act II, P.52)

At the start of the interrogation he resists Goldberg's injunction to sit down and at the end of it he kneels him in the stomach. And, in the panic of the party, he attempts to strangle Meg and rape Lulu. These are hardly the actions of supine victim. Even through Stanley is finally carried off shaven, besuited, white-collared and ostensibly tamed, the spirit of resistance is never finally quelled. When asked how he regards the prospect of being able to 'make or break' in
the integrated outer world, he does not stay limply silent, but produces the most terrifying noise:

(Stanley concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sound from his throat:)

Stanley: Uh – gug... uh – gug...
    eechhh –
    gug... (on the breath) caah...
    Caahh...

(They watch him. He draws a long breath which shudders down his body. He concentrates.)

Goldberg: Well, Stanny boy, what do you say, eh?

Stanley: Ug – gughh... uh – gughhh...

(Act III, PP.94-95)

Stanley, with his smashed glasses and maimed or ripped tongue, has been robbed of power of sight and speech in the interests of social and political conformity. What I mark here is that there is some grit in the human spirit that resists total submission, Pinter identifies with Stan and Petey’s active and passive resistance to external forces just as Goldberg and McCann.
Goldberg: ...Do you recognise an external force, responsible for you, suffering for you...?
(Act III, P.94)

The Birthday Party is not simply a play about a truculent recluse whose will is broken by two authority figures. It is a much more complex work about a defiant rebel who exposes the insecurity upon which adherence to orthodoxy and tradition actually rests: a theme Pinter pursues in the more overtly political plays of eighties. Pinter displays the anguish and desperation, isolation and mental anxiety of the modern twentieth century.

Hence; I have chosen the topic of search for Identity in Pinter’s plays because of the aforesaid appeal to our contemporary period. Likewise everyone of us have an urge for a selfhood, an identity and goals. The language and situation created by Harold Pinter in his plays is relevant to the modern period. East or West the problems discussed in the plays remain the same.

In Pinter’s theatre the persistent presence of a closed room, isolated from the outside world, with a few persons huddled together inside in a sort of non-communicative conversation,
is significant. The image is basic to his theatre not only physically, but it communicates something of essence of his approach to life, his understanding of the human situation in the theatre idiom. His stage is thinly populated; much of the conversation is in monologue style with pauses and in an incoherent slovenly manner; as if the men in the room are apprehensive of some imminent disaster from outside invaders, waiting for some thing.

The rooms are real enough, naturalistic in their setting, but the conversation that is carried on in these rooms, where people are temporarily locked, is completely different in character and import from anything we have heard on the British stage, we meet the people about whose exact background we know very little up to end and the people themselves do not seem to know each other well and cannot follow the thoughts of each other as intimate people do in actual life; the subject of their talk is almost irrelevant as if they are concealing something important; the atmosphere, an extension of their spiritual restlessness, is surcharged with mystery and a sort of pervading nervousness. This tense situation suddenly reaches a climax when there is a knock at

200
the door or a third person, apparently innocent enough, opens the door to come in. This is more or less, a basic representative pattern of situation in his plays, with necessary variations in emphasis. What do they discuss? Social problems? Philosophy? Their love affairs? Their frustrations? Apparently nothing of the sort.

Pinter's world is exclusively private. The great commotions of the world, the seething social problems which engage the attention of the social-realist dramatist do not figure in his vision. Instead, he concentrates on the delineation of fundamental human situations, free from accidents of social consideration and political affiliation; apparently in common place surroundings in which characters are "at the extreme edge of their living; all the insecurity and anxiety that haunted the pre and post-war western world seem to have been crystallized in the atmosphere; and without any reference to the political world we feel the impact of the modern socio-political instability in the private vision of the characters. Pinter himself considers the situations in his plays to be authentic. As a Jewish boy in London, during
Hitler's time, he experienced fear, isolation and insecurity, the basic emotional structure of his plays.

His characters are all British in origin, but the anguish they suffer from and the sense of insecurity inherent in their living have something peculiarly continental about them; and meaningless talks, communication gaps, recurrent fits of violence and cruelty underscore the image of a world which has lost its relevance. The central core of inspiration of his plays is the realization of the loss of identity and certitude that is so real, and not mere metaphysical proposition; to the harassed western men today. His plays deal entirely with personal contacts but he deals with them impersonally, and his interest is psychological. It is futile to seek in his dramatic world the balance and poise of the plot; development of characters and resolution of problems.

Situations develop, as in a dream or nightmare, devoid of apparent logic but with an inner convincing intuitive relevance of their own; people make entrances and exits with utter irreverences to theatrical conventions, sudden apparently inexplicable eruption of violence crystallizes the atmosphere of suspense and provides a justification of the
prevailing nervousness; these mark the peculiar quality of the world bringing into sharp focus the fluid nature of reality. This philosophical attitude has been most convincingly embodied in his plays, and the characters living in the islands of their own existence finding no objective correlative with the outer world; conversing with no apparent logic sense, strengthen its reference and substance. His people are always 'I' or 'they'; the we-ness of social organisation, as a living reality, is never there. Incidents and characters revolve in concentric multicoloured circles, their centre remaining invisible until at the close we discover the all-important centre and, as if in a flash, we see the relatedness and significance of the whole fabric. In a sense, Pinter goes deeper than the social realists for his drama is essentially a journey into the unconscious and the asocial roots of modern existence. His characters ordinary English men, specially the working class; he has captured their mode of thinking and feeling too. Out of this metallic ring of city conversation gradually a compulsive, unreal atmosphere of poetic beauty is created.
Pinter, more than any other British playwright, leaves much to the imaginative capacity of his audience; the humour of a situation often demanding a deeper reading, the gaps in the dialogue communicating the unspoken thoughts, the sudden violence indicating psychological maladjustment and fragmentation of a personality.

It goes to the credit of Pinter that he has composed plays embodying the anxious search of identity of the modern man which had been exclusively the continental dramatic forte in the post-war period of the habitual and accustomed relationship. Suddenly, under the impact of unseen subterranean forces reach a crisis and acquire new meaning and significance.

The four walls of the room are real enough; the description of gas-fire, tables, chairs, a double-bed faithfully conveys the domestic surroundings of a lower-middle-class living room. In those ordinary surroundings, between a few very ordinary people in an hour of their existence, a drama is enacted; it brings home the terrible uncertainty and spiritual malaise that lie beneath their apparently smug humdrum living. The
atmosphere of uncertainty with a sense of insecurity in the 
cosy rooms is developed with magnificent care.

The Room, it seems, achieves a marvelous positive note 
through an examination of the negative and the nihilistic 
aspects of living being. Rose’s blindness and her cry “I can’t 
see, I can’t see, is ironically a demonstration of repressed sex. 
Her blindness is associated with it, which recurs in Tea 
Party.

Bert’s killing of the Negro in The Room may be interpreted as 
killing the past of Rose and Rose’s anguished cry, “I can’t see” 
is her final break with the cosy everyday reality of life. Thus 
the spiritual biography of Rose is laid bare only at the last 
moment of the play and all that she constructed with so much care – her relationship with her husband, the warm 
room of her household, the smooth style of humdrum living – seems to be utterly irrelevant when she confronts the truth of 
her existence. She is left alone with her dark past, her sense 
of guilt – an exile. Through out the play Rose is inarticulate, 
her spoken words hide her inmost thoughts. She becomes 
articulate only at the last moment, as a direct consequence of 
her husband’s violence.
Unexpected burst of cruelty and violence is a recurring element in Pinter’s dramatic articulation; meaning thereby giving vent to modern day or contemporary sense of existence; In The Dumbwaiter Ben faces Gus to kill him, The Birthday Party is almost sickening with the display of unmotivated cruelty and the whole atmosphere in The Homecoming is a kind of exercise in abnormal psychological dissection. Does Pinter remind us that violence is a characteristic of life today?

The interior drama, whatever little there is, however, is susceptible to interpretations, and has some characteristics Pinteresque touches – or is it mannerism? – that have valid theatrical effect. Physical violence, psychological torture and sex images gain prominence in Pinter’s first full length play, The Birthday Party.

The Birthday Party, however, offers several powerful images that strengthen the multi-polar character of the play. The three unities of Time, Place and Action have been respected here; the action is throughout in the living room, the image of trapped being is even more intense than in The Room, and the exhibition of brutality and violence is much more
widespread than in *The Dumbwaiter*. It is the only play which could produce the tortured psychology of an artist, painfully conscious of the savagery and cruelty in life. There is a highly coloured picture of dominance of the violent and the ferociousness of existence in our social thinking and living. It is as if the playwright discovers a kind of equation between brutality and the absurdity of life!

In *The Birthday Party* the mother-lover relationship (oedipal?) between Meg and Stanley focuses our attention on the subterranean sex theme which later acquires greater prominence. Stanley’s moving toward Meg and “begins to strangle her” and then in torch light we see Lulu lying spread-eagled on the table and Stanley bending over her, giggling. Thus the destruction of Stanley’s personality is almost complete. Sex, disintegration of personality, death wish and palpable fear hang heavy on this play, the central figure of which is a frustrated musician whom society cast aside. So much is shrouded in mystery – the motive and identity of the visitors and Stanley’s background are futile questions.
The juxtaposition of the allegorical and the naturalistic, the funny and the serious, the imaginative and realistic, contribute to the dramatic strength of this play, and projects an image of the spiritual biography of modern existence.

In *The Caretaker* Davies, a mean sad, discarded from the society, always on the move from one place to another, a waif in search of identity and security, is the central theme of the play.

The tramp has assumed different names to be on the move and insists to be known as his establishment of identity. It is a commentary on the pageantry of an organised society, where a man has to establish his identity by papers rather than by his personality. Davies is expelled from the room like Rose in *The Room*, like Stanley in *The Birthday Party*. All of them cling to the safety of a room, and their struggle for safety ends in their defeat.

*The Home-coming* has the gruesome story of a family of pimps, prostitutes, of father and two sons desiring to share the wife of the third son, the husband, a professor in an American University, calmly asks his wife to work as a
prostitute at night and look after the household during day
time and meet the demands. The title 'Home-coming' of
course refers to Ruth's coming to her accustomed life of
aberration and prostitution, finding a family to mother and
comfort.

Pinter's distinctive achievement in modern British theatre
has been the domestication of the continental passion of
existential attitude tailoring and acclimatizing the philosophy
to the empirical, if not pragmatic, climate of the British Isles.
His conscious effort is not to present a philosophy and the
end product of his dramatic statements, is not to underline
the negative. In his depiction, he asks questions,
uncomfortable and searching of identity in their implications.

His vision is penetrating, ruthlessly penetrating and he is
capturing a mood or feeling about human beings that is very
prevalent in our modern days – prevalent in Britain as well as
in Europe. In all his plays he concentrates on the grim and
seedy side of human nature, and holds the mirror to a group
of people who are psychologically squalid. The kind of
macabre comedy one gets in the dialogue between Goldberg
and McCann or in Home-coming is another attraction of this
theatre. It is the kind of dialogue never heard on the British Stage - and its characters, temperaments, direction and effectiveness demand our social consideration. He hates to take up the role of the social reformer. Pinter's principal grip is on the desolation of the human spirit in the context of an indifferent world. His characters live a small world of illusion, vaguely aware of, and afraid to face reality, and the drama of their progressive disillusionment and final breakdown through shocks is conveyed as much by what is said and done on the stage as by the unspoken and the undone. Pinter has brought an area of introspective depth to the British stage, and the subjective world he explores in its fine subtle touches resembles the miniature Mughal paintings of the seventeenth century. Pinter goes deep into the problems of identity and human predicament, his poetry embraces the squalor and futility of the human condition, not so much as a criticism but as a sensitive observation of things.

Pinter illustrates most powerfully, in technique as well as in concept the conflict between illusion and reality that controls our actual life today. Characters like Rose and Stanley are victims of illusion, reality breaks in upon their apparently
safe, small existence and hurls them into the cold world outside. My findings in chapter second, third and fourth establish that Pinter's plays are for the whole globe striving hard to reveal the character's continued efforts to show an identity, whether meek or mild, defeated or surrendered, vituperative or lonely, these characters do try to achieve a dignified image. It is an existential attitude, tailoring and acclimatizing the philosophy to empirical, if not pragmatic, climate of the British Isles. Suspense and terror are the two constituent ingredients of this enchanted world. An inconsequential dialogue, a long-drawn monologue, an unrelated incident, or a sudden burst of violence reveals the plays' inner logic and consistency, at their organic structure only because of the strength of the central imagery. The contemporary social reference and the humiliation of low life in an advanced technological society have been focussed with as much poignancy and feelings as the concept of nihilism, of the absurdity of life in general. In the final analysis, Pinter stands as much the interpreter of the continental existential view of life as an artist of the mean, insignificant, subordinate life of millions. His is a typical modern mind of search, and
the intensity of the search makes him a great dramatist of the contemporary period. In all his plays he concentrates on the grim and seedy side of human nature, and holds up the mirror to a group of people who are psychologically squalid. Pinter illustrates most powerfully, in technique as well as in concept, the conflict between illusion and reality that controls our own actual life today. Pinter becomes a sadistic puppet master driving his characters and his audience before him. Like Davies, Pinter's characters seem to be the wilderness searching for roots and chronically rejected. It is implicit in his plays that characters are prevented from reaching rewarding relationships of identity wherein the truest security lies, by their own selfishness, pride or weakness. Pinter's interpretation could be on many levels. He presents the sense of depersonalisation mainly in the perspective of the dichotomy between surface behaviour and feelings of the characters, a manifestation in social, psychological and metaphysical dimensions. We may not be aware of the obsessive fears of childhood which dominate Pinter's characters (or shadowy configurations that take the place of characters), but we are never far from them, and a Pinter
play can trip us over into that neurotic world. The very shadowiness of the characterization makes his world more real, and makes it easier for us to enter it, to identify. Pinter has a very strong sense of what people really experience as well as a sense of mystery contained in the trite and banal. In The Room, the blind Negro is not a symbol, but the real instance of extreme loneliness, of human weakness, who calls to the woman, and who must be kicked to death by the man unable to face such weakness in a human being. His characters could be seen in double perspective, as individuals and as images of human predicaments. They are defeated individual who aspire for an identity though destined for pre-ordained conflicts and struggles. They are the protagonists, who struggle against the hidden menace in society. They find it difficult to establish rapport with the situations and feel threatened by menacing forces, often unidentifiable and emanating from a hostile universe. There is a deep rift between their real self and their inflated self-image. Although some of the characters may have tried to establish their identity in the presumed existence, but they still grapple with safer future identities. There is no end to
their efforts. The future seems to be beyond their grasp. They are perpetually betrayed in their search as once they heave a sigh of relief, the another problem crops up before them which is the real theme of modern period. Thus the search goes on and on. Search for identity continues.