

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Failure of Communication in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*

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requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts in English**

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This thesis titled Failure of Communication in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* Submitted to the Department of English, Tribhuvan University Campus, By Mrs. Nilam Rijal has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Chapter One

Introduction

After the emergence of 'free' and 'independent' theater in England, the development of drama as an art has been in the hands of the free theatres. This movement influenced the middle class drama, begun in the eighteenth century. The later part of this movement saw new dramatic forms influenced by the contemporary literary movement i.e. expressionism, symbolism, verse drama etc.

Verse drama, infact is inevitable since the links between literature and the theatre had been tenuous. The serious verse drama had two major influences that were to replace it had properly appeared. The first influence was the reopening of the English theatre to the full range of European practices. The work of Anouilh, Sartre, Brecht, Beckett, Ionesco came as a revelation. This was really a challenge to the majority drama because of its form as its content. Despite some comments on it, its great virtue was new content, which came with an evident, excitement and vitality. Conspicuously it was the life and style of a new generation, as in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. With it, a new generation of writers emerged who reflected the working class milieu of the contemporary post war English society.

Both Sartre's Existentialism and Camus' philosophy of the Absurd were forged largely in the outrages of World War Second, when both men were leading figures in the French Resistance movement. A hellish world that affords "no exist" and in which human activity is as meaningless as Sisyphus' torment seems perfectly credible during such desperate times, times of national occupation and genocidal slaughter. After the war Jean Paul Sartre, who was France's foremost exponent of

Existentialism and one of that country's leading dramatist in the 1940s, and 1950s, spoke eloquently of his first experience as playwright and director.

The plays of this school are dominated by the belief that the situation of human existence is uncertain, irrational, discordant and meaningless. In such a way, the theatrical presentation took a new turn with the presentation of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*(1955) at the Arts Theatre in London under the direction of Peter Hall. The plays of this school are different from the traditional drama in terms of its dialogue use, which is constantly exposed as an abortive attempt at communication. Likewise, the characters are not even, from one scene to the next, sure that they are talking to the same people. And then the Theatre of Absurd came into prominence.

The name 'Theatre of the Absurd' has been applied by critics to a grouping of plays that share certain common structures and styles which are tied together by a main philosophical thread: the theory of the Absurd as formulated by French essayist and playwright, Albert Camus. Camus linked man's condition to that of the mythological Corinthian king Sisyphus who because of his cruelty was condemned forever to roll a stone up a hill in Hades only to have it roll down again upon nearing the top. Camus saw modern man similarly engaged in an eternally futile task, the absurd task of searching for some meaning or purpose or order in human life on the one hand, human beings yearn for a lost unity and lasting Truth. On the other hand, the world can only be seen as irreconcilably fragmented chaotic, permanently unorganized and permanently unorganizable.

a. Pinter and Absurdism

The plays of Pinter, which constitute the Theater of the Absurd, are obsessed with the futility of all action and the pointlessness of all direction. In Pinter's works,

as in Beckett's works, it is not only the words, which are not said that are important, the silences and the words, which are not said, are also equally important. Pinter himself says that there are two sorts of silences: one where no word is spoken and the other where a flood of language is being used and his plays reflect the difficulties of communication between people as this statement suggests. It is said, "the plays of Harold Pinter have as a central theme the impossibility of communication between characters in an closed situation"(173).

If the plot and character involves the audience emotionally by enabling them to identify themselves with the heroes of its plays, this kind of theatre confronts its audience with a concrete pattern of poetic images. As John Russell Brown opines on the view of Martin Esslin about the Theatre of Beckett and Pinter, "the Theatre of Absurd is analogous to abstract painting and sculpture which also grip the spectator both on the level of the archetypal image that strikes swords in the deepest layers of the mind and on the level of a highly intellectual interpretative effort."(63)

Although Beckett himself is unaware of such influences his writings might be described as a literary exposition of Sartre's Existentialism. Existential philosophy starts from the rejection of the validity and reality of general concepts. In idealistic philosophy essence comes before existence but Existential philosopher argues that these platonic ideas, and eternal essences are mere abstractions from the concrete, the particular.

Beckett's influence on contemporary literature is only beginning to make itself felt. But it is certainly a noteworthy fact that one of the most promising young playwrights in this century, Harold Pinter, acknowledges Beckett, together with Kafka, as the main influence on his work. Yael Zarhy Levo views as:

The reviewers repeatedly compare Pinter to Beckett and Ionesco, which seems to create the notion that Pinter can be regarded as a British representative of the European avant-garde. This notion may have had an impact on Martin Esslin's decision to update the third edition of his book, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1980), in which he promotes Pinter from the margin to the center, presenting him as a major absurd playwright. (215)

Like Beckett, he is essentially concerned with communicating a 'sense of being' with producing patterns of poetic imagery, not in words so much as in the concrete, three-dimensional happenings that take place on the stage. Pinter also wants to communicate the mystery and the problematical nature of man's situation in the world. However, the originality of Pinter and other dramatists writing today lies in their belief that gesture can be as eloquent as words. Thus, modern dramatists esp. absurd dramatists look for a mirror to hold up to human nature that can reflect the unspoken and unspeakable with cloudier form than dialogue of statement. Pinter's 'dialogue' contains gestures as well as words, must be seen as well as heard. Ronald Knowles observes, "Comparably, Pinter writes two silences; one when no word is spoken, the other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed" (77).

Pinter's world, in fact, is a presentation of the tragic and unavoidable confrontation of man against the world, which is an arbitrary and autonomous process of renovation and destruction. He creates a world that is absurd in the existential, sense of being, emptied of meaning. His characters are pathetically funny in their circumscribed preoccupation so that the characters engage in communication within non-communication. Being centered within the individual world, they don't seem to care for others. In this sense Ronald Knowles puts his view as, "Pinter's characters

evade communication to resist being. As a consequence, for each dramatist to discover a character is to encounter an autonomous otherness rather than each creating a fiction out of omniscient imagination”(80). In most of his plays, the characters suffer from their own back groundlessness that is always in a dreamlike state, confused and embarrassed.

Therefore, this study attempts to analyze the guiding principle that forces the characters to be the victim of failure of communication in the play *The Birthday Party*. The characters in the play suffer from non- communication that they do not seem to hear each other even if they are sitting nearby and they simultaneously forget what they have said just a moment back. Their extreme realization of ‘Self’ in existential crises leads them to commit failure of communication. The experience, which these characters undergo, represents the overall condition of awkward men in an awkward land. Thus, ‘The Theater of Absurd’ has been a major tool of analysis of this study.

Communication is generally taken as a part of linguistics. It is defined in terms of an interaction by the use of language. Webster’s *New International Dictionary* (Second Edition) defines it as an, “intercourse by words, letters or messages: interchange of thoughts or opinions, by conference or other means, converse, correspondence” (541). This definition assumes three component of communication: participants who intercourse, thought or ideas and medium. Linguistics takes communication as a sort of speech act by presupposing “appropriateness condition” or “cooperative principal” as its requirement. In their book entitled *Linguistics for Students of Literature*, Elizabeth loss Traugott and Mary Louise Pratte write, “basically, the cooperative principle represents our knowledge that verbal communication is an activity in which individuals work together to accomplish shared

mutually beneficial goals” (237). According to this statement, communication is possible only under the circumstance that each of the characters shares mutual understanding. In lack of the mutuality, communication fails.

Moving beyond the linguistic definition of communication, this study examines its links to the human existence to answer the fundamental question “is communication really possible?” Communication as a sharing of ideas, it has its link to the human subjectivity. Since ‘self’ differs from person to person, communication can’t be defined so easily. Thus, this study will also scrutinize the “self” and observes the causes of failure of communication.

Published in 1965, Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* dramatizes the failure of communication by the means of problem seen in the relationship among the characters of the play. We sense some coldness in the relationship between Meg and Petey. Meg is talkative and inquisitive whereas Petey is reticent and evasive. Petey answers most of the time in monosyllables, very reluctantly and what Meg says is superfluous. It is like a ritual talk that is carried out to maintain only a semblance of relationship and to cover up the mess that existence is:

MEG: Is that you, Petey?

Pause

PETEY: Is that you?

Pause

Petey

PETEY: What?

MEG: Is that you?

PETEY: Yes , its me. (19)

Generally in conventional dramas, the dialogues would have finished just in two lines but in *The Birthday Party*, we find the characters are absentminded and suffer from communication problems. The play is full of short and irrelevant dialogues: abrupt questions and abrupt answers with which the characters keep themselves busy most of the times. The characters are never found talking on any matters serious, meaningful and logical sound so that one could never get some message of what they mean, what their true identity is, what they are up to and what is going to happen in the play is only sharp, informal and stereotyped, the most everyday language.

In this way, the reference of places and manners of acquaintance or relatives are all out of context, which ultimately create ‘whyness’ and ‘whatness’ among the characters that support the theme of absurdity in the play.

The Birthday Party, like his other plays, has at every nook and corner, situations of suspense and tone of whyness and whatness. For example Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* have no background of their problem. The mystery is woven in such a way that not only that we don’t know what they are up to but even they themselves do not know who they are working for. Their mission remains mysterious throughout the play. Another most mysterious character in the play is Stanley, who is the center of the party, keeps on saying from the beginning of the play that it is not his birthday and he has nothing to do with the party. In such a way, *The Birthday Party* supports the theme of absurdity where the communication that the characters have in the play is difficult and when it is so, they remain silent.

In this context, Ronald Knowles opines “with his outstanding success by the early 1960s, Pinter was frequently associated with the social realism of the ‘Angry Young Men’ and with the absurdism of Beckett and Ionesco” (73). The ambiguity of

the play as *The Birthday Party* prompted comparison with the absurdist. Ionesco founded his anarchic and surrealist drama on a premise: “ the Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...cut off for, his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his action become senseless, absurd, useless.(25)”

From the onset of all Pinter’s plays until the curtain falls and the play ends, the audience is deliberately left in an ambiguous and confused state. The characters are always in a dream like state, confused and embarrassed and the plays always open with an autonomous state of unexpectedness. The characters are obsessive to know about their own background having them locked up inside a room. Around them is so dark that they cannot see even themselves where they are standing and why and how they are there.

Reading Pinter’s dramas is to be left in obscurity, mystery and indefiniteness in the sense that no Pinter dramas aim at reading its message and defining its actions and characters. In his first play, *The Room*, Rose and Bert have no background except that they have been living in the room temporarily. Their past life is kept in a total dark, which is never revealed from the story where they were, what their profession was, and what for they are staying in this room. When the characters talk of their past, they speak in such a way that we cannot stop ourselves from doubting on their accounts. Their accounts are incomplete and often contradictory to their positions and even very mysterious. In such a way, we are left in an utter darkness. Like Rose goes into the darkness of her blindness we also enter a deep tunnel of blindness at last. The theme of backgroundlessness and mystery reaches its utmost height at the last and the play ends.

The same is the case with *The Dumb Waiter* in which Ben and Gus, two professional killers, who are hired to murder somebody paradoxically don’t know

whom they have to kill. They themselves don't know why they have to kill their victims or what advantage their boss has out of this. Their lack of knowledge of what they are doing and who they are working for can be clearly seen everywhere that hints the tone of mystification.

Likewise, in *The Caretaker*, the case is almost the same as in other plays of Pinter. Although each character is expressive of his past history, yet no one's story is dependable. We are left at the same ambiguity about what they were, what they are doing and what they are up to. The build up of suspense and mystification is strongly presented everywhere, from the very onset till the end of the play.

Harold Pinter being one of the leading playwrights of the 'Theater of the Absurd' presents this harsh and absurd situation of man in the world as it is. His form or style of presentation itself is absurd. Such a stage is not only thematically, but structurally absurd that really pictures man's crisis of existence. Like other absurd dramatists, Pinter conveys the message of absurdity through the absurd style.

Esslin observes, "while Sartre and Camus express the new content in the old convention, the 'Theater of the Absurd' goes a step further on trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed" (24). In other words, the Theater of the Absurd does not describe situations with a plot and a story in a language that is logical, well constructed and sequential like the existentialist's theater, but it merely presents everything through concrete images. He further supports the idea as, "The Theatre of the Absurd has been arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being that is in terms of concrete stage images"(25).

It is this nothingness, the only and the ultimate reality of existence in contrast to man's awkward placing in the world that is presented by the Absurdists. Thus, The Theatre of the Absurd is an experiment in literature to present man's vain and inconsequential search for the center of existence. Some cause for living in this world. The characters are confused and unaware about their own position and what is around them, so everything poses a menace or a threat to them. For instance, Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* have no background of their profession. The mystery is woven in such a way that not only that we don't know what they are up to but even they themselves do not know who they are working for. Their mission remains mysterious till the end of the play.

Fear from the unknown is the theme of absurdity, which is beautifully illustrated in this play. The characters are confused and unknown of their own positions who are victimized by uncertainties, insecurity, anxieties and restlessness. In *The Birthday Party*, the theme of fear is woven everywhere with every moment of suspense, concentrates on Stanley. Stanley is almost all the time, depressed, frightened, embarrassed and simultaneously indifferent. He seems from the beginning to be unsafe and self-contemplative and despite Meg's motherly infatuation, he is again and again threatened until, at last, he collapses down and is led out of the door. The anxiety, the impatience, the feeling of insecurity and tension are the proofs of Stanley's obsessed fear of the unknown. The menace is once again posed by the unknown; the anonymous visitors.

Likewise, the most powerfully characteristic theme of the 'Theatre of the Absurd' is the theme of loneliness which we also can find even in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. In the play, the characters do not talk to each other and the audience are informed of the character are totally alienated and left alone to dream in their past

experiences. Silence, monologue and family voices heighten the theme of isolation and alienation even more than ever before.

With a brief description of the historical development of the 'Theater of Absurd' and its characteristics, this study will also focus on some specific terminologies like anxiety, nothingness, alienation which cause the characters of the play *The Birthday Party* to be the victim of failure of communication. Even though a number of critics have poured down their intellect upon his play, but the dominant aspect of the works 'the failure of communication ' has not been examined. So this study will make an in depth study to justify that the major relation among the characters is only focused to perpetuate their illusion. They seem to talk with each other but the communication does not exist.

In such a way, the characters in *The Birthday Party* are like Kafka's characters, utterly confused, helplessly trapped, tragically unaware of the reasons for their persecution and the identity of the persecutor and only left to their hopes and illusions, after passing through a gradual experience of alienation of the self; that surpass themselves into objectivity by transcending the subjectivity. Rather than plunging into the collision of alienation, they try to consolidate themselves by surrendering into the objectivity. However, they can't escape from the very consciousness of their own subjectivity and they fail and so remain convulsive.

Stanley's recalling of the past unveils his realization of being merely an object. As a lesser human being struggling to survive in the highly industrialized capitalist society, his existence is nothing more than a raw material of the business company of McCann and Goldberg have taken the responsibility of celebrating birthday party for Stanley which again traces the masochistic attitude. Stanley knows that it's not his birthday who is behaved as an unwanted guest to McCann and

Goldberg. The result is obvious, he is not only humiliated but is prone to be kicked by them. Through the presentation of such a dull and unimportant part of our everyday life, we receive no new message.

In such a way, this study will make an in depth study to justify that the major cause of the characters' failure to communicate is nothing other than their realization of "self" in an existential crisis. From the absurd point of view, there is no experience of anything. Absurdity, despair and dread haunt severely causing them to escape into the subjectivity. In other words, having ourselves been locked up inside the human logic, Absurd tries to see the outside of the room of human brain and tries to present the existential crisis, the mystery of man.

Thus, the very process of reasoning is Absurd, the very confrontation of man with the world, with himself, is absurd and the very existential crisis is absurd. Using 'The Theater of Absurd' as a tool, this study will make cursory survey on the theme of failure of communication relating with *The Birthday Party* and for a better understanding elaboration will be held on chapter two.

Chapter Two

Absurd movement in Dramas

a. Free and Independent Theatres:

With the independent and irrational movements of the end of the nineteenth century, which revived Hegelianism after Hegel's concepts started fading away in Germany, there spread free and independent theatres throughout Europe including England. This movement of free theatre developed the middle class drama during the nineteenth century. This middle class drama with its own orthodox forms has spectacle, melodrama, farce, sentimental comedy and domestic realism in nature. The later part of this movement saw new dramatic forms influenced by the contemporary literary movements i.e. expressionism, symbolism, imagism, impressionism, anti-theatre presentations and philosophical movements like existentialism. This new movement revolutionized the dramatic reality of orthodox, a middle class drama, which presented the real looking characters on a real looking stage having realistic conversation.

Existentialism, as a new literary movement did not emphasize on the imitation of reality, which may not be accurate or may not be what it really is in itself if the inner inarticulate experience is neglected. It sought to present the underlying reality of life as it is in itself and sought to prove that the surface structure of life, as we see and try to imitate, is deceptive, illusionary. On the stage, they broke all the conventional patterns to experiment a new dimension of thought so that they could reveal the reality behind the appearance.

With the release of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* on 8 May 1956 at Royal Court Theatre, London, and the school of what is known as 'Kitchen Sink

Dramas' and 'Angry Young Man' was established. With it, a new generation of writers emerged who reflected the working class milieu of the contemporary postwar English society. Osborne's writings concentrate on portraying life in rented bed-sitters and workers' cottages in the urban industrial part of England. He sketched mainly the middle class people and attacked their unfeelingness.

Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* brought a renaissance of the British Theatre when it was not strong in the fifties. And with Osborne's revolutionary success emerged a school of dramatists like Arnold Wesker, Bond, and Peter Barnes etc who vividly represented the life of the working class people. The plays of this school are dominated by the belief that the situation of human existence is uncertain, irrational, discordant and meaningless. Their structure is break away of the patterns of the conventional well made plays, which develop through exposition, conflict, complication, climax and resolution.

Although the new British dramatists do not want to make statements or define their aims, they are creatively involved with society and seek a full revelation in their plays of what they find in the worlds around them and within them. John Russell Brown opines that, "they write for the theater because this is the art form which allows them to show the complexity of these worlds; the permanent and frightening forces that lie behind each explosive crisis and each boring, dehumanizing routine."(14)

On the other hand, there swept a new movement in England during the fifties. A radical group of young writers emerged with a message of dissatisfaction over the Post War sociopolitical scenerio. This post Shavian theatre saw the poetic dramas of the thirties and forties by W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherhood, often labeled as communists and associated with the Marxist Proletarian dramas of the American

thirties. This group fought against the contemporary fascist oppression and the decadent middle class culture.

After the centuries of indifference between the government and the artists, government, in Britain and France started to contribute enough financial aid to the companies and artist groups. The Art council was renovated and professional artist groups were encouraged which resulted in the production of a number of plays by the Existentialist and Absurdist playwrights. With the release of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (written in 1942) as stage performance in 1953 for the first time, the whole world of theatrical presentation took a new turn. With this presentation began the Absurd movement in drama. The plays of this school, which remained the most innovative, intellectually revolutionary and drastically peculiar as a form of theatre from 1950s-1970s, make a direct presentation of how the modern man has lost the definition of life and how he is struggling in vain to give this world a center and purpose.

Hence, The Theatre of the Absurd has emerged as an experiment in literature to present man's vain and inconsequential search for the center of existence, some cause for living in this world. Modern existentialists and phenomenologists tried to seek answers of the whatness, howness, and whyness of existence and the absurd situation of man, the meaning of the meaning itself despite being aware that they could find out nothing, they could but vaguely picture the situation of man living in a dark, gloomy and purposeless world without any power above it and man doing nothing but awaiting his own death. The Theatre of the Absurd in fact is an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to anguish, to shock him out of an existence that has become trifle, mechanical, complacent, and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness. In this sense, Esslins puts forward his opinion,

“God is dead, above all, to the masses who live from day to day and have lost all contact with the basic facts and mysterious of the human condition”(400).

‘Absurd’ originally means out of harmony in a musical context. Hence, its dictionary definition: ‘out of harmony with reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable illogical. In common usage, ‘absurd’ may simply mean ridiculous but this is not the sense in which Camus uses the word, and in which it is used when we speak of the Theatre of the Absurd. Ionesco defined his understanding of the term absurd as follow. “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose ...cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless”(23).

b. Absurdity in Theatre

The second half of the twentieth century saw a most radically different and revolutionary approach not only on philosophical writings by Nietzsche, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, Husserl etc but also on the whole world of literature. By the Second World War and the fall of the Nazi dictatorship shattered the concept of faith, progress, nationalism and other totalitarian fallacies. Albert Camus’s *Myth of Sisyphus* presents truly the situation of human existence in a world of shattered beliefs:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels a stranger. He is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity. (10)

The man who is living in an absurd world, suddenly finds himself in an awkward, foreign land. Then, at such situation, every object around him, which he had been so much familiar with for so long, becomes mysterious. Camus argues that this strangeness of the world is the Absurd. Man finally encounters himself, his own body, his own consciousness and senses, his own 'self' and his own existence. Because of the feeling of strangeness, individual cannot communicate with others so he prefers to be silent.

This is what Camus has discussed in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. What man keeps himself busy with all his life, his actions and ideas, his friends and families, everything is clear. But as soon as we wake up from these routines and watch this world from a distance, exempting ourselves from being a part of this mechanism, we feel an elemental surprise. And this surprise is what Camus in his *Myth of Sisyphus* calls the Absurd. To add, their meaning is their existence but the very existence is meaningless in Absurd point of view.

It is a world dark, gloomy and disillusioned the existentialists analysis of the world, life or human existence that man is left helpless, alone and is confronting the dark and hostile forces of the world and there is no god or Messiah above him resulted in a broad school of literacy who presented the situation of man as it is. It is due to the movement launched by the existentialists like Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, Kafka and Heidegger who tried to seek the meaning of human existence through the hopeless, dark, alienated and suffocating perspective of human life, penetrating into the whatness, whyness and Howness of existence of these themes in literature began. The characters presented in the absurd play as stranger that none of the characters are aware of their existence. Though the characters seem involving in the communicating

activities, they communicate through non-communication, which portrays the alienated perspective of human life.

The leading playwrights of the Theater of the Absurd, like Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet, Pinter present this harsh and absurd situation of man in the world as it is. They do not even focus language, plot, action and character. Their form or style of presentation itself is absurd. The Absurd dramatists thus have a unity between the theme and the form. They convey the message of Absurdity through an Absurd style. Esslin observes, "While Sartre and Camus express the new content in the old convention, the 'Theatre of the Absurd' goes a step further in trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed"(24).

In other words, the Theatre of the Absurd does not describe situations with a plot and a story in a language that is logical, well constructed and sequential like the existentialists theatre but it merely presents everything through concrete stage images. Esslin comments, "The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being than in terms of concrete stage images"(25).

In an actual sense, if we wish to examine the Absurd undercurrents in theatre, we will have to go back to the Sophoclean age. What can be more absurd than killing one's own father and marrying one's own mother and making children from her who can neither be sons and daughters nor sisters and brothers which we find in Oedipus, the king. We find the undercurrents of absurdity in all the great dramatists of all time if we see how Marlowe in *Dr. Faustus*, Shakespeare in his great tragedies i.e. *Hamlet*, *Othello* etc and even the playwrights of the comedy of manners created plots, foolish characters and used foolish devices to portray the Absurd situation of man.

When Shakespeare speaks through *King Lear* at the time Lear goes blind, when Othello roars out in agony when Hamlet philosophies the dilemma and meaning of life at the time he is left alone and at such situations, when the fools, given the least important roles, speak out the most important sentence, we find a strong thematic association of these plays with the Theatre of the absurd.

Shakespeare powerfully presents the nature and trapped situation of human existence, man's struggles and proves, in his tragedies, the futility, the inconsequentiality of man's efforts as everything proves fruitless and futile in the final doom i.e. death. Esslin includes, "how rich his (Shakespeare's) plays are in precisely the same type of inverted logical reasoning, false syllogism, free association, and the poetry of real or feigned madness that we find in the plays of Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter"(332).

But what makes the Theatre of the Absurd different from all the conventional theaters is the themes are handled with the structures they are built and shaped in and the message of absurdity that is literally and boldly conveyed through concrete stage images.

The dramas of this new school were experimented by the Arts Council of Britain and the opening of a number of repertory companies. These revolutionary companies, which were opened after 1950, came to be known as off- Broadway Theatre. It is this Off- Broadway, which presented the theatrical experiments of Brecht and the Absurdists like Beckett and Ionesco. It also saw some more radical groups of artists and playwrights moving towards the Theater of shock and audience participation. Esslin opines:

The Absurdist playwrights believe that our existence is absurd because we are born without asking to be born, we die without seeking death, we live between birth and death trapped within body and our reason, unable to conceive a time in which we will not be for nothingness is very much like the concept of infinity; something we receive only in so far as we can not experience it. (3-2)

c. The Theatre of the Absurd

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, regarded, as most representative play of the Absurd Theatre, has neither action and plot nor any logical dialogue. The whole play remains at the same situation it started. It is a powerful presentation of the timeless, circular and barren human world and it has no plot development. It opens with Estragon saying "nothing to be done:" and ends with similar expressions. Thus, *Waiting for Godot* does not tell a story; it explores a static situation. " Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful"

The whole play, *Waiting for Godot*, contains only five characters; there are two tramps i.e. Vladimir and Estragon, who have meet at a country road. They have to wait for Godot and they have to pass their time until Godot come. While they keep busy in talking non- sense to each other, Lucky and Pozzo enter. Lucky treats Pozzo as an animal. They cause a stage action comedy like in a circus show. Hence, we are disappointed at the nulity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But the identification of subject with the object of his desire can be attained. If Godot is the object of Vladimir and Estragon's desire, he seems naturally ever beyond their reach. It is significant that the boy who acts as go between fails to recognize the pair from day to day. As the boy leaves, Vladimir tries to impress it upon him: 'you are sure you saw me, eh, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me before?

The boy does not reply, and we know that he will again fail to recognize them. When Pozzo and Lucky first appear, neither Vladimir nor Estragon seems to recognize them; Estragon even takes Pozzo for Godot. In this way Estragon insists that he did not know them as it is stated that:

VLADIMIR: Yes you do know them.

ESTRAGON: No I don't know them.

VLADIMIR: We know them, I tell you. You forget everything.

(Pause. To himself) unless they are not the same...

ESTRAGON: Why don't they recognize us, then? (48).

Throughout the dialogue, Beckett wants to show the failure of communication among the characters. Though the characters confront with each other, they are presented as unknown creature; there is nothing very definite.

Similarly Beckett's second play "*Krapp's Last Tape*" has only one character who is always found murmuring through the play about tape recording on his earlier life when he was a writer and was in love with a girl who proves futile. We see him old, decrepit and a failure listening to his own voice recorded thirty years earlier. But his voice has become the voice of a stranger to him. Thus, the self at one moment in time is confronted with its earlier incarnation only to find it utterly strange. When the character himself is presented, as a stranger there is the feeling of loneliness ultimately helps to create the communication gap in the play.

Likewise, another absurdist playwright Ionesco protested against the imputation that he was a deliberate anti realist, that he maintained the impossibility of communication by language. Of course the traditional theatre has always been an instrument for communicating the basic experiences of humanity. But Ionesco

repudiates the well-made play that tells a story instead, the demand for intensity, the gradual heightening of psychological tension. Mostly in his plays, the characters have difficulty in communicating their personal experience. Thus, characters in the absurd play have been presented as imprisoned in their own experience.

The main themes that recur in his plays are those of the loneliness and isolation of the individual, his difficulty in communicating with others, the anxieties arising from the uncertainty of one's own identity and the certainty of death. It is stated, "His characters may be isolated and lonely in metaphysical sense that articulate the minimalist problem of individual that they compel to confront with the despair and absurdity of human condition"(146).

Ionesco's *The Chairs*, staged in London in 1957 has no theme, no plot, no action, and no story but just a dreads silence and emptiness. The whole presentation comprises of only two characters i.e. and old man and an old woman, who are found recollecting their past life which does not have any meaning for them. Throughout the play, they keep on mentioning several invisible characters by bringing empty chairs on the stage. The possessors of the chairs remain anonymous and invisible throughout, 'The subject of the play', he wrote to the director of the first performance, Sylvain Dhomme, is not the message, nor the failures of, nor the moral disaster of the two old people, but the chairs themselves; that is to say, the absence of people, the absence of emperor, the absence of God, the absence of matter, the unreality of the world, metaphysical emptiness. "The theme of the play is nothingness...the invisible elements must be more and more clearly present, more and more real until the point is reached" (152).

Arthur Adamov, the author of some of the most powerful plays in the Theater of the Absurd, depicts a senseless and brutal nightmare world throughout his plays.

LA Invasion is a play about the hopeless search for meaning, the quest for a message. Pierre, one lonely character of the play wants to retire to his own private den who withdraws from contact with others, because he finds communication more and more difficult. Language is disintegrating before his eyes, “Why does one say, it happens? who is that “it”, what does it want from me? What I want is not the meaning of words, but their volume and their moving body. I shall no longer search for anything...I’ll wait in silence, motionless” (102).

Likewise, another absurd dramatist Genets’ theatre may lack plot, character, construction, coherence or social truth. Genet’s theatre is, profoundly, a theatre of social protest. Yet, like that of Ionesco and Adamov before his conversion to epic realism, it resolutely rejects political commitment, political argument, and didacticism or propaganda. In dealing with the dream world of the outcast of society, it explores the human search for meaning and reality, The abandonment of the concepts of character and motivation; the concentration on states of mind and basic human situations rather than on the development of a narrative plot from, exposition to solution; the devaluation of language as a means of communication and understanding; the reflection of didactic purpose and the confrontation of the spectator with the harsh facts of a cruel world and his own isolation . His plays are not intellectual exercises but the projections of a world of private myth, conceived as such in the pre-logical modes of thought that are the hallmark of the sphere of myth and dream; hence the prevalence of magical modes of action in Genet’s play. Esslin comments, “ in the world of pre-logical thought, dream and myth, language becomes incantation instead of communication; the word does not signify a concept but magically conjures up a thing” (232).

His works like *The Balcony*, *The Blacks* and *The Maids* can be regarded as examples of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Likewise, Pinter being impressed by the Beckettian and Kafkasque absurdity, presents the human being helplessly trapped in a vast and incomprehensible universe who are unable to know the cause of suffering. In such a way, Absurdity is manifest in the lack of purpose and direction, certainty and continuity, consistency and stability in human life. Bernard F Dukove sees Pinter's theater as "a picture of contemporary man beaten down by the social forces around him, partially based on man's failure to communicate with other men" (54). Characters in his plays speak out of terror and loneliness; there is the dread of dispossession. As a result, characters want to be silent rather than speaking with others. On the next hand, his characters are contemptuous of their present condition. They try to impulse patterns on their chaotic condition who are utterly incapable of facing or speaking the truth. The past is an extension of the present, which is taken as something illusionary, a product of the pattern making impulse intended to fill the present void. Thus, communication can not be held properly since the characters make busy themselves remembering their past events.

In such a way, Harold Pinter share with Beckett and Ionesco certain elements of the absurd drama the violation of the Aristotelian principles of cause and effect, the inconsistency in identity and actions of characters, the unverifiability of situations, repetition of inconsequential actions, disjointed dialogues and multiple patterns of meaning. On the other hand, the problem of communication is a common theme in absurd drama. While Beckett's characters try to communicate but stumble, Pinter's characters maintain a non-communicative posture against all provocations, till they break down under pressure.

In this way, the absurd dramas hardly present the conventional heroes in their dignified positions. The characters, like those of the plays of the 'Angry young man' school, are anti-heroes, weak, gloomy depressed, effeminate and confused with themselves. They are hardly conscious of what they have to do and what they are doing. Absurd plays, thus, do not have a multiplicity of characters. And the characterization does not have any texture of subtlety, as these plays are basically free from plots. That is why the characters are always found busy doing most insignificant activities or doing nothing but only waiting like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*.

Concerned as it with the ultimate realities of the human condition, the relatively few fundamental problems of life and death, isolation and communication, the 'Theatre of the Absurd', however grotesque, frivolous and irreverent it may appease, represents a return to the original, religious function of the theatre, like ancient Greek tragedy and the medieval mystery plays and baroque art sacramental, the ultimate realities concerned were generally known and universally accepted metaphysical systems, the 'Theatre of the Absurd' is intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe. That is why communication between human beings is so often shown in a state of breakdown in it.

As the Theatre of the Absurd is not concerned with conveying information or presenting the problems or destinies of characters that exist outside of the author's inner world, it is not concerned with the representation of events, the narration of the fate or the adventures of characters. Nor is it concerned with telling a story in order to communicate some moral or social lesson. The action in a play of the 'Theatre of the Absurd' is not intended to tell a story to communicate a pattern of poetic images.

In the 'Theatre of the Absurd', on the other hand, the audience is confronted with characters whose motives and actions remain largely incomprehensible. With such characters it is almost impossible to identify the more mysterious their action and their nature, the less human the characters become. Thus, in the Theatre of Absurd, the audience is confronted with actions that lack apparent motivation, characters that are in constant flux, and often happenings that are clearly outside the realm of rational experience. The audience can ask, 'what is going to happen next?' but then anything may happen next, so that the answer to this question can not be worked out according to the rules of ordinary probability based on motives and characterizations that will remain constant throughout the play. So far as the mysterious nature of the characters's actions in the Theatre of the Absurd effectively prevents identification, such theatre is a comic theater in spite of the fact that its subject matter is somber, violent and bitter. That is why the Theatre of the Absurd transcends the category of comedy and tragedy and combines laughter with horror.

The alienation effect in the Brechtian theatre is intended to activate the audience's critical, intellectual attitude. The Theatre of the Absurd speaks to a deeper level of the audience's mind. It activates psychological force, releases and liberates hidden fears and repressed aggressions. As Eva Metman says in her remarkable essay on Beckett:

In times of religious containment, has shown man as protected, guided, and sometimes, punished by powers, but in other epochs it has shown the visible tangible world in which man fulfils his destiny as permeated by the demonic essences of his invisible and intangible being. In contemporary drama, a new, third orientation is crystallizing in which man is shown not in a world into which the divine or demonic powers

are projected but alone with them. This new form of drama forces the audience out of its familiar orientation, It creates a vacuum between the play and the audience so that the latter is compelled to experience something itself, be it a reawakening of the awareness of archetypal powers or a reorientation of the ego or both [. . .]. (43)

In the Theatre of the Absurd, the spectator is confronted with the madness of the human condition, is enabled to see his situation in all its grimness and despair. Stripped of illusions and vaguely felt fears and anxieties, he can face this situation consciously, rather than feeling it vaguely below the surface of euphemisms and optimistic illusions. As the reality with which the Theatre of the Absurd is concerned as a psychological reality expressed in images that are the outward projection of states of mind fears, dreams, nightmares and conflicts within the personality of the author. It is well known that the Theater of the Absurd expressed the anxiety and despair that spring from the recognition that areas of impenetrable darkness, that can never know his true nature and purpose, and that no one, surround man will provide him with ready-made rules of conduct. As Camus says in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

The certainty of the existence of a God who would give meaning to life has a far greater attraction than the knowledge that without him one could do evil without being punished. The choice between these alternatives would not be difficult. But, there is no choice and that is where the bitterness begins. (94)

Through the presentation of such a dull and unimportant part of our everyday life, we receive no new message. The way the characters either do nothing on the stage or speak and do irrelevant things, the way they keep silent or keep speaking for a long time is absurd. Camus, in the *Myth of Sisyphus* illustrates this as the absurd

situation of existence and this is what Pinter does in his play through concrete stage images.

Ultimately, a phenomenon like the Theatre of the Absurd does not reflect despair or a return to dark irrational forces but expresses modern man's endeavor to come to terms with the world in which he lives. It attempts to make his face up to the human condition as it really is. The Theatre of the Absurd, however, which proceeds not by intellectual concepts but by poetic images, neither poses an intellectual problem in its exposition nor provides any clear-cut solution that would be reducible to a lesson.

In such a way, most of the playwrights who are concerned with the Theatre of Absurd present the man's situation totally trapped in a purposeless atmosphere. As a result, every individual prefers to roam in an imaginary world that ultimately creates the gap among the characters. Hence, absurd and alienation intricably achieved in the plays are performed in the Theatre of the Absurd. Though the characters are involved in communicative activities, there is communication through non-communication. Thus, this observation of Theater of Absurd so far has presented that the real communication is impossible. The aforementioned survey on Theater of Absurd contributes failure of communication, which this study will explore in *The Birthday Party*.

Chapter Three

Exploring Failure of Communication: A Textual Analysis of the Birthday Party

The communication among the characters in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is dreamlike, with quick forgetfulness and repeatedness. The characters suffer from non-communication that they do not seem to hear each other even if they are sitting nearby and they simultaneously forget what they have said just a moment back.

a. Identity Crisis

Identity crisis is one of the themes of absurdity that can be seen in Harold Pinter's plays like *The Room*, *The Dumbwaiter*, *The caretaker* and *The Birthday Party*. The characters are obsessive to know their own background having themselves been locked up inside a room. Around them is so dark that they cannot see even themselves, where they are standing and why and how they are there. In the play *The Birthday Party*, the central character, Stanley compels to face the crisis of his own identity. The party, which is going to be celebrated, is for Stanley's birthday but Stanley, who is the center of the party keeps on saying from the beginning that it is not his birthday and he has nothing to do with the party. Because of the communication gap, birthday party is going to be celebrated though Stanley is unaware of his own birthday. Stanley does not recognize his own identity so that forcefully Meg is going to celebrate his birthday, which is emerged because of the communication gap:

MEG: It's your birthday, Stan. I was going to keep it a secret until tonight.

STANLEY: No.

MEG: It is. I've brought you a present. (*She goes to the sideboard, picks up the parcel, and places it on the table in front of him*). Here go on. Open it.

STANLEY: What's this?

MEG: It's your present.

STANLEY: This isn't my birthday, Meg.

MEG: Of course, it is. Open your present. (36)

Likewise, Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* also have no background of their profession. The mystery is woven in such a way that not only the audience but also themselves do not know whom they are working for. Therefore, their mission remains mysterious throughout the play. An undertone of suspense and mystification is further built-up when they talk seriously about their purpose and background:

MCCANN: I don't know, Nat. I'm just all right once I know what I'm doing. When I know what I'm doing, I'm doing all right.

GOLDBERG: Well, you do it very well.

MCCANN: Thank you Nat.

GOLDBERG: You know what I said when this job came up. I mean naturally they approached me to take care of it. And you know whom I asked for?

MCCANN: Who?

GOLDBERG: You. (29)

In this way, the irrelevancy of details, the obscurity of the purpose of expression, helps nothing but further confuses the reader. It seems as if the characters involve in non- communicative activities. Though they talk with each other, they

themselves are unaware of their own profession, own background so that they fail to communicate.

b. Theme of Loneliness

Another the most powerfully characteristic themes of the Theatre of the Absurd is the theme of loneliness which we find in *The Birthday Party*. In the play, the stage direction, the manners and the language of the characters always cut them off from each other and leave them inherently and originally lonely and isolated. As Albert Camus shows the situation of human existence in a world of shattered beliefs, “he is an irremediable exile because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he locks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting truly constitute the felling of absurdity”. (10)

Because of the feeling of alienation, the characters are strangers not only to each other and their surroundings but also even to themselves. The characters presented in such a way, which make them unaware of their own existence. The ‘self’ by nature is alienated between ‘I’ and ‘other’. To understand one’s own self, an individual has to objectify his self. In regards to this Sartre says “a man recognizes that he cannot be anything ...unless others recognize him as such. One can not obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another.” 868 Here, ‘I’ as a projection of ‘other’ is always prone to failure because the projection of one may not be accurate and realistic to other.

Though McCann and Stanley are not familiar to each other, McCann tries to declare Stanley’s identity. Stanley does not want to spend an hour with McCann but forcefully; they are going to organize the party for his birthday. As a result, Stanley is alienated from his own self that creates communication gap between these characters.

STANLEY: Excuse me.

MCCANN: Where are you going?

STANLEY: I want to go out.

MCCANN: Why don't you stay here?

STANLEY: What is it?

MCCANN: Mind it. Leave it.

STANLEY: I've got a feeling we've met before.

MCCANN: No we haven't. (39)

Because of the feeling of alienation, Stanley wants to be remained alone.

Despite an earnest request from Meg to be happy with her, Stanley wants to remain alone. Stanley arrives as a guest in her house but there is communication through non-communication. Stanley wants to run away from the compassionate nature of Meg, which he dislikes. Thus, though Stanley and Meg involve in communicative activities, there is not communication at all which is because of alienation.

MEG: Is the sun shining?

What are you smoking?

STANLEY: A cigarette.

MEG: Are you going to give me one?

STANLEY: No.

MEG: I like cigarettes.

STANLEY (*pushing her*): Get away from me.

MEG: Are you going out?

STANLEY: Not with you.

MEG: But I'm going shopping in a minute.

STANLEY: Go.

Here, Stanley's disregards with Meg prove that there is communication gap among the characters. Here, feeling of alienation emerged in the psyche of Stanley release and liberates hidden fears and repressed aggression. Throughout the play, Stanley struggles hard and tries to win his anxiety of being dispossessed of the preparation for the celebration of his birthday party. When he talks, he keeps boasting of himself and tries to prove his real identity. Despite all his efforts, he is finally dispossessed and snatched off from that house and make him silent. In such a way, he is again back with his loneliness to confront the hostility of the outside. Because of the communication gap, Stanley finally compels to live absurd life. It is stated that:

STANLEY: Get out

Enter McCann, with bottles.

Get that dried out. These are unlicensed premises.

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: I told you to get those bottles out.

GOLDBERG: Mr. Webber, sit down a minute.

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. Haven't and nobody's going to take advantage of them while 'I', here. (45)

Hence, the communication that the characters have in the play is difficult and when it is so they remain silent. Finally, in the play after Stanley is broken down in the final act, he can either remain totally silent when McCann and Goldberg shower

him with questions or he can only emit out sounds from his throat like animal- grunts

“Uh—gug-----Uh—gug---“

GOLDBERG: Prospect. Sure. Sure it's prospect.

Stanley's hand clutching his glasses begins to tremble.

What's your opinion of such a prospect? Eh, Stanley?

Stanley concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sounds from his throat.

STANLEY: uh-gug---uh-gug---eehhh-gag—(on the breath). Caahh---
cahh—

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

STANLEY: Ug-gughh---uh- gughh---

MCCANN: What's your opinion, sir?

STANLEY: Caaahhh---caaahhh--- (85)

c.Fear from the Unknown

Likewise, fear from the unknown is a most important theme of absurdity among the characters. Because of uncertainty, vagueness of time and space, menace, fear, embarrassment, unexplained, anxieties and restlessness, which are causes and effects of the theme “fear”.

In *The Birthday Party*, this theme of fear, as woven everywhere with every moment of suspense, concentrates on Stanley. Stanley is, almost all the times, depressed, frightened, embarrassed and simultaneously indifferent. He seems, from the beginning, to be unsafe and self- contemplative; he is again and again threatened that causes him to be silent. The feeling of unknown, anxiety and tension is everywhere, especially when Meg speaks.

MEG: What time did you go out this morning, Petey?

PETEY: Same time as usual.

MEG: Is it dark?

PETEY: No, it was light.

MEG: (*beginning to darn*) But sometimes you go out in the morning
and it's dark.

PETEY: That's in the winter.

MEG: oh, in winter. (11)

In such a way, the cause of the fear, which always victimizes the characters, is the unknown. The moment they come to know or they feel they have to face some outsiders; they get alarmed and overpowered by fear. They know that anything can enter their room anytime, and thus dispossess them of what they have.

STANLEY: What two gentlemen?

MEG: I'm an expecting visitor.

(*He turns*)

STANLEY: What?

MEG: You didn't know that, did you?

STANLEY: What are you talking about?

MEG: Two gentlemen asked Petey if they could come and stay for a
couple of nights. I'm expecting them (*She picks up the duster and
begins to wipe the clothes on the table*)---

STANLEY: Who are they?

MEG: I donot know. (20)

Hence, the characters suffer from unknown fear. Meg expects the arrival of two gentlemen but she herself is unaware of the real identity of these two gentlemen

on the one hand and on the other hand Stanley's obsessed fear of the unknown caused the anxiety, the impatience, the feeling of insecurity within him. Nobody knows who the visitors are and how they are going to behave until they arrive. Out of obsessed fear, he starts threatening, and pouring his manly anger on him.

There is communication gap between Stanley and Meg that we do not know what Stanley is talking about with Meg and Meg also does not know when she says "What?" and "what latest?" but she simultaneously seems to know what he is referring to when she absent mindedly or consciously answers "No", "I haven't." and unexpectedly Stanley starts talking about some people to threaten Meg by again creating suspense.

STANLEY: (*Advancing*) They're coming today.

STANLEY: They're coming in a van.

MEG: Who?

STANLEY: And do you know what they've got in that man?

MEG: What?

STANLEY: They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.

MEG: (*breathlessly*) they haven't...

STANLEY: Shall I tell you who they're looking for?

MEG: No.

STANLEY: You don't want me to tell you?

MEG: You're a liar. (24)

Here, when Meg is told of some unknown people coming with a big wheelbarrow to knock at the front door, we see nervousness and uneasiness mixed with obvious fear in Meg. The tension of fear is also with the way McCann and Goldberg enquire Meg about Stanley and the way Stanley also enquires about

Goldberg and McCann. They pose menace to each other by trying to break each other's spirit, confidence and mind. And later McCann and Goldberg shower Stanley with a volley of questions and really drive him to a nervous breakdown. They merely involve in nonsense dialogue.

GOLDBERG: Speak up, Webber. Why did the chicken cross the road?

STANLEY: He wanted to –he wanted to –

MCCANN: He does not know.

GOLDBERG: Why did the chicken cross the road?

STANLEY: He wanted to –he wanted to.

GOLDBERG: why did the chicken cross the road?

STANLEY: He wanted---

MCCANN: He does not know. He does not know which come first.

GOLDBERG: Which came first?

MCCANN: Chicken? Egg? Which came first?

GOLDBERG: Which came first?

MCCANN: (Stanley *screams*) (51-52).

After these volleys of questions showered at Stanley, he breaks down into hypnotic stages from the lethargic to quasi-cataleptic state. After this incident, we do not find Stanley speaking a single meaningful word. Though they involve in communicating activities, they completely misunderstand to each other and finally we do not find Stanley's one meaningful word.

GOLDBERG: He does not know. Do you know your own face?

MCCANN: Wake him up. Stick a needle in his eyes.

MCCANN: Who are you, Webber?

GOLDBERG: What makes you think you exist?

MCCANN: You are dead.

GOLDBERG: You're dead. You cannot live, you cannot think, you cannot love. You're dead. You're a plague gone badly. There is no juice in you. You're nothing but an adour! (52).

In this way, the theme of mystery is very powerful and inseparable from any line of this play. When Goldberg and McCann talk about an organization, we do not know what it is. When they ask question to Stanley, they ask him absurd questions thus, such unknown of situation everywhere creates atmosphere of menace and fear.

Thus, it is clearly portrayed in the text that life is enigmatic and man is a prisoner sentenced to doom and death as soon as he is thrown into this absurd world. He is so bound up by his daily routines and obligation to live with what he is given that he hardly ever finds any time to realize his own absurdity.

d. Absurd Dialogue

It is stated that one of the most generalized functions performed by terms of address is that of establishing and modifying interpersonal relations. When two people meet for the first time, the terms of address they adopt for each other serve to define their mutual relationship and the situation. Thus, knowing how to relate surface forms with particular communicative goals is another central aspect of communicative competence. It comprises the ability to bring into association surface forms, interpersonal speech, functions, and contexts. But in Pinter's plays, the characters suffer from non-communication that instead of relating surface forms with particular communicative goals, they keep repeating the same question even after receiving the answer each time. In the opening scene of *The Birthday Party*, Meg keeps asking Petey if it was he even after hearing him distinctly:

MEG: Is that you, Petey?

(Pause)

Petey, is that you?

(Pause)

Petey?

PETEY: What?

MEG: Is that you?

MEG: What? *(Her face appears at the hatch)*

Are you back?

PETEY: Yes.

MEG: I have got your cornflakes ready.

(She disappears and reappears. Here's your cornflake. (1))

Viewing the dialogue between Meg and Petey, we come to know that they have no alternatives else than remaining in silence or repeating the same question even after receiving the answer each time, which they experience time and again by coming across failure of communication.

In another context, the same type of repetitiveness occurs due to Meg's forgetfulness:

PETEY: *(turning to her Meg)* oh, Meg, two men come up to me on the beach last night.

MEG: Two men?

PETEY: Yes. They wanted to know if we could put them up for a couple of nights.

MEG: Put them up? Here?

PETEY: Yes.

MEG: How many men?

PETEY: Two. (12)

Here, Meg forgets that it is “two men” and repeats the question “how many men” two times. In this way, the communication is dreamlike, with quick forgetfulness and repeatedness. When the expressions are evasive, too short and repetitive, they abruptly go out of context and give a lengthy speech and the characters ultimately suffer from non-communication.

When the characters suffer from non-communication that they don't see any meaning in the world and they compel to live in the world which is clearly linked to the degradation of language, and both in turn, to the loss of faith, the disappearance of sacred rites and sacred myths. In this context, Adamov opines:

Perhaps the sad and empty language that today flabby humanity pours forth, will, in all its horror, in all its boundless absurdity, re-echo in the heart of solitary man who is awake, and then perhaps that man, suddenly realizing that he does not understand, will begin to understand. (96)

Thus, Pinter presents the absurdity of life through a technique, which is banal, repetitive, and full of irrelevances, and uncertainties that hinder the communication activities among the characters. Stanley as a representative of Pinter's characters remains totally silent and on the other hand Meg over speaks in the same play. It proves that the situation is self-contained and there is no unity of the actions for the play to be a single identity. The language spoken by the characters on the other hand is tautological, repetitive, stereotyped and full of pauses and silence, which add to the communication with in non-communication.

The Birthday party is full of short and irrelevant dialogues; abrupt questions and abrupt answers with which the characters keep themselves busy most of the times.

STANLEY: Visitors? Do you know how many visitors you have had since I've been here?

MEG: How many?

STANLEY: One.

MEG: Who

STANLEY: Me! I'm your visitor.

MEG: You are a liar. This house is on the list.

STANLEY: I bet it is.

MEG: I know it is.

STANLEY: What?

MEG: The fried bread.

STANLEY: Succulent.

MEG: You should not say that word.

STANLEY: What word?

MEG: That word you said (17).

In the conversation, the characters are never found talking on matters serious, meaningful and logically sound so that one could not get some message of what they mean, what their true identity is, what they are upto and what is going to happen in the play. Though the characters engage in communicative activities, message is not conveyed. Thus, the communication that the characters have in the plays is difficult and when it is so, they remain silent.

Since Pinter's plays are governed by techniques that seek to embody multiple patterns of reality and illusion in terms of verbal and non-verbal components. He lets

his characters play certain games- like 'blind man's buff' in the play. In the game, the figure of the blind man suggests the dark mysterious forces as well as the inability to perceive reality. Conversations are carried on for the sake of conversation alone that ultimately hinders the communication among the characters.

GOLDBERG: Right! Now who's going to be blind first?

LULU: Mrs. Boles.

MEG: Not me.

GOLDBERG: Of course you.

MEG: Who, me?

LULU: (*taking her scarf from her neck*). Here you are.

MCCANN: How do you play this game?

LULU: (*tying here scarf round Meg's eyes*). Haven't you ever played blind man's buff? Keep still, Mrs. Boles. You mustn't be touched. But you can't move after she's blind. You must stay where you are after she is blind. And if she touches you then become blind. And if she touches you are after she's blind. Turn round. How many fingers am I holding up?

MEG: I cannot see (56).

The final scene is most strange, dark which symbolizes the absurd situation of human beings. Stanley remains unmoved, like a stone idol and remains where he is paced while McCann and Goldberg again keep commanding Stanley with different suggestive epithets, which Stanley poorly listens to, silent, patient and reactionless. We do not even know whether he is attentive to them or is mentally absent from there, a most ridiculous situation.

MCCANN: You're in a rut.

GOLDBERG: You look anaemic.

MCCANN: Rheumatic.

GOLDBERG: Myopic.

MCCANN: Epileptic. (82)

When Stanley tries to speak, he can make only sounds: “Uh-gug---Uh-gug—ccchhh-gag---gg” (84).

Goldberg and McCann treat Stanley in such a way that he is nothing rather than an object. Comparatively the condition, which Stanley is compelled to undergo, is nothing less than that of the bug.

We only see how Pinter is concerned with manipulating not only a language of enlightenment but also a language of obfuscation: not a language of social progress but a language of existential survival: not a language of communal faith but a language of divisive strategy.

Of course, the lies Pinter introduces are not any lies. Often the clearest falsehood introduce, or are accompanied by, the most potent words, words which are found to reveal several levels of meaning or suggest a large wake of association.

MEG: Where's Stan?

Pause

Is Stan down yet, Petey?

PETEY: No --- he's ---

MEG: Is he still in bed?

PETEY: Yes, he's ---still asleep.

MEG: Still? He'll be late for his breakfast.

PETEY: Let him---sleep. (87)

The conversation clarifies that; Meg is unaware about the condition where Stanley is already taken out by McCann and Goldberg. Because of the communication gap, Meg thinks as if Stanley is still sleeping. John Russell Brown opines, “ After his ‘Birthday’, Stanley has regressed as if into the womb, in a foetal position, buy quiet and still as if dead.”(96)

In this way, through the technique of silence, Pinter presents how the communication is often misleading. In our real life also what we say may not exactly be what we actually think or want to say. And due to the fear of being disclosed of the mask that we put on as a defense for our existential survival lest the weaknesses would not be seen, false and misleading expressions are made as we find in *The Birthday Party*. “In Pinter, words are not bridges; they are barbs to protect the enclosure of self”(12).

Through the dialogues and expressions of the Pinter’s characters in *The Birthday Party*, we see how we cannot accurately express our feelings and thoughts and how we don’t accurately understand what others say in our actual life. As John Russell Brown views “Pinter’s originality is to be found in his style, and the aim of his style is to reveal the varying consciousness of his characters---it is necessary to look through the web of conversation and gesture”(142). The characters in *The Birthday Party* suffer from this problem everywhere. As a result, either they remain silent or resort to make idiotic speeches full of incoherent and meandering babblings. The sentences are hardly complete and meaningful.

On the other hand, the dialogues are most frequently marked with pauses like we top, take breath, think and speak in our everyday life. The technique of pause is applied everywhere in *The Birthday Party*.

PETEY: Let him ---sleep.

Pause

MEG: Wasn't it a lovely party last night?

PETEY: I wasn't there.

MEG: Weren't you?

PETEY: I came in afterwards.

MEG: Oh

Pause.

It was a lovely party. I haven't laughed so much for years. We had dancing and singing. And game. You should have been there.

PETEY: It was good, eh?

Pause. (87)

In such a way, the way the characters are doing nothing important on the stage, engaged in non- sense language and activities, which strikes us with an awareness of the meaninglessness of existence, which supports the theme of absurdity. Though the characters engage in communicative activities, there is no hint of message. There is a communication gap among the characters, which has at every nook and corner, situations of suspense and tone of whyness and whatness that lead towards failure of communication.

Through methodological point of view, this play supports the idea of The Theatre of Absurd. The Theatre of Absurd is one of the expression of searching for a way in which they can, with a dignity, confront a universe deprived of what was once its center and its living purpose, a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless- absurd. It bravely faces up to the fact that for those to whom the world has lost its central explanation and meaning. In

the play, Stanley's social identity has become disjointed and purposeless in the sense that Goldberg and McCann determine his identity, which is devoid of purpose. As it is mentioned in the play-

MCCANN: Who are you, Webber?

GOLDBERG: What makes you think you exist?

MCCANN: You are dead.

GOLDBERG: You are dead. You can't live. You can't think. You cannot love. You are dead. You are a plague one bad. There's no juice in you. You are nothing but an odour!

Though, Stanley is still alive, Goldberg and McCann determine of his death in the sense that Stanley becomes silent in front of them without uttering any voice.

As the theatre of absurd is not concerned with conveying information or presenting the problems or destinies of the characters, instead with the presentation of one individual basic situation. Since it is trying to present a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor solve the problems of conduct or morals. Nor is it concerned with telling a story in order to communicate some moral or social lesson. Rather the action in a play of the Theatre of the Absurd is not intended to tell a story but to communicate a pattern of poetic images. Here, in the play, Stanley has been presented as an unidentified person since the visitors who are recently arrived recognized him differently. As it is mentioned in the text:

STANLEY: You'd better be careful.

GOLDBERG: Webber, what were you doing yesterday?

STANLEY: Yesterday?

GOLDBERG: And the day before. What did you do the day before that?

STANLEY: Me? What are you—?

GOLDBERG: I'm telling you, Webber. You're a washout. Why are you getting on every body's wick? Why are you driving that old lady off her conk? (47)

Though Stanley does not know anything about the solution, he compels to listen the questions emerged doubting about his identity. Thus, as a play of Theatre of the Absurd, it is not concerned with the representation of events rather concerned with the presentation of Stanley's basic situation.

The Theater of the Absurd, however, neither poses an intellectual problem in its exposition nor provides any clear-cut solution that would be reducible. Many of the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd have a circular structured ending exactly as they began. The Birthday Party being a play of The Theater of Absurd does show the circular structure in the sense that it begins with the unidentified identity of Stanley. In the beginning, Meg and Petey engaged in talking about the identity of Stanley. Though they are not aware of his real birthday, they are going to celebrate the birthday party. So is the case in the final of drama that forcefully he is taken by Goldberg and McCann, he is still unaware about his own real identity. He is made to be silent in his life in the absence of clear-cut solution. As it is mentioned in the text:

MCCANN: What's your opinion, sir?

STANLEY: Cahhh---Cahhh---

MCCANN: Webber! What's your opinion?

GOLDBERG: What do you say, Stan? What do you think of the prospect?

MCCANN: What's your opinion of the prospect?

Stanley's body shudders, relaxes, his head droops, he becomes still again, stopped. Petey enters from the door, downstage, left.

GOLDBERG: Still the same old Stan. Come with us. Come on boy.

Here, in the conversation Stanley remains silent when someone else like in the beginning again determines his identity. So, rather than protesting, he prefers to be silent. Due to which reason, communication among the characters is failed.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

In writing the play *The Birthday Party*, it seems, Pinter did not have any obvious objective other than to create an atmosphere of fear, unnecessary irritation, feeling of loneliness, anxiety and helplessness that we find in our actual life. Due to the realization of such feeling like fear from unknown, alienation, feeling of anxiety every characters in the evade to hear others or don't understand the exact feeling the other means.

Stanley, the main character of the play is haunted with the fear of losing his social identity. He is almost all the times depressed, frightened, embarrassed and simultaneously indifferent. The anxiety, the impatience, the feeling of insecurity and tension all are proofs of Stanley's obsessed fear of the unknown. Nobody knows who the visitors are and how they are going to behave until they arrive. In such a way, every act of the characters leads to the theme of absurdity that ultimately creates communication gap among the characters. Being obsessed with unknown fear, the characters prefer to be silent which creates communication gap within themselves. In such a way, the avoidance of communication on the one hand and the desire for relationship or adjustment, on the other, paradoxically intersect and create a state of illusion in the midst of this menacing world.

Thus, there is no communication among the characters. Stanley speaks out his own terror and loneliness, his fear of the newly arrived people, his dread of dispossession, whereas Meg speaks about her boarding house. But there is irrationality and an uncertainty that pervades identity and motive. There is not definite information about Stanley's past about how and why he has taken shelter in Meg's

house, about the organization Goldberg and McCann represent, why they persecute Stanley, and whether Stanley has at all betrayed any organization. In such a way, it seems as if there is no such clear-cut idea about their real identity, which is in fact because of the communication gap. It is like a ritual talk that is carried out to maintain only a semblance of relationship and to cover up the mess that existence is. In this way, the characters attempt to hide tension and avoid communication.

Since the Theatre of the Absurd expresses the anxiety and despair that spring from the recognition, areas of impenetrable darkness surround man, that he can never know his true nature and purpose. Stanley, the central character of the play does not know his own true identity. Though he is arrived as a guest in Meg's family, Meg herself is unaware of the real identity of Stanley. Stanley avoids what the communication may reveal and is afraid that this revelation may undermine his clinging possessiveness with regard to Meg's family. So, he confronts the order of McCann and Goldberg, the intruders but there are they, and whether Stanley has at all betrayed any organization persecute no definite information about Stanley. In such a way, there is confusion and uncertainty of identity and motivation that ultimately avoids communication among the characters.

In the 'Theatre of Absurd', all values are degraded in a state of misery, all men die in solitude. So the characters in *The Birthday Party* are contemptuous of their present condition who are utterly incapable of facing or speaking the truth. The characters are presented in such a way that their existence is explicated from their own selves. Stanley projects himself as a protector of his subjective self to objectivity. Though McCann and Stanley do not recognize with each other, McCann forcefully is going to organize birthday party for Stanley. Because of that reason, Stanley feels himself as stranger to his own identity. He feels he is alienated from his self, so, he

prefers to be silent rather than participates in communicative activities. Despite all his actions, he is alienated again when he is snatched off from the house and compels to live absurd life. Moreover since the 'other' holds the mystery of an individual he always becomes hostile to the 'other'. Such type of contradiction contributes an individual to suffer from failure of communication, for the communicating partners try to impose their power rather than sharing the common environment.

The characters in *The Birthday Party* are confused and unaware of their own positions and what is around them. So, everything poses a menace or a threat to them and consequently they are victimized by uncertainties, insecurity, anxieties and restlessness. Stanley from the beginning of the play seems to be frightened and unsafe that forces him to be silent. The cause of the fear, which always victimizes the characters, is the unknown. McCann and Goldberg presented as intruders, plan to visit the boarding house where Stanley lives. Stanley, when he hears the message of their arrival, his mind is hunted with the dread of intruders. Nobody knows whom the visitors are and how they are going to behave until they arrive. Stanley keeps changing his name, sometimes Webber and sometimes Joe soap. They pose menace to each other by trying to break each other's spirit, confidence and mind. And later they make Stanley nervous and silent. After this, we do not find Stanley speaking a single meaningful word that creates communication gap. In such a way consciousness of dread always haunts him; paralyzed to himself, he can't communicate.

While as characters on the stage, Goldberg and McCann appear mysterious and enigmatic, McCann himself feels threatened and unnerved by the mysteriousness of the organization he serves. On the other hand, Stanley's total being, his social security and psychological well-being is under attack. Goldberg and McCann are not attributed to any specific identity, they could be representing something beyond and

outside society who are perceived basically in terms of the very ambiguity of their beings. Such type of ambiguous relationship compels an individual to suffer from failure of communication.

Likewise, the technique of silence adopted by Pinter in his plays invites communication gap among the characters. In *The Birthday Party*, there are a number of situations where such movements of silence are created. In Act II of the play, there is a total blackout after the birthday party programme and in the utter darkness; we can again hear the same tone of silence when everybody is blinded by confusion. In this way, in the play, through the technique of silence, Pinter presents how the communication through “word” is incompetent, difficult and misleading. In the play, Stanley as well as McCann and Goldberg also use this device against each other; they resort to playing different language games on the stage. In such a way, the characters suffer from communication problem.

Likewise, the dialogue in the play is not in sequential orders since the characters are absentminded and suffers from communication problem. The play is full of short and irrelevant dialogues that the conversation is funny and what they say is almost contradictory everywhere. In such a way, the communication that the characters have in the play is difficult and when it is so, they remain silent. Similarly, the play is full of tautologies and the sentences lack structural completeness. The characters are always trying to escape away from communication by stammering out meaningless expressions. The language used by the characters is full of pause, stammering that supports the theme of absurdity. The way the characters presented in the play hints the mystery of existence that challenges man every moment; the characters engaged in non-sense language and activities strikes us with an awareness of the meaninglessness of existence.

Pinter's main concern is to present the meaninglessness of life, the awkward throwing of man in this awkward and mysterious universe which creates the problem in the relationship. The problem of relationship manifests itself through the problem of communication and adjustment. In the play, there is a continual cross talk and continual talking about other things, rather than what is at the root of their relationship. The characters talk but hardly communicate, and they talk merely to cover-up their own limitations to deceive others and to perpetuate their own protective illusions to avoid communication.

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