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Vol. – XI, No. - XIV (Revised Edition)



Eds.

Amitava Roy, Ronan Paterson,
Bryan Reynolds, Subir Dhar, Tapu Biswas

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From the Editorial Desk

Its after a rather long fallow period that we are once again re-connecting with you, our readers. First there was a longish period of re-organization of various parameters of TGI in order to be included in the UGC CARE LIST, currently the highest academic certification for scholarly journals like ours. Not only is IJCSSS now in this list, it also covers certification for back issues too. The UGC has insisted that we bring out all issues of the journal as *printed material*, which can then be put online.

The other cause of delay is the world-wide Pandemic. The virus has left the whole world reeling and rudderless. India is about the second most infected and affected country together with the USA and the United Kingdom. Our Editorial Family comes from mainly these three countries (occasionally from Canada, Japan or Bangladesh): Bryan and Sheila Cavanagh (USA), Ronan and Antony (UK), Subir, Tapu and myself (AR) from India. Of these Antony Johae and myself, both being over seventy are at “high risk” from Covid. Bryan, Sheila, Subir and Tapu being much younger can hope to outlast the virus. Though no one in the world can claim complete immunity from Covid attacks.

Hence, during the last 8/9 months I did not bother any of the above editors as I knew they will be fighting their battles in Trump’s America, Johnson’s Britain and explosive-devastated Beirut while Subir, Tapu and I are stuck at home during forced Quarantine days currently called “Lockdown days”.

I have been in sporadic touch with all of you. The consensus is that Life, Love, Death and Taxes, Education and Academic work and the work of the mind must go on even in the Plague Year(s). Shakespeare and Tagore emerged unscathed from Plague and Pandemic Flu, raging Malaria and terrible TB. So there’s hope for us. On non-Lockdown days three hardy and heroic lads – Tapu, Sekhar, Tilok – and one not-so-hardy or heroic Senior Citizen ie. yours truly are getting together in the office to once again re-start Journal publication. Intrepid Protima Das, not a lad but a lady, joins us for these Journal – istic capers whenever she can. So my Colleagues be prepared in the midst of your physical and intellectual

struggles to receive a few E-Mails from us for Editorial help. As you all know, its best to go down fighting in the time of cholera and global collapse. Together with Kamala Harris we have to form a rainbow coalition with blacks, whites, green and brown (its best to leave out yellow at this time), to overcome.

We, from the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India, had invited Prof. Stan Dragland from Canada to Kolkata back in 1996 and then again in 2006 to deliver a Shakespeare Foundation Lecture on any area related to Shakespeare. Dr. Dragland chose to talk on the works of the much-awarded Sinhalese-Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje who was both a friend and one-time colleague of Dragland. Ondaatje is renowned in India and indeed the world over as the prize-winning author of *The English Patient*.

As we usually do with our foreign friends and guests from abroad we took Stan to various Universities and cultural centres (to name only two, Dibrugarh, Assam and Purulia, West Bengal) where he gave courses on Canadian Literature. We conducted various Workshops on Translation, Shakespeare's Theatre and performative practices, and literary genres. He was so taken up with India and the multiplicity of its cultural zones – Folk, classical, modern and postmodern and post colonial – the various dialogues between Marxists, Feminists, Existentialists and others that he vowed to return again and again to Indian and sub-continental shores.

In this issue we present a revised and expanded version of his Shakespeare Foundation Lecture on Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, including Dr. Dragland's meditations on Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the possibilities inherent in the person and character of Edgar, the son of Gloucester.

Dr. Papia Mitra, Member Exec. Committee of the Shakespeare Society, is a regular contributor to the Journal on matters classical. An accomplished Sanskrit scholar, she frequently lectures on Comparative Religion in India and other countries. Equally adept in Greek and Sanskrit mythology, the Epics and Dramatic Literature, She brings to bear her extensive knowledge of the Vedas, the Laws of Manu and associated texts on Kshatriya Dharma and the vexed question of non-violence in the Indian tradition.

The Kshatriyas or the Warrior classes were usually kings and monarchs in the classical Indian polity. Arjuna, Bheema, Duryadhona et al are much like Achililes, Hector, Agamemnon et al for whom the highest honour is to die fighting on the battlefield. Achilles was given the choice between a long, contented, peaceful quiet life and a short, action-filled life with a violent death with honour in battle. He chose the latter as the epic heroes

of the *Mahabharata* too would have gleefully done. This warrior code is also found in the Viking Sagas and in the advice of the Anglo-Saxon mothers to their sons going into battle: “Either return in triumph with your shield held high or on it – dead but with honour in battle”.

Dr. Mitra’s paper is a cogently argued counterblast against the much-touted concept of non-violence as the only Indian tradition. She shows that violence, as in the rest of the world, has been a major tradition with Indian kings and rulers from classical times up to the present.

Janardan Ghosh, research scholar at Vivekananda University, explores with much erudition the Rasa Theory. He does so in the context of its many classical commentators and in Bharata’s *Natyashastra* (NS), the key text on the Performative Arts – song, dance, music, mime, acting – in the ancient Indian Tradition. His paper focuses on Anandavardhan’s Rasa Dhani theory and clearly explains its postmodern ramifications. Ghosh’s treatment of the Rasa Theory in relation to the Performative Arts makes two major contributors : (1) The differences between Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Bharata’s *Natya Shastra* (2) How Indian Rasa Theory and Performative Arts traditions offer illuminating perspectives on Brecht’s concept of alienation or the *Verfremdung effect*.

“All creation is the sport of my mad Mother Kali” and the world as a “lila” (play) of Krisna and the Gods are central to both the Sakta and Vaishnava faiths. Ghosh is particularly good on these ideas. He concludes with a very brief but suggestive take on the use of histreonomies in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He was the 19th Century Bengali saint and the Guru of the 12 disciples led by Swami Vivekananda (Ghose’s alma mater University) who founded the Order of the Ramakrishna Mission on May 1, 1897.

Ghose would do well to write another paper, monograph or even a book on Shri Ramakrishna, theatre and his performative ecstasies. He has the investigative capacity of the true researcher and the ability to theorise, historicise and problematise the findings.

Paloma Chatterjee has extensively examined the diverse and divergent theoretical studies on gender, environment, ecofeminism, colonization and postcolonial aftermath, Comparative Religion, Christianity, animism, folklore and indigenous tribal cultures. She also has experience of field work in Assam and the North East, being associated with an NGO. She brings together all this theoretical knowledge and on-the-ground practical experience to focus on the changing lifestyles and identity crises of the

Angami Nagas subjected to repeated colonial exploitation and religious assaults on their traditional ways of tribal existence.

Chatterjee uses three major writings by Easterine Kire – *A Naga Village Remembered*, *Terrible Matriarchy* and *Bitter Wormwood* for her work on the Angami Nagas. These texts meditate upon and record in fruitful detail the relationship of the Angamis with Nature, their gender system and their collision, confrontation and compromises with the Christian religion which entered their lives and society as part of colonial rule.

Writers like Kire, environmentalists like Vandana Shiva, postmodernist experts on cultural confrontation and their socio-political fallout like Stewart Hall and Edward Said have all written about Nature-Himan interaction, cultural domination, colonial expansion and how it goes hand in hand with religious takeover of a “backward” tribal civilization. For a most pithy and on-target view of how Colonialism, Capitalism and Religion work together we should go to Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright renowned for his entertaining revolutionary plays. Brecht has wittily but profoundly revealed this connection in many plays, specially in *Kalkutta 4th Mai* on the British takeover of India. The colonialists first arrive as traders and open a shop for marketing their goods. At the back of this shop stands a priest with Bibles. “In the beginning we had the land, and they had the Bibles. Very soon they got the land and we were left holding the Bibles” is the familiar cry coming out of all colonised societies.

Some may feel that Paloma’s paper is beset with theoretical overkill. Be that as it may her paper clearly and movingly records the pain and agony of the Angami Nagas forced to accept change in their gender laws, views on economics, religion, agricultural practices and ethical world views under the White man’s attack. She gives this back story well enough. But the Nagas and their various tribal-political factions are still trying, not with much success, to negotiate most of these problems even today.

Arpita Dasgupta’s paper on ‘Rupkathas’ (fairy tales, folk-tales, lullabys, tales of fantasy and wonder) blends universal perceptions with close-analyses in a clear, jargon-free manner. This Editor (AR) grew up on his grandmother’s lap hypnotised by the tales collected in 1907 by D. R. Mitra Majumder on his peregrinations in Bengal’s villages and marvelously re-told by my granny. This oral tradition has thankfully continued unchanged in Bengal and elsewhere in India where grandmothers and mothers still exist and have the time and the inclination to entertain and educate the children of the family. Every night I went to sleep with my granny’s and

mother's re-tellings filling my heart and soul with amazement, awe and wonder. I had the best of the East and the West too as my grandfather was commanded by my granny to tell me the stories of Greek myths and wonder-tales from all over the world. I was exceptionally fortunate to have a family of story-tellers who were able to spin a yarn at the drop of a hat, and not just at bedtime.

Arpita Dasgupta rightly points out the essential Bengaliness of the stories she analyses. But these stories have complex ancestry and come from multiple sources. From around the 14th Century onward a huge stream of narratives flowed across the continents and inundated India (itself the source of many such streams) and the rest of the world. The *Jataka Tales*, the *Panchatantra*, the *Decameron*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the translations into French and English of the *1001 Nights* popularly known as the *Arabian Nights* told by Scherazade "to keep a drowsy emperor awake" all fed into this ocean of stories across the globe – what Rushdie calls a veritable 'sea of stories'.

Dasgupta brings under comparative focus 1907 and 2007. She shows how the landscape or seascape of the narratives have changed from Mitra Majumder's times (1907) to the re-tellings by Nabanita Dev Sen, the renowned womanist, activist, poet and writer.

The popularity and need for fairy and folk tales is even recognized by Kolkata's famed Great Eastern Hotel which till recently had a Dining Room Named 'Scherazade'. Everything changes. So do fairy tales. But Dasgupta fervently hopes in her conclusion that we should all try to cling to the good things of the past. As long as grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers and fathers and families exist fairytales will be there. In the West the Family is vanishing fast even though Peppah pigs are desperately fighting a rearguard action. In Modi's India, Trump's USA, Johnson's Britain, Putin's Russia the Machines, the Super Computers, AI, and the robots rule the roost. Can childhood, children and the Fairy Tales survive all this?

Dr. Tapu Biswas is India's foremost authority on matters Beckettian. I will end with a brief reference to a highly successful Indianized stage version of *Waiting for Godot*. He has written in detail about this production by *Mimesis* theatre group in his book on *Waiting for Godot, Indian Interpretations* published in 2004. Pradip Banerjee was the translator-adaptor and the play entitled *Iswar Babu Aschen* was published by P. Lal, of Writers' Workshop and is now out of print. Amitava Roy, who played the part of Pozzo (here called Haripada) and alternatively Vladimir (here

called Godai) recalls “After our first production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1969 it was performed with quite some regularity between 1969 and 1975 – with as much regularity that a non-profit Bengali theatre group could muster. Mimesis and Theatre Arts Workshop from the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India got together to stage this play for over 6 years. No other group staged this play as many times as we did. An application for performance rights was sent to Samuel Beckett. Beckett was very magnanimous and himself replied saying that he had requested his agent to give us the performance rights. He asked us to go ahead as he was very happy to know that a Bengali theatre group from 10000 miles away was performing *Waiting for Godot*. He assured us that there won’t be any problem and part of this note by Beckett has been included in the Writers’ Workshop publication. Beckett got the Nobel Prize in 1969 and our play was regularly performed for over 6 years till 1975 making Beckett a household name in Bengal.

I would usually play Pozzo as my physical build, shape and my personality appears to be very dominating. Our production required a very high degree of physicalization. On the surface the play is very verbal, but the non-verbal action under the surface required a lot of body and bounce, where the body itself becomes a metaphor in action.

The play was a trascreation adapted into the Bengali ethos. Not only were the names changed – Bhuto, Godai, Nibaron, Haripada – the text was presented by the use of Tagore songs that embodied the meaning of the scenes and actions and situation the characters found themselves in. The media hailed it as a landmark Asian production of Beckett.

Rupsa Mukherjee Banerjee in *Feminine Being and Existence: a Study of Adrienne Rich’s Poems* brings together a vast range of theory and theorists from de Beauvoir to Irigaray, Freud to Foucault. Some readers might find this to be a bit too much, but nevertheless her take on Rich’s poems are clear and cogent. At times Rich stitches into her imagistic poems images from Leni Riefenstahl’s stunning film *Triumph of the Will* celebrating Hitler, the blond athletes of the Master Race and the Berlin Olympics. Adrienne Rich is either naïve or willfully ignorant or really knows what she is doing in these poems. Among other things, the poems are about female homosexuality. Hitler of course has been portrayed by his enemies as a “hijra” or eunuch of uncertain sexual ability and orientation. As the lampoon sung by the British soldiers during WWII indelicately suggests:

“Hitler had one big b – /And Goebbells none at all.” We know of

Hitler's predilection for blonds, dogs and boys all of which he used for his sexual and "scientific" purposes. Riefenstahl's oblique presence in Rich's verses points towards the Fascistic domination of the Blond Beasts over women and members of the dispensable Jewish race. This gives some credence to the accusations of Fascism against Rich, Irigaray et al who on the surface seem to be fighting for women's sexual freedom and independence from all suppressive structures.

Anita Desai, one of the most significant woman novelist has added a new dimension to Indian-English fiction by focussing on the inner world of her character. Her exploration with the individual and his/her psychic complexities sets her apart from her contemporaries. *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) her first novel, deals with Maya who is trapped in a difficult marriage to Gautam who is much older. Dr. N. Banita Devi, well-known scholar and faculty member of Dept. of English and Cultural Studies in Manipur University has closely explored a new discourse on the female desire, anger and hysteria in Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*.

History does not exist. Only texts do. Time does not exist, only diachronic and synchronic confusion. Subjectivity is always dismembered. Premanjana Banerjee meditates on such issues with some help from De Laureties, Jameson, Hutcheon, Baudrillard et al to give us interesting perspectives on three kinds of historiographic metafiction, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* and D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* are offered as studies highlighting the dilemmas of authors and readers in postmodernist times. We are left wondering what is "real", what is "unreal", are there "realities" and "unrealities"? Who is a Historiographer, who is a Novelist? What forms our subjectivity, if it exists at all?

Pratima Das, renowned translator/transcreator into Hindi of Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, Indian English poets et al here focuses on Tagore's controversial novel *Gora*. She observes: "This is the right time to examine Gurudev's critique of Nationalism, women's liberation, Caste and class bigotry when all these issues are buffeting our polity. We always turn to Rabindranath in times of crisis to listen and learn from his voice of sanity."

Das takes up the English translation of *Gora* by W. W. Pearson published in 1924 and done mostly under Tagore's participatory supervision. She gives her translation a dialogic, dramatized look to sharpen the opposition between the bigoted orthodoxy of *Gora* and the enlightened humane and humanistic emotions and feelings of Anandamoyee, the mother. Das observes in conclusion that *Gora* (1910) "is that great work that reveals

Tagore moving away from Hindu Revivalism and Brahmanical orthodoxy towards a Religion of Man. My translation of selected passages underlines these motifs as best as I can.”

“Humorous Dialogues on TV Shows: An Effective Tool in English Language Learning” by Kshetrimayum Vijayalakshmi Devi and Rajkumari Ashalata Devi is an excellent paper on learning English as a Second Language using TV shows, films and other resources not generally used in conventional classroom teaching. The scholars focus on all the academic experts and then use selection from the British Sitcom “Mind Your Language”, American Sitcom F.R.I.E.N.D.S. and an interview of the Korean Boy group BTS in the *Ellen Degeneres Show* to reveal how situational comedy can improve both speaking and reading skills of non-native English students. Vijayalakshmi Devi and Ashalata Devi should be congratulated for this exemplary paper. If they teach like this their students should all become adept in speaking, reading and writing English.

Amitava Roy’s “My Grandfather BVR: urban historian *per excellence*” gives us his memories of his famous grandfather. BVR was best known for his Jt. Editorship with Amal Home of the CMC Gazette on urban and civic matters, for his special brand of Journalism and for his book, *Old Calcutta Cameos*. This long out-of-print book is being re-printed by Nepal Chandra Ghosh, Proprietor Sahitya Lok (Literary World). Mr Ghosh had requested Amitava Roy to pen a memoir of his famous grandfather as an Introduction or Foreword to this rare book.

Rajkumari Ashalata Devi is Assistant Professor, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Manipur University, has contributed her paper on ‘Reconstruction of Distinct Dalit Identity In Bama’s KARUKKU’ with her research scholar K.Christina Kamei. She also has contributed another paper with her research scholar Kshetrimayum Vijayalakshmi Devi on ‘Humorous Dialogues in Television Shows: An Effective Tool in English Language Learning’. These two papers have added new dimension of this journal.

IJCSSS occasionally publishes unpublished verses or short fiction from various parts of the globe. We close this issue with a short poem composed by Pradip Chatterjee in 1987. *Wisdom* will be followed by *Head Against Heart* in our next issue.

Amitava Roy
Bryan Reynolds

Re-viewing Samuel Beckett and Re-presenting His Indianness

Tapu Biswas

Samuel Beckett has been placed at the pivotal centre of literary explorations not only in the Western academia but also in the Asian and Indian universities as well. Many researches have been made on the literary oeuvre of Beckett that primarily focus on his absurdism and the writer's attempt to go beyond the conventional literary paradigm. However, there are some significant areas of problematic exposition which demand a minute and critical interrogation. My academic paper earlier entitled "Absurdity and Creativity, Innovation and Individualism, Myths & Mysteries In Samuel Beckett's Writings: A Critical Interpretative Study from an Indian Perspective" is a modest attempt to analyze the texts written by Samuel Beckett from the perspective of history, myths and philosophy. This paper will also provide a detailed comparative study of Beckett's writings from the oriental point of view, which will necessarily incorporate cogent deliberations of Indian and Asian litterateurs, scholars and critics. This research article is an effort to bring together several threads of interpretations, thoughts and ideas that go deep into the human psyche in order to bring out the nuanced portrayal of absurd vignette, which ultimately delineates the Indian responses to Beckett.

The prestigious coveted Nobel Prize for Literature for the year 1969 was awarded to Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906-1989), an Irishman by birth (who was 'damned to fame' from the time his enigmatic precocious play *Waiting for Godot*, with no woman character, was staged before a group of almost fourteen hundred convicts at the San Quentin penitentiary, California, USA). The Nobel was conferred on him "for his writing, – in new forms for the novel and drama – in which the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation".¹ Here was an award given for contributions,

which were a mix of “a powerful imagination with a logic in *absurdum*”², the obvious outcome in the bargain being a paradox. Born in 1906 near Dublin, Samuel Beckett, as an author, entered the world almost half-a-century later in an alien country, namely France. Having now gone on the wrong side of forty-five, he quickly, in the space of three years, was able to bring out the novel *Molloy* (1951); its sequel *Malone Meurt* [*Malone Dies*] in the same year; a play *En Attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*), (1952), and two more novels *L’Innommable* [*The Unnameable*] (concluding the cycle about *Molloy* and *Malone*), and *Watt*. Here was a twentieth century genius whose poetry could not be understood or grasped even by the intellectuals, not to speak of the ordinary common man, and whose earlier plays hardly evinced any interest for a man of average intellect.

Writing in *Contemporary Poetry Review* about Samuel Beckett’s poetry, the American critic and Professor of English Literature Andrew Goodspeed observed of his early verse as being :”Extremely difficult and occasionally unpleasant”. He wrote:

It [Samuel Beckett’s poetry] is a body of work that can be as oblique, resistant and complex to the scholar as it is to a novice reader. Even his fervent admirers tend to regard it as recondite and baffling. For those unconvinced by Beckett, the poems are easy targets. They contain in microcosm, precisely those faults his detractors find throughout his oeuvre- squalor for squalor’s sake, indulgence in gloom, endless obscurity, pointless obscurantism, unfollowable erudition, reference to the untraceably personal, and the occasional unexplained diversion towards what seems motiveless degradation of humanity...

In the words of the noted French-American novelist and academic Raymond Federman, a known friend and great connoisseur of Beckett, who claimed to have read and re-read all books authored by Beckett, in English and in French, “one must be crazy to read the entire oeuvre of Beckett... Certainly only mad people – fanatics – would spend time reading and re-reading everything Beckett has written... In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett’s most celebrated play, Estragon ‘[aphoristic for once]’ says: ‘We are all born mad. Only a few remain so’...”³ Federman observed:

I believe I am one of those who remained mad, because for more than forty-five years I have not stopped reading and re-reading the

books of Samuel Beckett, and I always imagine that others, too, are as mad as I am and they, too, never stopped reading and re-reading Beckett...”

Interestingly enough, two knowledgeable researchers B. McGovern and B. Stewart brought out a research paper bearing the symptomatic title: “Well, Well, So There’s an Audience in the Plays of Samuel Beckett”. In spite of the warnings to the contrary, the critics remained stubbornly insistent in finding meaning in all that Beckett wrote. First, it was a matter of finding the literary sources of Beckett’s work, and what the critics gradually revealed was something like this:

His [Beckett’s] work was inspired by Joyce, Kafka, Proust, Flaubert. Balzac and moving back in time, the 18th century novel (Diderot and Laurence Sterne) and before that, Racine, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Cervantes, Dante and Homer. So many possible sources were concocted that, finally, one was reduced to saying that **the work of Samuel Beckett was, in fact, all of literature - the entire history [and story] of literature...** (emphasis mine)

Then came the critics who felt absolutely compelled to try and discover the philosophical and theological sources.

And so Beckett was read as an Existentialist and a Phenomenologist, influenced by Sartre, Heidegger, Bergson and certainly Nietzsche, and by the pessimism of Schopenhauer; by the dualism of Descartes; by the Occasionalism of Malebranche; and, still further back in time by Luther and Calvin, St. Augustine, the Sophists, Plato and Aristotle and the Pre-Socratics; and of course by the Ancient and the New Testaments. That is to say, once again, that **the entire history of philosophy and theology was allegedly contained in the work of Samuel Beckett...** (emphasis mine)

Eventually, what a tribute to the genius of Beckett! He was certainly one of the greatest and most influential writers of our time. Beckett believed and spiritedly asserted that an artists’s duty was “to express the totality and complexity of his experience regardless of the public’s lazy demand for easy comprehensibility”(Esslin 30).

Here is direct expression – pages and pages of it. And if you don’t understand it... it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content

that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other... The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quaternary conditioned reflex of dribbling comprehension (31).

Such was the genius of this great writer that, instead of stooping down to conquer the minds of his uninitiated readers or audience, instead of fashioning forth afresh his own style and manner to suit the taste of the ordinary reader or spectator, he stood his ground emphatically seeming to stress: 'I can't go on; I'll go on'. Such indeed was his genius that quite promptly he, instead of bowing before the intellect of the masses, 'taught' them to learn to seize and grasp the complexities and absurdities of his contributions in the right perspectives. Here was a genius who made himself one of the active protagonists of a new approach (or genre if we could so call it) to theatre that came to be known as 'Western Absurd Theatre'.

Such has been Samuel Beckett's academic distinction, reputation and standing in the world of scholarship that over the years ninety-five doctoral theses on his literary contributions have been accepted by first grade Universities in England. Of these 17 have been published by the University of Reading, 13 by the University of Oxford, 8 by the University of Cambridge, 4 by the University of London, 4 by the University of York etc.⁴ English, French, German apart, his select writings are available in translation in Russian, Japanese and several languages of India. There has since not been any decade during which there have not been either Exhibitions of writings by and on him in libraries of worldwide well-known institutions of higher learning, or national or international Symposia or Conferences related to him, or simply dedicatory celebratory Weeks. Of the International Symposia mention may be made here of the one held at the University of Leiden in October 1991; and then the second held at The Hague, Netherlands, in April 1992. Another International Samuel Beckett symposium was held at Tokyo in 2006.

The focus of such Symposia *inter alia* has been on how the intellectuals all over the world study, research and interpret Beckett's writings and theatre productions. It is interesting that this highly controversial genius is, on the one hand, known for his comic and humorous gamuts - to include just 3 studies by Ruby Cohn (New Brunswick: N J Rutgers University Press, 1962); Valerie Topsfield (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988);

Laura Salisbury (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). On the other, the critics have equally enthusiastically been researching the element of the tragic, the shape of chaos, in his art. Even a most modest select bibliography of writings on him would easily run to over seventeen to eighteen thousand entries. Such then is a brief, bird's eye view of this literary giant Samuel Beckett and his impact and continual hold on the literary scene of the American and European countries.

“Coming to India, the work that has been done on Beckett scholarship since the pioneering M.Phil. dissertation and Ph.D. thesis of Tapu Biswas (published under the titles *Indian Response to Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot* : Kolkata, 2006 : *Indian Responses to Western Theatre of the Absurd Vol II* ; Kolkata, 2009), can be counted on finger tips. (Prof. Amitava Roy)” The publications that can be mentioned here are *Samuel Beckett and the Encounter of Philosophy and Literature* (2013) by Arka Chattopadhyaya and James Martell; *Samuel Beckett's 'Endgame' : Conversational Principles and Absurdity* (2014) by Ganesh Mundhe. An Indian scholar has , in mid-2014, submitted a doctoral thesis on ‘Absurdity in Samuel Beckett's Select Novels’ to Shri Jagdishprasad Jhabarmal Tibarewala University (Rajasthan, India). The theatre productions of Beckett's plays in various languages in various States of India have been almost intensively documented in the aforementioned published works of the present writer.

India is a land of ancient culture and civilization, whose sagacious sages over the years have, in many ways, been pioneers in advancing renowned theories and principles of poetry and drama. The world of Beckett scholarship at large is looking at India to find out what parallels and coincidences, if any, the theories of the ancient Indian thinkers on drama and poetry have with the paradoxical and complex views of Samuel Beckett. Scholars are curious to ascertain how to look at Samuel Beckett's aesthetics from the Indian standpoint. It was not for nothing that quite recently, a Conference was organized in the legendary holy city of Chester to find out the responses to Samuel Beckett of intellectuals from the “countries on the margins” (implying probably the countries of Latin America, Africa, Asia). The importance that this Conference gave to India may be judged from the fact that the organisers very logically and gracefully remembered to invite an Indian scholar, Tapu Biswas, to present the Indian perspectives. Unfortunately, the only invited Indian delegate, despite having submitted in proper time to the Conference organisers a résumé of the contribution

to be made by him, could not be present at the Conference because of non-receipt of the mandatory Visa in time from the British High Commission in India. The curiosity and the desire of the Western world to elicit responses from the countries at the margins, particularly India, does not cease here. Now, as a part of a three-year collaborative research project undertaken by the Universities of Chester and Reading, and the Victoria & Albert Museum, another international conference on “Staging Beckett and Contemporary Theatre and Performing Cultures” was held at the University of Reading on 10th and 11th April 2015. The Conference *inter alia* propose to explore the impact of productions of Beckett’s plays on British and Irish theatre practices and cultures while particularly looking at how Beckett has been studied **and staged internationally** (emphasis mine) - [including India]. At the same time, another International Conference was planned at Phoenix, Arizona, on 19th and 20th February 2015 by the Samuel Beckett Society, Arizona State University, in collaboration with some other relevant academic bodies, to bring together new emerging and established perspectives on the Nobel laureate’s writings for sustained exchange of ideas.

Interestingly enough, one of the writings of Samuel Beckett bears the title *Mal vu mal dit* (“Ill seen, Ill said”). It is commonly known that the great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi widely propagated: “See no evil, speak no evil” (a phrase that first emerged in Japan in the 17th century and was later adopted worldwide as a message of peace and tolerance). Can one analyse and interpret the inter-relationship between these two separate phrases “Ill seen, Ill said” and “See no evil, speak no evil”?

Samuel Beckett’s passion for painting is well known though he himself never took up a brush (Cf. *Samuel Beckett: A Passion for Paintings*; essays by Nicholas Allen, Susan Sreibman & Lois Oppenheim; *Samuel Beckett: A Passion for Paintings*, by Fionnuala Croke). As the scholars researching his great passion for painting emphasize, Beckett had an abiding interest in and love for painting. He wrote profound innovative essays on painting, he could explain painting beautifully, his best friends were painters [Jack Yeats, Avigdor Arikha, Bram van Velde, Jasper Johns, and many others with whom he collaborated] and he could have, himself, been a great painter, but became that painter in his written work. He “painted tableaux with words” rather than with paint (The Imagery Museum of Samuel Beckett; a lecture delivered at Vienna in February 2000 by Professor Raymond Federman).

It may be conjectured that Samuel Beckett, the Western writer, shared with Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian writer, an yearning for painting, seeing in painting a medium to convey thoughts as forcefully as through words or even one to project thoughts that cannot possibly be expressed with the same force with words. Like Beckett, Tagore too had some of the greatest painters of the time amongst his associates - for instance, his nephew Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), Nandalal Bose (1882-1966), Jamini Roy (1887-1972), the painter and sculptor Ramkinkar Baij (1906-1980). It is known that at the ripe mature age of over 60 years or so, at the height of his career as an eminent writer (to whom, writing and music, playwriting and acting came so easily, so naturally) Rabindranath Tagore suddenly picked up brush and colours to make a dent in the world of drawing and painting. Was it that at such a mature age the distinguished writer felt that there were some thoughts which he could not possibly make visible through the medium of words and that brush and colours could come to his aid for the purpose? There are several interpretations though no one can really arrive at the truth of this phenomenon. Does Samuel Beckett (of Irish descent) too shared such thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore (whose paintings and drawings were influenced partly by Scrimshaw from northern New Ireland)?

As Martin Esslin stressed in his essay in *20th Century Views*, “Beckett’s characters may lose the capacity for locomotion, their senses may decay, yet their awareness of their own self continues relentlessly”(34). The awareness of their own mortality, feebleness... remains vigorous while all else is declining. Lalita Ramakrishna quotes Rosette Lamont “Awareness then is what matters for Beckett... He seems to prefer the Buddhist ideal of choiceless awareness more suited to a dramatist whose concern is with the irrevocability of human suffering”(34). It is a matter for study and research how such ideas have been inherent also in the works of some Indian writers. For example, the famous Indian Urdu poet, MirzaGhalib, too has portrayed characters whose awareness of their own self continued relentlessly even when they were losing the capacity for locomotion and finding their senses decaying.-

Go HaathKoJumbishNahin / Aankhon Main To Dam Hai
(though the hands have no [capacity for] locomotion, [yet] do the
eyesstillretain their spirit]⁵

Lalita Ramkrishna further goes on to mention that it is the “same kind

of awareness that remains undimmed in Krapp and gets stronger as he nears his end. Physically and mentally he is on the decline – fumbling fingers, unsteady gait, addicted to alcohol and bananas. Despite this decadence he is clear in his capacity to see himself as he is...”(34).

While there have been critical studies on “Beckett and French thought” or “Beckett and German thought”, the idea of formulating a proper overview of “Beckett and Oriental Thought” has hitherto remained elusive. No serious attempt worth the name has so far been made to explore the Eastern elements, if any, in Beckett’s works. Certainly, a literary giant like Beckett could not in any way be unaware of the great Eastern traditions of Indian thought. Interesting parallels can be explored between Beckett’s texts and those of great Eastern sages though it has not yet been researched and discovered how much direct knowledge Beckett had of Eastern wisdom.

The founder and head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Geneva, Swami Nityabodhananda, in one of his talks at the Musée des Monuments Français Trocadero, Paris, touched upon the topic of atheistic spirituality of Samuel Beckett. He stated *inter alia*:

The divestment of the ‘I’ (throwing away the crutches) down to the state of silence; the internal condition in which one no longer asks himself questions or, if so, it is without expecting answers; in which one remains without defining the mental states but simply discerning the nature of things, the essence, the *tathata*— these are the parallel lines traced by Beckett and Buddhism (6).

Swami Nityabodhananda affirms that Buddhism is an atheistic form of spirituality. For Buddha life being a constant Becoming, an impetus toward becoming which pushes us ahead, between what we are and what we should like to be, this becoming gives rise to a physical and moral suffering. In answer to a question about suffering, Beckett is known to have replied that if in his writings he insists on suffering, this comes from no perversity on his part. We have only to look round us to ascertain the acuteness and universality of suffering. Everywhere, even in a London taxi, there are signs asking aid for refugees, orphans or handicapped children. The ideas which Beckett sows in his writings, such as: We have to go on, I am going on,” ‘it is always a beginning again’. ‘Oh, in spite of that, what a beautiful day! Oh, what a beautiful day nevertheless’, whisper to us of a possible transcendence. Another idea parallel to this is that of liberation through the attitude of not evaluating the nature of things, but rather integrating

oneself with that while observing it. This attitude of waiting without expecting answers – i.e. without setting a price, is one which emerges from Beckett's works (8). Swami Nityabodhananda asserts that the "Buddha's philosophy is neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but realistic in the sense that it tries to make us discover the co-existence in us of suffering and its transcendence, leaving the choice to us. This liberty is equally evident in the thought of Samuel Beckett" (10).

This theme has now been brought to the fore by Dr. Lidan Lin, Professor of English Literature at the Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, USA (& Visiting Professor of English literature at the Southwest University, China) by publishing a thought provoking article under the title "Samuel Beckett's Encounter with the East" in *English Studies*⁶. Professor Lin refers to Paul Foster identifying the prevailing theme of Beckett's novels as the "expression of a dilemma that is spiritual", arguing that the nature of the Beckettian impasse is the kind of impasse the Buddha set out to resolve. Foster contends that, "like the Buddhists, Beckett believes that the situation of suffering and dissatisfaction is brought about by desire... the basic motivation in all human beings for seeking satisfaction. Professor Lin affirms that "Beckett's solution, like the Buddhist one, is an "escape from the dilemma... by abandoning desire and all attachments to worldly gains."

Samuel Beckett's long essay on the French novelist, critic and essayist Marcel Proust (1871-1922) and another essay on "Henri Hayden, home-painte" provide authentic evidence of his interest in Buddhism and Hinduism, - an interest evoked by continuing influence (indirect, if not direct) on him of the great German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who had been greatly influenced by Oriental philosophy. Schopenhauer is known to have acknowledged that the truth was recognized by the sages of India, and as such his solutions to suffering were similar to those of the Vedantic and Buddhist thinkers. He considered Indian philosophy "the production of the highest human wisdom" and called the opening up of Sanskrit literature "the greatest gift of our century", and predicted that the philosophy and knowledge of the Upanishads would become the cherished faith of the West.

It must be of interest to an Indian reader to know that, despite his question "Where would I go, if I could go", Samuel Beckett was a tourist par excellence in the beautiful cities of Paris and London, was always

aware of Indian presence where he felt he could spot it. In his novel *Murphy* (published 1958), when the hero of the novel, viz. Murphy, is suffering the pangs of separation from his sweetheart Celia and is unable to live without her for long, he decides to get his horoscope prepared from a 'swami' [an Indian saintly person, generally a self-styled astrologer] in Berwick Market [an iconic old, weird but vibrant London market with a rich heritage – having Indian shops providing hot traditional Indian cuisine, Indian sarees]. It is this horoscope which, once acquired from the 'swami', is found to decree that not before the first Sunday in 1956 ... will Murphy be able to seek work with the maximum chance of success. Later, struck by a sudden congruence between two of the *swami*'s motifs, ... he offers to join the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (59).

Another point of interest to an Indian steeped in ancient Indian cultural traditions is that in this novel Beckett makes it a point to see that, to ensure greater accuracy and authenticity, the dates mentioned are never left vague and are matched with relevant planetary information. This is a trait very typical of the ancient Indian epics where too, for greater authenticity, the events are linked to planetary configurations. As is known, in the *Mahabharata* alone there are 150 instances where worldly events are mentioned along with the planetary positions in the sky. For instance, when Bhishma died, "it was the 8th day of the bright half of the month of Magha – a day when the moon was at the asterism Rohini and the day of Winter Solstice. On this day, there also appeared a comet at the asterism Pushya... The day on which Ghatotkacha, son of Bhima, died, the moon appeared at the horizon at 2.00 am. The epic also mentions the occurrence of a very rare astronomical event that took place prior to the War: three eclipses, two lunar and a solar, within a lunar month of 27 days.

I will end with a brief reference to a highly successful Indianized stage version of *Waiting for Godot*. I have written in detail about this production by *Mimesis* theatre group in my book on *Waiting for Godot, Indian Interpretation* published in 2004. Pradip Banerjee was the translator-adaptor and the play entitled *Iswar Babu Aschen* was published by P. Lal, writers' workshop and is now out of print. Amitava Roy, who played the part of Pozzo (here called Haripada) and alternatively Vladimir (here called Godai) recalls "After our first production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1969 it was performed with quite some regularity between 1969 and 1975 – with as much regularity that a non-profit Bengali theatre group could muster Mimesis and Theatre Arts Workshops from the Shakespeare

Society of Eastern India got together to stage this play for over 6 years. No other group staged this play as many times as we did. An application of performance rights was sent to Samuel Beckett. Beckett was very magnanimous and himself replied saying that he had requested his agent to give us the performance rights. He asked us to go ahead as he was very happy to know that a Bengali theatre group from 10000 miles away was performing *Waiting for Godot*. He assured us that there won't be any problem and part of this note by Beckett has been included in the Writers' Workshop publication. Beckett got the Nobel Prize in 1969 and our play was regularly performed for over 6 years till 1975 making Beckett a household name in Bengal.

I would usually play Pozzo as my physical build, shape and my personality appears to be very dominating. Our production required a very high degree of physicalization. On the surface the play is very verbal, but the non-verbal action under the surface required a lot of body and bounce, where the body itself becomes a metaphor in action.

The play was a transcreation adapted into the Bengali ethos. Not only were the names changed – Bhuto, Godai, Nibaron, Haripada – the text also use Tagore songs that embodied the meaning of the scenes and actions and situation the characters found themselves in. The media hailed it as a landmark Asian production of Beckett.

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(Footnotes)

1. Nobel Prize Committee citation - The Nobel Prize in Literature 1969 – nobelprize.org the official website of the Nobel Prize.
2. Award ceremony speech by Karl Ragnar Gierow of the Swedish Academy - nobelprize.org the official website of the Nobel Prize.
3. Raymond Federman. *Lecture delivered in February 2000, at the Kunsthalle in Vienna on the occasion of a Beckett and Bruce Nauman exhibition*. Available on website under the title "The Imagery Museum of Samuel Beckett"
4. Information collected from standard bibliographies of dissertations - e.g. (a) Lawrence F. McNamee. *Dissertations in English & American literature; theses accepted by American, British & German universities*; (b) Gernot W. Gabel & Gisela R. Gabel. *Dissertations in English & American literature; theses accepted by Austrian, French & Swiss universities etc*
5. Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869). – Urdu verse taken from *Ghalib: A Hundred Moods* (published by Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. New Delhi, 1996).p.. 171 -Tr. from Urdu by Harish C. Gupta's.
6. *English Studies*, vol. 91, no. 6, October 2010, pp.623–642

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