

INTRODUCTION

Arnold Wesker (1932 -) is a much-discussed dramatist of the English stage introduced by Lindsay Anderson, George Devine, and John Dexter right down from the nineteen fifties. Different critics have assessed his contributions from different perspectives. Robert Brustein called him a secondary dramatist, whereas according to Sheridan Morley, Wesker is one of the "four discoveries of the fifties". According to J. Chiari, Wesker, who is one of the members of the new wave of British dramatists, has "dedicated to the task of bringing art and enlightenment to the masses". P. Hartnoll calls him a dramatist of the school of the "kitchen-sink drama". "Wesker", says David Daiches, "is a left-wing moralist who has used the drama to say things about contemporary society". According to Clifford Leach, Wesker is "one of the Romantics, Harold Pinter being the other Romantic". Dr. J.R. Taylor calls Wesker "the perfect example of the new working-class dramatist" or according to Christopher Booker Wesker is "romanticising lower class vitality". With due regard to the above critics the present assessor would like to submit that his method is to explore the mind and art of Arnold Wesker who naively says - "I cannot simply 'write' plays, I have to write them in such a way as to suggest a play is worthwhile writing for something more than telling a tale". Therefore writing drama becomes an art medium to him, and this art is, of course, not "an escape from life" but

"an escape into life" at the cost of new form, content or even myth.

Wesker, in fact, is related to a particular age and also to a particular class, i.e., the working class, and it is quite natural that all the major characters portrayed in his plays belong to the tens of millions of the working people — 'the flower of the country, its strength and its future'. As a dramatist he remains true to his class keeping pace with the spirit of the age save despair, for he must not ignore the interest of the working class as he feels the dire necessity of exercising his responsibility as an artist towards the class and the society to which he belongs.

Wesker might personally be a furniture maker's apprentice, a carpenter's mate, a book-seller's assistant, an enlisted airman, a plumber's mate, a farm labourer, a seed sorter, a kitchen porter or a pastry cook but his success as well as workmanship as a dramatist rests upon a spectrum of colours through his art so that the real life of the working class vibrating with hopes and aspirations is reflected in various aspects. That he belongs to the working class does not mean that he is mean as an artist. Far from it. All that is much more important for an artist is, whether his sensitivity is so keen as to notice 'diamond' in 'carbon' or to transform the 'carbon' into 'diamond'. Drama, to Wesker is a medium of art through which he attempts to express the impulses and expectations of the major sections of people of his age in terms of a struggle for existence. He strives to project the moment

not only to give permanence to the present but also to forge a link between the past and the future or to propel history forward if and when possible. He, of course, is bent on creating as many living and lively symbols as possible in his plays. These symbols have some definite relation with the environment or society of his age. These will certainly lose their own entity as well as identity whenever these are divorced from environment and age.

It may further be noted that these symbols take shape amidst environmental forces when they interact and counteract with each other. All that the writer endeavours to do is to clarify, intensify, dramatize and interpret the world about him in all its physical, psychological and social aspects. Hence he tends to create images in order to ask questions of life, to offer understanding or to reflect poignantly a significant moment of time in a significant individual so as to give a close-up view of an epoch with all its adequate potentialities and apparent failures. Eventually his is the attempt to establish and embellish a social relation which is meant never to be bound up with a set pattern which, it proves, not only stale but also rotten at the core, neither healthy nor convincing at all. The said pattern is on the verge of utter disintegration because of unproven socio-economic relation between man and man. Hence the conflict between those who want no change at all and those who strive, seek and find new values but who are not to yield. If it be the duty of the artist

to reproduce life with the mode of transforming varieties. Beckett is certainly an artist. If it be the sincere task of the artist to bring about permanent interaction between the experience of the past and the experience of the present Beckett deserves to be a great artist.

While Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Harold Pinter, the contemporaries of Beckett, resorted to allegorical drama, and grotesque farce, groping in the dark finding no way out in the labyrinth of phantasmagoria, while some tend to existentialist ideologues, while John Osborne, another contemporary of Beckett, looks back in anger with the childish vanity and disarming egotism of youngsters, Beckett makes himself useful in every possible way of art to pave the way for a better tomorrow ushering in Eros - the life force instead of Thanatos - the force of death.

Beckett says : "I believe that the purpose of life is the perpetual re-enactment of the first great myth of all time : the creation of order out of chaos". What matters most in Beckett's art is the quality and nature of the artist's commitment that all is not lost though the field had been lost for a long time. He is right in thinking that "art is about something, that it has reference to something beyond itself by which it must ultimately be judged".

Beckett's dramas are not to be rigidly demarcated as tragedies or comedies, but they are dramas only where the characters are not puppets that strut and fret their hour on the stage or like a

Sisyphus driving a boulder in vain. That his characters are not so is obvious for two reasons - because Mosker is well acquainted with those whom he portrays, and secondly he is at the vantage point of understanding them. This clear-cut knowledge and understanding of the people has prevented him from being insipid and inadvertent. He makes an assiduous study of the society he belongs to, the various classes in society, their mutual relations and respective conditions, their physiognomy and their psychology. Yet it is remarkable to note that he is not primarily interested in man-as-an-individual in his plays, his subject is man-in-society. I have tried to understand and estimate Arnold Mosker more as an artist of social realism that demands a consciousness of the fate of humanity than as one who conforms to pure aestheticism that prefers art to the great struggle for the new Renaissance.