



**A LIFE
LESS
ORDINARY**
ALY ZAKER

BACK HOME!

I was thinking of how the future would be in this new-born nation of ours. Looking at the void, ruling over the dark waters of the Jamuna, I was ruminating on the immediate past that we had travelled through and attempted to imagine what the future would hold for us, in the just liberated Bangladesh. There was no easy indication. We were so close to and yet so far from our motherland over the last nine months that it was not easy to imagine the kind of life that this newly born motherland had in store for us.

I was not sure if the job I had left behind and went to war would be waiting there for me anymore. I could not even imagine the new economy that would emerge for us, in that, in a totally devastated land, I could have had to settle for a very insignificant job for my survival. I didn't know if there would be any place for me that I could call home. I didn't know if my elder brother was still fruitfully employed. There were hundreds of such discomfoting thoughts that kept coming back to my mind as I kept looking at the flowing waters of the Jamuna river that night.

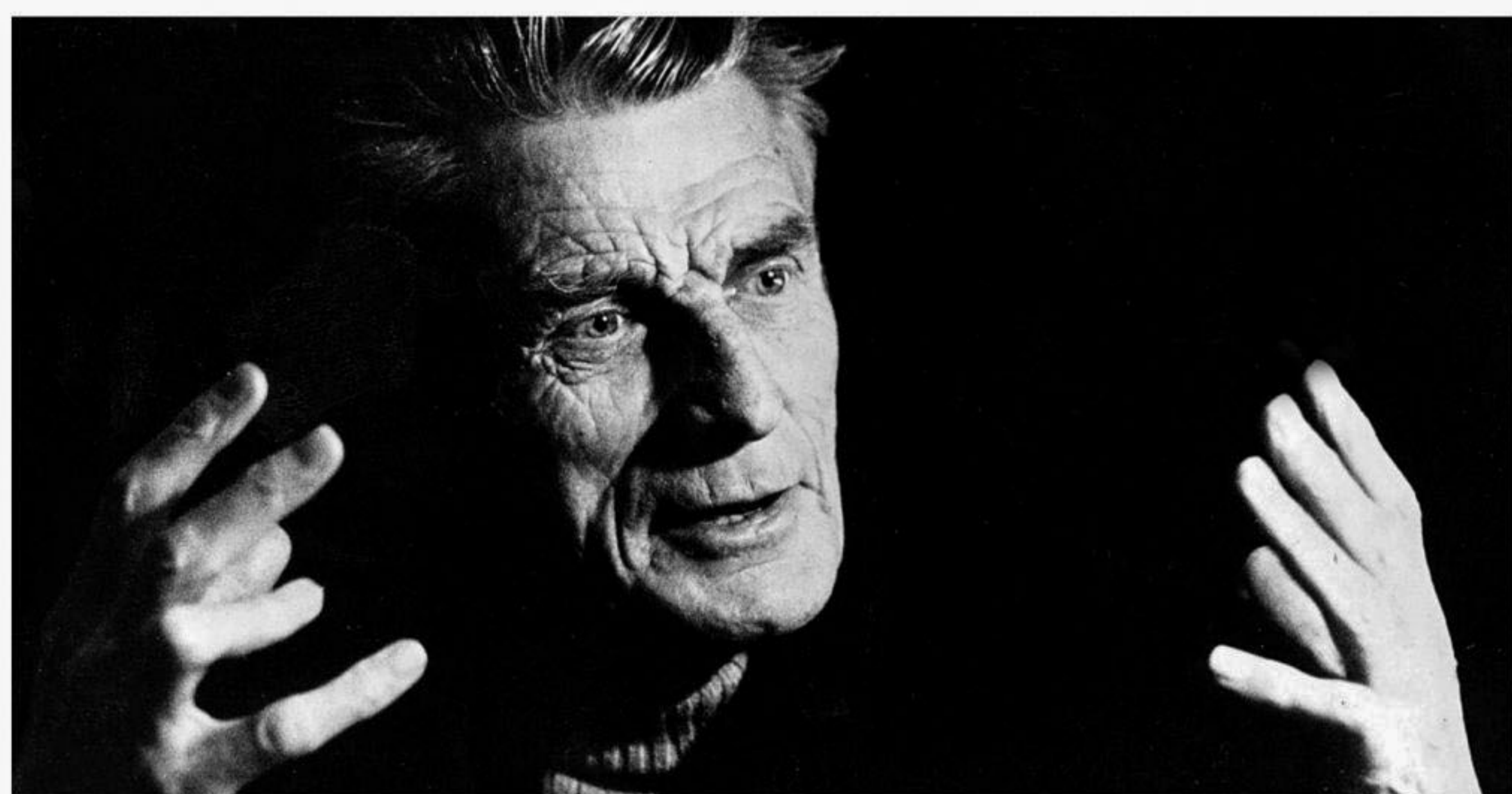
We took a country boat at around 07:00 in the morning from Goalondo to Aricha, the following morning. This journey with the cool breeze blowing from the north, rejuvenated me a bit and I fell asleep on the deck of the boat. It took us four hours to reach a village close to Aricha, where we had to disembark and walk towards the ghat. This was quite another experience. There was the river to the left and vegetable patches to the right. The morning with a mild winter sun seemed extraordinarily beautiful. I could literally smell freedom in the air. And the smell of freedom was accentuated by the fragrance of the crop of the season like mustard and coriander. There were only a few dilapidated buses available to travel from Aricha to Dhaka and we took one of those. There was no regular bus service between these two points. It took us a little over three hours to arrive at Dhaka. By the time we entered the city from Mirpur it was nearly afternoon. I was amazed at being greeted by my city with an enormity of colours. Men, women and children were all on the city streets wearing colourful dresses. I don't think there were anybody within the confines of their houses that after noon. Here was a just liberated city celebrating its hard earned freedom. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had returned from the Pakistani prison via London that morning. So there was all the more reason for celebrations.

I distinctly remember having gone cetaceous at this heavenly feeling of returning to my dear city after the protracted war of nine months. I met my brother, sister-in-law and their daughter born during the period of the liberation war. Both my brother and I were happy beyond measure on meeting each other after the war. I never thought that I would ever be able to meet the rest of my family in this life. I remember having hired a rickshaw and travel through all my known roads in the city. Oh, what an ethereal pleasure it was!

The author is a renowned stage performer, actor & director. He is also a successful business personality.

Only a woman can cope and go down singing

*When we think of Beckett's theatre, the images that come to mind are bodies in pain, immobilised, paralysed, trapped or incomplete, observed William McEvoy in an online article titled *An introduction to Happy Days*, published in the webpage *Discovering Literature: 20th Century* in 2017. Amalgamation of pain, immobilization, paralysis, trap or incompleteness is almost a recurring theme in Samuel Beckett's plays. They appear in different shapes and forms in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days*—just to mention the ones we are mostly familiar with. His props are almost routinely wheelchairs, hollow barrels, mounds and the likes that immediately create an ambiance of human disabilities and dull imprisonment. Perhaps, that is the reason why Beckett has no storyline continuum to work with, though he has apparently disjointed, yet unique messages to deliver. This style of Beckett was termed controversially as; we all are aware, *theatre of the absurd*, by the Hungarian-born British producer, dramatist, journalist, adaptor and translator, critic, academic scholar and professor of drama, Martin Julius*



Esslin, in 1962. Some of our theatre scholars in Bangladesh too have reservations about that coinage of Martin, though an off-beat trend of writing *absurd plays* ensued worldwide during the mid-20th century.

After exactly thirty-one years of its premiering in Paris, *Waiting for Godot* was brought on Bangladeshi stage by *Nagorik Natya Sampradaya*, in 1984, under the direction of Aatur Rahman and incredibly enough, this so-called *absurd play* instantly got the audience acclaim—thanks to Professor Kabir Chowdhury for his one-off translation of so communicably difficult play. Credit is also due to Aatur Rahman for his being able to convince his theater group and the cast to produce such a play and that too, so successfully. No second Beckett play has been performed in Bangladesh since then, although almost four decades have elapsed, and intriguingly enough, many other groups are still performing this one and only Beckett play in Bangladesh.

But then, after thirty-four years under the auspices of the Embassy of France in Bangladesh along with the cultural wing of

the *Alliance Francaise*, Dhaka, the second Samuel Beckett play, *Happy Days* came to our stage on February 01, 2019—an adoringly collaborative endeavor between the *Alliance Francaise Dhaka*, and the Bangladesh *Shilpokala Academy* in particular, I must admit! Thanks also to *Hrithmancho* and *Monipuri Theatre* for their concerted contributions to the production. Though the play is claimed to be the Bangla translated version by Professor Kabir Chowdhury, it has been edited and adapted by Shubhashis Sinha and Jyoti Sinha, and there lies their effort of theatrical distinctiveness. Shubhashis and Jyoti paired in many other mind-winning productions previously, and the one that I lovingly reminisce is *Kohe Birangona*. So, they do have something special to offer to the audience and this time too, there was no exception. The play had a frequent blend of code switching and mixing between English and Bangla and what impressed me most was Jyoti's ease of projecting the code-mixed dialogues together with her befittingly theatrical feat. Her confident and unaffected English pronunciation added an extra aura to

her performance, though at times, her Bangla was touched by her English utterances.

On the whole, it was a well-directed and well-performed mono-play—and we all know mono-plays are not easy to perform, neither linguistically nor theatrically, as they are prone to becoming tiresome and dreary from both sides; audience and the actor. It becomes doubly so if it is Beckett! Profuse praise to two Sinhas, especially Jyoti, for not making it mind-numbing and being able to hold audience interest till the end, and perhaps Beckett was right when he commented on his *Happy Days*, '*And I thought who would cope with that [life of the modern woman] and go down singing, only a woman.*' Jyoti acted, danced and sang with the music (music had a dynamic role to play) vibrantly enough throughout the play to give a convincingly visual portrayal to the playwright's subtly creative imaginations!

The writer is an educationist teaching English Language & Literature at Central Women's University. He is also a Bangla Academy awardee for translation.

**WHAT'S
IN THE
THEATER**
ABDUS SELIM

