

EXISTENTIALISM –A STUDY OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR*

GODOT

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Human beings consider themselves as rational beings. They are the most sophisticated entities on this planet. But this entity has no meaning. From the very beginning of their existence, they keep on searching the true meaning of their life and the purpose of their existence. They further go on questing the existence of God or any transcendent force, meaning of subjectivity, morality, religion and so on. But their rational intelligent comes to bring nothingness into the irrational universe. They come for nothing and go for nothing and wait for waiting because every action they have taken is insignificant and it has no meaning. So their quest of meaning for everything is totally purposeless and baseless which comes to an end under the cover of the darkness of death. This present paper attempts an analyzing how Samuel Beckett throws light on the philosophy of existentialism through his tragic comedy *Waiting for Godot*.

Keywords: Sophisticated, Transcendent, Insignificant, purposeless, Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical movement which began in the mid of 19th century but reached its peak in the mid 20th century. It emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice through philosophy and literature. It is based on the view that humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe .It focuses on the question of human existing, and the feeling that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence. It holds that, as there is no God or any other transcendent force, the only way to counter this nothingness.

Among the existential dramatists, Samuel Beckett is a renowned name in the history of English literature. He was a Poet, novelist and dramatist, translator and director who was

born at Fox rock, near Dublin in a very prosperous family. He was born talented which is reflected through his writing. His tragic comedy play *Waiting for Godot* is a perfect masterpiece in which he throws light on existentialism. According to the meaning of existence and the purpose of life is absurd which has no meaning. He himself said on the Christmas eve when he was in Germany that “I could not bear the absurdity of teaching others what I did not know myself.”

In his plays we find very few characters and no action at all. In *Waiting for Godot*, there are four characters only and there is no major action. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for the mysterious Godot whose identity is not clear. It refers to human being as a being is nothing and he will not be anything until he becomes what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism which is also called its subjectivity. Man, in fact, is a project possessing a subjective life and before this projection of the self-nothing exists. So given that existence precedes essence, it is only natural that the man be held responsible for what he is. This is the first effect of existentialism that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence upon his own shoulders. Man is thus his own master. It also projects that man is free.

Existential philosophers believe that the existence of God is baseless. Therefore the identity of Godot in Beckett's play is mysterious. Both the tropes Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for him through they don't know when He will come and even they don't know how he looks like, how he stands in which way he will come.

Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea.

Vladimir: Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.

Estragon: On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.

So existentialists called atheists' disbelief in God. This gets precisely enclosed in Fyodor Dostoevsky, one of the first existential writers' remark, “If God did not exist, everything would be permitted” (Sartre). This becomes the starting point of existentialism. Sartre also believes that there is no determinism, which means that there is no God or any other power

to compel or guide man in his choice. In other words man is free or rather condemned to be free. The words of Estragon and Vladimir make this point realized.

Estragon: And if we dropped him?

(Pause) If we dropped him?

Vladimir: He'd punish us. "

Vladimir: we will hang ourselves to – morrow.

(Pause) Unless Godot comes.

Estragon: and if he comes?

Vladimir: we will be saved

Through this drama Beckett asks innumerable questions which are unanswerable. It seems impossible to find an answer because we do not know where to begin looking or whom to ask. In this context the world seems utterly chaotic. We therefore try to impose meaning on it through pattern and fabricated purpose to distract ourselves from the fact that our situation is hopelessly unfathomable. According to the dramatist, a human being life is totally depended on chance, and by extension, time is meaningless; therefore, a human's life is also meaningless, and the realization of this drives humans to rely on nebulous, outside forces, which may be real or not, for order and direction.

In this drama every character is represented as a symbol of human being. Vladimir represents the portion of humanity who trusts in religion and spiritual beliefs as guidance of life. Estragon represents the more ideal existentialism portion of humanity who chooses to stop waiting and construct the meaning of life based on experience in the tangible and physical world around them. The following lines utter their symbolic representations.

Estragon: Charming spot. (*He turns, advances to front, halts, facing auditorium.*) Inspiring prospects. (*He turns to Vladimir.*) Let's go:

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

Estragon: (*despairingly*). Ah! (8)

In this sense both Vladimir and Estragon are portrayed as contradictory to each other. Vladimir is depending on Godot to tell him what he needs to know regarding his existence, while Estragon asserts that they do not have the time to wait and that they should take action on their own before it is too late. The metaphor of the cooling iron suggests that humanity does not have enough time to wait for their spiritual ponderings to offer them enlightenment, that the chance will pass, and their efforts will not take effect once it does. Therefore, it can be concluded from this that Estragon's suggestion that he and Vladimir make their own way now, before it is too late, is the more ideal course of action advocated by the play. It is Estragon who follows the notion of no longer waiting on religion for answers and going to the philosophy of existentialism.

It has often been said that Vladimir is the more intellectual of the two – but it is Estragon who claims to have been a poet and he does quote Shelley's 'To the moon'. Some have even gone so far as to say that Vladimir is the soul and Estragon is body. That seems difficult to establish but it is easy enough to see that Vladimir is obsessed with his hat, and Estragon with his boots; that Vladimir has stinking breath, and Estragon stinking feet; Vladimir has trouble with his prostate and is therefore always restless, while Estragon falls asleep all the time; and Estragon has dreams, while Vladimir hates listening to them. Vladimir looks after Estragon in almost a maternal manner, feeling him, covering him with his coat and singing a lullaby to put him to sleep. Vladimir is the one with hope, Estragon is the one with the complaints and the sulks, and is also more aggressive. They constantly bicker with each other like a couple of long standing – husband – wife, mother- child or just old friends. These are precisely the pairs of roles that circus clowns ply as part of their routine. Vladimir and Estragon are different from each other but you can't think of one without thinking of the other; they need each other to play out their various roles, for they

are their roles as is every one (for in terms of existential philosophy, you are what you choose to be, the role that you choose to play, there is no essential you).

If we scrutinizes carefully we find that Pozzo goes by the watch which refers to regulate the world. His is also a world of movement and material comfort in contrast to that of Vladimir and Estragon. Lucky is luckier than Vladimir and Estragon because he has found a better a way of filling his time than go through the unbearable anxiety and tedium of Waiting. Pozzo seems at last in the first act to be almost Godot, the powerful lord who can decide the fate of all underlings, the savior that the tramps are waiting for. It has often been suggested that Pozzo is precisely that and that Vladimir and Estragon fail to recognize him, just as many jaws failed to recognize Jesus Christ. However what can be said with certainty is that Pozzo's relationship with Lucky, too is a symbiotic relationship, the one needing the other to give purpose to their lives..

After the above survey it is absolutely true that Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* express the themes of existence and freedom of choice through the question about the existence of God. Nature of mankind and the nature of morality. The existence of God gives people the faith to move forward in the life and create a purpose for existing, just like Estragon and Vladimir's faith in Godot. The nature of man, portrayed through Estragon and Vladimir, how people question their own existence, however they processes the freedom of decide how they wish to spend their lives. Lastly the nature of morality shown through Pozzo and Lucky establishes the idea that having morals is like having a guide line that can be used to help to make smart decisions in life. Therefore, existentialism is an immense influence within the play, because it metaphorically illustrates the nature of society and the essence of the human existence through the characters.

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