

Theatre of Absurd in Samuel Beckett Novels

Parveen¹, Dr. Satyendra Sharma²,

¹Research Scholar, Baba Mastnath University, Asthal Bohar, Rohtak.
parveensoni69996@gmail.com

²Professor, Department of English, Baba Mastnath
University, Rohtak

ABSTRACT

Theatre of Absurd is mainly a Western phenomenon, this term coined by the English critic Martin Esslin in his 1961 book Theater of Absurd and subsequently associated with the styles of many playwrights, like Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Tardieu and Harold Pinter. During the 1940s-1960s, this distinct style of drama was written largely by the European playwrights with spreading its popularity beyond France. By rebelling against theatrical traditions, the 'Theater of the Absurd' is shaping the characters in an absurd sense to reveal their pessimistic outlook toward life and society. This absurdity arose in the life and society at that time for several reasons and due to socio-political changes, the West was more inclined to scientific temperament which resulted in growing disbelief toward God and religion. As a consequence, the so-called Darwinism emerged with two World Wars totally changing the human concept of the world as a safe place (Abraham, 2009). Due to all these events, a major transformation took place in the society with sensing the difficulty to communicate human's ideas and sensibilities properly. The Theater of Absurd and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and Bidal Sarcar's *Evam Indrajit*. The most stunning thing about these plays of this social event is that in spite of their opposing of the rules they are productive. Both *Waiting for Godot* and *Evam Indriyat*, symbolize the hollowness, avoid and articulate futility with purposeless and meaningless existence. In both plays the group of onlookers do not appear to get a handle on anything critical, important, or conventional and plays have no sensible or intelligible plot. With its significant presence in the premodern world, theater vibrantly expresses human experience and different scenario of human life. This strongest medium is immensely popular on the global platform of drama for not only representing the world but also for its societal transformation power within its structures of consciousness. The word theater is derived from the Greek word 'theatre on' which signifies 'a place for seeing' that consistently searching the meaning of life. As a participatory ritual, theatrical experience formulates a strong interface between the actor and spectator by cyclic interchange of reactions.

KEYWORDS: *Absurd; God, Meaningless, Men, Universe, Samuel Beckett, Camus, Chaos, Existentialism.*

INTRODUCTION: *Waiting for Godot* qualifies as one of Samuel Beckett's most famous works. Originally written in French in 1948, Beckett personally translated the play into English. The world premiere was held on January 5, 1953, in the Left Bank Theater of Babylon in Paris. The play's reputation spread slowly through word of mouth and it

soon became quite famous. Other productions around the world rapidly followed. The play initially failed in the United States, likely as a result of being misbilled as "the laugh of four continents." A subsequent production in New York City was more carefully advertised and garnered some success. *Waiting for Godot* incorporates many of the themes and ideas that Beckett had previously discussed in his other writings. The use of the play format allowed Beckett to dramatize his ideas more forcefully than before, and is one of the reasons that the play is so intense. Beckett often focused on the idea of "the suffering of being." Most of the play deals with the fact that Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for something to alleviate their boredom. Godot can be understood as one of the many things in life that people wait for. The play has often been viewed as fundamentally existentialist in its take on life. The fact that none of the characters retain a clear mental history means that they are constantly struggling to prove their existence.

Thus, the boy who consistently fails to remember either of the two protagonists' casts doubt on their very existence. This is why Vladimir demands to know that the boy will in fact remember them the next day. *Waiting for Godot* is part of the Theater of the Absurd. This implies that it is meant to be irrational. Absurd theater does away with the concepts of drama, chronological plot, logical language, themes, and recognizable settings. There is also a split between the intellect and the body within the work. Thus, Vladimir represents the intellect and Estragon the body, both of whom cannot exist without the other. Here, in this study it's decided to work on the absurdity in this text in order to analyze that how this text represent key issues of absurdity. The text selected is Samuel Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot". Though much have been written on this literary text from existentialist point of view but the present study has uncovered many dilemmas of absurdity in the text and in this way the analysis will further our understanding of absurdity. Although efforts have been made to make the analysis more comprehensive, but still because of the length of the texts only limited examples are selected and thus worked on.

WHAT IS EXISTENTIALISM? Existentialism which carries different themes and meanings is a twentieth century philosophical movement that began and flourished after World War II in France. The first existentialists with whom this philosophical movement can be related are Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. They were not existing when the actual existentialism started in the twentieth century. Though existentialism got different connotations but basically its focus was on individual and his relation to God that why people exist and what role this existence has got. It says that man's life is full of unease, restlessness, awkwardness, apprehensions, worries, angst, and fear and with no meaning in life. In this regard Marshall (2006) while presenting all the negative aspects of life states that it is concerned with homelessness, facelessness, meaninglessness and solitariness. There are two views about existentialism i.e., atheist and theist existentialism. Atheist existentialism is the belief that life is meaningless with no purpose. It is just existence with no ultimate truth. This view is shared by Camus and Samuel Beckett etc. On the other hand, theist existentialism believes that it is not the

fact that life is without any purpose and meaningless but it is we people that cannot understand this phenomenon.

This includes Kierkegaard's philosophy about existence who turns to Christ for salvation (Blackman, 1952). To make this meaningless life more dignified and decorous, choices are to be made. This does not mean that these choices are meaningless. These choices are supposed to be rational and not irrational like the world, man lives in with no purpose. In this regard Nietzsche says "God is dead and men are faced with the profound responsibility of deciding for themselves, choosing for themselves, acting for themselves, and being themselves; i.e., choosing authentic existences rather than "losing" themselves in the crowd, being coming a "non-entity," escaping reality". It means that they are of the view that do, what you want to because after death only your existence will come to an end and there will be no future about which you are to be worried. There is another name Jean-Paul Sartre whose famous maxim is "existence precedes essence". William Barrent says that "essence is what the thing is; existence refers rather to the sheer fact that the thing is". He further clarifies it and says that if somebody says that I am a man then it means that "I am" represents existence and "man" is the essence that the presence creates. It means that we exist with no essence and thus no reason or purpose. Man does not exist for the fulfillment of some predefined goals but rather it is man himself who will define his goal and essence. In this way individual is free to live and act. In this sense these views reject any agreed upon or determining code. But it should be kept in mind that this freedom does not avoid man's responsibility. This is this freedom which leads towards responsibility. The individual is responsible for what he is doing, he is and what he thinks. As there is no limit to man's freedom, in the same way there is no rational bound to what he is responsible for (Tulloch, 1952). It is man who can choose his own course of action but this freedom is also a problem (Warnock, 1970). Now what happens is that if individuals are free and they are completely responsible for their actions, beliefs and other things then this struggle between freedom and responsibility creates a situation of anxiety which leads to escapism and at last to self-deception. To conclude, existentialism is a movement whose basic themes include individual freedom, responsibility, irrationality of life, subjectivity, selection of choices, anxiety and absurdity. This paper is a try to analyze the text while keeping in view the major themes of absurdity, so here some light on absurdity has been thrown.

WHAT IS ABSURDITY? Absurdity is the view of existentialist philosopher that human existence in this universe is ambiguous and chaotic. In literal sense absurdity is meaninglessness, bizarre, incongruence, silly, ridiculous and strange. Though it was Beckett who is well known for the theater of the absurd but basically the word absurd was coined by "Martin Esslin to describe the anti-realistic post-war drama of playwrights as Beckett, Arthur Adamov and Jean Genet". In absurdity, no meaning exists in this universe for man, but it is man himself who has to search for the meaning. Absurdity is in fact a condition where man is compelled to exist without his individualism in society and hence does not possess any degree of effective

communication (Robert, 1995). In the real sense, man existence cannot escape from being absurd. One cannot claim that he has some solutions for attaining the life which is without being absurd. Martin Esslin quoted in Nelson say that absurd is a: kind of drama that presents a view of the absurdity of the human condition by the abandoning of usual or rational devices and by the use of nonrealistic form. Conceived in perplexity and spiritual anguish, the theater of the absurd portrays not a series of connected incidents telling a story but a pattern of images presenting people as bewildered beings in an incomprehensible universe. So, while keeping in view the above definitions of absurdity one can say that in absurd conditions man becomes senseless, lost and detached. It is this senselessness where one gets "conscious realization that there is no final resolution---no final synthesis- but only a kind of social game whose purpose it is to create theses that will eventually destroy themselves". In absurdity death is considered the most awaited thing and in fact the most important moment of one's life and hence celebrated. Now, the question arises that why death is so welcomed besides the fact that it is the harshest aspect of one's life. The answer to this question is escapism i.e., to escape from the very source of absurdity, which is life. So, all this means that absurdity is despair i.e., disparity of life and actions where man is compelled to go for some remedies and in this way, death is considered as opium which can help in escapism from this absurdity.

SAMUEL BECKETT'S LIFE AND THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Samuel Beckett was born in 1906 in a Dublin suburb, into a Protestant middle-class family. He was educated at a boarding school and then at Trinity College in Dublin. Then he moved to Paris, where he became closely associated with the Irish novelist James Joyce. In Paris he wrote most of his works first in French, then translated them into English. He began his literary career as a short-story writer and a novelist. He was one of a group of dramatists who developed the so called "Theatre of the Absurd". Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" (1952) was the first play in this style. It achieved immense success, it was regarded as the most original, influential play of the time and its protagonists, the tramps Vladimir and Estragon, became the emblems of the Absurd. Beckett's further plays develop the character of the naked, helpless, static being: "Endgame" (1958) deals with the dissolution of the relationship; "Krapp's Last Tape" (1959) is a monologue which stresses the impossibility for a man to find an identity; "Happy Days" (1961). One of his last plays is "Breath" (1970). In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died in 1989. Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" is generally considered the starting point of Absurdist drama. The term "absurd" is linked to a group of dramatists who emerged in the 1950s: The Irish writer Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov and Eugene Ionesco. They did not form a school, since each playwright regarded himself as an outsider, with his own roots and background and a personal approach to form and subject matter. Cut off from religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless. This sense of anguish, inaction and lack of purpose, is the theme of the plays of Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard. The "Theatre of the Absurd" is characterized by the belief that

man's life appears to be meaningless and purposeless and that human beings cannot communicate and understand each other. The main features of the "Theatre of the Absurd" are:

- The absence of a real story or plot.
- Vagueness about time, place and the characters.
- The value of language is reduced.
- Large use of pauses, silences, miming and farcical situations.
- Incoherent babbling makes up the dialogue.

THE ABSURD STORY OF WAITING FOR GODOT - The play is divided into two acts. In Act I, two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon; or "Didi" and "Gogo", are waiting on a country road for a mysterious Godot, who eventually sends a boy to inform them he is not coming but will surely come the following day. The tramps think about separation and even suicide in each act, yet remain dependent on each other and never do anything. The other two characters, Pozzo and Lucky, who are physically linked to each other by a rope, make continuous purposeless journeys to fill their existence. The play ends with the two tramps still waiting for Godot, who never comes.

ABSURDITY IN TITLE-According to "Lexikon der Weltliteratur", the title of the play already includes past history, action and solution, sense and meaninglessness, goal and satisfiability. In general, a title evokes expectations and is foreshadowing the coming scene. When there is a name mentioned in the title, we automatically assume that this name stands for the most important character in the text. But with regard to Waiting for Godot one can learn that "waiting" appears – but Godot never does. Thus, it is an unconventional handling of the title through which a disillusion is created. In short, one could say that the title is misleading you.

ABSURDITY IN SETTING- Waiting for Godot's background is "Country Road". wood. evening. "The introduction itself is a wonderful glimpse of the reader through the absurd scripts that it has experienced. This absurd exists in every aspect of this drama. The reader is easily confused with the same strange funny thing as the character. The habit has been reflected in drama, characterization, plot structure and stylistic theme. The reader cannot remove this habit, the play is also provided by monotonous repetition, repelling, but to a deeper understanding of people.

ABSURDITY IN STRUCTURE - The play "Waiting for Godot" is structured in a way, which presents the idea not only about the uselessness and meaninglessness of time but also of life. The basic structure of the drama where being tired of their lives and waiting but without any help from Godot, the two main characters with non-sensical existence, two times both in Act one and Act two, try to commit suicides. The continuous waiting increases their despair and their lives are disgusted in this way and thus absurd. This is this structure, which shows the absurd nature of this play. So, it could be said that death, which is fear, and the end of life, time and hope is the overwhelming theme in this text.

We know that death is the worst happening and nobody will want it to have but still if someone looks to the protagonists of the concerned text that are Estragon and Vladimir in this work of art, they not only want death but also welcome it. They want death to escape the harsh realities of life and to achieve their goals and this is the sign of absurdity.

ABSURDITY IN THEME - Samuel Beckett's *Godot* Waiting for the alienation and truth, the purpose, the alienation theme of God and mutual theme "Waiting for Godot" is Samuel Beckett's play. Play and sparring Periodic performance conveys hopeless feelings, feelings influence this senseless world, not fearing God. Due to lack of communication, alienation of humans, absurd vocabulary, image, structure and perspectives are sufficient to demonstrate. The aim of the play is to evoke imperfections and frustration.

ABSURDITY IN CHARACTERS - The characters of the texts also got elements of absurdity. In order to prove it, if we consider the main characters of "Waiting for Godot" i.e., Estragon and Vladimir, we can see that they are waiting without knowing the purpose they are waiting for. Furthermore, they are not making sense of the lives and existence and that is why they think about suicide. In the same way, they also indicate the carelessness of Godot towards them. This relationship is represented in the shape of master slave dichotomy named Pozzo, the master and Lucky, the slave, where no importance is given to the slave and is overburdened without any care. This is to make Estragon and Vladimir realize that though you are waiting for Godot but this could be your situation in the end. Another thing which is also associated with the absurdity in the characters of "Waiting for Godot" is their trust on each other for holding up and support. Each of them believes to get some sort of help from the other one and thus tries to put a seal to his chaotic life. Therefore, we can say that it is this meaninglessness, this detachment, this strangeness and finally, this spiritual and physical isolation in the characters of the text that make them absurd characters.

METHODOLOGY - Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* is a dramatic work which still uses the same theme of waiting that has been used in another Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. *Endgame* was written in French, entitled *Fin de Partie*, then Samuel Beckett himself translated it into English. The process of writing *Endgame* was finished in July 1956. It was published in February 1958 by Grove Press, copyright 1958 by Grove Press. This play, the English version, consists of 43 pages and it was republished together with Beckett's other plays in *Samuel Beckett the Complete Dramatic Works* by Faber and Faber limited in London in 1986. The first production, in the hands of Roger Blin, was put on in the Studio des Champs-Élysées in May of 1958. *Endgame* is a play in one act. The characters of the play are four persons; Hamm, Clov, Nagg, and Nell. Each of the characters was described as having a mutual depending toward another. The story began with Clov, the servant of the house, starts some activities which can be said as his daily tasks. Clov serves Hamm, the master but later can be concluded as Clov's father,

and Hamm's parents; Nagg and Nell who have no legs and living in the ashbin. Most parts of the play are the conversation between the four characters and it is dominated with Clov intent to leave Hamm. It can be said that the waiting in the play is the waiting of Clov's leaving which will be result in the end other characters' life. Endgame is a portrait of the hopeless human condition. By using the idea of absurdity, we can see that Endgame contain an idea of man searching the meaning of his life and it is a critic toward man eternal failure to understand about it. Therefore, the Moral-philosophical approach will be applied in the analysis since there is an indication of the present of philosophical value in Endgame. Moral-philosophical approach, according to Guerin, is an approach of which is basic is to examine the literary work that teach morality and to probe philosophical issue (Guerin, 1979:29). With this approach, the analysis to find the idea of absurdity that reflected on the characterization of characters in Beckett's Endgame will be possible to be done.

CONCLUSION -To conclude, we would say that as both the writers are famous for their absurdity, so their present works, also shows absurdity because of the meaninglessness of actions, sterility of the characters and strangeness of setting etc. Furthermore, we can say that both the works show some sort of absurdity but still got many differences. The very basic difference is that of their beliefs in God. On the one hand, Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for days for the arrival of Godot but on the other hand Meursault does not believe in God. Though Estragon and Vladimir believed in God and waited for His coming but like Meursault who did not believe in God, have not the blessing of meeting Him and thus the play ends with nothing but with meaninglessness and absurdity. While keeping in view the elements of absurdity, the study focuses the analysis of Samuel Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" and Camus' novel "The Outsider". The artistic features of these works such as title, setting, structure, theme, characters and actions/dialogues are overviewed through the lens of absurdity. Both of the texts have these issues in some proportion with different contexts but many similarities. The absurdity appeared was in the form of meaninglessness of life without any goal and purpose, chaos in life, love for death and emotional and spiritual barren characters.

REFERENCE

- [1] Irfan Ullah and Liaqat Iqbal "A Study of Absurdity in Samuel Beckett's Play Waiting for Godot and Albert Camus Novel the Outsider", (online) retrieved February 29 2020 from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/glr.2016>.
- [2] J. Nick Smith. "Waiting for Godot Study Guide". Grade Saver, 1 September 1999 Web. retrieved March 2 2020 from: <https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot>
- [3] Lea Lorena Jerns. "Absurdity in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot ". (online) retrieved March 1 2020 from: <https://www.grin.com/document/274162>
- [4] "Samuel Beckett's Life and The Theatre of The Absurd". retrieved March 1 2020 from: <https://www.docsity.com/it/samuel-beckett-slife-and-the-theatre-of-the-absurd/2256695/>

- [5] Setting and Theme of Waiting for Godot and All My Sons retrieved (online) March 1 2020 from:
<https://www.essaybot.com/sample/essays/detail?id=1834&query=Setting%20and%20Theme%20of%20Waiting%20for%20Godot>
- [6] Tazir Hussain." Theatre of Absurd and Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' as an Absurd Drama". (online)retrieved February 29 2020 from:
<https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v3i11/MDcxMT>
- [7] Beckett, Samuel. Waiting for Godot, New Delhi: Penguin Books India. Pvt. Ltd.1996. Print.
- [8] Cuddon, J.A, Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory. New York: Penguin Group. 1998. Print.
- [9] Barnett, R. (2008). Suicide and Atheism: Camus and the Myth of Sisyphus. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from www.geocities.com.
- [10] Barrett, W. (1964). Irrational man: A study in existential philosophy. London: Mercury Mooks.
- [12] Blackman, H. J. (1952). Six existentialist thinkers. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- [13] Natanson, M. (1973). A critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's ontology. Netherlands: The Hague.
- [14] Nelson, (1993). Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot: A study guide. Retrieved May 24, 2018 from io.uwinnipeg.ca.
- [15] Robert, (1995). Cliff's notes on Beckett's Waiting for Godot. New Delhi: Kalyani.