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EXISTENTIALISM IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S "WAITING FOR GODOT"

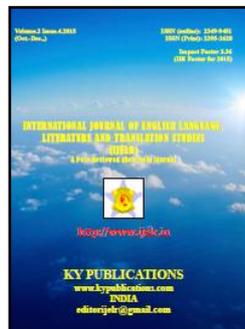
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ABSTRACT

Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* can be gathered in the category of Existential Drama. All the four characters Estragon , VLADIMIR, Lucky, Pozzo in an absurd way discuss the problems of existence. As is shown they are waiting for an unknown person 'Godot' at an unknown place. They suffer from meaninglessness, isolation, and frustration. As it happens no Godot comes but ironically a messenger comes who informs that Godot will not come .These characters are fed up of waiting. The word 'waiting' is universalized in the play which is an essential feature of any existential drama. Their antics and useless activities lead them nowhere. This is exactly modern man's predicament that is successfully dramatized by the dramatist. The importance of the play as an existential drama lies in the multiplicity of meanings which critics have discovered in it.

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Discussion

The context of existentialism, we must go back to Plato. We feel Plato started the pace for 'existence'. He said in day to day existence what we come across is not the objects we encounter, but FORMS and these forms can be understood at the level of intellect. For example, we see a beautiful chair and a beautiful ox. These are two different things yet common. The common element in these two is beauty. We cannot see beauty alone, we must have an object only then we can see beauty. Such is existence, it has no meaning or we cannot see meaning alone we need objects and the relation only then we can find meaning. So meaning is an ideal thing, one has to participate in finding it. It has to be searched in events, things, persons and objects. But important thing is what meaning we get out of things that can make or mar our life. At later stage Plato's word 'forms' was also addressed as ideas. If we apply Aristotle's four basic questions to existence, then things can be seen in new light.

- What is existence?
- What is it made of?
- What made it?
- What purpose does it serve?

If we try to answer the first question, many answers can be given. Existence is a mass of things, objects, ideas. Interestingly, the second question can have the same answer. It is made of things, objects, ideas and actions. If we come to the third question, we see some power or some energy has caused it to exist. It surely has a purpose and this purpose is up to the humanity what they find.

The play 'Waiting For Godot' can be and has many interpretations. The question of existence can be noticed in almost all the dialogues of the play. We see two tramps wait beside a tree for a mysterious figure with whom Vladimir asserts and Estragon believes, they have an appointment. This mysterious figure hopefully will change their position for better. The existentialistic element is visible in this dialogue:

Estragon: Didi.

Vladmir: Yes.

Estragon: I can't go on like this.

Vladmir: That's what you think.

Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.

Vladmir: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. Unless Godot comes.

Estragon: And if he comes?

Vladmir: We'll be saved.

We see human beings on earth always expect somebody to save them from all existential problems.

The play does not tell a story, it explores a static situation. "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful", says Estragon. The two heroes of this play neither recognize their own existence as accidental, nor think of transforming it into something positive with which they can identify themselves. What Beckett presents is not nihilism, but the inability of a man to be a nihilist even in a situation of utter hopelessness. In spite of their inaction and the pointlessness of their existence, these two tramps still want to go on. Millions of people today do not after all give up living even when their life becomes pointless. Even the nihilist wish to go on living. Ruined by their habit of inaction or of acting without their own initiative, they have lost their will power to decide not to go on. Or ultimately, they go on living merely because they happen to exist and because existence does not know of any other alternative but to exist.

Vladmir: I get used to the muck as I go along.

Estragon(after prolonged reflection): Is that the opposite?

Vladmir: Question of temperament.

Estragon: Of character.

Vladmir: Nothing you can do about it.

Estragon: No use struggling.

Vladmir: One is what one is.

Estragon: No use wriggling.

There is another pair in 'Waiting For Godot' which gives it an existential touch. The speech of Pozzo in the following words is remarkable:

Pozzo: Have you not been tormenting me with your accursed time? It's abominable. When? When? One day, is not that enough for you...? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then its night once more.

Like many existentialists, Beckett is talking about the problem of boredom and problem of living. Pozzo and Vladimir have both entered" the perilous zone when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being." Neither of them likes what he sees but both know that there is nothing to be done.

"On!" cries Pozzo to Lucky as they make their last exit.

"You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on," says the unnamable. "I can't go on," repeats Vladimir.

The basic problem that afflicts mankind is, 'how to get through life?' Beckett's answer is simple and not encouraging: by force of habit, by going on in spite of boredom and pain, by talking, by not listening to the silence, absurdly and without hope. The only consolation man on earth can have to talk about his position or

problem but never the solution. Life is to be lived as it is, nothing can be suggested or no change can be brought.

Man's constant search for happiness on this planet has been depicted in the play. In any existence all creatures would seek it. Beckett suggests it in a very effective manner in this conversation of Estragon and Vladimir.

Estragon: I tell you I wasn't doing anything.

Vladimir: Perhaps you weren't. But it's the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living.

Estragon: I wasn't doing anything.

Vladimir: You must be happy, too deep down, if you only knew it.

Estragon: Happy about what?

Vladimir: To be back with me again.

Estragon: Would you say so?

Vladimir: Say you are, even if it's not true.

Estragon: What am I to say?

Vladimir: Say, I am happy.

Estragon: I am happy.

Vladimir: So am I.

Estragon: So am I.

Vladimir: We are happy.

Estragon: We are happy. (silence) What do we do now, now that we are happy?

The problem of everydayness is considered to be a vital issue in existential philosophy. The routine of human beings is such a dull affair that it saps all energy of a man. Man is caught in the web of everyday existence. In the play this problem of everydayness is visible. The second act is almost the repetition of the first act, it is deliberately done.

Vladimir: It's the start that's difficult.

Estragon: You can start from anything.

Vladimir: Yes, but you have to decide.

Estragon: True.

Silence

Vladimir: Help me!

Estragon: I'm trying.

Silence

Vladimir: When you seek you hear.

Estragon: You do.

Vladimir: That prevents you from finding.

Estragon: It does.

Vladimir: That prevents you from thinking.

Estragon: You think all the same.

So the couple tramp is fed up with the routine life which is too difficult to be handled. This sameness and dullness snatches meaning out of existence.

Another existential trait is visible in the play when Vladimir, Pozzo, Estragon want to leave everything but they cannot, they have to be there.

Estragon: I hear something.

Pozzo: Where?

Vladimir: It's the heart.

Pozzo: Damnation! (disappointed)

Vladimir: Silence!

Estragon: Perhaps it has stopped.

They straighten up.

Pozzo: Which of you smells so bad?

Estragon: He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet.

Pozzo: I must go.

Estragon: Then adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Vladmir: Adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Silence. No one moves.

Vladmir: Adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Estragon: Adieu.

Conclusion

We can sum up that 'Waiting For Godot' is an existential drama, as all the four characters are always worried about their lot and try to adjust in the dreary setting of life. They fight with the hopelessness and meaninglessness of life. The uncertainty and unreliability with which Godot surrounds them reveal the existential outlook of the play. At first sight the play does not appear to have any particular relationship with the human predicament. But as we probe through the absurd dialogues we are confronted with the existential element visible in the play. The baffled helplessness of the couple 'Vladimir and Estragon' appeals to us as our own helplessness on earth.

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