



SAMUEL BECKETT'S *ENDGAME* AS AN EXISTENTIAL PLAY: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: -

Samuel Beckett (April, 13, 1906-1989, Paris, France) was a Nobel prize winner Irish writer, who has written numerous novels, plays, short stories and poems. His works links and marks new dimensions in modern and post-modern literature and he is associated with absurd theatre deals with absurdity and existentialism. Some of the notable works of this genre written by Beckett are 'Waiting for Godot (1954), Endgame (1958), Happy Days (1962) etc. This article focuses on the existential crisis and how characters are portrays a light on the miseries of life where the meaning of life is put under the lenses and existentialism as a theory taken in consideration for further analysis were meaning of life is questioned thoroughly. In the Endgame (1958), an endless cycle of pain is shown in a single setting by Beckett and implications are towards human being state of acute helplessness and hopelessness struck by either due to physical inabilities, disease, mental dilemmas, societal conditions, meaning formation and by inevitable reality of life. Time has also struck and it seems like eternal cycle which brings suffering endless one. The protagonist i.e. Hamm, suffers from blindness and disability, lost his claim on his own leg and sits all together in the wheelchair, Clov, his male caretaker shown as a man suffering from pain in his legs and body frequently asked by Hamm about his condition. Nag and Nell the progenitor of Hamm desolated forgotten and isolated within isolation and are in the ashbin, counting days and days are now numbers. All the characters one way or the other symbolizes human conditions and miseries or deals with existential crisis. This article relies on secondary sources of data like articles, journals, websites, e-books, YouTube videos, research papers on the topic for validation and reliability. Analytical methods based on secondary sources are the methodology followed. Many scholarly articles and research works, done on this further analyzed and concept of decay, destruction, desolation, isolation, hesitation and broken relationship etc. are some of the aspects which contributes to the formation of this play as well as notions for Absurdity and Existential crisis at the same time

KEYWORDS: -

Absurd Literature, Existentialism, Samuel Beckett, Modern, Post-modern literature, Theatre of absurd.

INTRODUCTION: -

Samuel Beckett, prominent Irish play write of the Modern and Post-Modern era of 20th century mainly deals or talks about the existential philosophy, absurdity and crisis of life in most of his plays, *Endgame* is one such. Absurd literature can be justly applied in drama as well as in prose works which deals with human agonies, internal dilemma; constant search for purpose, meaning and outlined that existence is essentially absurd, beyond logical and can be represented through the works of the same genre. Alfred Jarry's French play 'Uber Roi' can be considered as the fundamental or building block of existentialism. Expressionism and Surrealism contributes to the development of Existentialism and fictional works of writers like Franz Kafka's 'The Trial' (1925), 'The Metamorphosis' (1915) are of some of the fundamental works of 1920s. "Existentialism" is first coined by French philosopher Marcel, which somehow not widely accepted rather

Jean-Paul Sartre rejected it but through he later mentioned “Existentialism is Humanism” in a lecture. Soren Kierkegaard, renowned philosopher also regarded as the “Father of Existentialism”. He rejects the scientific basis of reason and logic in his existential philosophy and denies that reason and logic are not the absolute truth. Existential philosophers like Sartre and Camus talks about human conditions and isolation which Beckett adopted and skillfully applied in his works like *Endgame* (1958), *Waiting for Godot* (1954), *Happy Days* (1962) etc.

Critics like Sartre and Theodor Adorno praised Beckett for his work and critic like Georg Lukacs questions Beckett’s philosophical approach towards life and literature.

Endgame deals with the miseries of characters of the play, symbolizes societal conditions, identity crisis in a particular setting as a microcosm of society and world, desolated, destructed and detachment from material world and spiritual crisis contributes to meaninglessness, lack of purpose, sense of oneness, fragmented relationship, prolonged waiting aided by fear, trauma, anger, despair, gloomy situation, and overall lack of interest in worldly affairs and in life as a whole. Post war condition and effects on human psyche also prominent in it where outside the room is barren and hardly any site of human and any creature is visible in the play *Endgame*.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: -

The play opens with a gloomy setting a room is shown where Clov, the caretaker of Hamm is constantly at run observing and going left to right in a confined space or can be illustrated as trapped in the walls. Hamm, the blind, disable master sitting in a wheelchair without actual wheel in a centered position described by Beckett symbolizes decentered values and constant search for validation. The two are justly connected. Though absurd drama there are actually no setting, no plot construction and on certain opening and definite end. Beckett’s *Endgame* as an absurd and existential play reflects on the same.

Miseries of existence and disparities of life of characters like Clov, who affirms that he himself trapped and has to rely upon Hamm, his master just for surviving, resentful and angry of his existence, avoidance, spiritual crisis and tone of utter frustration prevails in his voice and constant search for escape and also sometimes meaning, a reference to this can be found in Camus work ‘*The Myth of Sisyphus*’ (1942), which talks about conditions of man which is deprived of meaning and full of unjustified actions and thoughts where there no real basis, man feels no sense of oneness rather feeling strange of his existence, constantly tries, he points out that man and his life is not connected anymore like the actor and his setting are two things the actor has very little no control over the setting. In the ‘*The Myth of Sisyphus*’ Camus tries to give the reader what existential crisis and absurdity be like.

In the play constant conversation between Hamm and Clov has very little to do with and merely has meaning rather than babbling. A sense of nothingness and lack of purpose in life like a trap is predominant. Hamm, calls his parents and blames them that they are the one who is liable for his pain and miseries, he feels that they have the opportunity and the option to have a child or not.

“NAGG:

Me Pap!

HAMM:

Accursed progenitor!” (Beckett, 1957, p.6)

The pair, i.e. Nag and Nell, the parents of Hamm, are in the ashbin, unable to move and in constant dilemma, lurking in their days of past tries to reestablish which seemed lost in a course of time, which can be a symbolic representation of modern and postmodern people just after the World Wars and started questioning the existence of God and authority and the meaning and purpose of life. Nagg and Nell once in a love relation has lost interest in the physical as well as intellectual manifestation of it, one finds no interest in the other.

Sleep is compared to death and the two Nagg and Nell most of the time either silent or in slumber signifies they are like the living dead. Nagg tries to confront and reestablish romantic relation but fails. Their vision weakens, memory fades away and physical sense are collapsing, detachment and distancing of human relationship is also can be further illustrated from the conversation of the two, where Nagg ask Nell to scratch his back but got the reply that it can’t be possible and he himself have to do it. Nagg ask Nell that

is she crying or not like before. Nagg saves half biscuit for her given by Hamm. They are left with no such purpose in life or meaning, the crisis of survival.

Nagg tells stories to Nell but she couldn't grasp it. Nagg sometimes as a husband tries to show and feels the sense of responsibility towards his wife, he keeps half of the biscuit for her, tries to provide her with solace, but existential crisis, sense of isolation and individual existence which he himself suffering from.

Hamm, as a son feels irritated and has very little sense of responsibility towards his parents and isolate him, his in capabilities physical barriers and indifferent attitude towards life in his conversation with his caretaker Clov and strong individual and desperation shows his present situation. The characters are individual in nature and alienation hits them and they are left with or trapped in an eternal cycle where there is no escape, Clov tries to free himself from his master but his survival instinct and need for food restrain himself him or it might be that there is no any human left. Hamm in a conversation asked Clov that there is a time when they both share a bond of love as a human but present situation and loss of faith in life mingled with spiritual and moral crisis changed their perspective towards life.

The philosophy of existentialism can be interpreted as a juxtaposition of two terms 'exist' and 'existence' and seen as an active notion than a passive one. This relates to the existence or state of being in the world, human overall presence in the world, including his living conditions, food habit, spiritual connections, relationship dynamics, his societal status and wholly his contributions towards the greater good. Soren Kierkegaard famous existential works '*Fear and Trembling*' (1843), *The Concept of Dread* (1844) are some fundamental works which deals with existentialism. He indicates towards the authority and role of God in human life and in his belief system which in term provides serenity and peace to the mind.

Jean Paul Sartre reveals the notions of modern existentialism and elaborates it in his novels and plays and philosophical writings and according to him human being choice and willingness defines the meaning and purpose of his or her life which leads to fulfilling and integrated society and life.

Late 20th century prepares the stage for existential movement and civilization struck with the horror of the world wars started questioning the vary basis or root of existence and God. Humans are left with the choice and started evaluating life as an individual, long lived essence of life and authority either political, spiritual and presence of God becomes obscure.

Two notable philosophers in existentialism Sartre and Kierkegaard questions Christian faith within the system, beliefs of human values, cultural, moral, social now becomes individual in existentialism. Existentialism talks about the notions of individualism, isolation, alienation and altogether it leads to find the purpose of life in meaningless fragmented gestures and actions of humans. According to Larsson, Existentialism is creepy because it typically suggests that existence has no purpose or explanation (denying the presence or authority of God, or a Godless world).

In the play *Endgame* Beckett constantly portrays the disintegration and shattering ideas and fragmented conversations either in between Clov and Hamm or in between Nagg and Nell. The activities in the play by Clov is mundane and repetitive, he constantly moves within the room once in the kitchen and again comes back to his master Hamm and carry out his order willingly or unwillingly in mere despair and anger, he find no purpose still tries to find one in momentary actions of his. The other characters are completely desolated. Beckett compassionately uses his ability and the characters use repetitive words or sentences in the play purposefully like Hamm ask that he want pain killer many times and Clov replies that it's not the time for you to have it.

This line has been repeated several times is on such example. The concept of center is also presented where it is symbolically an indication towards de-centeredness of life. Hamm ask Clov to put his wheelchair in the center, not too right or left. Hamm and his father Nagg in a conversation makes a reference where Nagg reminds Hamm of his childhood fear and not letting him sleep and be present by his side, another burning aspect in existential writings i.e. fragmented or broken relationship which might be a result of loss of faith in humanity in post war western society. Clov reveals that he encounters a rat in kitchen upon hearing this Hamm becomes shocked and ask him are rats still there or ceased to exist and he ask is there still any dog. in episodic manner through conversation Beckett dim light on material and physical aspects of earth and its elements. Desolated and destructed outside world shows that the characters might be the only people living, continuous decay of human senses and emotions are there throughout the play where all the characters inabilities and lacking are shown periodically either physical lose or isolation from one self and society and lose of purpose and meaning in life which is common and general theme in the theater of absurd

with relation to existentialism. Hesitation of the characters inability to find meaning contributes to the theme of absurdity and existence. The color grey in the 2nd line of the play which is neither white nor black also symbolizes desolation.

Longing for freedom from misery and finding purpose is the motive and the play *Endgame*, as an existential work of Beckett closes with such sort of actions and restore and comes back to the very beginning where Hamm and other characters are left with the questions about the meaning of life. Decay, death, loss of human life, society, moral, spiritual crisis constructs the basis of existentialism and the play of Beckett not an exception to it.

CONCLUSION: -

The play *Endgame* by Beckett is a literature of modern world based on the philosophy of existence and tries to answer the vary basis of existence in the world either with purpose or without it in a philosophical way considering all the aspects on human emotions which a person encounters within himself and due to influence of society in the course of life. All the aspects of life are lastly shown as devoid of purpose and meaning by Beckett in the closing of the play and the hopeless and helplessness of human conditions are justified by doing so.

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