

***Existentialism and the concept of Islamism in  
Samuel Barclay Beckett's Waiting For Godot***

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***Abstract***

*This work of literature drama, Waiting for Godot by Samuel Barclay Beckett, is a masterpiece in English literature for summarizing the chaos of postmodern individuals. The work is considered to be the last of modernist literature or the first of postmodernist literature. Samuel Beckett's works have been identified as a representation of people's attitude and the meaningless absurdity of the human condition<sup>1</sup>. This paper investigates the Islamic representation of existence in this world in this drama. It highlights the misinterpretation of the religion. The words of the character denotes the mental illusion of their existence which is the result of unconscious memory and believes they have made. The remedial condition for them was the adaptation of the Islamism.*

***Keywords:*** Islamism, existentialism, God, absurdity

***Introduction***

Waiting for Godot (1952) is an unusual and prominent drama written by Irish Nobel Prize-winner (1969) contribution to drama and literature. Samuel Beckett. He originally wrote the drama in French, with the title *En attendant Godot*. The work was innovatory for what it lacked: real plot, discernible character development, and any sort of adherence to dramatic traditions. It was a hit – everyone loves a rebel – and the play became a cornerstone of "Le Théâtre de l'Absurde," or Theatre of the Absurd, a dramatic body of work largely defined by the characteristic traits of *Godot*.

Samuel Beckett himself translated the play into English – his first language – shortly after, and the play's achievement continued. The amount of criticism spawned by *Godot* is staggering and revolves both around the play's literary merits and its value as a philosophical work. Beckett is the single

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writer in the world who had written his entire work in two languages, English and French.

This drama was a probe of a new practice of drama. Martin Esslin categorized this as the 'theatre of the absurd'. The purpose of this study is to analyse how Islamism is developed by Beckett. He constructs the world of the absurd, nothingness in the drama which represents misleading of the people. The Theatre of the Absurd explains the distinction between orthodox dramas and contemporary dramas. This drama of Samuel Beckett grasps the key interrogation that remains in every today's sentiment, nevertheless an unreciprocated question in itself it is a pomposity one for the Muslims of today. In 2012, Bahee Hadaegh discussed this drama under the title, Quasi-mysticism in Beckett's Major Plays. Where he talks that it is positively appraises the specific approach of the late modern tragic characters through the lens of the author's own cultural background, bringing some evidence from Persian mystic (Sufi) poetry which reflects the concept of rejoicing suffering, self-annihilation, and finally self-realization. The study discloses that as tragic characters eagerly get involved in the substratum of suffering from modern times, they progressively manifest a more complete degree of self-realization<sup>2</sup>. Azam. A in 2014, studied this drama with the perspective of Post-Modern. It investigated the subplot of Pozzo and Lucky mark some other major issues of postmodernism (Ibid). A paper, Waiting for Godot: Absurd Drama Mould in Malaysia by Mohamad Nazri Ahmad. Where he studied the influences of Waiting for Godot as basic mould of Malay absurd drama. Source of this study are Malay drama scripts which are being classified as absurd drama. It is argued that although these scripts have absorbed existentialism influences through Waiting for Godot but its characteristics in Malay drama had been moulded in such a way that suit the Malay taught, custom, creed, and most importantly with the religious faith of the Malays, that is Islam<sup>3</sup>. The play "Waiting for Godot" has a universal appeal. The homeless person represent all humanity. Their sufferings are the sufferings of all human being, no matter in which country they live in or what religious beliefs they have. They reflect modern man's

loneliness, absurdity, forgetfulness, illusions, deferred hope, meaninglessness, inaction, physical suffering and mental anguish, death-wish and isolation.

Estragon and Vladimir are the sickly residents of this new wasteland. They suffer from inward and outward ailments. The only cure from all these afflictions is in the shape of Godot.

### ***Theatre of the Absurd***

It refers to a literary effort in drama popular throughout European countries from the 1940s to approximately 1989. Absurdist playwrights adhered to the theories of French-Algerian philosopher Albert Camus, in particular his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, published in 1942. The definition is;

*Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless<sup>4</sup>.*

### ***Existentialism***

The early 19th century philosopher Kierkegaard is considered founder. It is chiefly a philosophy of searching the 'Purpose of Existence' of individual self. The philosophical intellectual activates with the rational of human matter, Enquiring Religion-Islam, Civilisations, the Existence of complete Truth, the purpose of awareness.

'Waiting for Godot', is an Absurddrama, stirred by the Existentialism of early 19th century. The plot of 'waiting for godot', in which the characters are waiting ceaselessly in order to meet the godot. The Vladimir and Estragon wait endlessly but in vain for the named Godot to come. They think that godot is an acquaintance but in reality unable to know him. They were admitting that if he comes, we would not recognise him were they to see him.

Islam is the religion of performing the obligatory deeds. In this religion every individual is required to keep busy himself/herself in order to meet the criteria for the Day of Judgment. In the drama, to pass the time the characters eat, sleep, converse, argue, sing, play games, exercise, swap hats, and contemplate suicide.

Kierkegaard continued that the single is exclusively answerable for giving his or her own life meaning. The human

is confronted to live life zealously and naturally, despite existential hindrances and disruptions including hopelessness, anxiety, ridiculousness, estrangement, and dullness.

The Succeeding existentialist philosophers retain the emphasis on the individual, but differ, in varying degrees, on how one achieves and what constitutes a fulfilling life, what obstacles must be overcome, and what external and internal factors are involved, including the potential consequences of the existence or non-existence of God.

### ***Existentialism and Qur'an***

“Do they not reflect upon themselves (even once) God has not created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them save with truth (meaningfully and for definite, wise purposes, and on solid foundations of truth), and for an appointed term. But surely many among the people are in unbelief about the meeting with their Lord.”  
(*Surah Rum'-The Romans-30.8*)

The light of the Holy Qur'an is making the point clear that within the self, that the Quran speaks about an important aspect of Human existence. The 19th century philosophers were lacking the Quran, if they had it, they would have known their purpose of life. The only this verse of the Quran. As the nature of Islam is more of Existentialist in nature.

### ***Analyses of the Drama***

The play is criticizing of religion, God, and the inherent instinct humanity has for identifying its Maker. This debatable play, first played in 1953. It signifies the putting down of the anti-religion, irreligious thought process in the western society. It initiates a common sense that the concept of God is a resultant of human impotence, that the prophets were ineffective liars, and humanity suffers because of its own absurdity. It is trapped in the notion that God will one day come to its saving.

In the play the character of 'the boy', who is not even given a proper name, gives clear likeness to a prophet, as his only part in the entire play is a repetition of the promise that 'Godot is not coming to today, he will come tomorrow'. One of the main character Vladimir treats him with disdain and in a haste of irritation, chases the boy away. Vladimir gets confused

if the boy is the same or his brother and demands that he be recognized the next time they meet; thus creating a tragicomedy depicting that humanity has repeatedly been put in a misunderstanding by prophets, who have made promises of meeting the Creator.

The mere name Godot is painful according to them. It has generally been taken for God in the western societies where it has been played many times. The writer when faced with criticism over the name 'Godot' he chose for the play, believed that if by Godot, he had meant God, he would have said God, and not Godot, adding 'and if I did have that meaning in my mind, it was somewhere in my unconscious and I was not overtly aware of it'. The name 'Godot' also gives an instant notion of describing God with a 'dot', perhaps a dot of human thought and not a reality<sup>5</sup>. However, it is understandable that the writer himself was in the confusion of existence. He made a name for the play which is entirely full of doubt and illusion in terms of the conflict.

In the drama, they do not know their existence in the world and also unaware about the duties of one's life. They are talking in the manner like they are not living in this era.

"Vladimir and Estragon has no family ties nor have their future plans been illustrated in the play. They avoid helping each other, sharing their views and suffer from sheer claustrophobia. They try to change the place of waiting but do not materialize any of their resolutions. These activities denote decentralization, absurdity, identity crisis, frustration, and confusion. They feel afraid of Pozzo and Lucky indicating their sense of uncertainty, insecurity and xenophobia<sup>6</sup>"

**ESTRAGON:** (Giving up again). Nothing to be done

This is the very start of the play.

VLADIMIR: I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.

'Gone forever' indicates here that they are unaware about the importance of the time. They just want to finish this life. Now this has not been proved from the Islamism. It teaches the beauty of life, the joys, the worship and aiming the goal.

**ESTRAGON:** There's nothing to show.

They are repeating the word nothing which leads to the idea of nothingness. When there is no attachment of spiritual believe

then everyone gets to the stage of being not exist in the universe.

**ESTRAGON:** Let's go.

**VLADIMIR:** We can't.

**ESTRAGON:** Why not?

**VLADIMIR:** We're waiting for Godot.

They are being waiting for an entity which is undefined. This concept is developed by their past.

**ESTRAGON:** What about hanging ourselves?

The idleness is the root cause to destructions and disturbances. Human has got a brain which is too fast and numberless flow of positive and negative thoughts are generated within no time. They are waiting for godot which is not sure to come, meanwhile get the sense of nothingness. They do not need to be existed in the world.

**ESTRAGON:** Let's hang ourselves immediately!

They do not even want to be alive for a moment.

Islam is providing hopeful life. They are addicted of such boring life.

**ESTRAGON:** We've lost our rights?

They even do not consider their self to be the part of the world.

**ESTRAGON:** I hear nothing.

Not aware of the time around them.

Estragon declaration “All my life I’ve compared myself to him” echoes atheism in the play. Though there is the reference of Adam, Cain, Abel, The Bible, Gospel, Christ, and Saint but the characters look for a rope to commit suicide, considering life as a burden and time as anagony, and cheapen the existence of God, trusting Him heartless and malicious<sup>7</sup>. These symbolises the mental chaos of the charter about the life they are living in.

Quran clarifies that man is intrinsically aware of both right and wrong, and that it is completely up to him/her to select right or wrong. That is exactly why Allah is going to hold people accountable for their deeds on the Day of Judgement. In the drama, they are demotivated by their own making thoughts.

The path of life cannot be accurately speculated and is completely unknown. Throughout the play we come across hundreds of questions that have no answers, consequently

paralleling our lives because we never understand what, where and how life has brought us to the present moment. When Beckett was asked, he did not have any answers<sup>8</sup>. These are comments about the life of the world. It is only the Islam which gives a straight path and full of satisfaction in terms of strong believes.

The sequences of queries that these Existentialists questioned were not answered by the Religion or one might say Christianity at that time, this is what they believe but it is not so with the faith and religion Islam. The non-availability of proper religion guide made them to say 'there is no meaning to be found in the world beyond what meaning we give to it.' which was notably called the 'Absurdism'. While 'Existentialism' is a search of the individual self, and the purpose of existence of the self, paradoxically people in numbers, captivated by this new set of judgments, started taking it as 'Fact' than philosophy, and became Atheists in numbers.

This 'Meaninglessness' of life, lately, seems to be more of a sadist choice of a group of people like a latest fashion, rather than a search of one's own purpose in life, in the latter part of the century. The generations that came after, were more of 'Agnostics' than Atheists. The reason is they the less awareness of religious facts.

This is the Existential solution that exist in a world devoid of reason, one must create that reason, else be doomed to endless years of waiting for enlightenment to come, which it never will, appearing only on the horizon of tomorrow's forever. Beckett is telling us to get up off our butts and exist. God isn't coming, and if you want to wait forever for him be our guest, but the rest of us are going to be human.

Existentially, there is a segment of thinkers that believe in the divinity of the self, and I believe Beckett, by this statement and others in other plays, feels that way as well. Godot will never show up. Estragon and Vladimir must find him for themselves, rather than letting him come to them. They must take action and make the world around them exist, a world with more than a dead or dying tree.

The strong believes of religion give birth to the satisfaction of life. It was Islam which has been helping the nation. It is the identical religion which was addressed by all the prophets and is further elaborated through the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him<sup>9</sup>.

God ordered him:

"Say: We believe in Allah and in that which was revealed to us and in that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and in that which was given to Moses and to Jesus and to other Prophets from their God; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we are Muslims." Al-Qur'an 3:84

### ***Conclusion***

In this study, it looked for misbelieves of the wrong doer in religion. They made notions of creating a body which they call godot. In *Waiting for Godot* the characters away from the fact that death is inescapable. As a matter of fact, death becomes at times a solution for the frivolousness of daily life. The main two characters envision suicide as nonetheless it were as inoffensive as a walk to the grocery store, probably because there's nothing in their life worth sticking around for anyway. The characters eventually do not commit suicide because they claim not to have the means, but also because they are uncertain of the result of their attempt. As they can't be sure of what their action will bring, they decide on no action at all. They stay at one place all the time and thinking about the life and its happening. They are effected by the doubt of life and existence here. However Islam, a code of life, provides full guideline to live successfully and fulfill the missions. They were far from the religion, therefore the suicide attempts were the daily conversation of them. In order to fulfill this hope, waiting is the pattern they create to represent the meaning of their lives, because they strongly believe that their lives will be fulfilled if they meet Godot. However, they would be hopelessly disappointed if they encounter a negative aspect from Godot. It seems that Godot is probably an ideal illusionary figure in the mind of Vladimir that could never ever exist in reality. This is



the human made god, which leads them to the idea of getting happy being not exist here in the world.

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