**WAITING FOR GODOT**

Samuel Beckett was a dramatist who revolutionized the whole concept of drama and his unconventional play **‘Waiting for Godot’** is universally recognized as a contemporary classic. This play was originally written and performed in French under the title **‘En Attendant Godot’**. Later on it was translated into twenty languages. According to the traditional canons of drama, it is not a play at all. It has no exposition, no middle and no epilogue. Therefore, it was labeled as ‘The Theatre of the Absurd’. This is a term which is applied to drama in which all conventions such as structure, plot and characterization are ignored and distorted. According to Albert Camus, in a universe, that is suddenly,

“deprived of illusion and of light, man feels a stranger…

This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity”.

‘Waiting for Godot’ is Beckett’s successful attempt at this kind of expression in drama. The play is formulated in a wonderful way. On the one hand, there is a certain emptiness precisely at those places - such as plot, character, dramatic speech, setting etc. On the other, the cognitive enterprises moves from the immediate dramatic interest to some philosophical horizon beyond history and society. It presents before the audience an indefinite place for an uncertain appointment with somebody called Godot who never comes. His identity indeed, is in serious doubt. In the course of the play, he is perceived in various ways: savior, God, a vindictive tyrant, a rich employer, somebody who has the tramps’ future in his hand … at least their immediate future. In their attempt to solve this mystery, critics have researched Beckett’s own life, without being able to find out ‘who’ or ‘what’ Godot might mean. Beckett’s angry response to this question was:

“If I knew who Godot was, I would have said so in the play.”

Actually, Godot cannot be made to represent any one idea, ideal or person, precisely because he represents an absence. Godot is also, by analogy, the void that Beckett perceived at the centre of human existence. The play explores a static situation. Its two acts are summarized to perfection by the element of one of the characters:

“Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful”.

Incapable of any significant action or initiative, they imply an utterly pessimistic view of man as a helpless victim of his fate, his destiny. The play has a symmetrical structure like a mathematical formula in which one part balances the other. This symmetry is evident, first of all, in what may be called the device of coupling. It employs two sets of characters and each set is a pair - Estragon and Vladimir versus Lucky and Pozzo. Their names are symbolic and represent different nationalities, Estragon, French; Vladimir Russian; Pozzo, Italian; Lucky, English. These suggest different nationalities to reinforce the idea that similar circumstances were prevalent in every nook and corner of the world.

The play opens with an empty stage representing country road and a single sickly tree. Two tramps in tattered clothes are trying to keep an appointment. They are not clear even regarding the time, place and purpose of the appointment. These two men. Estragon and Vladimir are in some ways complementary entities, Estragon is emotional and a poet, Vladimir is more rational and down-to-earth. They are dependent on each other yet they want to get away from each other. They indulge into nonsensical talks just to kill the time. Their dialogues are short, mono-syllabic devoid of any meaning, sense, purpose and conductive power.

In each of the two acts, they meet another pair of characters Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo is a big, fat and opulent master whereas Lucky is thin, beraggled and old, being driven by his master by means of a rope. In the second act, Pozzo gets stricken with blindness and Lucky’s halter now serves as the blind man’s lead. The two pairs of characters made in each case, try to communicate, fail and part. At the end of each act, a boy appears and brings a message from Godot:

“Godot cannot come today but he will come without fail tomorrow”.

The final situation is exactly the same as the opening one. The final curtain falls even before the characters have been explained or presented. The characters in the play are imprisoned within a closed situation without any positive alternative. The play itself questions the very base of it and Didi and Gogo seem to be oscillating between assurance and doubt.

Are the boots in second Estragon’s? …

Is Pozzo Godot?

Is Vladimir’s name Mr. Albert? …

The sense of closure and nullity is enforced by the play’s repetitive rhythm. The play contains a variety of verbal repetitions, the most important of which are

“Nothing to be done” and “We’re waiting for Godot”...

‘Ah!’

Similarly, Act two is a repetition of Act one. In each act, we are offered basically the same sequence: the tramps reunite, wait, contrive ways of passing time, encounter Pozzo and Lucky, receive Godot’s disappointing message, contemplate suicide, decide to leave and do not move. Some variations, particularly in regard to the tree and the physical condition of the couples, do occur but these are too feeble to distract our attention away from the sameness of the situation. As observed by Ruby Cohn,

“The entire play is ‘woven with repetition’”.

Waiting for Godot is considered one of the excellent examples of a tragicomedy. Because of the black humor—humor brought on by something genuinely painful—Beckett himself referred to this play as a tragicomedy in two acts. The play has a lot to move us, but it also has a lot to make us laugh. Then there are those events and utterances that both affect and amuse us. The characters themselves are humorous and tragic in equal measure; we sympathize with them while also finding humor in their surroundings and conversations.

Estragon: Let’s go.

Vladimir: We cannot.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We are waiting for Godot.

(They do not move.)

Estragon and Vladimir, our two characters, find themselves in an odd predicament as they wait for Godot but are unsure of his identity or the purpose of their wait. They don’t even know what would happen if Godot showed up. The potential of Vladimir and Estragon’s suicide is heartbreaking, but the reasons they have for not succeeding in their goal are humorous: sometimes they think the tree is too weak, and other times they don’t have the right rope. The tramps’ choice to leave at the end of both Acts I and II and their inaction despite the decision serve to further emphasize the play’s both **tragic and comic aspects**. We can sum up with the remarks of Sean O’ Casey,

“Beckett is a clever writer, for within him there is no hazard of hope; no desire for it; nothing in it but a lust for despair and a crying of woe …”

The clock time plays a very important role in our lives but the world being depicted in Waiting for Godot’ is devoid of such linear progression of time. In the first act of the play, Pozzo is firmly immersed in normal time. Gradually his memory and progression of linear times begins to weaken. Then, at the same time, his speech constitutes one of the striking instance of the collapse of past and future into an eternal present. Lawrence E. Harvey observes,

“The impression is created that there is no casual relationship, nor even marked differences, between past and present, which therefore tend to merge into each other”.

Thus, the play portrays the microcosm of the society of the lost generation. The world and their living was worthless, meaningless and rootless for them. The play presents the ordeal of waiting, ignorance and boredom. It deals with the problem of man’s essential misery, suffering, frustration, loneliness, alienation and failure. This play depicts the life which is meaningless and insignificant, hence absurd. The manner in which the tramps pass time symbolizes boredom and futility of human actions, insignificance of life and the endless suffering associated with existence.

On the whole, it can be concluded that acts in the play, are meaningless; time does not flow; existence remains an impression or perhaps a dream, happiness, in reality, is absent. The tramps can’t communicate and interact as language fails to remain as means of communication. There is no hero, no story in the play but endless and tedious waiting which renders life miserable, meaningless and hence absurd. Many critics while interpreting the play zeroed at the following conclusion’

“The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting. The act of waiting is an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout our lives we wait for something, and Godot simply represents the objective of our waiting, an event, a thing, a person, death …”