Absurdism In Samuel Beckett’s Waiting For Godot

Abstract: This paper explores the impact of absurdism in Samuel Beckett’s play Waiting for Godot. Absurdism as a philosophy stands on the idea that the whole universe is irrational and meaningless and that the look for order brings the person into conflict with the universe. During the period of the two World Wars, the mass killing of millions of people makes the writers of the age believe that the universe is meaningless. Beckett’s play Waiting for Godot lavishly deals with absurd tradition. It is one of the best examples of absurd literature where the characters are unrecognizable, in isolated setting, and the dialogues are meaningless in the traditional sense. The characterization of the characters is like mechanical puppets with their incoherent conversation. Though the characters are present, they are not recognizable, and whatever they present is meaningless. Beckett wonderfully presents the nothingness of life in every action of the character. This play immensely exemplifies the absurdity of life so that the reader can easily understand the concept of the author through the characters. This paper reflects the conflict between the meaning of life and struggles of the life of the characters by using absurd elements like repetitiveness, desolate setting, puppet-like characters, no well-made plot, fantasy, dark humor, indefinite time, meaningless dialogue and violation of tradition. Based on these elements, this paper shows the suffering of human beings, the boredom of life, struggle between body and mind.

Human beings seem to yearn for meaning, looking for it and giving birth to it. Human beings always try to make up some stories from their lives to provide them a new meaning. And they seek out for explanation for the meaningless universe. Many people make their lives meaningful by following the path of God, believing in a Holy Book, an afterlife, or practicing prayer and ritual. And religion is not the only one source, there are also so many possibilities here such as science, art, logic, nationalism, Marxism and many other beliefs. Absurdists think that all of these beliefs and practices are ultimately destroyed. As human being, we never escape from absurdity, no matter what people do or try to do. Indeed the universe is not absurd, but the human being who desperately search for meaning in the meaningless universe is absurd. Whatever the stories are that we are trying to give them meaning to our lives, they are just stories of fiction.

Absurdism originated in the work of the 19th century Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. Though he was a Christian he does not ignore the criticism about the religion which he has heard around him. Kierkegaard has observed that criticism and he believes that there is no logical thing to believing in God. Indeed he finds those critics so logical that for him there is no rationality for believing in any kind of hopeful story or thing about the idea of existence. In this sense, absurdism starts off from the rejection of religion. However, when Europe goes through the bloodcurdling of World War I and World War II, and also the Holocaust achieves its believer. During World War I an entire generation has joined the military force through the belief that this military service will give their lives meaning. But they are proved wrong. After World War I, the horrors of Nazism and death camps force the European thinkers to think that the universe is meaningless. Many philosophers and writers are forced to cast off their belief and hope. Not only they abandon their faith but the philosopher also question that how the moral God could allow this misery, how could he allow this torture and suffering. Albert Camus, the French philosopher believes that life has no meaning that nothing exists could be a source of meaning.

The Myth of Sisyphus asks a question that, if we think that life has no meaning then what is the point of living in this absurd world. In The Myth of Sisyphus, Sisyphus is fated to push a rock up a mountain only to have it roll to the bottom again and again. Through this, we can see the meaninglessness of his task. Despite knowing that the rock rolls back to the foot again and again, he willingly continues his task. Camus says that in real life it happens with the human that throughout life we are in search of our existence. But he also says that it is just a little attempt to find the meaning of life, we should find the meaning which makes our life worth living. And that is why Camus says that “One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (The Myth of Sisyphus)

In the 1950s, Europe witnessed the rise of a new genre of theater. It is called the Theater of the Absurd. And it is named by-Hungarian critiques, journalist, and dramatist Martin Esslin. This genre is the revolution against religion and tradition. It produces the themes and questions examined by Existentialism. The philosophical school of thought was popular at that time. Theater of the Absurd examines the absurdity in human life by exploiting meaningless repetitious dialogue, plots which lack reality, purposeless and confused setting, and puppet-like characters. It is an exploration of the human conditions such as human anxiety, misery, ordeal, anguish, hopelessness in the face of a sleeping universe. The French philosopher Samuel Beckett is related to this genre. Because of his contribution to this genre, he is known as the grandmaster of the genre. Though there are other playwrights with significant contribution to this genre, Beckett remains its individual, most magnificent figure. Beckett in 1953 presents one of his masterpieces Waiting for Godot in a small theater in Paris and he is most famous for his dramas. In Waiting for Godot, the plot presents two characters who wait for the coming of a mysterious figure named Godot. The whole play details us about their wait for Godot. But the Godot never arrives at the play. There is no indication that, is Godot exist or not exist. It is a play where nothing really happens. The conversation of the characters has no meaning. The non-appearance of Godot is illustrated the absence of God from the 20th century. Another interpretation is that Godot represents the things that are waiting for and will never reach those things. Godot exemplifies an external force that may give the answers to many questions, which will stop the pain of modern insecurity. Godot can be anything. It can be happiness or satisfaction or peace that never arrives.

Some people believe that absurdism and nihilism are similar things. But absurdism is separate from nihilism. Each one has its own meaning and has their own characteristics. Nihilism affirms that there is no significance of life and making it meaningful is purposeless. Contrarily, absurdism presumes that this universe is worthless, purposeless, and a particular should accommodate it or rebel against it. In literature absurd dramas are not purposeful, strong-willed, determined, and are not specific like it solves no matter, it unrabel no puzzle. There is no tragic scene in absurd plays, there is no theatrical rivalry in absurd plays. Absurd dramas are like abstract art which does not carry any particular essence. In absurd plays, phenomenon conveys a major and deeper position than the language. These plays comprise traditional speech. Men are enchanted by death which turns into dreams and illusions. In absurd plays language are failed to express the condition of human being and their experience. There is no action and plot. Whatever happens is mere limited, but there is nothing important or meaningful things. Existence and truth cannot be come except free from imagination and illusions. The ultimate result is absurd, irrational, or comic.