PORTRAITURE OF HUMAN EMOTIONS IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19 WITH REFERENCE TO SAMUEL BECKETT'S WAITING FOR GODOT

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has created an existential crisis among people. It has applied what Nietzsche once said, "to live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering." Many people are being down and out all over the world. The lockdown period has increased the struggle to find genuine meaning for existence. Why are we here? How can we make a difference? How should we really live?

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a search for a way of relief. The characters here reflect the meaninglessness of life. The acts of Vladimir and Estragon resemble the boredom and monotony of lockdown. In act I, Estragon says, "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." Godot is the unknown. Godot never turns up, but keeps on procrastinating his visit to the end.

The paper is an effort to shed light on human emotions in the wake of Covid – 19 and how it has thrown humans to confront with the basic situation of their existence and undergo through dilemma of choices and expectations.

Keywords: Covid-19, meaninglessness, existentialism, and despair and hope

The story of Covid-19 is not just of a virus and pandemic, but one which has affected different regions and sections within regions differently. Frank Snowden, epidemiologist and medical historian, says, "Epidemic diseases are not random events that afflict societies capriciously and without warning. On the contrary, every society produces its

own specific vulnerabilities. To study them is to understand that society's structure, its standard of living and its political priorities." This paper has narrowed down the focus on various aspects of a society and their impacts on human beings throughout the Covid-19 pandemic situation to impact of Covid-19 on human emotions.

With the Covid-19 situation continuing to evolve, it is difficult to feel grounded. We are all dealing with major distraction in our lives and overwhelming unknowns that have shaken our foundations. The lockdown or stay-at-home orders are vital for preventing the spread of the virus, they also add to a general sense of anxiety. We are unable to engage with people in our regular activities. This loss of regular contact is isolating us and can be draining. People have started feeling powerless because of this monotony. The state of powerlessness is causing stress. Our mind and body are connected and taking care of our physical well-being makes us emotionally sturdy. But, once people carry their stress in their body, it becomes noticeable as physical pain. Physical pain leads to grief and it is not obvious at first phase of lockdown. From not being able to socialize to losing a job, we are all facing loss right now and figuring out how to cope up with it. This is a confusing moment for everyone and sometimes we find it easier to downplay our emotions. But, burying stressful emotions won't make them go away. Therefore, it is very necessary to remind our self that things will be go back to normalcy and we will return to feeling safe, busy and connected with our communities in the weeks and months to come.

This whole circumstances resemble to *Waiting for Godot*, the exemplary work of absurd literature, where leafless tree and no development of plot show human condition. This play ironically reflects the condition of a human in the midst of the pandemic Covid-19 and how a man has to deal with the feeling of purposelessness of life. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was written with the central ideology of "There is no meaning in life. The life is permeated men but there is no man. Human life is like a bubble." It is an absurd drama, where nothing happens and everything is meaningless and useless. The characters are too confused to know what they are doing and why. The plot of the play has no beginning, middle and an end. The setting of the play

consists of a country road, leafless tree and actions of two men named Estragon and Vladimir. It reminds the post war conditions of the world which brought violence, uncertainty, despair and pessimistic outlook. The characters in the play appear to be unable to find their identity. They breathe but they live a meaningless and purposeless life. They wait for a person but their waiting is useless. They are not sure about his coming. So, these elements question the essence of human existence. This entire 'wait for the unknown' scene can be compared to the present 'lockdown' and 'social distance' and our desperate strive to stay positive. In the middle of Covid-19 outbreak, we seem to have no clear purpose of our day-to-day activities. We are facing a breakdown of face-to-face communication. Various communication apps deliver our messages, but those are not enough to keep us emotionally lively.

The ending of the play is not a conclusion as in the start of the play Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for Godot and audiences get an image that Godot might come. Till the end of the play Godot does not arrive and again audiences are not sure whether Godot comes later or not (after the play ends). Audiences never think that at the end of the play Godot will not come. This creation of absurdum in the play is closely related to existentialism. It is a theory which is based upon the belief that human existence is meaningless and the universe is indifferent. So, the play *Waiting for Godot* contains the elements of existentialism and is applicable to the present day development of emotional instability due to Covid-19 outbreak.

In the present context, it is essential to describe how Covid 19 wreaks havoc on emotional well-being of humans in the midst of Covid-19. This research work focuses on the impact of existentialism in *Waiting for Godot*. The nature of the research is Qualitative as far as descriptive. *Waiting for Godot* is the text which is taken as a sample to explain the impact of existentialism on us at present time.

Literature review

Albert Camus in his work *The Myth of Sisyphus* considers existentialism as an argument between two ideals. He defines the "human condition as absurd as the

confrontation man's desire for significance and the silent, cold universe." Albert Camus also said that "in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light man feels a stranger." Eugene Ionesco, the French author of absurd literature, said "People drowning in meaninglessness can only be grotesque their sufferings can only appear tragic by derision." Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote extensively on the absurdity of the world. In his journals Kierkegaard writes about the absurd, "what is absurd? It is as may quite easily be seen, that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection, tell me: you can just as well do the one thing as the other, that is to say where my reason and reflection say, you cannot act and yet here is where have to act, but reflection has closed the road. So I take one of the possibilities and say...this is what I do, I cannot do otherwise because I am brought to a standstill by my powers of reflection." Jean-Paul Sartre, the prominent philosopher of existentialism, in his plays *No Exit* discusses the philosophy of existentialism. "Existentialism is a root of absurdism and it is deal with the freedom, existence, position, responsibility of human beings and similarly absurdism also deals with the meaningless life of a modern man." Arthur Adamov's work "deals with the isolation and loneliness of all human beings and also based on the ability of individuals to make meaningless connection with other".

Findings

Waiting for Godot is considered an essential expression of existentialism. Both Estragon and Vladimir are waiting endlessly and pointlessly for someone unseen called Godot who maybe actually existed. Existentialism is entirely an unstructured conception referring to man's nature and **his relation to the world he lives**. Existentialists believe that in existentialism life is cyclic; what happened in past will happen again. As it is, *Waiting for Godot* presents endless examples of the two main characters speaking and repeating themselves in circles. The pattern and style of dialogue of the play is a maddening experience if the audience doesn't happen to be in the right frame of mind. Godot's existence is just a part of the play, as the visitation of both Pozzo and Lucky would give Beckett a chance to inject an additional absurdity into his narrative. The second visit by Pozzo and Lucky evokes an increased sense of existential doubt. Pozzo

disputes the idea that he has been at this precise spot on the day before claiming to have lost his sight. Then Estragon and Vladimir engage in futile discussion of whether they exist and how they know so.

The play has an unwholesome of suspension and eagerness. The waiting is conformist activity that searches the restoration of something or someone whose absence is profoundly felt, even if the lost object has never actually been present. The act of waiting maybe also considered a kind of worship and an expression of disinheritance. However, as Vladimir and Estragon wait, their lives become hopeless, helpless, meaningless and absurd. The main subject of the play *Waiting for Godot* is waiting. The waiting deals with the meaninglessness, purposelessness and foolishness of human beings. Throughout the play, everything remains same, nothing changes. There is a continuity of sameness till the end.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, lockdown has been imposed with travel restriction. The quarantine has been extended as more people are getting affected by the virus. People are asked to stay at home and to make them socially isolated to prevent being infected. This has induced fear among everyone. People are likely to experience feeling of helplessness and stigma. They start questioning the meaning and purpose of life. Isolation and remote working are forcing some of us to act reluctantly. Without our knowledge, we tend to develop into Estragon and Vladimir; we repeat a mundane routine. We wait for the hard times to pass by spending amount of time reading or watching things which aren't making us feel better. Waiting for the things to be normal is similar to waiting for Godot. How Estragon and Vladimir wait for Godot without knowing when Godot will come, we are doing the same. It is the matter of declining of personal faith. At present, everything is uncertain. While waiting for Godot, Estragon and Vladimir do not give up, they wait continuously. Beckett gives a picture to audience that though they cannot see Godot, Estragon and Vladimir are optimistic. Likewise, while self-isolating, we must try to strike a balance between having a routine and making sure each day has some variety. With weeks and months of the Covid-19 pandemic ahead, it is important to have down time and stay active.

It is fairly easy to lose hope amidst the negativity but, we must manage to stay positive in the uncertainty. It is these times, alone locked in confinement that maybe people can also come to realization that everything is temporary, that we need to be humble, to be kind and empathetic to one another as everyone has their own burden to carry, the need of having hope and keeping faith in a better future and appreciating those in our lives and what we have, is what will bring us together through the time of darkness. Social distancing is stressed during this time to prevent contagion but this does not mean we should stop socializing and talking. It's the best way to feel connected and maintain positive emotional balance.

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