

**Waiting for Nothing: Examining Existential Crisis in Samuel
Beckett's *Waiting for Godot***

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2016-1-93-002

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A Thesis submitted to the Department of English

Of

East West University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
English.

May 2017

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To My Parents

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Afrin Zeenat, who encouraged me to work on this topic. It would not have been possible without her help, guidance and advice throughout the process of writing this thesis. I am also thankful to my friends at East

West University who loved me and supported me throughout my university life.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this is based on my original work except for the quotation and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that this dissertation was not published anywhere.

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Introduction

Estragon: Nothing to be done.

Vladimir: I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. (Beckett 41)

When do people start believing that they cannot do anything to change the situation of their life? Does faith help one recover what one has lost? Reading *Waiting for Godot* creates such questions in a reader's mind. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* does not provide direct answers to these questions; however, we see the agony and angst of human beings of postmodern era in *Waiting for Godot*. The life of helpless human beings have been portrayed and the absence of an idea has been shown through the character of Godot. The people who have everything may not understand how it feels to lose everything and wait to recover. People who have nothing tend to wait to revive what they have lost. Nothing will seem important to that person and mortality will force him to wait for some miracle. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a play where the characters have nothing and they wait for that revival. The wait seems meaningless because the characters do not know what they are waiting for. The post Second World War society saw so much horror that they started to see *meaninglessness* in everything. The *nothingness* became a true phenomenon in everyday activities. The shock of the war turned society into believing that there is no guarantee of life in the coming hour. The existential crisis destroyed the believe system of the greater part of the society. The interpretation of the play varies from critic to critic but the play has been accepted as a masterpiece by the modern audience.

This thesis will try to explore the traumatic experience of destruction and the existential crisis of the characters in the post-World War II society of Europe. Life became harder after the 1950s and the rapid changes of the modern world also made sure that the authors changed their

techniques as well. The word 'postmodern' will appear in the thesis frequently. It is hard to define what postmodern era is or what postmodernism is in the literary world.

Postmodernism is difficult to define and has therefore evoked much controversy. As Hans Bertens puts it: "post modernism means and meant different things from humble literary-critical origins in the 1950s to a level of global conceptualization in the 1980s". (Tanaka 55)

The postmodern era advocated that the creation of an artistic piece can have multiple interpretations and it may not have a 'center' point with a concrete meaning. The writings of that era focused mostly on the problems of human beings. While talking about the problems human being faced and how it was reflected in literature, Grattan said, "Man, being caught up in such a rapidly changing way of life has been subjected to much hardship, he faces new discoveries to learn about and understand, he must reconcile old tradition and concept with new" (1). People found the changes hard to accept but they had to adapt to the situation. The drastic change of the society took away the essence to live a happy life in the society. *Waiting for Godot* reflects the above mentioned problems of human beings in the postmodern era. This thesis tries to examine society and human beings mental state using the concept of *The Theatre of the Absurd* and *existential philosophy*.

Waiting for Godot was published after the Second World War and we cannot deny the fact that characters may have been the representatives of the war victims. The most damaging consequence of a war is the existential crisis it creates among human beings who are directly or indirectly affected by the war. Existential crisis is triggered in a war affected society. Philosopher Richard James (2007) defined existential crisis saying, "An existential crisis is a moment at which an individual questions the very foundations of their life: whether this life has

any meaning, purpose, or value". Existential philosophy became popular after the Second World War and during 1940s and 1950s. The life of the protagonists in *Waiting for Godot* represent the human beings who had no significant purpose of life and they cared a little about the value of time; they spent day after day waiting for Godot. *Waiting for Godot* shows how the characters were suffering and waiting for salvation from 'Godot'. The action in *Waiting for Godot* shows how the characters failed to track whether they had passed a day or many days in their conversation. Often, they are seen arguing about the day Godot promised them to meet. The leaves of the tree became green overnight and they were surprised to that fact. The concept of time seems irrelevant for the protagonists in the play. The play has been categorized as the play of *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Martin Esslin described *The Theatre of Absurd* by saying,

The Theatre of the Absurd shows the world as an incomprehensible place. The spectators see the happenings on the stage entirely from the outside, without ever understanding the full meaning of these strange patterns of events, as newly arrived visitors might watch life in a country of which they have not yet mastered the language. The confrontation of the audience with the characters and happenings which they are not quite able to comprehend make it impossible for them to share the aspirations and emotions depicted in the play. (5)

The word 'abstract' has been used frequently while describing the situation in a play of the theatre of the absurd. Often it is hard to point what exactly is happening on the stage. Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo or Lucky have several problems and it is hard to point out one particular solution to their problems. The 'abstract' nature of the action in the play makes it difficult to put them as series of incidents. *Waiting for Godot* does not solve the problems of the characters. The protagonists are living a life which they think have complication. Towards the end of the play,

Vladimir and Estragon keep waiting for Godot. The pattern of the play is 'absurd' and no solution is imposed by the author to get them out of their miseries. The whole play is a mere representation of the human mind living in a complicated world. They do not even know who Godot is but that does not stop them from waiting for Godot.

Estragon: And if he doesn't come?

Vladimir: We'll come back tomorrow.

Estragon: And then the day after tomorrow.

Vladimir: Possibly.

Estragon: And so on. (Beckett 48)

Godot is their only hope but the end result remains zero. Godot does not show up magically to rescue the protagonists but they have nothing better to do than waiting either. The whole meaning of life becomes *meaningless*. The response of the audience is important to understand because the inconsistency in action made it hard for the audience to understand the play. The tragic fate of Vladimir and Estragon failed to create immediate effect on the audience. We can argue that the audience were also living in a complicated world which made them unable to understand the true message of the play. The chaotic nature of the world also created chaos in human psychology. The postmodern authors tried to focus on the chaotic situation of human mind and tried to explore it through their writing and Samuel Beckett became very successful in this regard. People did not know the problematic state of their mind and failed to connect with the play. The world that is shown in the play was not familiar to the audience. The world became an unknown place after the war. The physical destruction of the world and the mental destruction of human beings made it hard for the human beings to recognize their familiar world. The world

seemed like a place that was forced to go on exile. People form their identity through the eyes of the surroundings. A person has an identity in terms of nationality. He also has a personal identity to the people he knows. Vladimir and Estragon is waiting at a deserted place and they cannot form an identity based on that place; the world in *Waiting for Godot* does not show the power to give someone an identity.

Waiting for Godot, for example, shows the world in exile, waiting for the deliverer of a safe return, But desire for return has been corroded by long helplessness and lethargy; so the world is made up of tramps and madmen- of boredom, cruelty, horror,. Nothing happens. (Zinnes 299)

Beckett wrote about a pair of tramps who are waiting for a ‘person’ named Godot. Throughout the play it will feel as if the wait is meaningless and they will be forced to face a tragic fate. There were some comic elements in the play and it is brilliantly mixed with the tragic outline of the play. However, as it has been said earlier that the play was not popular among the audience who could not relate to the incidents that were being staged. Eventually people started to understand Beckett’s work and applauded him for his brilliant thinking. The complicated world had taken away their security of life and they perform the cycle of life without bothering about the end result. Esslin pointed out the fate of the characters in the play of the theatre of the absurd saying, “Above all, everything that happens seems to be beyond rational motivation, happening at random or through the demented caprice of an unaccountable idiot fate” (3). Vladimir and Estragon fight, laugh, wait for Godot in a day and they prepare to complete the cycle in the following days. One of the most interesting aspects of human life is that they are continuously surprised by the incidents that take place in their life as well as the surprising facts about their surroundings. At the same time, it is important to mention that human beings do not consciously

wait for the unexpected things to happen in their life. The process should be automatic. The protagonists of *Waiting for Godot* have been doing the opposite things a human being does in his/her life. Vladimir and Estragon are consciously waiting for the unexpected things to happen in their life. Vladimir and Estragon represent the postmodern society where people are no longer in control of the things that happen in their lives. They get prepared and wait for certain incidents to happen in their life. Godot is not something or someone who has a concrete identity. Godot is absent and the whole play revolves around his expected visit to that deserted place where Vladimir and Estragon are waiting. Vladimir and Estragon are entirely dependent on Godot's arrival. Godot's appearance will give them an identity or help them to end their miseries. The irony of waiting for someone who is not even real makes Vladimir and Estragon rootless human beings who are waiting for nothing. Beckett had the first-hand experience of war and the experience may have influenced him in creating the characters. The following chapters will explore Beckett's connection with war and the existential crisis that hampered the basic human communication shown in *Waiting for Godot*.

Chapter 1: Rise of Existential Crisis and Degradation of Faith in *Waiting for Godot*

Faith has always been a dominating part in human society. The history of religion shows how has been an influential aspect in a person's life. People often try to take shelter under the roof of religion and place their faith on a divine power. It is also important to understand that the degradation of faith create a void inside of a human being. *Waiting for Godot* was written in the 1950s. We can assume that the play was influenced by the horror of the Second World War. Human beings can suffer from existential crisis after a devastating war because "The psychological confrontation with deep existential concerns occurs most dramatically in the aftermath of extreme negative events-whether personal ones, such as a devastating accident, or more globally significant ones like the terrorist attacks of 9/11" (Koole, Greenberg, Pyszcynski 212). The setting of the play hints at the physical destruction of the earth but the main focus which is the mental destruction of human existence have been shown though the dialogues of the play. The main protagonists of the play can be related to the then society when *Waiting for Godot* was written. The author may have brought his own experience in the play and tried to show the vulnerability of the society during that time. The existential philosophy always tries to focus on the connection between a person's work and his/her life. The ideology itself can be helpful to find out the complicated structure of the play. The author must have a motive to write a play but in naked eyes *Waiting for Godot* does not show anything meaningful throughout the whole play.

The ritual was rich in details, but too often this Vladimir and Estragon were not the familiar figures through whom I have so often in the past found or refound marvelous insights, but symbolic figures, devoid of personality. (Grant 42)

The common notion about the play is that the playwright intentionally made it vague to show the true picture of that society. Existential and other crisis in a human life may force a human being to reassess his situation and often he ends up finding nothing meaningful about his life. We see during the play that an act presents something funny and the reader may laugh out loud reading it or the audience may roar the theatre with laughter while watching it performed. An important part of the theatre of absurd is the irony in the funny conversations of the play. An audience's careful observation will point out the hidden angst of the characters. Vladimir and Estragon tried to end their life in a funny way in Act-I.

Vladimir: Yes, while waiting.

Estragon: What about hanging ourselves?

Vladimir: Hmm. It'd give us an erection!

Estragon: (highly excited) An erection!

Vladimir: With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did you not know that?

Estragon: Let's hang ourselves immediately!

Vladimir: From a bough? (They go towards the tree) I wouldn't trust it.

Estragon: We can always try.

Vladimir: Go ahead.

Estragon: After you.

Vladimir: No, no. you first.

Estragon: Why me?

Vladimir: You're lighter than I am. (Beckett 51-52)

Vladimir and Estragon often talk on unnecessary topics while they wait for Godot. The conversation shows that they were having seemingly a pointless discussion and decided to hang themselves but fails to materialize the plan. They thought that they have tried everything and 'agreed that nothing is left to be done; all the possibilities have been exhausted' (Via 32). They abandoned the plan because they thought that if one of them committed suicide, other one will be alone. Initially, it seems that the audience is given a chance to laugh about a situation but if they think deeply, they will realize that they all are laughing at the horror of their own life. People become frustrated while finding no hope and try to commit suicide. The scene is more tragic than comic in a deeper sense. The absurdists often tried this technique in their play to show how vulnerable a human life is in the complicated modern world. They end up laughing at the horror of their own fate.

Vladimir and Estragon are not sure about their own existence. They think that Godot has something to offer and they will finally stop waiting. The crisis is severe because they know that Godot will never show up. The characters had to act in that way because, "despair and helplessness are also aspects of an existential crisis" (Butenaite, Sondaite & Mockus 12). They are desperate to meet Godot and they want it to happen soon. Deep inside they know that Godot will not be able to solve their problems. The horrible part of their wait is that they don't even know what they are waiting for. It seems that they are waiting for the sake of waiting. These are the acts of the human beings who have lost everything and do not know what to expect from life or what to expect from their precious 'Godot'.

Estragon: He should be here.

Vladimir: He didn't say for sure he'd come. (Beckett 48)

Estragon: What exactly did we ask him for?

Vladimir: Were you not there?

Estragon: I can't have been listening.

Vladimir: Oh...nothing very definite.

Estragon: A kind of prayer.

Vladimir: Precisely.

Estragon: A vague supplication. (Beckett 53)

According to some view of the play is that the play is filled with Biblical allusions and references. It is also clear that the allusions are of the Christian doctrine. The absence of female characters in the play has also been discussed by the critics and the common explanation to that criticism is that the setting and lack of female actors during that time. If we consider the fact the play has a lot of biblical allusions, we can compare the lack of female characters with castration. The state of male protagonists can be seen as castration. On the other hand, the tree on stage can be seen as the representation of biblical allusion and "in the light of the fact that the tree comes alive in Act Two, it symbolizes the life-giving power of the Cross, which in Christian tradition is often referred to as a tree" (Via 33). They are hoping for the salvation from the almighty. They talk about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ while talking about the two thieves in Act-I. Many

interpretations of *Waiting for Godot* suggests that Godot is god and the characters are waiting for the supreme power to solve their problems.

From the very beginning of the play, Vladimir is haunted by his memory of the Bible. He is particularly perturbed by the fact that only one of the four Evangelists mentions Christ. Vladimir and Estragon are also intrigued by the story of the two thieves who were crucified along with Christ; the theme of the uncertainty of the hope of the salvation.

(Grattan 54)

The concept of God in Samuel Beckett's play did not have significant influence on the characters. Vladimir and Estragon is waiting for God(ot) and they are expecting a physical presence of Him. Some argue that the expectation of a physical God(ot) suggests a fruitful and satisfactory solution of their problems. Existential crisis has led them to believe that some miracle will happen and they will receive salvation. Godot cannot come because "the point is that there is simply no awareness on the part of Vladimir and Estragon that Godot has actually ever come" (Via 33). The suffering of being alive continues in their life. The Boy who delivers the message of Godot does not leave Vladimir and Estragon satisfied because they fear that the boy will not remember them the next day. They are constantly exposed as the insecure human beings and that is the core feature of existential crisis.

The supreme power of thinking and rationalizing are not present in the characters of *Waiting for Godot*. They are living as an object of this world. Human beings try to rationalize their actions in life but Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky and Pozzo seem to have lost their power to rationalize their actions. The bizarre depiction of Lucky as the slave and Pozzo as the master can suggest the hierarchy of the society and power but their actions are symbolic and it may not seem as a believable act in the modern society. The characters do not have anything to identify

themselves throughout the play. They are as lifeless as rocks. Lucky follows all the order of Pozzo like an animal and does not make a sound. Lucky seems to be the victim of the rising power of the capitalist world. Pozzo admits that there was a time when Lucky taught him a lot of things but now he is nothing but a toy to him. Lucky does not have a choice and often denies to have the privilege of the mercy of his 'master' Pozzo. Pozzo also admits that Lucky has been his faithful servant for more than sixty years but now he has become a burden to him. It is important to understand that the pair of Pozzo and Lucky completes each other because without one another they are nothing. However, the question remains whether they have identity at all because when they came back in the Act III, they starts to act differently. Pozzo is a dominating figure in the play but there are certain doubts on his strength as well. All four characters seems to be dwelling in a world where there is no purpose of living. In Act I, Estragon wanted the chicken bone Pozzo threw away but Pozzo said that the bone belongs to Lucky and if Lucky has no problem giving Estragon the chicken bone, he does not have problem either.

Estragon: Er... You've finished with the... er... you don't need the...er...bones, sir?

----- *Estragon goes to towards Lucky, stops before him.*

Estragon: Mister...Excuse me, Mister...

Pozzo: You're being spoken to, pig! Reply! (*To Estragon.*) Try him again.

Estragon: Excuse me, Mister, the bones, you won't be wanting the bones?

(Lucky looks long at Estragon.)

Lucky is an old man and he has been carrying bags for the whole time. He must have been hungry but he acted afraid to have the chicken bone which belonged to him. This is the sign of a

man who does not know how food is going to help him to get rid of the misery. The animal like behavior should not be associated with Lucky's action because an animal would have jumped on the food his master provided. Is it the kindness of Lucky to give the food to Estragon who wanted to have the chicken bone? Positive answer should be considered because a man in misery understand the misery of another man. Lucky does not talk throughout the First Act but he heard the conversation between Pozzo and the other men. It is true that the act can be seen otherwise because when Estragon approached him, Lucky kicked him which is not the sign of kindness. The crisis that was created between the characters and the mysterious behavior and appearance of Lucky should be seen as the difficulty of communication between the characters. The relationship between Lucky and Pozzo reflects the unequal and cruel relationship between a rich person and a poor person dependent on him. Can we consider Pozzo of having a concrete identity? The character seem to have a descent economic background and can hire someone else as a servant to replace Lucky. In a postmodern word, people like Pozzo will not drive away a servant like Lucky because they make a complete pair. Pozzo can act like a master because Lucky is there to obey his orders. Lucky gives him an identity for the time being. The inhuman treatment of Lucky makes the situation complicated because toward the end of the play we see that Lucky abandoned the blind Pozzo. The identity that had the history of sixty years was destroyed overnight.

The protagonists of the play are the victims of the postmodern dilemma of believing in an idea which do not have a concrete identity. Godot is most likely to be an idea because Vladimir and Estragon is familiar with it but they have the dilemma of conquering it in a practical life. The play reflects that the characters have only one choice which is 'waiting'. Godot is not the main focus of the play, rather 'waiting' takes the central role of the play. The justification for waiting

for Godot by Vladimir and Estragon can be seen as irrational and senseless. The hopelessness and the irrational actions of the protagonists can frustrate the audience but the true meaning of the play and the wait for the mystery to solve makes it a relevant for the audience. The knowledge gained from the play 'will have a liberating effect: if we realize the basic absurdity of most of our objectives we are freed from being obsessed with them and this release express itself in laughter" (Esslin 13). The existential crisis became the most significant characteristics of the protagonists. They could not be freed from the obsession of meeting Godot and remained as the victim of postmodern *nothingness*.

Chapter 2: Problematic Human Communication in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

We use language to communicate with other human beings. We also have several communication tools that work while two person communicate with each other. What will happen if we fail to communicate with other human beings? Will we enjoy the same comfort while our communication tools stop working? We feel irritated when someone fail to understand the message we try them to understand. The communication between the characters in *Waiting for Godot* is not effective and often they fail to convey the meaning of their dialogues. It is also important to understand that the characters are not very interested in making themselves understood to the other characters. There are repetition in dialogues but they did not have much significance. Vladimir and Estragon often repeat their dialogues because the listener does not understand the meaning at the first go. Vladimir who seems to be the person who is smarter than Estragon often describes or elaborates his argument so that Estragon understand the meaning of it. In Act I, Estragon tries to explain his dreams to Vladimir who is reluctant to hear about his dream. Throughout the whole description Estragon fails to make any sense and Vladimir lost interest towards the end. There is a communication gap between the characters. The meaning is too hard to understand for the people who are suffering. In Act I, Estragon tries to take off his boots but struggles a lot. Vladimir makes fun of him and Estragon becomes furious. It is later revealed that the boots hurts Estragon but that does not stop him putting those on every day. Vladimir spends the entire time with Estragon but fails to understand the pain of his partner. The communication between the characters is an important aspect to understand the existential crisis in *Waiting for Godot*.

Vladimir: Boots must be taken off every day, I'm tired telling you that. Why don't you listen to me?

Estragon: (feebly). Help me!

Vladimir: It hurts?

Estragon: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

Vladimir: (angrily) No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.

Estragon: It hurts?

Vladimir: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts! (Beckett 42)

There are two important things to be noted in that conversation. First, Estragon does not want to leave his boots which hurt him all the time. Second, Vladimir fails to understand the pain of Estragon which should have been easy for a person who spend every moment with the sufferer. The property of Estragon is unknown and the boots seem to be the very few things Estragon has in his life. The complicated world probably made him understand that he should protect things that belongs to him. People grabbed everything they had while going out their houses during the war. The uncertainty of being alive in the next day made them realize the importance of their belongings. It is just a pair of boots for the ordinary audience but it is a precious thing to Estragon. People used to see their identity with their belongings. Boots are probably used as a metaphor to understand pain of the human being during the tough time in Europe. People suffered a lot and they wanted to revisit the pain to remember what happened to them during the war. The pain were there to make them realize who they are and where they belonged. The energy of their life were being used to make small talk and suffer the pain. Vladimir was suffering too and he became angry while Estragon accused him for not understanding his pain. It is the broken mind that failed to understand each other's pain.

Beckett's characters do not seem to have any optimism and epiphanic strength to surpass the existential angst. Rather they are confined in cycle of optimism and pessimism and meaninglessness. The utter helplessness had been portrayed in the play when they could not commit suicide as they did not have rope and when they have rope, they could not commit suicide as the lifeless log of the tree did not give them assurance about its strength.

“Estragon draws Vladimir towards the tree. They stand motionless before it. Silence.

ESTRAGON: Why don't we hang ourselves?

VLADIMIR: With what?

ESTRAGON: You haven't got a bit of rope?

VLADIMIR: No.

ESTRAGON: Then we can't.

Silence.

Vladimir was heavier in weight than Estragon and therefore, to commit suicide Vladimir would have to go first to judge the strength of the log to hold him but if it collapses while holding Vladimir, there chance of committing suicide will be gone forever and if Vladimir dies, Estragon will have to suffer alone if there is no available way to commit suicide. It shows the utter misery of human existence in this universe. However, why this death drive is important? *Waiting for Godot* had been published in 1948, couple of years after the World War II where Beckett participated as he joined in the French Resistance. Can the play be a projection of his posttraumatic stress disorder? How about the play is a simulation of Beckett's own psyche and through this he actually portrayed the collective psyche of humanity?

The whole play is centered and also revolved around the waiting for the arrival of Godot. The play portrays the absence of Godot in such a way that it is really hard to think Godot anything else but the implication of God. The tree itself symbolizes the tree of life and also the cross of Jesus Christ where he sacrificed his life for the sins of humanity, Vladimir and Estragon do not have any grand purpose. One of the examples can be given where Godot is symbolized as God is:

VLADIMIR: You work for Mr. Godot?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: What do you do?

BOY: I mind the goats, Sir.

VLADIMIR: Is he good to you?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: He doesn't beat you?

BOY: No Sir, not me.

VLADIMIR: Whom does he beat?

BOY: He beats my brother, Sir. (1.783-792)

The other brother is the shepherd and the word shepherd has always been associated with prophets in Abrahamic religions. Here Godot beats the other brother may symbolizes the Lamb of God who had been sacrificed for sins of mankind. Another important feature is a narrow coherence with coherence with temporal perception is the question of baring memories of the past. The memories could be associated with the relationship between the past and the present. In

Waiting for Godot the memories itself can be seen as the most hurtful experience of human beings. “Vladimir: Is it possible that you’ve forgotten already?/ Estragon: That’s the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget.” (Beckett 108) Estragon cannot remember what happened to him yesterday but can remember the incidents that happened to him a long time ago. The condition hurts a human being because he is no longer a part of the present. Every incident has a string with the past.

The perception of the characters are also different about the surroundings. Vladimir and Estragon had conversation about believing in god and they seem to be confused about the role of the religion. The belief system was shattered and religion was no longer the most dominant part in a human life. They expected something from the divine power to stop the madness of the war but they received no response. The churches were deserted and people of all religion started to have doubt on the supreme power. Men became aware of the ability in themselves. One person’s madness created the whole world a mess. People communicate with god because they seek shelter during their bad time. People compared their good sides with god’s mercy and asked for forgiveness for their sins. These are the common characteristics of every religion. *Waiting for Godot* shows how the belief system was changed among the characters. In other words, they lost the identity through which they could relate to their god.

Vladimir: But you can’t go barefoot!

Estragon: Christ did.

Vladimir: Christ! What’s Christ go to do with it? You’re not going to compare yourself to Christ!

Estragon: All my life, I’ve compared myself to him.

Vladimir: But where he lived it was warm, it was dry! (Beckett 99)

They certainly have lost the patience and trying to get the meaning of god of their own. “All my life, I’ve compared myself to him” is powerful statement because they are no longer seem to have hope from Christ anymore. Religion and expectations has become subjective. The wanted immediate result. If Godot was the representation of God, then they have certainly lost the divine connection with god. Godot in *Waiting for Godot* has a family and friends. The Greek mythologies tried to give gods and goddesses human form and Beckett has done the same.

Vladimir: Let’s wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea.

Estragon: What did he reply?

Vladimir: That he’d see.

Estragon: That he couldn’t promise anything.

Vladimir: That he’d have to think it over.

Estragon: in the quiet of his home.

Vladimir: Consult his family.

Estragon: His friends.

Vladimir: His agents

Estragon: His correspondent.

Vladimir: His books. (Beckett 53)

The characters were trying to understand Godot on their own. Pozzo wanted to give information about Godot as well. The existence of god in a believers mind is very important because he seeks comfort in a supreme power. He thinks that he will be alright once the almighty listens to him and solves his problem. Vladimir and Estragon is not sure whether Godot is going to help them or not. They are not sure about his commitment either. All they know is that Godot will consult his family and friends and gave them a decision. The ambiguous promise from Godot made them more insecure and left them rattled in a deserted place. The entire conversation indicates how little they knew about Godot. The fact that they did not remember what they asked from Godot or if we take Godot as god, that they do not even understand what they actually need. The situation seems like a customer is asking something from a store keeper but they he/she does not know what exactly he wants. They are so insecure that they don't even know how long they have been waiting for Godot. The illogical conversation between Vladimir and Estragon makes it easy for the audience to understand that they have lack of concentration on the present situation. The mental state of the protagonists are not very assuring. They are there because fate must have played a role can be a possible interpretation of their conversations.

Vladimir and Estragon's conversation very often gives the impression of being illogical and unsystematized. But logic and pure thought according to Kierkegaard, can never capture the existential reality of becoming, for logical entities are states of being which

are timeless and fixed and also there can be no system for an existing individual who always stands in the throes of becoming. (Sharma 277)

The existing reality of the characters are hard for them to have a separate identity. They can move on with their life and no one is there to stop them. The wait is making their life miserable and the trams know that. Knowing these facts should have made their life easier but it did not happen and they were stuck in a place where there is nothing but dirt and a dead tree. The *nothingness* on the place made them realize what they have lost and how impossible it is for them to move on without the help of God(ot).

From the linguistic perspective it is possible to conjecture that Beckett selected the designation Godot to indicate his elusive central character. Ruby Chohn points out that although the equation of Godot with God may be too simplistic, the name does seem to be for most readers some sort of composition suggesting such a union. (Busi 879)

The intention of the author about the connection between God and Godot has never been revealed. It is known that –ot suffix is used in French to ridicule someone. The common perception of the name should not be taken lightly because the art is open ended and open for any interpretation. Beckett's introduction and description of Godot in the play seem to be a way to show the degradation of faith in human life. *Waiting for Godot* and waiting for God will not change the life of Estragon or Vladimir. They have to deal with the life they are living in the present world. Their life has become just like the life of Sisyphus. Myth of Sisyphus has become the reality of Vladimir and Estragon's life.

The hour which is like a breathing and which is coming back just as safely as his unhappiness, this is an hour of consciousness. Having left top during a gradual

penetration into the loneliness of gods, at any moment, he is superior to his fate, he is stronger than the boulder is [...] Sisyphos, a proletarian of gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the full range of his miserable fate: which should have been his suffering, at the same time accomplishes his victory. There is no fate which would not be crossable by a contempt. (Camus 128)

The fate of Vladimir and Estragon is miserable at the present date but who knows what they were in their early days. Maybe, they were strong enough to create their own fate. They may have had the power to be their own 'god'. They probably did not need a person like Godot to help them to get out of their misery. The Marxist interpretation of *Waiting for Godot* can be vital to understand the current situation of Vladimir and Estragon. They lost the battle to the superiors and unequal power to live a 'normal' life. They became dependent on a person who resembles as god to the characters. The author may be trying to mock the concept of god through the character Godot. Marxist theories deny the concept of god. The general conception of god in Marxist vision is meaningless and the existence of god is denied. According to the pioneer Marxist critics, god will not help a human being to get out of his miseries. The wait for Godot and his absence in the play and in the life of Vladimir and Estragon implies that the Marxist interpretation of God is relevant in *Waiting for Godot*.

Karl Marx's religious views have been the subject of much interpretation. He famously stated in *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*:

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.

(<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm#05>)

Vladimir and Estragon created Godot and made him a supreme power who controls the fate of them. The meaning of creating god by men is proved again in the text. Marx pointed out how human sufferings are centered at the religious beliefs. Could Estragon and Vladimir move on from waiting for Godot? They could not get out of the obsession of Godot in their life. The conversation between Vladimir and Estragon proves that they have never met Godot. It also proves that just like human beings never see God but wait for his mercy, Vladimir and Estragon is waiting for Godot without ever meeting him. The above mentioned quote of Marx shows that he compares religion with opium. Vladimir and Estragon are addicted to god like opium and do not even try to get out of their addiction. They have started to believe that no one but Godot can help them. They tried to form their identity through Godot. The existential crisis that Marxist critics advocate have clear relationship with the characteristics of Vladimir and Estragon. The argument of religion and the concept of god is relevant with *Waiting for Godot* because the characters are the victims of false commitments. They are being given a notion that the supreme power will solve their problems. In reality, their sorrows were not reduced, rather they suffered more because of their belief of Godot. Godot as a symbol of God s symbolizing the supreme power and with his absence his apathy has been shown in the play. The absence of god in human beings life was a key feature and the lack of faith in god also been important in postmodern study. Beckett did not portray the symbols directly but it visible that the character Godot was

mocked in the play through different symbol. The boy says that Godot beats his brother and he remains afraid of Godot throughout his conversation with Vladimir and Estragon. If we consider the boy as a believer who is afraid of god and is always in fear because he has seen the sufferings of his brother on the hand of god, then we can easily interpret the conversation as the self-proclaimed ‘messengers of god’ who always give references to the sufferings of other human beings in order to restore faith of the audience. We can argue that the protagonists of the play Vladimir and Estragon, though they are waiting for Godot, are actually in the false notion of being converted as the favorite creature of the divine power. The complex world is responsible for the deceived characters in the play. They were not even sure who to believe. The boy who worked as a messenger in the play do exactly look same in two different days. Vladimir and Estragon’s world is complicated to be understood with a normal point of view.

In the more complex world of *Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon seek to be perceived in full, focusing obsessively on keeping God’s mind’s eye on them as well as on the observing each other. To Estragon’s “Do you think God sees me,” Vladimir answers, “You must close your eyes” (p. 49b). This elliptical exchange makes sense only in a Berkeleian context. If Estragon stops perceiving and continues to exist, he being perceived. Yet neither of the human character can be certain that the sustaining observer is God and not the other, although they know instinctive that a cosmic observer is vital.

The characters could not have become the savior of themselves. They needed a medium. They had to have some sort of assurance from a helping hand. The cruelty of the world denied them the privilege to expect something from the ‘concrete’ world can help them. They cannot afford to wait for the help from a human being they knew or met in their life. Maybe a human being who could give Estragon some food or Vladimir some comfort and acknowledge his intelligence. The

faith in a divine power becomes less powerful when the state of a human being becomes questionable.

One of the characteristics of Existentialist movement, the activity towards on-self and one's future is highlighted. Vladimir and Estragon did not have a future. They were just wasting their time in waiting for someone who probably will never show up. When the expectation of a person goes to the bottom, he will not be interested in anything that is coming on his way. People who were suffering directly in the war expected god's intervention which most faithful people do in the time of crisis. They waited and over time they lost their hope. These type of condition led them to the denial of God and morality in human beings. Godot promised to come meet Vladimir and Estragon but there was no active approach from him to meet the tramps. In the mean time they suffered a lot. The following soliloquy is an example of how they were confused of their actions throughout the play. Vladimir is seen as the smarter one among the two tramps but he is not even sure that his actions are going to bring them salvation. He does not know what the truth is anymore. He does not know what happened yesterday. He questions his own existence and his responsibilities towards his friend Estragon. He does not know what the right thing is to do in these situations.

Vladimir: Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, When I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? The Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? (*Estragon, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again. Vladimir looks at him.*) He will know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot (*Pause.*) Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave

digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (*He listens*) But habit is a greed deadener. (*He looks again at Estragon.*) At me too someone is looking of me too someone is saying. He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (*Pause*) I can't go on! (*Pause*) What have I said?

He goes feverishly to and for, halts finally at extreme left, broods. Enter boy right. He halts. Silence. (Beckett 147-148)

Vladimir is probably waiting for death. He is thinking about his daily responsibilities. He questions the worthiness of his daily activities. In Act I, they tried to hang themselves with the dead tree but now Vladimir is thinking about the judgment day. Vladimir sees freedom in death and because, “In a world where the only real certainty is death, where one can never fully share one’s experiences with others, where one’s identity is uncertain, and where one’s identity is uncertain, and where one is prodded by external forces while facing a bewildering array of choices, what meaning does life have?” (Koole, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, 214) He cannot quit waiting because he cannot abandon Estragon. At the same time, he can’t see a point in their wait. In his unconscious mind he say “I can’t go on!” but after a pause he forgot what he said. The thinking process was not clear among the people who suffered a great pain. The setting can be an example of a battlefield where the physical destruction is visible. A sound mind is the most precious component of a human being. The characters of *Waiting for Godot* did not have the ability to think rationally. Jean Paul Sartre who, within the second chapter named *Temporality* of his work *Being and Nothingness*, is dealing with the past claiming: “Since the past has fallen into nothingness and does not exist any longer, the memory exists still” (Sartre 153). Vladimir’s memory is important to understand here because in the postmodern world, the human mind failed to understand what actually the reality is. The trauma of the war made it hard for them to have a strong self-belief. Moreover, they did not have

that core consciousness of time and sometime space. In case of Vladimir and Estragon, the idea of time and space had been portrayed as vague and obscure. They act and appear as more than middle aged man but they are not aware of their age. From the play we can see that:

“POZZO: You are severe. (To Vladimir.) What age are you, if it's not a rude question?

(Silence.) Sixty? Seventy? (To Estragon.) What age would you say he was?

ESTRAGON: Eleven.

POZZO: I am impertinent. (Beckett 76)

The act of repetition, loss of sense, death drive all these traits are not only signifying a traumatic psyche, it also shows a mindset burdened with nostalgia and mostly a sense of schizophrenia.

When a human beings existence is questionable, everything else is filled with *nothingness*. The meaningless and long dialogues of the play also indicates that the characters have nothing better to do than passing time. They have set a goal to meet Godot but they are not very positive about the fact that they will ever accomplish that goal. The crisis of identity is so severe that they sometime don't even remember what happened the previous day. The intriguing fact about the forgetfulness of the characters are when Lucky and Pozzo came back the next day and they did not remember meeting Vladimir and Estragon.

Vladimir: So it is he?

Pozzo: What?

Vladimir: It is Lucky?

Pozzo: I don't understand.

Vladimir: And you are Pozzo?

Pozzo: Certainly I am Pozzo.

Vladimir: The same as Yesterday?

Pozzo: Yesterday?

Vladimir: We met Yesterday. (Silence.) Do you not remember?

Pozzo: I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone today. So don't count on me to enlighten you. (Beckett 144)

They are crippled in terms of memory and since memory is all a human being has to form an identity, they are lost in their life. All the characters are having the same problem. Pozzo came on the first day as a capable man but the next day he appeared on the scene as a blind and helpless man. The master of Lucky became a helpless blind fellow who continuously asked for help from the Vladimir and Estragon. The uncertain appearance of Lucky and his soliloquy is one of the major talking points of the play. A long soliloquy of Lucky where he speaks unknown words and nonsense sounds like 'quaquaquaqu' again and again resembles how some people have lost the power to communicate with other human beings through language. Linguists have tried to find out the meaning of Lucky's soliloquy and proved evidence of some meaning of the words.

Lucky, one of the four main characters of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, is just such a man babbling his way to silence. His speech in Act I is a continuous run-on of unpunctuated, idiotic words and phrases- a paper bag full of nonsense-water thrown splat in the audience's face. Yet the speech is more than the verbal inanity which it may at first reading or first hearing appear to be. (Atkins 426)

The most problematic aspect of the speech is that the other character fail to stop him. They listen to his speech and sometime tried to stop him but he speaks his way out. This proves that the voice of a neglected human being is heard but is not understood. He may have been tried to prove a point through his speech but it did not happen. The speech were later decoded and some even tried to prove that the speech made a lot of sense.

Lucky's speech is as carefully constructed as the play itself, and its meaning reinforce the themes of the play. The speech not only is absurd, it argues for absurdity. The sense=line arrangement given below and the commentary are designed to bringing out some of the latent intelligibility of the speech. As for the nonsense- that will take care of itself.

(Atkins 426)

However, we cannot deny the fact that the audience of the play as well as the other characters of the play did not understand what he tried to say through a long and nonsensical speech. The present audience may not have the privilege to understand the linguistic meaning of Lucky's soliloquy. The communication skills broke down and we can held the postmodern world responsible for the break down. It is important to understand that the process of communication should not be taken lightly because the entire human race is connected by the effective communication system.

The friendship between Estragon and Vladimir is not only a representation of two human beings connection. It is clear that the characters have affection for each other but should we consider them as good friends? Are they not representative of entire human beings who are connected only through the elements they get close to them? Vladimir and Estragon do not talk about their remaining family because probably they do not have anyone left. Through the representation of the characters, it is visible that the characters are merely in their thirties. At that

age, a human being is at his/her prime to have a family. The protagonists are forced held each other as the only significant thing in their life.

If the repetition informs the friendship in that it provides the reflection and recognition the two need, it is also a reflection of that friendship in that it provides an outlet for affection they can in no other way express, and it masks the need that they have for each other by preserving certain illusions which, when fractured reveal a reality more frightening than the one established within the context of the friendship. They have, at least, an 'other' to repeat and to be repetitive with. (Yates 441)

The characters are bound to hold each other for the rest of their life. It is way more than a friends and even family. Vladimir and Estragon knows that they need each other in the long way of their sufferings. They have seen Lucky and Pozzo who did not even remember meeting them in the previous day. They know that the communication system will not be the same they have enjoyed before. No one else is going to help them in the long run of their life. It is true that Vladimir and Estragon fights and complains about each other all time but at the end of the day they are always together. They have the same goal and the venue of waiting is same as well.

Vladimir: You must be happy, too, deep down, if only you knew it.

Estragon: Happy about what?

Vladimir: To be back with me again.

Estragon: Would you say so?

Vladimir: Say you are even if it is not true.

Estragon: What am I to say?

Vladimir: Say, I am happy.

Estragon: I am happy.

Vladimir: So am I.

Estragon: So am I.

Vladimir: We are happy.

Estragon: WE are happy. (*Silence*) What do we do, now that we are happy? (Beckett 79)

They often finish a topic repeating each other. Vladimir seems more intelligent than Estragon and often provides philosophical argument about a conversation. The quote mentioned above is a perfect example of how miserable their life had become. They became happy just because at the end of the day, they see each other. Their destiny have been fixed with each other. The agony and existential crisis has played the vital role in their present state of life.

Conclusion

The play is regarded as one of the most brilliantly written plays of modern era. Play like *Waiting for Godot* is started to show the true aspects of postmodern world to the audience. The existential crisis was shown in the play and people initially rejected it. It is well known that the first time *Waiting for Godot* was appreciated on stage when it was shown in a prison of maximum security. Prisoners wait for their term to end; they know the value of waiting. There is no plot twist, no emotional turn around or the other aspects that are common in a typical play in *Waiting for Godot*. The absence of a character is the driving force of the play. *Waiting for Godot* shows how human sufferings can go to the extreme. We do not know what is waiting for us in the future and all we are capable of doing is waiting. Vladimir and Estragon was waiting for Godot and they do not come close to meet him throughout the play. We can consider Godot as an idea. The idea can represent the absence of something significant. Nothing happens throughout the play and the wait is bound to be fruitless. Yet, the significance of that wait is immense and intriguing.

Samuel Beckett's first-hand experience has provided a proper guideline to present a play that is significance for the human beings. The postmodern era is difficult to understand and we may not understand the angst of the society of that time. Beckett's masterful portrayal of Vladimir and Estragon have made it possible to understand the situation to some extent. Violence destroys the sense of belongings because the objectives of violence "is a demonstration of power and therefore a voluntaristic enforcement of one's own ideas, concepts, and perceptions" (Roehl and Kalthoff 113). During the war, people used to go outside not knowing the fact they will ever return to their family members and the family member did not have that hundred percent to get him. These kind of situation intrigued the existential crisis among the

postmodern societies. We may not have the sympathy for the characters much when we watch is performed for the first time but once we get the connection with the characters and our sufferings, we can see the inseparable connection between our agony and the agony of the protagonists.

Waiting for Godot may not provide the ultimate solution and mocks the divine power, but it represents the reality of the current society. The absence of action and proper chain of dialogues have been the key features to understand the existential crisis. The *nothingness* in the play became the most significant aspect of *Waiting for Godot*. The psychoanalysis would prove that fact that the characters were in a state where they could not do anything other than waiting. The title itself is a significant feature to understand the protagonists' search for identity. From the background of the play and other materials, it can be fairly argued that the play represents the entire world. The sense of space has been given less priority because the setting did not have anything significant to be mentioned. The tree is symbolic because the conversation between Vladimir and Estragon proves that the tree changes its leaves which resembles the changes of the fortunes of the world. Ironically, we do not see the change in the characters of *Waiting for Godot*.

The story of the Vladimir and Estragon can be related to the people of every corner of the world. Every human being suffered because of the world wars. The setting and the mental state of the characters are representing the chaotic world after the world war. The world witnessed the destruction of nuclear weapons during the Second World War. Vladimir and Estragon was living somewhere in Europe but the horror was spread everywhere. The idea of existence of the human being became questionable. All the Vladimir, all the Estragon got scared and wanted to have someone like Godot who promised to solve their problems. The resemblance of Godot and God

evoked thinking of the audience of the play to relate the incidents to the loss of faith in the postmodern world. Beckett may have tried to mock God through the character Godot and tried to show that the faith in a divine power will not rescue a human being from the miseries of the world. The human society are forced to live with an 'abstract' identity and bound to wait for their fortune to change. We cannot decide which one is best for us and "Identification fuels our most simplistic parsing of good from evil; normal from deviant; inner from outer" (Diamond 383) It does not matter in what 'Godot' they believe in, they will tell them to wait and will never show up.

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