

Q. In Waiting for Godot nothing happens twice. Do you agree? Justify your answer.

Aristotle's suggestion about the action in a tragedy, that it should have a beginning, middle and an end can be applied in its extended sense in analyzing the structure of plot or nature of action in different types of literary productions, be it drama or novel. But in modern realistic drama from Ibsen to John Osborne, we are presented with another idea, as we find, many of their plays instead of reaching upto some resolution constructed by cause and effect relationship, we arrive at a conclusion which is frequently open ended. Again, there is another kind of structural organization known as circular. It means the action certainly moves from one point, but instead of progressing to a reasonable conclusion, resolves to meet the same point, where it started from. The action in Beckett's Waiting for Godot obviously follows this idea, which has prompted Vivian Mercier to comment- "... in Waiting for Godot nothing happens twice."

It has been often remarked that the key note of Beckett's play is to be found in Estragon's words to Vladimir – "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." Indeed nothing happens in the play. Here characters do not indulge in Shakespearean conflicts, nor are there melodramatic scenes and sensational sights. Instead we confront two tramps Estragon and Vladimir, who we learn are waiting for some fictitious Godot. Their waiting however comprises of boredom, fatigue, frustration and disappointment as they can not go away and are destined to wait the whole day. In Act I in the course of their waiting one takes off his boots and the other talks of salvation and damnation. Again one eats the carrot the other offers. They even decide to hang themselves but soon such scheming proves ineffectual and is replaced by their (Estragon's and Vladimir's) talk about Godot, and once again they devote themselves in the act of waiting, which they obviously hope will result in something being done to them. But all such hopes end up with the arrival of the boy, who declares that Godot will come the next day.

The same monotony dominates even the second act of the drama which too is replete with similar act of waiting. Here too the tramps- Estragon and Vladimir – are left all alone to wait for Godot who never appears. Once again we witness two human figures devising ways to pass their time by sleeping, by telling stories and even by fighting with one another. But no such means appear fruitful for the betterment of the situation. Nay throughout the play Beckett even does not allow his characters to indulge in diversions for long. Thus the story of Estragon (i.e. the story of an Englishman in the brothel) remains unfinished, Lucky is not able to complete his speech and even the thoughts like the speculation on the thieves do not reach conclusion. Hence we witness that every attempt of respite from the tiresome task of waiting collapses into uncertainty, confusion and silence. The climax of such an unbearable situation is however attained, when the boy reappears in Act II only to inform that Godot has yet not decided to come.

Earlier in Act I, however two characters, a cruel master called Pozzo and his half crazy slave, Lucky have appeared to create a diversion. Now, Pozzo is cruelty personified and occupies the stage with his inhuman torture on Lucky, who bears them all with infinite endurance and fortitude. Again in the second act, both Lucky and Pozzo re- appear with a certain change. Pozzo has become blind and Lucky has become dumb. Now, this supports the idea of progression of time that has certainly taken place. But even inspite of such diversions which the play offers with the introduction of the two new characters and their sudden and strange change in Act II, the action hardly gains any progression. Hence throughout the two acts, we are confronted with nothingness of action providing the justification of the statement- "In Waiting for Godot nothing happens twice."

Now it is primarily this lack of action that leads to a kind of circularity in the plot of Beckett's play. At the end of the drama, we come back to the same point from where we started- i.e. the tramps are waiting for Godot. Contextually Jane Lyman has commented, "even if the play had ten more acts, they would have ended the same way with Godot sending a message that he is not coming and the tramps deciding to leave for the night with a helpless determination to come and resume the wait the next afternoon." The monotony and boredom that comprises the centrality of Beckett's play however asserts itself with much prominence through the refrain- "We're waiting for Godot" – that occurs again and again. But needless it is to say that, it is a senseless and tiresome refrain with no theatrical value.

However, a just and thorough analysis of Beckett's Waiting for Godot certainly makes clear Beckett's intention in denying the conventional theatrical tradition. Beckett's primary concern in this drama was actually to portray the fact that throughout their lives human beings always wait for something- an event, a thing, a person or even death. Moreover it is through the act of waiting that people experience the flow of time. Thus Waiting for Godot is the dramatic statement of the human situation itself. To justify this assertion further, one may cite several changes in the stage direction during the two acts of the play. No doubt, a number of adjustments are made during the interval between Act I and II. For instance Pozzo goes blind and Lucky becomes dumb. Again the tree puts forth some leaves, Estragon's boots are changed and Lucky gets a new hat. These changes however serve to show that time is in continuous progression. But noticeably the tramps are provided with no relief even with the progress of time. Now, this suggests the fact that gloom is an inseparable part of human life and it can not be overcome in any way.

Considered from this perspective it may appear that Vladimir and Estragon, Lucky and Pozzo are not conventional characters, but embodiments of basic human attitudes. Man is usually ignorant about his real purpose in life and he lives in the hope of some revelation in future. We just hang around, waiting like Vladimir and Estragon, or rush madly like Pozzo in search of some purpose. Again like Pozzo and Lucky man is subjected to reversal of fortune. His search for meaning may be reduced to an empty rush of meaningless words like Lucky's monologue. As social beings we are tied to one another and loath in each other's company. And yet all contacts between human beings produce fiction- as between Vladimir and Estragon, or dominance and subjection- as between Pozzo and Lucky.

Therefore on the basis of the above analysis it may be well asserted that despite the paucity of incidents Beckett's Waiting for Godot achieves a conspicuous success in its purpose of communicating the experience of waiting, of boredom, of impotence and of ignorance to the audience. Contextually, we are reminded of Beckett's other plays namely Endgame and Happy Days, which too are replete with such nothingness of human existence. Therefore we may conclude with the words of Williams Raymonds, "Beckett was concerned with the gradual degeneration of human condition in the course of time that leads to the futility of his attempts and circularity of his action, rather inaction."
