

Modern Man's Religious Plight: Harvey Whitehouse' Modes of Religiosity in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract

This study textually analyzed Samuel Beckett's '*Waiting for Godot*' which shows dispositions of religion to man and man's behavior to religion. Moreover, the study highlights Beckett's depiction of man's belief of waiting for his survivor to come for his help. This paper questions the purpose of religious interpretations and man's dwindling belief in God at the time of his utmost trial. To debate on the hypothesis, *Beckett's Play "Waiting for Godot"* is chosen. For the purpose of investigation *Harvey Whitehouse's theory, "Mood of Religiosity"* is hence considered. To carry out research, textual analysis is applied. The paper comprises of two levels of investigation, first on theoretical model and second on dimensional model. The paper sets new trends for the future researchers to analyze religion in text through different ways.

Keywords: Religiosity, dimensional, behavior, dwindling belief, trial, religious interpretations.

Introduction

Samuel Beckett is Avant-Gardist playwright. He is a revolutionary play writer, who questions on the relationship of God and man. Modern Critics find themselves more expedient to treat Beckett's work on philosophical grounds. Samuel Beckett's main concern is religion and positivism (ghanbari 2). If Beckett's notions on the philosophy of positivism and religion are apprehended then he says that these two notions justify the content and means rather than the ends of stories. He further elaborates that both of these notions set questions on man and his ultimate response to God. Beckett says that man must have the understandings of both of these collectively (ghanbari 3). The play "*Waiting for Godot*", is about man's helplessness and absurdity at the time of his utmost trial. In this play, there is neither communication nor development. The whole play is consisted of just two acts and the second act is the repetition of the first act. The play is about man's strangeness in this strange world. This world is world of chaos and despair where human value does not matter. Beckett has depicted the actual hollowness and situation of shattered belief of modern man. Beckett affirms that man's attitude and deviance has led him towards his absurdity and despair. Beckett is a revolutionary creative writer who did not follow the expectation from others to his works. He did not confine himself as a priest or pastor (ghanbari).

Beckett has based religion in depiction of his theatre in which he has portrayed the actual chaos and real pathos of man's belief and his commitment. Beckett's religious notion is excessive throughout the play. Characters in the play are of the point of view that God has created imperfect world hurriedly in seven days. Everywhere is chaos and despair and mutiny. Man remains in wait for savior to come, but no one comes at last. He remains in complete wretchedness. There is no room for man's problem and worries in front of God; he does not bother to solve man's issues. Beckett's notion is not to depict pessimism and nihilism; in fact he wants to bring his reader close to the reality (Albert 1). Religion that Beckett depicts challenged the modern man to question on the relationship of God and man. Man is now in complete state of conscious that if God loves His men more than the love of seventy mothers then why is he silent on the agony and troublesome condition of His men.

Beckett's audience does only one thing along with his characters to wait for the arrival of savior the God, but He does not come. Anthony Jenkins gives remarks on Godot, he says that no one knows whether Godot comes or not (Albert). This uncertainty of the arrival of God shows whether the characters be given forgiveness and meet their salvation or not. Both Vladimir and Estragon are unfamiliar with God which shows actual relationship between God and man (wang). Beckett's religious interpretation has become the interest of many researchers. Man is unaware of the day of his death and also the Day of Judgment when he will meet his God. The same is the case with Vladimir and Estragon, they do not know that when they will meet Godot and whether they would be punished or saved (Wang).

Man is born to suffer the crisis of his identity and faith. Man has in a bizarre relationship with God and until his death he remains in that state of relationship (Pandit). This World is made for decay. Although man is born free but he is not set to be free. He is interlinked and connected to his doom and the fear of destiny. Beckett has depicted biologically entrapped human conscious and will and says that man struggles to meet his death. Man has the commitment to meet his Lord for salvation or punishment it depends on his deeds. God does not

those, who do their deity well (Wang).

As far as, religion does matter for Beckett he is not a priest. He did not justify his obligations to religion and God. He doubts and objections God's sterility and avoidance towards His men (Flaherty). According to Bryden's view Samuel Beckett has divided the play into two portions in the first portion the supremacy and biblical interpretations of God and in second portion unresponsive attitude of God (Flaherty). Beckett is an avant-garde writer of his age directly and indirectly. Beckett has handled a remote silence in his play and that silence may refer to the silence of god as well. The silence with which Beckett is concerned, time and again in the play, may be directly or indirectly refer to God's silence towards human. There is a profound role of silence in the play (Flaherty). Beckett has uncovered the trauma and anxiety of human misery in the form of his play. He silenced the minor sounds in the play just to expose the distraught and unhappy conditions of human life (ghanbari).

In almost every religion and time, there is a silent message for the followers to wait for a savior to come for help. History is replete with such examples found in many holy books. Different schools of thoughts have different arguments in this perspective. In Moslems, according to Shia's sect that twelfth Imaam will come and organize a new government (ghanbari). According to Indian holy book Bask, there is a frontrunner of angels and human, who will come and rule the world (ghanbari). Psalm of David confronts that all the cruelty and oppression will meet its end when a savior sent by Allah inherent the globe (ghanbari). In New Testament, chapter twenty four and verses thirty seven, one day son of a man will arrive beyond your expectations and will end all the mutiny (ghanbari). In tradition Al-Qaim's arrival is possible at any moment, and those who believe will find their salvation (ghanbari).

There is a message from every religion that one day a savior will come and will put an end to all the woes and miseries. In religion, there are two choices of wrong and right, good and bad. It is on man's part which one he will select. Man reaches to his salvation by his own dint and effort. If it is true then why Beckett keeps his characters to wait for a survivor? Why he let his characters in a complete confusion about their upcoming life? Why Beckett did not give a hope to his characters that one day everything will be fine if they carry on their struggle for their survival? Why Beckett is left only two choices either to hang them or silently bear all the oppression? (ghanbari) He could have given a third choice to fight against all the tragedies, traumas and mutiny of life deliberately. This paper will focus mainly on the given questions and will investigate the actual meanings of human belief, his commitment and involvement in religion.

Scope of the Study

This paper was carried out on new magnitudes to Beckett's play "*Waiting for Godot*". A lot of work is done in context of this play. Different types of comparisons and contrasts are made with other intellectual's works concerning its themes and absurdity. This study tried to explore the new ways of analysis on Beckett's work while applying "*Moods of Religiosity*". The gap is filled because this research tried to show dual sides of a picture. It tried to indicate both religious interpretations and man's behavior and response to that with justification of his ways to his creator.

Rationale of study

The topic of the study was worthy to study because no one ever has applied this theoretical framework on Beckett's play "*Waiting for Godot*". Many a work has been done in context of existentialism and absurdity but none of any researchers has analyzed the text of this particular play on the "*Moods of Religiosity*".

Research Objectives

The study analyzed the texts on theoretical Moods of religiosity given by Harvey Whitehouse

- To investigate the relationship between religion and man through different dimensions in context of "*Waiting for Godot*".
- The paper posits on the fluctuation of religious beliefs and human commitment in the play.
- To apply "*Waiting for Godot*" and its interpretations on "*Moods of religiosity*", in current era.

Research Questions

The study ponders deep into the following questions.

- Is God really nothing except the projection or illusion of human mind as it is interpreted in the play?
- What should be done now and why modern man is suffering from the same problem as Vladimir and Estragon face in the Play?

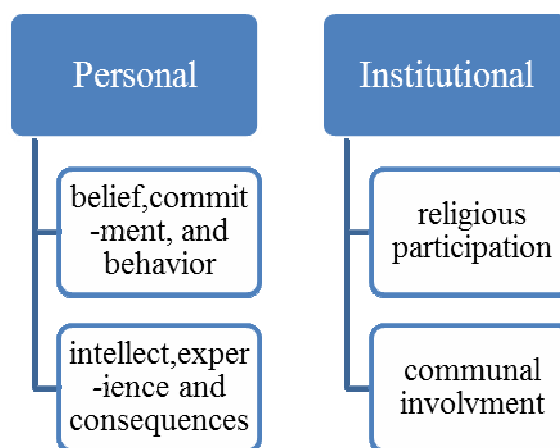
Research Methodology and Data analysis

Descriptive textual analysis was employed as methodology in this study. In the context of research Samuel

Barclay Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" was chosen for analysis. To carry out research, qualitative methodology is applied. The paper comprises of two levels of investigation, first on theoretical model and second on dimensional model. In this context Harvey Whitehouse's theory, "Modes of Religiosity" is concerned.

Theoretical and Dimensional model for analysis

Religiosity is basically meant by believing excessively on religion, the extreme kind of belief. Harvey Whitehouse introduces different modes of religiosity. He posits that there are different responses to religion, personal and institutional. In personal dimension, there is cognition, affection, knowledge and the consequences. In institutional dimension, individual and society's participation and involvement in religion is considered (Marie Cornwall, Stan L. Albrecht, Perry H. Cunningham and Brian L. Pitcher). The theory is about man's belief, commitment and his ultimate response to his religion in reference to his life's experiences and consequences. On the other hand, it also posits how community and other institutions contribute in man's belief and his commitments.



Literature Review

World War I had left the shadows of sorrows and frustration on all around the world. The pessimism, nihilism, despair, agony and oppression were rampant on the globe. The world was witnessing a great change in literary genres. People and literary figures were becoming more rational and practical. All the previous norms and literary techniques were questioned and new epoch was merging on the world's scenario. There was widening a gap that could not be filled. Man became frustrated after running materialistic pursuits. He began to have a vacuum between his body and soul and is left alone in the world. He does not have anything to do in order to kill his time, such as in the play by Beckett; he time and again interprets that "nothing to be done".

Man lives in this world free handed. He infact considers himself, beyond the restrictions of good and bad. There is not any God who considers man what he is not (Liljeström). Man is free to make choices and decisions for his own life. Although he is free yet in complete isolation and despair. It is unto man whether he has to make his decisions right or wrong.

"That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does". (Liljeström)

God in another sense assured his men that He will make him blissful if he has his firm belief on Him. If man lives a purposeful life then He will not let His man suffer from agony and despair provided that he remains hopeful of his blessings (chinyi 1). There are many social institutions such as religion, science and logic. These institutions are directly or indirectly related and interlinked to human reasoning and knowledge that later on resulted in chaos and disarray (chinyi 1). Chaos devalues truths and human reasoning as it is found in Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" (chinyi). Waiting for Godot is completely a satirical interpretation of human condition in the absence of God and savior. As Harvey Whitehouse interlinks human knowledge and reason to his belief and religion, Chung Chin-yi in his article, "Religion in Beckett's waiting for Godot", confronts that truth, reason, intellect and knowledge are interconnected to one another (chinyi). Personal and institutional dimension are the "Modes of Religiosity". Liljeström in his article says that although human is alone yet it is up-to him how he manages his responsibilities and potentials according to his belief and religion. All is the matter of man's belief and his commitments towards his religion and God (Liljeström).

In the play, there is a biblical allusion of thieves, about which it is penetrated that God does partiality on his decision making. He blesses them who do well and leaves the rest alone. One of the characters in the play,

Lucky delivers some dialogues according to which God does favors to His beloved ones and leaves the others to hell and eternal damnation. Such notions of Beckett violate and negate God's mercy and kindness while making him cruel and irresponsible (chinyi). God in spite of His absence remains more important and worthwhile throughout the play (Sharma). When Estragon claims that they get things always to some extent, which shows their existence and being for themselves. Vladimir responds to Estragon that they should not avoid trivial things in their lives (Sharma). This shows man's irresponsible behavior towards religious interpretations. Beckett's men are suffering from complete illusion and utmost anxieties. It is not only the condition of Beckett's characters in the play, in fact every modern man is suffering from the same chaotic condition. What should be done now? Man has lost his religious norms and has forgotten his divine commitments (Wang).

The play "Waiting for Godot", is a one-act play because the second act is the repetition of the first act. The play revolves around the one who is absent and near to arrive but at last neither any one comes nor does anything happen throughout the play. This play is so much profound and compact in its sense that before its acting to be started its fame entered into the stage (Scott). To Marx, religion is ineffective and feeble that makes human conscious weak and fragile. On the contrary, the main motif is about the promise to be fulfilled or broken. Either God has broken the promise or man himself due to his disarray life (Wang).

Beckett himself gives his arguments about Godot in his play that he does not know anything about Godot. He is not well familiar with Godot or His arrival. He further says that he is not concerned with those who are waiting for Godot (Scott). From womb to grave, man is in a continuous struggle for his survival and existence. Beckett's depiction of human situation in such a manner clearly shows that in spite of all desperateness and bleakness man's journey of life goes on. He does not set his journey off in despair; he is supposed to be hopeful for betterment (Scott).

Discussion

Harvey Whiteshouse in the "*Modes of religiosity*" affirms that there are two dimensions of religiosity, one leads towards individual and the other towards society. He claims that it is up to man that he has to cop up with all the conflicts that become the cause of his irresponsible attitude to his commitment (Wang). If man is in the state of solitude and despair then which thing is responsible for all this mess?

There is a state where Beckett's characters live. Harvey states that man's behavior and response justifies his conducts to his deities. Modern man has his faith and belief according to his experience, knowledge and his general behavior towards his religion and world, it is up to him that he takes this world as "at-home-ness" and tries to elope from it without performing any deity (woelfel). Beckett consciously molded the play according to his own desire and cult of mind. Brecht says that art is a weapon with which the situation and content can be molded. Art does not reflect the society rather it gives shape to it (Scott).

"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 observing each other". (Kroll)

God remains in the state of remote silence and man waits for His arrival. The play also violates all the specific notions of a play as Aristotle describes plot, action etc. The whole play starts and ends with lamentation of not happening anything, any one neither comes nor goes it's appalling (Kern). Actions in the play are also about physical sickness and mental disorder. It is also symbolized to Beckett's sterility to worst condition of human (Kern). Agony, anguish, unhappiness, hollowness, despair, remote silence and utmost nihilism are prevailed everywhere on Beckett's stage. The spectator and the audience is confused whether to identify himself to those two characters or not (Kern). The characters of Beckett are truly identical to the people of current era. When religion does not take its real place in man's life then it becomes hollow, despair, and anguish.

Vladimir and Estragon are in a complete state of unconscious and uncertainty because they do not have the knowledge about Godot. Knowledge, according to the "*Moods of religiosity*", plays a vital role in man's belief. (Marie Cornwall, Stan L. Albrecht, Perry H. Cunningham and Brian L. Pitcher) They do not know where they are going to have a meeting with Godot. They know nothing about Godot expect the "white beard" Godot has (Kern). Belief, knowledge and experience give justify man's indications to his religion. Vladimir and Estragon have bad faith of coming Godot for their salvation (Kern). Vladimir and Estragon are identical to each other as if they are identical to all human kind. Lucky and Pozzo also are interconnected with each other with a rope. There is not any specific relationship between the characters of 'Waiting for Godot'. They are in the same relationship in which all human beings are tied to each other (Kern).

Beckett's religious quest is clearly shown when both of his characters in muddle ask themselves that why are they here? They did not get answer instead of their consistent attitude towards their waiting for Godot (Kern). One more thing is noticeable in Beckett's play that there is no escape from their life except having belief on their salvation according to their deeds. Despite Pozzo becomes blind, Lucky did not flee (Kern). Beckett did not show the way to escape humanity from their solitude, but he wants his characters to stay there in same

estrangement and keep on waiting for their savior. All the characters of the play are not living in their selves but they are dependent and interconnected to each other and are not free and independent.

Both the characters in the plays want to be conceived from Godot's mind when Estragon confronts whether Godot would see him or not? And the Vladimir replies that he must shut his eyes (Kroll). Confusion and intermingling of time and space disturbs Vladimir. The problem is that they even cannot discern their yesterday from their today, because both are the same (Kroll). Their only belief can save them from their problematic life. Here it can be seen that religion has shaped human life, it gives aims and harmony to man, but modern man has forgotten this and suffering from the same condition as Vladimir and Estragon do. Humankind is needed to have a unique and uniform organization that may cop up with issues of world, fate, and the entire scenario (Salvatore). So the divine supreme power is always needed to supervise humanity.

Lucky perceives that whatever the matter is, only the real facts do matter. All the matters exist because they are conceived by God's mind as Berkeley argues (Ravichandran). Beckett's characters in his play are surely in the conflict of non-beings (Rhodes). Beckett's characters are the real predicaments of post-modernist society (Azam). Estragon and Vladimir both are the reflection of their own destiny. They keep on waiting and do each mortify task to kill their time (Kiesenhofer). In the play Vladimir and Estragon both think they either would be blessed or damned by Godot (Wang). There is a contract signed by God and man. Man first breaks its promise and contract with God and also does not validate his responsibilities as His man. Man suffers due to his violated and rebellious attitude then why he is waiting for a savior to come and save him from his damnation and chaos (Wang). The play simplifies and elucidates man's chaotic condition God's existence and His response and man's solitude. Beckett just tries to portray reality as it is (Rechtien). This play is devoid of abstraction, fully based on reality (Rechtien). God cares for man and if there would be a "personal God", and then He would be inferior to man (Sobosan). Vladimir accounts that there was a time when man had his superiority but now he is nothing except a vagrant and wanderer (Sobosan).

Conclusion

Man is free in nature but he does not let him free from his worldliness. He becomes again a slave of his desires and materialistic attitudes due to which he makes a distant between him and his divine power. Harvey Whitehouse in his theory of "Modes of religiosity" affirms that man has his response towards his religion according to his knowledge, reason and belief. He grasps his institutional participation and gets experiences that later on set his notions and beliefs towards God and religion. The more man becomes materialist the more he gets away from his religion and God. Through this play, it is justified that if God becomes silent then the whole world will be damned and become mute. Chaos and despair would be found everywhere as it is depicted in Beckett's play. In the play, the two vagabonds are in a continuous wait for Godot, the survivor to come and save them from ultimate disparity and desolation. It is their belief and commitment that let them tied with their faith of salvation. But man is again need of repentance as Adam did. Again man has made God angry with his sins and detachments and again is in need of salvation and savior. Modern man is also in the same scenario of Vladimir and Estragon. The whole play can also be applied while analyzing the beliefs and commitments of Vladimir and Estragon to the commitments and beliefs of modern man.

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