
A Comparative Study of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and Vijay Tendulkar's *The Cyclist*

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Abstract

This study aims to compare Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and Vijay Tendulkar's *The Cyclist* as an absurdist play, keeping in mind certain aspects and characteristics of the Theatre of Absurd such as silence, pause, repetitions, unconventional and illogical dialogues, no story or plot, no settings and interest in global and universal problems rather than contemporary issues. Due to the undesirable effects of the Second World War, there has been a noticeable change in the world scenario, and feelings of meaninglessness and nothingness spread worldwide. Beckett, in his play *Endgame* and Tendulkar, and much later, in his play *The Cyclist*, reflects these issues and can be considered the prominent absurdist playwright representing the Western and the Eastern Theatre of the Absurd, respectively. The chosen plays depict this kind of drama's characteristics and show the modern world's emptiness and alienation. In this study, by examining and comparing these two plays, it is depicted that with the absurdist drama, the alienated modern world of the West and the East is successfully put on the stage and how and in which way the alienation, emptiness, nothingness, and meaninglessness of the West is similar and different to that of the East.

Keywords: Absurdism, Theatre of Absurd, Meaninglessness, Nothingness, Alienation

Background Study:

After the horrors of World War II, there was a general tendency, especially evident in the existential perspective of writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, to view a human being as an unaccompanied existent who is cast into an alien universe to create the mortal world as possessing no intrinsic truth, value or meaning; and to describe human life- in its fruitless search for meaning and significance, as it moves from nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end- as an existence which is both anguished and absurd. As Camus said in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942),

In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile.... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.

These two World Wars represented the twentieth century's moral depravity and spiritual degeneration. These World Wars have disordered human life in such a way that people across the globe started thinking that there is no meaning and hope in their lives. World Wars have entirely changed human sensibility and perception, so much that they did not find anything

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significant in their religion or daily ritual practices. They have completely gone astray. The people, in general, shared their suffering, hopelessness, dissatisfaction, anger, loneliness, alienation, immigration, and deep psychosis about their own lives. They become so hollow from within that they fail to find hope and affirmation.

Modern English literature largely abounds in such portrayal of human frustration and deep agony that came from these two World Wars and adversely affected human lives across the globe. This is not only discovered in the poem of W.B. Yeats's *The Second Coming*:

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
They are full of passionate intensity.

However, this anarchy can be found in almost every genre of literature of the twentieth century, and human beings paid heavy prices for the destruction that wars brought into their lives and the consequences of the aftermath.

This anarchy, frustrations, meaninglessness, alienation, and loneliness generated after the Second World War led to the idea of Absurdism or the philosophy of the Absurd. Albert Camus raised the idea of Absurdism. It explores the reality of human life. The main idea is that Absurdity is the ultimate truth. As per Camus, Absurdity can not be explored thoroughly. The characters in the play *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett and *The Cyclist* by Vijay Tendulkar reflect some themes through their actions, speeches, and thinking. These themes are routines, meaningless conditions, and the end. Based on Camus' philosophy of Absurdity, these themes can be categorized as a reflection of the idea of Absurdity.

In his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus said that the Absurdity of the human condition is the situation of a man full of the desire to explain anything in his life and the world. He faced the reality that nothing could be explained in life and the world.

But what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose calls echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. (Camus,1955:16)

The moment of Absurdity appears when man realizes his condition of being. It is the Time when he is aware of his existence. This awareness raises a fundamental question about man's existence. This alienation also leads man to a feeling of alienation from the world. Camus describes this situation by using the example of people with their routines.

Rising, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, rest, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this course is readily followed most of the Time. However, one day, the "why" arises, and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. In other words, Absurdity arises from moments when all the acts of life that flow mechanically stop and when consciousness starts to wake up and move (Camus, 1955:15).

Space and Time and its impact on individual and milieu in *Endgame*:

The catastrophe is used as the setting of *Endgame*. It is described as a painful place. A great holocaust has happened in the world, and this condition has affected the characters. They live a sorrowful life. One of the critics, Astro, gives a philosophical opinion about Hamm. He said that Hamm's need for a painkiller can be interpreted as the sickness of his existence.

Life in this post-Holocaust world is quite painful. Hamm repeatedly asks Clov for a

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painkiller, and Clov always answers that the Time for it has not yet come—until the end, when he informs him, "There is no more painkiller." These words also apply to the audience: we share the characters' pain as spectators of the laborious dialogue and action. We cannot escape from the fact that existence is painful and the world is bent on destruction.

Seamus Deane correctly observed, "Time in Beckett is a metaphysical problem. It is the dimension in which thought moves just as space is the dimension in which body moves." (Joyce and Beckett 64). The concept of Time and its experience plays a significant role in Beckett's *Endgame*. There is a significant relationship between the character and Time. The characters of Beckett in *Endgame* are thrown out of successive life events, and this occurrence creates an illusion of a flux of Time and stops the characters in a single moment, opening up the static and infinite world of Absurdity. The characters are enchained to this flux of Time. In this play, Beckett conveys a feeling of entrapment through the characters' impossibility of running their spatial confines.

While Time and space are manifestly different, they combine in a firm compression in Beckett's works. Hamm, the central character, remains on stage all the Time, even as Clov goes in and out. Confined to his chair, Hamm cannot move, but there is a compromise: Clov pushes him around.

This image of (im)mobility in space appears as successive phases of a spatial paradigm in which the Cartesian concept of the body as that which occupies space, the phenomenological notion of the body ground in the world, and the metaphysics of presence are integrated ironically. Beckett incorporates these philosophical frames and concepts to subvert their authority and suggests that philosophy and the history of ideas can provide no reliable answers about the human condition. This distrust of philosophy explains why the body appears on stage and at the same Time does not appear. As Steven Connor indicates, the more still these characters are, the more they speak. Beckett's belief that nothing happens in human existence is translated into the visual space of his plays- encapsulated in frozen images, dominated by the immovable dimension of space- more than in the repetitiveness of their movement through Time.

Though Hamm in *Endgame* says, "Enough, it is time it ended, in shelter, too," it never ends. It is a cyclical process. Even this cyclical process hinders Hamm to dive back into his memory. He needs to remember what he has done just five minutes earlier. The structural narration of the play makes the characters stop in Time and space, where Time holds them up in an invisible prison. When Time loses its only property – the delusion of fluidity, life seems to make no sense at all when Clov asserts, "Then one day suddenly it ends, it changes, I do not understand, it dies, or it is me, I do not understand it either" (Beckett 52). When the remote past of the characters is filled, and the immediate past becomes the present, Time flows slower and slower. Time breaks into smaller fragments blocks the sense of perceiving Time, and makes all characters prisoners of a never-ending path. Hamm's speculation of Time proves the enchained experience of the futile waiting of human beings:

HAMM: Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of...(…)...that old Greek, and all lifelong, you wait for that to mount up to a life. (...)Ah, let us get it over! (...)What? Neither gone nor dead? (Beckett 45)

In his writing, Beckett showed us that we are disturbed by awareness of the fluidity of our memory. Our older memory can suddenly rise while the immediate can sink into total oblivion. The self becomes an unstable entity if we become what we remember. The

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advancement of the sense of Time keeps pulling us forward. Memory, which is the absolute creation of Time, presents what is physically absent. By representing particular experiences, the Beckettian narrator tries to show us the primary structures or laws of the mind, which are manipulated by how a narrator narrates the Time.

Space and Time and its impact on individual and milieu in *The Cyclist*:

The Cyclist is not about a single journey set in a specific time and space; it is layered and keeps shifting between the real and the imagined world from the Cyclist's perspective. The excitement of the journey diminishes with each encounter with natural and human obstacles, bringing the Cyclist closer to the harsh realities of the world. The encounters are odd and uncanny, albeit hilarious, but are instrumental in driving home the futility of an individual's endeavors to seek the meaning of their presence in the world.

This play was first performed at the Har Burreton Centre in Toronto, Canada. It is the description of the ultimate reality surrounding the playwright. The play is descriptive and an introspective-reflective narrative of a young man who has set out on his first independent journey around the world on a bicycle to realize his long-cherished childhood dream. The play raises a question about this fantasy journey: is the journey an escape or freedom from the trap of home as a space or place of restrictions of irresponsible parenthood?

This play reflects the ambiance of fluid Time and space and, perhaps, geography because the story could belong to any home Indian or global, urban or rural, Asian or Western, thus projecting "Realism." It projects the contemporary reality of young men and women being systematically stripped of their freedom in the name of protection and safety from dangers outside.'

Although we believe that ideally, the whole world should be where everyone can move freely from one place to another, it is not. Restrictions are imposed through a range of signs, symbols, and conditions scattered throughout the landscape to demarcate territories, thereby quashing the free spirit of humanity. A journey in its truest sense should be a liberating experience from all these artificial restrictions. These territorial signs and symbols often block the Cyclist's free spirit. Various of them are used in the play to depict the Cyclist's struggle throughout her journey. The props are equally important, serving as an extension of the characters and establishing the space.

In the play, the main character's older brother lived for only two months. He then died, which is why his parents did not let him go. This parental restriction has impacted the main character, who seeks freedom in "Outer Space" but feels imprisoned in "Inner Space." This "Outer Space" has become his dream space, but his parents do not want him to go around the subcontinent because of the past.

Main Character: Stop it! Both of You! I will be back safe and sound. Must I never see my dream realized?

Can you guarantee that if I go tomorrow, it will be all right and different from what it is now? Tell me, Pa. Can you guarantee that? Say, Amma?

Further, he asserts that we are all so engrossed in our daily monotonous routine that life has become absurd and meaningless, and that is why: "... time's come now to get off the potty and smell the world." He wants us to find some meaning in this meaningless, purposeless life. His visit to the dreamland makes him aware of his existence, and he wants to seek meaning in this meaningless world.

Time is described with the help of an alarm: "If the Alarm is gone, what will happen to the warnings needed during the rest of the journey? A life-saving device. Should this be given

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up? Life or Alarm that is the question." This question is very much allegorical to the warnings in our lives. We must understand the symbols of these alarms in our lives.

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