

## Waiting for Godot: As a tragic-comedy ①

'Waiting for Godot' is one of the most popular dramas of the modern age. It is a master piece of Samuel Becket, a great literary authority and a major influence on the progressive trend of modern literature. He has the first hand and intensive experiences of fear, terror, suffering, agony, poverty, and misery and other negative aspects of human life. His works explore and present the modern life of material aggrandisement in a satirical vein and pessimistic tone but with some comic touches. The present play demonstrates his creative genius and, at the same time, throws ample light on the enigmatic, exasperating and complex situation the modern people are entangled with in the name of modernity. The common people are making futile efforts and are hoping against hope. It has been described from various angles and has been called a tragedy, a comedy, an Absurd and tragic comedy. Let us see it in a brief.

Undoubtedly, waiting for Godot is a serious play but well cast in a light atmosphere. It has rightly been called a tragic-comedy. There are, no doubt, the dominance of serious and tragic elements in the play. There are much to move the readers, but there are also enough to amuse them. It is not a conventional tragedy for the action of the characters are too light and absurd. But, its object is serious for it deals with the eternal problems of life and death, happiness and sorrows, existence and environment. It also deals with the themes of despair, boredom, alienation, etc.

In the very beginning, the tragic effect is produced by the repetition of the fact that the two tramps are waiting and waiting for ~~the~~ Godot. Whenever they say that they cannot leave the waiting place, an effect

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of fathers is deeply felt for their words remind <sup>us</sup> of the state of their hopelessness. Estragon's nightmares and his fear of the 'others' who repeatedly beat him in a ditch add to the poignancy of the situation. On three occasions, the tramps plan for suicide but their attempts prove abortive, making them the most pathetic characters. Vladimir's speculation about the thief who was 'damned' and one who was saved has also an ominous ring. There is also a pathetic element in Estragon's lamentation, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." and "All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud."

There is something very moving in the plight of Estragon who sleeps on as the boy tells Vladimir that Godot would not come even that day. Vladimir is sober, level-headed and capable of enduring hopeless agony patiently. But, his pain seems beyond endurance that is amplified when he repeats Pozzo's words "we have time to grow old, the air is full of our cries. But the habit is a great deadener." The position of Pozzo and Lucky is also pathetic. They are tied together, move here and there and finally one gets blinded and the other becomes dumb. The tragic element is chiefly provided by the treatment meted out to Lucky. Lucky, like a beast of burden carries a heavy load and is mercilessly whipped by Pozzo. To each crack of the whip, he quickly responds to minister some or other need of his master. The two tramps comment pitifully that the rope has caused a running sore on Lucky's neck.

The overall impression that the play produces is one of hopelessness and the boredom which human beings have to experience in life. Human life is completely devoid of meaning and purpose. Thus a feeling of despair dominates the play even though the dramatist has employed farcical situations to

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suit his design of a tragic comedy. The play has a good number of comic, humorous, farcical and absurdist touches either because of wit of dialogue or the humour of character or situation.

In fact, the very opening of the play is very funny. Estragon's vain efforts to take off one of his boots is amusing despite his remark, 'Nothing to be done', that proves to have serious implication in the light of later development. Similarly, Vladimir amuses us by taking off his hat, peering inside it, putting it on again and again and doing the same again and again. Vladimir remarks that Estragon is true to his character in 'blaming on his boots the fault of his feet' is also amusing. When Vladimir and Estragon embrace as a mark of their mutual friendship, Estragon recoils saying 'you stink of garlic' and Vladimir explains that he takes it as a treatment for his weak kidneys.

As we see, much of the dialogues between Vladimir and Estragon is amusing, though they are not consciously humorous. For an example, Estragon, rejecting the convention proverb, says 'strike the iron before it freezes'. The words like 'ceremonial ape, punctilious pig, morrow, vermin, abortion, sewer-rat, etc.' used in tramps' dialogues are humorous. Their diminutive names 'Gogo' and 'Didi' are also funny. Some elements in the play have dual character that is they are simultaneously tragic and comic. We can cite the attempted suicide of the tramps. Their ~~possibility~~<sup>immobility</sup> in spite of their decision to go away at the end of both the Acts is both tragic and comic.

Thus, we see that *Waiting for Godot* is a tragic comedy, for we find both the tragic and comic elements in abundance in this play.