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**QUANDARY OF ACCEPTANCE AND DENIAL IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S
ENDGAME**

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Abstract:

Endgame is a one-act play written by the Irish dramatist, Samuel Beckett. It is a major play belonging to the literary genre, 'The Theatre of the Absurd'. The play was originally written in French and was later translated into English by Beckett himself. The French title of the play is 'Fin De Partie'. The play is set in a dull grey room consisting of an armchair and two ashbins and revolves around four characters namely, Hamm, the protagonist of the play, Clov, Hamm's servant, Nagg, Hamm's father and Nell, Hamm's mother. All the characters are stuck in their monotonous routine and are miserable as they struggle to find meaning in their lives. Albert Camus's work, 'The Myth of Sisyphus' provides a framework for understanding how the characters in the play are confronted with the absurdity of life and are faced with the dilemma of either accepting their situation or escaping it. The present paper explores Camus's idea of Acceptance and Denial through Beckett's play, Endgame.

Keywords: *Absurdity, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Acceptance, Denial, Endgame, etc.*

Albert Camus's essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* delves deep into the human condition and presents the concept of the absurd. Absurd, according to Camus, is the human desire for meaning in this indifferent universe which provides no answers to the questions of humans. This clash creates a sense of absurdity as our quest for significance is met with the unresponsive nature of the world. He says everyone at some point in their lives is confronted with the most urgent of questions, which is, 'What is the meaning of life?' We try to bring order and structure to our lives by engaging ourselves in various activities but end up realising that the universe is unreasonable and that life is absurd. According to Camus, human reason is incapable of reaching solutions to the absurd occurrences of life and that the phenomenon of the universe is incomprehensible to us. Camus compares the human condition to that of Sisyphus who was condemned for eternity to roll a boulder up a mountain only to have it



tumble back down every single time he reaches the top. Our fate is no different than Sisyphus. Like Sisyphus, we also carry out the same repetitive and meaningless tasks every day with a hope for a better tomorrow, we long for a meaningful life but in vain.

Upon confronting the absurdity of life humans tend to have two major responses. One is denial and another is acceptance. Denial may take the form of physical suicide, escapism, distractions or philosophical suicide. Physical suicide is a form of denial in the sense that one tries to evade the absurdity of life. People may also be in denial by distracting themselves through mundane routine activities. Philosophical suicide involves turning to religion and metaphysical beliefs to seek meaning and purpose in life. This response offers a seemingly satisfactory explanation for the absurdity of life but in fact, it is nothing but an illusionary and false explanation.

Camus advocates for the acceptance of the absurdity of life. Acceptance, according to him, means embracing the true nature of our existence as it is, without resignation and living life fully despite the pointlessness of life. Camus suggests revolting against the absurd and pursuing life with passion. Acceptance is the conscious recognition of the absurdity of life and the refusal to succumb to despair. Once we accept the absurd only then can we find a way to deal with it, hence acceptance is important if we wish to live with contentment. Accepting the absurd leads one to a profound sense of freedom and happiness where one finds meaning in the struggle itself rather than in any external or ultimate purpose.

Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments towards that lower world whence he will have to push it up again towards the summit. He goes back down to the plain (Camus, 108).

One must imagine Sisyphus happy (Camus, 111).

The above lines demonstrate Sisyphus's acceptance of his fate. He carries on with his task despite knowing that he will never succeed in completing it. It is his acceptance that brings him contentment, only he gets to decide whether he suffers or remains happy performing the task. He owns himself, in the sense that it is thoroughly up to him how he wants to make himself feel within the confines of his punishment.

Samuel Beckett's play, 'Endgame' reflects Camus's idea of acceptance and denial. Although, no character in the play perfectly adheres to the definition of acceptance given by Camus, there are various instances in the play that showcase an attitude of denial on the part of characters in the play. 'Endgame' is an absurdist play featuring a dark, pessimistic tone where characters are trapped in a desolate and cyclical existence. It depicts the stark reality of human existence. Characters in the play are seen confronted with the absurdity of human existence and are struggling to find purpose in their lives. The majority of the play revolves around Hamm, a blind and paralyzed man unable to get out of his armchair and Clov, his servant who is unable to sit. Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell live in ashbins. All of the action takes place in a single room which reinforces the sense of confinement experienced by the characters.



The characters perform their mundane daily rituals reluctantly and are in a miserable state as they are unable to find anything substantial in their lives. They are continuously in a state of mental battle when it comes to embracing the joys and sorrows life offers them. Many a time, they are perplexed about accepting or denying their fate. In the opening scene of the play, Clov is seen taking off the sheets from the ashbins, raising their lids and briefly laughing. This brief laugh does not emerge out of nowhere but is actually an accompaniment to the dilemma faced by him regarding the acceptance or denial of his situation. Clov's first dialogue in the play, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (Beckett, *End.*, 41) reflects his acknowledgement of the hopelessness of his situation. He further says he'd go to the kitchen and wait for Hamm to whistle him which also implies acceptance. A few moments later Hamm wakes up and claims to be tired and asks Clov to put him to bed again. His strange tiredness is mental tiredness which has arisen as a result of the confrontation with the absurdity of life. He finds his life so dismal that he doesn't want to remain awake. He wants to escape the reality of his life by sleeping.

Further, Hamm asks Clov why he stays with him. As a reply, Clov asks Hamm why he keeps him. Hamm replies, "There's no one else." (Beckett, *End.*, 43) To Hamm's question, Clov replies, "There's nowhere else." (Beckett, *End.*, 43) This implies acceptance on their part as they both are aware of their interdependency. Hamm asking Clov, "What time is it?" (Beckett, *End.*, 43) and Clov replying, "The same as usual" (Beckett, *End.*, 43) shows how according to Clov, time holds no significance as long as their situation remains the same. His understanding of their situation highlights his attitude of acceptance in this instance. Hamm wishes to keep track of the world outside their room for which he asks Clov to keep looking out of the window now and then which hints at his mysterious expectation of some occurrence outside their room. By wanting to know about the world outside his room, he wants to escape his confinement. His authoritarian nature and assumption of himself as the head of the family is his way of imposing structure and order on his family. This reflects Camus's idea of acceptance to some extent as Hamm is willing to continue living his life despite its challenges. To some extent, because, Camus's idea of acceptance involves accepting the absurdity of life wholeheartedly, but Hamm is seen frustrated throughout the play.

Clov: No. I'll leave you, I have things to do (Beckett, *End.*, 45).

Clov: I'll leave you (Beckett, *End.*, 65)

Clov: I'll leave you (Beckett, *End.*, 74).

The above lines are Clov's dialogues in the play. His repetitive insistence on leaving Hamm is suggestive of his escapist notion. Although he claims of leaving Hamm, he cannot bring himself to do so because he is in a dilemma about whether to accept his situation and continue his stay with Hamm or to deny it and try to escape it. Clov's assertion of leaving worries Hamm and he tries to persuade Clov to stay. He says, "Outside of here is death." (Beckett, *End.*, 44) He clings to his dependency on Clov thereby exhibiting an attitude of denial. Nagg and Nell reminisce about their happier times. They discuss about the day after their



engagement. Their indulgence in nostalgia is their way of denying their current wretched state. This longing for the past serves as an escape from their present situation. Also, Nagg's insistence on telling a story to Nell indicates his way of distracting himself from facing his bitter life. Another instance of denial is, Hamm asking Clov to take him for a little turn and then asking him to put him right in the center, Clov updating Hamm about the sun, ocean waves, night etc. Their engagement in such futile activities exhibits their desperate attempt to escape the barrenness of their life.

Clov: Why this farce, day after day? (Beckett, *End.*, 53)

Clov realises the monotony and meaninglessness of their routine hence poses the above question. He oscillates between acceptance and denial. He is often seen fed up of obeying Hamm's orders. At one point, he even states that he doesn't even know why he obeys Hamm's orders. At times, he gets annoyed by Hamm's behaviour yet chooses to continue serving him. Despite contemplating escape, he consistently returns to his role suggesting a recognition and acceptance of his absurd condition. His struggle to leave but ultimately staying exemplifies the tension between the desire for change and the acceptance of his role in Hamm's life.

Hamm: Let's go from here, the two of us! South!
You can make a raft and the currents will carry us away,
far away, to other... mammals! (Beckett, *End.*, 55)

Just like Clov, Hamm also faces a quandary regarding acceptance or denial of his fate. Although he seems to be willing to carry on with his life despite its challenges, but here in this instance, he seems so dispirited that he wishes to go away somewhere to put an end to the struggle they face every day. This highlights his feeling of denial and his struggle to truly embrace the absurd. Moreover, due to his disability, he finds his life even more dismal as he cannot experience life like other people. An example of this is when he asks Clov about his eyes and legs and reminds him that at least he can see and walk. Rather than accepting his condition, he compares his situation with Clov which presents his outlook of denial. Hamm's expectancy of the world beyond the hills to be green can be viewed as his attempt to deny his present reality.

Hamm: Let us pray to God (Beckett, *End.*, 63)

Hamm's urge to pray to God parallels Albert Camus's concept of philosophical suicide, which is a form of denial wherein individuals seek life's meaning by turning to God and religion. He somehow wants to set free from his miserable state for which he resorts to praying to God. He probably thinks God might rescue them out of their distress. Hamm's urge to tell a story indicates his denial. By creating narratives, he distracts himself from the bleakness of his present situation. These stories serve as a means to escape the present moment and delve into a world of imagination, thus denying the acceptance of his reality. In his soliloquy, he says, "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on" (Beckett, *End.*, 70). This is suggestive of his



conscious admission of the meaninglessness of life. The soliloquy further also depicts his worry for his future highlighting his notion of denial and his lack of preparedness for the acceptance of his situation. Hamm's longing for emotional bonding with Clov is evident in his desire for a kiss on the forehead from Clov. Hamm is divorced from the feeling of love, warmth and care as there is no one to provide him with a sense of care and security. His parents are old and they live in ashbins therefore he never gets to experience fatherly or motherly kind of care. He doesn't have anyone to share moments of his vulnerability. Yes, Clov obeys his orders but Clov himself is in a conflict regarding staying or leaving hence he is not the sort of caretaker that Hamm expects to have. Hamm's longing for deeper human connections underscores his refusal to face his harsh reality. The ending of the play perfectly mirrors the dilemma of acceptance and denial. Clov stands by the door, prepared to leave but ultimately does not move. This moment symbolises the perpetual conflict between the desire to escape (denial) and the inability to act on it (acceptance). The unresolved ending of the play leaves the readers pondering whether the characters can ever fully accept their reality or if they are forever trapped in a cycle of denial.

Thus, *Endgame* reflects Albert Camus's concept of acceptance and denial. The play perfectly encapsulates the human condition by shedding light on the quandary of acceptance and denial faced by the characters in the play. The characters vacillate between facing their bitter reality and seeking ways to sidestep it through performing daily rituals, indulging in past, telling stories, etc. This tension emphasises the human struggle to find meaning in a world that appears indifferent.

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