Title: “Absurdity in Samuel Beckett’s Select Novels”

Introduction:-

Samuel Beckett, better known for his absurd dramas in general and “Waiting for Godot” in particular, has emerged as an absurd novelist as well. Beckett has authored a good bulk of fiction also that centers around the ‘Trilogy’, ‘Molly’, ‘Malone Dies’, ‘The Unnamable’, ‘Murphy’. A lot of research has been undertaken on the absurdity in the dramas of Beckett. It was thought to focus on absurdity in the novels of Beckett because under the debris of Beckett’s theatrical writing or dramatic works, Beckett’s fame and potential as an absurd novelist needs to be uncovered. Hence, the present research work concentrates on absurdity evident in Beckett’s select novels.

Absurdism/absurdity, which is considered as one of the most exciting and creative movements in modern theatre, has completely altered the nature of approaching drama. Absurdity has been defined and interpreted differently by different critics.

“Absurd means as in harmonious, out of harmony with reason, playing opposed to reason, ridiculous, and silly.” (Oxford Dictionary, 2002, p-2)

“Absurdity is that which has no purpose, goal or objective.” (Kafka1998, p-12)

“Absurdity in its dramas and novels reflects the attitude that there is no in the universe. It also reflects the view that Human life is meaningless and futile. It suggests that living in such a condition man’s life become absurd. In absurd plays and novels human beings are portrayed as isolated from others, a situation that existed in Europe, during and after the Second World War.” (Beckett, 1962, p-4)

The current movement of absurdism has its roots in Alfred Jarry’s French play ‘Ubu Roi’ and in Shakespearean drama especially through the influence of Commedia dell’ Arte. Absurdism or absurdity in the post world war is perceived as a rebellion or revolt against the traditional values and beliefs of Western culture and literature. The author’s personal experience and intimate feelings are the central inspirational sources reflecting both their state of mind and their spirit. Samuel Beckett belongs to the galaxy of revolutionary writers like Eugene Ionesco, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Edward Albee and Harold Pinter. The work of these writers is an expression of their personal experience which Albert Camus Characterized as ‘Absurdity’ in his book of essay ‘The Myth of Sisyphus’.
The characteristics of absurdity found in absurd dramas and novels usually are,
1) Free floating images,
2) Irrationality,
3) Disorderliness,
4) Irlogical and incomprehensible, dialogues and situation,
5) Isolated and clown-like character who are often disconnected dialogues,
6) Meaninglessness, irrelevance, lack of trust, loss of faith, absence of human touch, purposelessness and existentialist concerns.

Absurdity is keyword, main theme and the central idea of Beckett’s dramatic and fictional work. He asks very fundamental and basic question - if there is any meaning in/to our existence at all. In other words, absurdity arises from concerns of existentialism. Absurdity in dramas and novels shows cases that there is no purpose in the universe. It revolves around the idea that human life is basically meaningless and futile. Living is unbearable.

Samuel Beckett considered as the most eminent and influential writer of absurdism in drama and in prose fiction, was an Irishman living in Paris who often wrote in French and then translated his works into English. Becket has tried his hand in almost all sorts of literary genres. His dramatic work needs no discussion but it is imperative to mention here that he has an outstanding career as a writer of radio and TV plays, cinemas. He has written a good amount of short stories, novellas besides non-fictional work. To his credit are the collections of poetry and translated collections as well.

Beckett's career as a writer can be roughly divided into three periods: his early works, up until the end of World War II in 1945; his middle period, stretching from 1945 until the early 1960s, during which period he wrote what are probably his best-known works; and his late period, from the early 1960s until Beckett's death in 1989, during which his works tended to become shorter and his style more minimalist.

Beckett translated all of his works into English himself, with the exception of ‘Molloy’, for which he collaborated with Patrick Bowles. The success of ‘Waiting for Godot’ opened up a career in theatre for its author. Beckett went on to write a number of successful full-length plays, including ‘Endgame’ (1957), ‘The Krapp’s Last Tape’ (1958, written in English), ‘Happy Days’ (1961, also written in English), and ‘Play’ (1963). In 1961, Beckett received the International
Publishers' Formentor Prize in recognition of his work, which he shared that year with Jorge Luis Borges.

Beckett's outstanding achievements in prose during the period were the three novels ‘Molloy’ (1951), ‘Malone meurt’ (1951; Malone Dies) and ‘L'innommable’ (1953: The Unnamable). These novels are sometimes referred as a "trilogy". Despite the widely held view that Beckett's work, as exemplified by the novels of this period, is essentially pessimistic.

The physical inactivity of the character and the character's immersion in his own head and thoughts are present in Beckett's first published novel, ‘Murphy’ (1938), which also explores the themes of insanity and chess (both of which would be recurrent elements in Beckett's later works). ‘Watt’, written while Beckett was in hiding in Roussillon during World War II, is similar in terms of themes but less exuberant in its style. It explores human movement as if it were a mathematical permutation, presaging Beckett's later preoccupation—in both his novels and dramatic works—with precise movement.

Of all the English-language modernists, Beckett's work represents the most sustained attack on the realist tradition. He opened up the possibility of theatre and fiction that dispense with conventional plot and the unities of time and place in order to focus on essential components of the human condition. Beckett is one of the most widely discussed and highly prized of 20th-century authors, inspiring a critical industry to rival that which has sprung up around James Joyce. He has divided critical opinion.

Samuel Beckett’s novels are multi-dimensional pictures-connecting literary art with visual one. They give us, in the form of novel, an evidence of the author’s personal experience. There is no hesitation in perceiving Beckett’s art as an expression of his most intimate vision on the essential philosophical question about the place of human being in the world around. The present project ventures to attempt the absurdity in Samuel Beckett’s selected novels.