

Tribhuvan University

Meursault's Indifference: Individual in the Historical Context of Albert Camus's

Novel *The Stranger*

A Thesis

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Abstract

This research entitled “Meursault’s Indifference: Individual in the Historical Context of Albert Camus’s novel, *The Stranger*” aims to show the main character, Meursault's indifference throughout the novel caused by the context of the creation of this novel. After this study, this research will prove that Meursault's indifference is caused by the historical context of this novel’s creation which was full of tragedy and despair of mid- twentieth century Europe.

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Chapter One

General Introduction

I. About the Author

Albert Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria, on 7 November 1913. His father, Lucien Camus, was an agricultural labourer, descended from one of the French families. His mother, Catherine Sintes, was of Spanish descent.

In 1914, his father volunteered for military service and was killed in action at the first battle of the Marne. Camus's mother then returned to Algiers, where she shared a small flat with her own widowed mother in the working class district of Belcourt, she earned money to bring up her two sons by working as a charwoman.

In 1923, Camus won a scholarship which enabled him to go to Lycee in Algiers. He was helped to win his scholarship by Louis Germain. Camus was an athletic young man, fond of football and swimming and between 1928 and 1930 he kept goal for the Racing Universitaire d'Alger. In 1930 he fell ill with tuberculosis and was to suffer recurrent attacks of this illness throughout his life. In 1934, he joined the communist party. His marriage to Simon Hie, took place in 1934 and was dissolved a year later

In 1936, Camus collaborated with two of his friends in writing a play entitled *Revolte dans les Asturies*. In the same year, he began to write the essays later published under the title of *Betwixt and Between*. In the same year, he also completed a short thesis on the relationship between Plotinus and Saint Augustine. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Camus was rejected as medically unfit and continued to work as a journalist. He became editor of an evening paper, *Le Soir Republican*.

Camus himself dated his decision to join the Resistance Movement from 19 December 1941. He joined the network known as 'Combat', which formed part of the mouvement liberation- Nord. In 1942 his novel *The Outsider*, later named as *The Stranger*, made him well known in literary circles and the publication in the following year of *The Myth of Sisyphus* confirmed his reputation.

Camus married Francine Faure in 1940. In 1945, his twin children Catherine and Jean were born in Paris and Camus lived and worked there until his death. In 1943 he had accepted a post as reader with the publishing firm of Gallimard and remained with them for the rest of his life.

Camus's great fame in post war France stemmed partly from his reputation as a writer from the performance of his plays and partly from his work as a journalist. His best known novel, *The Plague* was published in France in June 1947. In 1948 and 1949 two more of his plays were produced *State of Siege (L'Etat de Siege)* and *The Just (Les Justes)*. Late in 1951, his major essay in political philosophy, *The Rebel (L'Homme revolt)* presented an analysis and criticism of the tradition of metaphysical and political revolt from the Greeks to the present day.

Apart from the essays collected in *Summer (L' Et)* in 1954, Camus published no further major literary work until 1956. Then his short novel, *The Fall (La Chute)* presented his most complex fictional character, Jean-Baptise Clamence, in whom many critics saw a self-portrait of Camus himself. In the same year Camus's adaptation of William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* scored great success, and the publication in 1957 of a volume of short stories entitled *Exile and the Kingdom (L'Exile le Royaume)* showed an increased awareness on Camus's part of individual problems and a movement away from the political and philosophical preoccupations of *The Rebel*. In October 1957, he became the youngest French writer even to receive the Nobel Prize for literature.

In January 1959, Camus scored what was perhaps his greatest success in the theatre with his adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*. In the same year, he spent long periods of time working on a novel with the tentative title of *Le Premier Homme (The First Man)*, but had not finished it when he was killed in a car accident on 4 January 1960.

II. Background

Every writer is influenced by the age in which he lives and his work can not be

properly estimated without an understanding of the social, economic, religious, political and literary events which impinged up on the writer and coloured the every texture of his work. In every literary works, we find the glimpse of social and political factors of the contemporary period. The creator of any literary creation shapes his/her work according to the many more affecting factors of that time.

The main factor influencing literature of the worse was a wide spread demand for social reform of every kind: not slow and orderly reform, which is progress, but immediate and intemperate reform, which breeds a spirit of rebellion and despair. No wills and desires could be fulfilled. Literary figures and intellectuals began to move their pens and echoed the sorrowful cry of the people.

In the twentieth century, two destructive world wars totally affected the feelings of the common people and those seemed totally desperic towards their life. People desired to search meaning of their life in the chaotic world. This feeling on human beings supported for the development of the existential philosophy in the years of 1930s.

III. France at the War

The Second World War (1939- 45) was much more destructive to France than First World War (1914- 18). The nation had lost a quarter of its wealth to war damage and German requisitioning- compared with about 1/10th lost in 1914-18. Once again, the damage was particularly severe in the north. Battles had been fought through Nord in 1940 and again in 1944-45, with heavy bombing raids in between.

Transport was left broadly disrupted. As in the rest of war – torn Europe, there was a serious shortage of basic necessities such as fuel and food. After the initial hardships, the effort of reconstruction was to launch France in to 30 years of growth and prosperity. Production returned to pre-war levels by the late forties.

France was more affected by the world's chaotic situation in 1940s. At this

period, the whole of France was occupied by Germany and parallelly they were facing tragic situation because of the World War. Economically also, France was disturbed and it had to face economic problems.

IV. Existentialism

Due to the devastating effects of the great world wars, futility and worthlessness crowded human rationality. The world wars brought the widespread feeling of despair and separation from the established order. The certainties and scientific outlook that ruled the previous century were broken in to fragments. The old concepts like unity, Christianity, rationality and objectivity failed to satisfy people's curiosity. Uncertainty, anxiety, despair and human alienation ruled the fragmented world. Writers, as the representative of the society, many contemporary writers began to oppose doctrines that view man as the manifestation of an absolute value. They saw the world totally absurd and so inexplicable in terms of human rationality and scientific logic. This feeling of an existence without justification became the main proposition of the twentieth century. According to the existential philosophers, man is free of routine and conventions; he is laid bare face to face with his own destiny. Existentialism draws attention to the risk, the void of human reality and speaks of human being existing in the world where pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malaise and death dictate. This strong feeling of alienation was the result of post war thought corresponding to Nietzsche's metaphor of "The Death of God", the total negation of transcendental God as the source of absolute control and the values relating to him. After all, not only was the authority of God dead for modern people but also the entire intermediary values connecting God and man declined. Now, man is, therefore, a deserted animal in the Godless, absurd and overwhelming universe. And the philosophy that tried to define such a human existence was termed as "Existentialism".

Many philosophic thinkers and critics have defined the term “Existentialism” in various ways. Indeed existentialism is certainly the most discussed philosophy of contemporary criticism because of its dynamism and appropriateness to define and interpret the anxiety and the uncertainties of the human existence. Existentialism attempts to describe our desire to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. Thus, existence means to stand out in such a universe, which is hostile to us. According to *Cambridge Encyclopedia*, “...its most salient theses are that there is no ultimate purpose of order in the world; that the world is vaguely hostile; those persons choose and can not avoid” (398).

Jean Paul Sartre defines existentialism in these words: “In any case, what can be said from the beginning that by existentialism we mean a doctrine, which makes human life possible and in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity” (10). So, according to Sartre, the focus of existentialism is on “being” and “subjectivity”. Instead of concentrating on logic or science, it is primarily concerned with human existence and human emotions.

Existentialists conclude that human choice is subjective because individuals finally must make their own choices without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules or traditionals. Because individuals make their own choices. Existentialists truly emphasize that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility. Since individuals are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom and therefore their responsibility-thrust up on them. They are “condemned to be free” (*Sophie's world*, 457).

For existentialism, responsibility is the other side of freedom. When individuals realize that they are completely responsible for their decisions, actions and benefits, they are overcome by anxiety. They try to escape from this anxiety by ignoring or denying their freedom and their responsibility. The propositions of Existentialism found a particular relevance during the World War II when Europe found itself entangled with

material as well as spiritual decay. Assimilating the absurdity of the world, the negative aspect of human existence like pain, frustration, nausea and death become the essential features of human reality.

Existentialism also places the emphasis on the lack of meaning and purpose in life, and the solitude of human existence. In this context, existentialism propounds the theory of the absurd. Existentialism maintains that existence precedes essence. This implies that the human being has no essential self, and is no more than what he is. He is only the sum of life in so far that he has created and achieved for himself. The human being cannot find any purpose in life; his existence is only a contingent fact. If human being rejects the false pretensions, the illusions of his existence having a meaning, he encounters the absurdity, the futility of life.

V. Albert Camus and Absurdism

Albert Camus developed his philosophy of the absurd. He developed his philosophy due to his anxieties over world war and economic depression of contemporary period. Lohani writes: "Camus's preoccupation was a product of his anxieties over World War II, following so soon after the massively destructive and absurd World War I" (66). The World Wars took unimaginable men's lives. These Wars were so destructive that no other Wars in the world affected so severely to this world. All prevalent values were changed after these wars. In every sectors new trends were seen.

Literature of this time also tried to reflect the human situation of this period which was very tragic and full of despair. Writers like Albert Camus, Sartre and Heidegger tried to show the futility of human existence in this period and they developed the *existential philosophy* to describe the human existence in this period.

The major component of this philosophy was Camus's assertion that life has no rational meaning. As science has made the world more complex and inexplicable, the only predictable truth is that the world is absurd and unintelligible. Lohani remarks,

“Camus was faced with the view that life itself is without meaning” (67). Camus reached the conclusion that the condition of man is absurd when he realized that the speculative systems of past provided no guidance for life nor guaranteed any foundation of human values. Camus argues that humanity has to resign itself to recognizing that a fully satisfying rational explanation of the universe is beyond its reach; thus the world must ultimately be seen as absurd. Camus acknowledges that it is difficult to describe the feeling of absurdity. Instead, he offers a series of sketches to clarify the kinds of experiences that might provoke such a feeling. The absurd is essentially a conflict. We search meaning but the universe gives us none. The dissatisfaction we feel with our lot in life is fundamental to the absurd, and any attempt to resolve this dissatisfaction is an attempt to escape from absurdity. Camus identifies the absurd in this confrontation between our desire for clarity and our understanding of the world’s irrationality. Neither the world nor the human mind is in itself absurd. Rather, absurdity finds itself in the confrontation between the two. To clarify the concept of absurd Camus writes:

This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together. (*The fact of absurdity*, 827)

In the above concept of absurd, we are faced on the one hand with man who wants to find reason and unity in the universe, and on the other hand with the universe, that provides him with nothing but mute and meaningless phenomena. As such, the absurd does not exist either in man or in universe but in the confrontation between the two, we are only faced with the absurd when we take both our need for answers and the world’s silence together, the absurd is the relationship that links these two basic facts.

Camus opens his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* by asking if life is meaningless

leading to commit suicide. If life has no meaning, does that mean life is not worth living? If that were the case, we would have no option but to make a leap of faith or to commit suicide, says Camus. He is interested in pursuing a possibility; that we can accept and live in a world devoid of meaning or purpose. According to Camus, when the absurd man becomes conscious of his meaningless living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and hopelessness. But this hopelessness and anxiety do not compel him to surrender himself in the mouth of death. Lohani writes:

The Myth of Sisyphus is a meditation on the theme of suicide. Camus was faced with the view that life itself is without meaning. The traditional values had been weakened by war, lack of faith in authority, attacks on religion and the world wide economic depression that cast every thing in to doubt. (67)

This philosophy of the absurd developed due to the World Wars which destroyed the old values and beliefs. Worldwide economic depression of this time also casted down everything in to doubt. These events slowly and gradually paved the way for the development of the philosophy of the absurd.

The human beings expect the world to be governed by rational principles. But, the sustaining pattern of justice is impossible because the existence itself is fully illogic and irrational. Life can neither be explained nor justified. The reality is mysterious and unknowable. The only way to make life meaningful is to revolt against the meaninglessness. This effort at least facilitates man to recognize his situation. Man is free to choose, but he meets the impediments of an external order, which is indifferent to his needs, and these warring forces can not easily be resigned. In such a condition of unfulfillment, the fact of purposelessness transpires.

According to Camus, the absurd man is amoral. Either morality comes from God or it is invented by humans in order to justify certain kinds of behaviour. The absurd man can not believe in God, and he has no need of justification. He is guided only by his own

integrity, and integrity does not need to be guided by a moral code. Because he is free from morality and, thus, from the concepts of guilt of wrongdoing, Camus describes the absurd man as “innocent”.

Camus was also considering about human rights while thinking on the common condition of man. The revolt against the injustice heaped upon man was as relevant as the revolt against the absurd condition. Sisyphus maintained at one and the same time these revolts. The injustice done up on him by God has made him conscious of his absurd task. To get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, one may take recourse to the rules of God or he may submit himself to the hand of death. But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The living of absurd man depends up on the maximum struggle against this absurdity. The idea of the rebellion against meaninglessness is seen in Camus’s book “*The Rebel*” as follows:

I proclaim that I believe in nothing and that everything is absurd, but I can not doubt the validity of my own proclamation and I am compelled to believe, at least, in my own protest. The first and only datum, that is furnished in me, with in absurdist experience is rebellion [...] rebellion arises from the spectacle of the irrational coupled with an unjust and incomprehensible condition. (16)

In his opinion, Camus sees existence in rebellion. One who rebels against the absurdity of the situation, he exists, not simply exists but exists happily because Camus writes, “The Struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Absurd Freedom, 852). Camus claims that Sisyphus is the ideal absurd hero and that his punishment is representative of the human condition. Sisyphus must struggle perpetually and without hope of success. So long as he accepts that there is nothing more to life than this absurd struggle, and then he can find happiness in it says Camus. Moreover, to live one’s life one must exercise the freedom to create a life. Just going along with conventional values and forgetting about the absurdity of the world is

not authentic. Authenticity is to exercise one's free will and to choose the activities and goals that will be meaningful for one's self. With this approach, even Sisyphus can be engaged and satisfied with what he is doing.

VI. Camus, Existentialism and *The Stranger*

The Stranger is often referred to as an "existential" novel but this description is not necessarily accurate. The term "Existentialism" is a broad and far reaching classification that means many different things to many different people, and is often misapplied or overapplied. As it is most commonly used, Existentialism refers to the idea that there is no higher meaning to the universe or to man's existence and no rational order to the event of the world. According to this common definition of existentialism, human life is not invested with a redemptive or affirming purpose. There is nothing beyond man's physical existence.

Some ideas in *The Stranger* closely resemble this definition of existentialism, but the broader philosophy of existentialism includes aspects far beyond this definition that are not present in *The Stranger* from the philosophical perspective of the absurd.

"Absurd" is a term, Camus himself coined, and a philosophy he himself developed.

Reading *The Stranger* with Camus's philosophy of the absurd in mind sheds a good deal of light on the text, "Maman died today. Or yesterday may be, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home "mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours." That doesn't mean anything may be it was yesterday" (3). The starting lines of the novel, *The Stranger* gives the mental picture to the reader of this text about how careless is the main character of this novel even in the death of his own mother. Tragic situation, hopelessness, war and destruction of that period had totality shaped the mind of the main character. He had no time to think about others. He had to seek for his own life's meaning.

Since Meursault is indifferent to the death of his own mother, perhaps we should not be surprised that he is largely indifferent in his daily life as well. Camus is

constructing a framework through the character and life of Meursault in order to explore his ideas of the absurd. Camus once said “what is absurd is the confrontation between the sense of the irrational and the overwhelming desire for clarity which resounds in the depth of man.” Camus didn’t believe in the world with absolute and divine forces such as God or an after life. In this world, when one died, that was all. Thus, the striving by the majority of humans to make their lives meaningful in the face of God is absurd. Every aspect of one’s life is devoid of any greater meaning or truth and leads solely to nothingness. The struggle then, as he understood it, is to come terms with the absurd. Hope and faith are pointless measures constructed by man to provide purpose and avoid responsibility. When these constructs are removed and one understands that he is faced with a definitive and eternal end, he has the ability to take control over the actions of his life and give them personal meaning. Creating meaning in a meaningless world is, indeed absurd but a journey by which Camus is immensely intrigued.

Vii. Critics on Camus and his works

During the war, Camus published the main works associated with his doctrine of the absurd-his view that human life is rendered ultimately meaningless by the fact of death and that the individual can not make rational sense of his experience. We can find these themes in his first novel *The Stranger* and a short philosophic essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* published in 1942. The publication of *The Stranger* brought him to the peak of reputation. “[...] *L’Etranger*, the first novel that established his reputation, and more accessible than his later writings [...]” (*The Plague* vii).

Almost all of the Camus’s writings are mainly concerned with the search of freedom and meaning in this world. Commenting on Camus and his writings *The World Book of Encyclopedia* writes: “Camus was concerned with the freedom and responsibility of the individual, the alienation of the individual from society, and the difficulty of facing life without the comfort of believing in God or in absolute moral

standards” (vol 3, 69).

Camus’s writings are found reflecting the alienation, frustration, tragic felling, restless situation of the persons living in the world full of massacre, bombing and destruction due to the effect of world wars and economic depression. Because of these negative impacts in the world during the world wars, his work *The Stranger* is a literary work representing the twentieth-century alienation of human beings. *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* takes this novel as “a study of twentieth century alienation” (203). This alienation is caused by the world wars and its effects on the society.

Referring to the main character that is totally found alienated from his society and is in search of his life’s meaning, the Encyclopedia again adds:

The title character of *The Stranger* is Meursault who is sentenced to death ostensibly for shooting a man who he had never met but perhaps more.

So, it is suggested, for his ability to dissemble, to experience.

conventional modes of feeling or to confirm to society’s requirements.

[...] The shooting which occurs midway through the novel is an

experience that opens Meusault to gradual self-awareness. (1073)

All actions done by the main character are without any significant cause. He does everything without proper cause.

Camus, being a prominent existential philosopher shapes his novel in the light of his same philosophy relating it with the tragic situation of the world. In this novel, being written in the midst of Second World War, 1942, the main character is unconsciously motivated to kill the Arab. This also shows the tragic and careless situation of the world in the time of world war. The main character is psychologically disturbed due to the consequences of the world war and its tragic result. He seeks his identity being different from others, not caring about his own life even in his death penalty. Poser writes:

Quite apart from the existential reading of this work as saying something about every man in an indifferent, meaningless, godless universe, the character of Meursault provides an uncanny portrait of a particular form of psychology that can be described dynamically both in terms of his unconscious motivation to become a murderer and more generally in terms of how and why affect of any kind is so forcefully and systematically rejected from his unconsciousness. (1)

Rebellion of the characters for their identity is in the centre of all the Camus's writings. Rebellion against the established force is the main theme of his writings. In the foreword of *The Rebel* Sir Herbert Read writes: "Camus believes that revolt is one of the 'essential dimensions' of mankind. It is useless to deny its historical reality-rather. We must seek in it a principle of existence" (8). In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus has offered his own depiction of the freedom that comes through an acceptance of the godless universe in which he happens to exist for a brief spell. His appeal to the singular adventure of a life well lived, without hope or fear of eternity, registered powerfully with Sartre. In a review of *The Stranger* Algis Valiunas writes about this book as: "about a man who drifts numbly through life until, condemned for murder, he finds happiness in the benign indifference of the universe" (Proquest Sartre vs. Camus).

Commenting on Camus and his writing style, Lohani, Adhikary and Subedi write: "His great theme in literature was partly a product of his anxieties over world war II, following so soon after the massively destructive and absurd world war I. Such exercises in futility may have had an influence on the creation of such a figure as Camus's Sisyphus" (66). This novel being published in 1942, in the midst of the Second World War, the main character's psychology and behaviour represents the whole human being's psychology and behaviour in the world full of tragic and chaotic situation. War was pervasive everywhere in the world. Human beings were in the most critical situation in

this world. They were living with their uncertain life and future. They had to face the reality which comes in the forefront of them.

Thus, Meursault, the main character, of Camus's novel can be considered as the representative of all human beings threatened by the killing, bombing and tragic situation of the Second World War in 1940s Europe. If we care about the whole context of this novel, there, we don't find unusual behaviour of the main character. All he does is usual and can be accepted in the time of world war and its destruction. During this time everyone was in search of meaning of their own life. So, Meursault like others is also in search of his life's meaning totally being unaware about the worldly happenings. He enjoys his life's opportunities not caring about his mother's death the day before and indulges in a sexual activity with Marie. His total carelessness towards his mother's death can be taken as other event as representing his indifference. He kills the Arab without any significant cause and does not lament during the moments leading up to his own execution.

These all events can be taken as usual in the time of destruction in any continent. In 1940s, France also was totally destroyed by the effect of world war. So, in this tragic and chaotic situation, many people were in a similar mindset like Meursault's who is careless about all worldly happenings. His carelessness towards all these worldly happenings is motivated by the concept of the tragic and destructive World War II, which had made every person to care only about their lives. Others have viewed this novel only from existential perspective, but this researcher is going to analyse this novel from historical point of view. In other words Meursault's indifference is placed within a historical context in this study.

Chapter Two

Historical Context

I. Introduction

The text is not only a literary fact, but social one, that is, the text is engaged within the context of both its production and narration with social, political, historical and religious factors. It is equally true that the historical context of any text is infinite and hence that the historical or sociological explanation of the literary series must be pursued in detail, focussing not merely upon literature but on the social totality of which literature is one manifestation.

Any text creates its own world within its own context of creation. All the characters and movements are found influenced by the context of the creation of the text. All events are motivated by the context. Edward W. Said writes:

Both a recording and a printed object, however, are subject to creation legal, political, economic and social constraints [...] a written text of the sort we care about is originally the result of some immediate contact between author and medium. (1211)

So, all the literary productions are directly linked with the social political and religious factors of the contemporary society. Texts reflect the social, political, economic and religious situation of society.

Literary theories developed in the modern trends incorporate in different ways, a number of historical factors; such theories assume that, the text refers as part of its meaning, to a greater or lesser degree, to events ideas, personalities, structures, relationships and other historical factors outside itself. History functions as a factor in all literary theory, whether by its explicit incorporation in to theoretical framework, or by its attempted exclusion. And though much may be made of texts as transcending history, the literary text takes the existence first within the history of author's life as well as the society, as also with the culture and history within which he or she reads or writes.

So, the context of creation of any kind of literature reflects the society from which it emerges. Literary texts are burdened with their occasion. This type of social occasion influences the creation of any work. In other words, literary works reflect social reality embedded in it. Edward W. Said again writes, "...every literary text is in some way burdened with its occasion with the plain empirical realities from which it emerged" (1213). This also gives us the clear vision that the characters and situations of any literary texts are greatly influenced and motivated by the worldly situation of any text's creation. If context is serious, characters and situations are found serious and if context is frivolous, characters and situations are found frivolous.

II. General survey of twentieth century Europe

Twentieth century proved to be quite revolutionary from the point of development of new critical trends due to the social, political and economic change because of the world wars and the economic depression of 1930s. This century is far more different in every respect from the preceding ages. As per the time changed, political, social, religious and literary aspects also changed accordingly, and so happened throughout the twentieth century. Modern age, especially after the world war I (1914-18), brought out new and distinctive features in every field of society, and literature of the period required new subjects. Literary creation of this age coped with different trends and movements such as political convulsions, social unrest and reformation, imperialism, two great world wars, religious decadence, spiritual dryness, massacre injustice etc. All of these factors very clearly influenced the literary creation occurring within the period.

These factors changed the people's view towards the contemporary world. The people of this age lost faith on God and wished to die rather than to live because of the disastrous situations of this world in the first half of this century.

A. World war I

World war I (1914-18) involved more countries and caused greater destruction than any other war except world war II (1939-45). On June 28, 1914, an assassin gunned

down Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria- Hungary in Sarajevo, the capital of Austria- Hungary province of Bosnia. This event caused the outbreak of world war I.

Soon after the start of world war I, Germany invaded France. This war spreaded gradually all over the world. All powerful countries became involved in this war, which caused greater destruction and casualties In every sectors of society. This war caused greater destruction of lives and world economy.

All over the world, during the first world war, the involving powerful nations used the new weapons to be victorious and to prove their existence. In this period about 10 million soldiers died as a result of the war-far more than had died in all the wars during the previous 100 years. About 21 million men were wounded. This high causality resulted from the destructive power of new weapons, especially the Machine Gun.

France was involved in the First World War right from its beginning. So, this country faced large number of casualties of individuals. In the battle of Verdun, French casualties totaled about 315,000 men. *The World Book of Encyclopedia* writes:

France had the highest percentage of battle death in relation to its total number of servicemen. It lost about 1-1/3 million soldiers or 16 percent of those mobilized. No one knows how many civilians died of disease, starvation and other war related causes. Some historians believe as many civilians died as soldiers. (Vol. 21, 374)

This gives the real picture of France and casualties of France during the First World War. This war caused greater destruction and casualties than other war affected countries. The human casualties in France went beyond imagination. France was totally destroyed by the world war in every sector and saved person were also depressed.

First World War also affected world economy greatly. World war I cost the fighting nations a total of about 337 billion U.S. dollars. This cost affected world economy seriously; French economy also was greatly damaged during the war. *The World Book of Encyclopedia* writes:

Property damage in World War I was greatest in France and Belgium.

Armies destroyed farms and villages as they passed through them or, even worse, dug in for battle. The fighting wrecked factories, bridges and railway tracks. (Vol. 21, 374)

World war caused great property damage all over the world war fighting countries. They tried their best to bring the condition in their favour.

First World War seriously disrupted economics. Some businesses shut down after workers left for military service. Other firms shifted to the production of war materials. To direct production towards the war effort, governments took greater control over the economy than ever before. Most people wanted to return to private enterprise after the war. But some people expected government to continue to solve economic problems.

a. War gains and losses

France emerged from World War I triumphant but exhausted. She had fought and had won, but she was “crushed beneath her laurels.” She had apparently realized all her war aims: the recovery of Alsace- Lorraine, the acquisition of 244,000 square miles of additional colonial territory, and the defeat of the hated invader. Her hegemony of Europe, for the moment, was unquestioned, and the world accorded her spontaneous admiration for her courage and her tenacity.

The French were more impressed by their losses than by their laurels. These had cost too much, and they were too fatigued to glory in their triumph. The effort had increased the debt by 200,000,000,000 francs. The French had borrowed almost the whole cost of the war. In 1914, French investments abroad had totaled 9,000,000,000 dollars. Five billion of this had been lost by the Bolshevik repudiation of Tsarist loans; the rest was consumed in purchases. France was transformed from a creditor of \$ 1,400,000,000 at the close of the war; France's foreign and internal debt amounted to \$ 34,600,000,000.

In France, greater number of humans lost their lives and other millions were wounded. Talking about human losses in France during the First World War, Albjerg writes:

Human losses to the French as a result of World War I were staggering. A total of 1,400,000 were killed, 3,500,000 were wounded or missing and many of the injured became permanent wards of the state. One of every twenty- seven of every thirteen was either killed or wounded; 50 percent of the young men between the ages of twenty and twenty two were lost, a higher ratio than that sustained by any other country. (296)

France lost great number of human lives during the First World War. Large numbers of persons were wounded during this world war severely.

After this disastrous world war, the trend of writing in France changed dramatically. Not only in France, but all over the world this war affected literature and new trends of writings were emerged. Those writings carried in their soul the negative effect of the world war towards humanity. These writings reflected the human torture and pain during war time, and its effect.

B. Economic Depression

In January 1919, representatives of the victorious powers gathered in Paris to draw up a peace settlement. The Paris Peace Conference largely disregarded the lofty principles of the fourteen points. The major allies had scarified for more than the Americans and wanted to be paid back.

In May 19, the peace conference approved the treaty and presented it to Germany. Germany agreed to it only after the allies threatened to invade. With grave doubts, German representatives signed the treaty in the palace of Versailles near Paris on June 28, 1919.

Although war ended with the Paris peace conference, the disastrous effects of world war were pervasive everywhere. Humans were fearful all the time. This was a

time of 'mounting despair' (Culler, 28). The countryside was sunk in depression in the twenties. The rural population steadily declined. Prices of farm products fell; the level of rural incomes declined; the vitality of small country towns became impoverished. Slowly and gradually, the losses of first World War were going to be recovered in the twenties.

The relative stability achieved after 1925 was soon shattered by a world economic crisis. As the 1920s passed, people had gradually become confident that the wounds left by the first World War could be healed, that the prosperity of the years before 1914 would again be reached and that the march toward progress that the war had interrupted could be resumed. The economic crisis destroyed these expectations and hopes; the pre war world now appeared irretrievably lost and many were convinced that the new course of events was leading inexorably down hill and would end in a holocaust more dangerous and devastating for the continuity of European life than the First World War had been. Thus, the decade of the 1930s was a period of full of anxiety and insecurity.

World War I seriously damaged the economy of European countries. Both the winners and losers came out of the war deeply in debt. The defeated powers had difficulty paying reparations to the victors, and the victors had difficulty repaying loans from the United States. By the late 1920s, Europe appeared to be entering a period of economic stability.

A worldwide business slump known as The Great Depression halted Europe's economic recovery. *The World Book of Encyclopedia*, pointing out the effect of economic depression writes:

great depression caused mass unemployment and spread poverty and despair throughout the world. It weakened democratic governments and strengthened extreme political movements that promised to end the economic problems. (vol. 21, 379)

The economic depression which had paralyzed economic activities in many countries, swept in to France in 1930. Since 1928, France had experienced an unfavorable balance of trade, and by 1936, the volume of her exports was little more than half it had been in 1928. The industrial productivity had fallen sharply and by 1932, it was down to almost what it had been at its post war peak.

In the years of economic depression, economic sector of France was greatly affected. In this period, a great number of man powers were unemployed and many others were compelled to do jobs in low wages. Regarding this Albjerg writes:

when the economic blizzard gripped the French, they expelled 3,000,000 foreign workers in order to reserve employment for their own people. But in 1935, France still had 2,000,000 unemployed. While many of those who did have jobs received pitifully low wages. (311)

Therefore, this, also shows how French people, at this period, were affected by the economic depression and how they were helpless at this period. France was totally gripped by economic depression and French people were very depressed from this movement. France was full of tragedy, voidness and despairing situation in this period. France was unable to raise the tariff to protect her own industries, for she had negotiated commercial treaties based on reciprocal tariff levels.

In this period of economic depression, other main European countries also were greatly affected. This depression put the whole Europe in the backward steps from its progress. At this time, all European individuals were depressed, and were in search of their life's meaning in this tragic world. There were some new and disruptive economic problems that resulted from the loss of foreign markets and the sale of overseas investments to pay for the war.

During this period, the worldwide economic depression and the rise of Fascist leader Adolph Hitler in Germany caused serious political unrest in France. In 1936, at the

time of widespread strikes, a government called the Popular Front came to power in France. It made many promises to workers and tried to establish a strong position against fascism. But in 1938, the government began to give into the demands of Nazi Germany. As part of this policy of appeasement, France signed the Munich Agreement, which forced Czechoslovakia to give territory to Germany.

The really acute phase of the economic breakdown lasted from 1929 to 1933. The actual beginning of the crisis was the collapse of the New York stock Exchange under a wave of speculation in the last week of October, 1929, although some danger signs pointing to a decline in production had appeared earlier. In Europe, the height of the crisis occurred in the summer of 1931. In May 1931, the most important Austrian bank, the Kreditanstalt, which was controlled by the Rothschilds, declared itself unable to fulfill its obligations. This failure shook confidence in the solvency of banks in Germany; there was an accelerated recall of money from them, and the main German banks soon found themselves insolvent and were forced to close. They were able to reopen only with the help of a government guarantee. In this critical economic situation the payment of international debts was clearly impossible, and the American president Herbert Hoover suggested a one-year moratorium on reparations and war debts; after tedious negotiations, it was agreed upon in August. But the moratorium came too late to remedy the British financial situation, which had been seriously impaired by the economic collapse in central Europe. On September 21, 1931, Britain abandoned the gold standard; this event seemed to make the end of an epoch, for hitherto the pound had enjoyed the reputation of being as good as gold.

In the next years, the level of economic activity remained low, although from 1934 on, slowly and gradually recovery began, especially in the industrial countries. Agricultural prices remained depressed, and the Balkan States, which were dependent on the export of agricultural products, continued to suffer severely, moreover, France, which at the outset had seemed unaffected by the crisis, began to experience economic

difficulties in 1933, and French recession played its part in retarding recovery played its part in retarding recovery in the rest of Europe.

The unemployment and depression of the thirties lies in the lack of political and economic power vested in the older industrial areas, another lies in the growing commitment to a pleasing and acceptable form of subaltern life by larger and longer sections of the population left relatively unscathed by bleak years.

In this period, European people were fallen in to the tragic and despairing world due to the First World War's consequences and the economic depression of 1930s. This economic depression caused unemployment problem. Most of the manpower were without employment. Some others, who got employment, were also compelled to work on low wages. The economic crisis was a turning point in the interwar years because it changed the political climate and the political constellation in Europe. This economic crisis left Europe too weak. This decade also ended in the tragic and restless situation for the individuals due to worldly economic crisis. Politically also, this decade remained unstable and Second World War started in September 1, 1939 when Germany invaded Poland.

C. World War II

World War II began when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Two days later, France and Great Britain declared war on Germany. On May 10, 1940, the Germans attacked Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. They invaded France through Belgium on May 12, passing northwest of the Maginot Line. The Germans launched a major attack on the south on June 5, and entered Paris on June 14. On June 22, France signed an armistice with Germany. The Germans occupied the northern two thirds of France, and southern France remained under French control. Southern France was governed at Vichy by Marshal Henri Philippe Petain, who largely co-operated with the Germans.

a. The Fall of France

France had expected to fight along a stationary battlefield and had built the Maginot Line for its defence. But German tanks and aircraft went around the Maginot Line. The Germans passed north of the Maginot Line as they swept through Luxemburg and Belgium and in to northern France in May 1940. They launched a major assault against France on June 5. The Blitzkrieg sent French forces reeling backward. As France neared collapse, Italy declared war on France and Great Britain on June 10.

German troops entered Paris on June 14, 1940. The French government had already fled the capital. Paul Reynaud had become premier of France in March. Reynaud wanted to fight on. But many of his generals and cabinet officers believed that the battle for France was lost. Reynaud resigned, and a new French government agreed to an armistice on June 22.

Under the terms of the armistice, Germany occupied the northern two-thirds of France and a strip of western France along the Atlantic Ocean. Southern France remained in French control. The town of Vichy became the capital of unoccupied France. Marshal Henri Petain, a French hero of World War I, headed the Vichy government. He largely cooperated with the Germans. Then in November 1942, German troops occupied all France.

After France fell, General Charles de Gaulle fled to London. He invited all French Patriots to join a movement called *Free France* and continue fighting the Germans. This resistance movement spread throughout France. Some groups of French people called Maquis hid in hilly areas and fought the Germans after allied troops landed in French North Africa in November 1942, German troops also occupied southern France. The Germans tried to seize the French fleet at Toulon. But the French sank most of the fleet's ships to prevent them from being captured by the Germans.

On June 6, 1944, The Allies landed in France at Normandy. They landed in Southern France on August 15. After fierce fighting and heavy loss of lives, the allied

troops centered Paris on August 25. De Gaulle soon formed a provisional government and became its president in 1945, France became a Charter member of the United Nations.

b. Consequences of the War

World War II took more lives and caused more destruction than any other war. All together, 70 million people served in the armed forces of the Allied and Axis nations. About 17 millions of them lost their lives. The Soviet Union suffered about 7.5 Million battle deaths, more than any other country. The United States and Great Britain have the fewest battle deaths of the major powers. About 400,000 American and about 350,000 British Military personnel died in the war. Germany lost about 3.5 million servicemen, and Japan about 1.25 million.

Aerial Bombing rained destruction on civilian as well as military targets. Many cities lay in ruins, especially in Germany and Japan. Bombs wrecked houses, factories and transportation and communication systems. Land battles also spread destruction over vast areas. After the war, millions of starving and homeless people wandered among the ruins of Europe and Asia.

No one knows how many civilians died as a direct result of World War II. Bombing raids destroyed many of the records needed to estimate those deaths. In addition, millions of people died in fires, of diseases and of other causes after such essential services as fire fighting and death care broke down in war torn areas.

The Soviet Union and China suffered the highest toll of civilian deaths during World War II. As many as 20 million Soviet and 10 million Chinese civilians may have died. Many of the deaths result from famine.

World War II uprooted millions of people. By the war's end, more than 12 million displaced persons remained in Europe. They included orphans, Prisoners of war, survivors of Nazi concentration and slave labour camps and people who had fled invading armies and war-torn areas. Others were displaced by changes in national borders.

To help displaced persons, the allies established the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. About the losses of France in the World War II, Albjerg writes: “of its 10,000,000 homes, 500,000 were completely destroyed and 1,500,000 were seriously damaged 750,000 families were left homeless” (657). France was destroyed greatly in this world war. Great numbers of people were died in the war and other lots of people were made homeless.

About human loss of France in this war, the same book writes;

The Human losses, though by no means of so great as in world war I, were nevertheless considerable, for 149,954 of the armed forces lost their lives, 30,000 were shot by firing squads, 188,000 civilians were killed, 150,000 were deported, 38000 war prisoners died in captivity. Of the “fighting French,” 244,000 were killed and 7000 others were missing. France with an almost stagnant birth rate lost 620,000 people as direct victims of the war. (657-58)

This war destroyed thousands of civilians and thousands were displaced. All individuals become fearful and depressed by this type of tragic and void situation of world war.

The tragedy and despair during the mid twentieth century Europe due to world wars and world economic crisis, affected every sectors of the contemporary society. Most of the people were killed or displaced by the world war and remaining survivors were also badly depressed. The individuals of this period were in search of their life meaning in this fragmented world. This made them alienated in a world that lacked both political and economic stability.

Modern man, especially in the mid twentieth century fell down on a deserted land. Over a period of twenty five years, between 1922-47, 70 million Europeans men women and children were uprooted, deported or killed. In this period, individuals were frustrated, alienated and became indifferent towards others. In this period, contemporary

writers began use their pens to represent a world that was tragic, void and restless.

Robinson writes:

Between the wars writers began to take as their subject the representation and analysis of their dissatisfaction-the new uncertainty as to what man is. The rise of fascism in Europe, the experiences of World War II, the advent of nuclear weapons added decade by decade to the disorientation and disillusionment of many intellectuals. (132)

During and between wars, there were great massacres and deaths. There was the flood of uncertainty concerning humanity and human existence. So, in this period writers began to represent human alienation, anxiety and dissatisfaction. The intellectuals also were disillusioned by the disastrous happenings of this period and they started to depict the tragic human situation of this period in their writings.

The writers of this period started to represent the tragic and absurd human existence in the chaotic world. Absurd literature was developed to justify human existence in the tragic world. These writers tried to console the depressed, alienated and indifferent individuals due to the tragic worldly situation. Human condition was "... essentially and ineradicably absurd, and that this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd" (1, Abrams M.H).

To represent the absurd human condition, absurd literature was developed:

Emerged in France after the horrors of World War II, as a rebellion against essential beliefs and values both of traditional culture and traditional literature. This earlier tradition had included the assumption that human beings are fairly rational creatures who live in an at least partially-intelligible , universe, that they are of an ordered social structure. (1, Abrams M.H.)

To represent the horrors of the World War II and rebellion against earlier beliefs and values, this absurd movement was developed/ emerged in France in the decade of 1940s.

After 1940s, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus developed existential philosophy to view a human being as an isolated existent who is casted in to an alien universe. This philosophy tried to represent tragic, alienated and indifferent human existence in this world.

Existential philosophy represented human journey from nothingness to nothingness. One of the best works representing the absurd human existence at this period is "*The Myth of Sisyphus*" (1942). Camus in this book writes:

In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. He is in irremediable exile [...] this divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting-truely constitutes the feeling of absurdity.

(1, Qtd. Abrams M. H.)

Due to this absurd human situation and worldly circumstances, individuals and intellectuals did not have time to care about others. Every individuals had to create meaning of their own existence in this world, not to care about others. This situation developed the feeling of alienation of individuals.

Alienation bears the constant notion of having the feeling of being a stranger or an outsider. It is to be in exile-exile from the milieu one lives, from one's products and even from oneself. The broad meaning of it is the one suggested by etymology and morphology of the word the meaning in which, "alination" (or estrangement) is the act, or result of the act, through which something or somebody becomes (or has become) alien (or strange) to something or somebody else"(Alienation, 76).

Alienation generally means turning away or keeping away from associates or former friends; in psychiatry, alienation usually means deviation from normal life that is insanity. In psychology and sociology, it is often used to name an individual's feeling of alienness towards society, nature, other people or himself. For many socialists or philosophers, alienation is same as reification: the act (or result of the act) of transforming human relations and actions in to the properties and actions of things, which are

independent of man and which govern his life. For other philosophers 'alienation' means "self-alienation" (self-estrangement), the process or result of the process, by which a 'self-God or man-through itself (through it's own actions) becomes alien (strange) to itself (to it's own nature)" (Alienation 76).

Such alienation causing estrangement of individuals of mid twentieth century Europe also made them indifferent towards others, including their dearest or nearest ones. They had no time to care about others in this chaotic and tragic world ravaged by wars and economic depressions. Every individual was totally frustrated due to his absurd existence in the years of world war and economic depression.

The main character, Monsieur Meursault, of Albert Camus's one of the finest novels, *The Stranger*; is also one of the individuals of this tragic world. He is the representative of all the alienated individuals of this period. He is casted down in to this tragic world and he is in search of the meaning of his existence in this world. He is alienated and indifferent towards all worldly happenings, even on his own mother's death, and during his own trial for the case of murder, seems totally indifferent towards these happenings.

This research is going to analyze the Meursault's indifference towards every kinds of worldly happenings is caused by the tragic and chaotic situation of the mid twentieth century Europe, which paved way to absurdism, due to existential crisis of humanity in this chaotic world. Meursault's existential crisis and his feelings of alienation in the society has made him indifferent towards every kind of worldly happenings.

Chapter Three

Textual Analysis

I. Indifference and Alienation

Indifference is a lack of interest, feeling or reaction towards somebody or something. In the mid twentieth century, individuals were indifferent towards all kinds of worldly happenings. This type of indifference was caused by the alienation of individuals due to the devastating world wars and the political crisis of this period. In the mid twentieth century, the world was totally engulfed by the chaotic and tragic worldly situation. Alienation of individuals paved the way towards the indifference of individuals.

There is direct connection between the feeling of absurdity, consequence of alienation and the longing for death. Meursault, the hero of *The Stranger*, is no more than the title itself suggests. Throughout the novel he has been presented as an alien, disillusioned, disinterested, irrational and ridiculous character. He is a clerk in Algiers where he has been living leaving his only mother at home in the village. It was later clear that he left his mother alone because he was unable to take care of her. His salary was hardly enough only for himself. During the time of his mother's death, too, he received no sympathy from his boss.

The boss of Meursault's office is also indifferent towards other's sufferings and pain. He hesitates to grant Meursault leave on his mother's death to go to the village for her funeral. He grants him only two day's leave. The main character Meursault's indifference can be noticed from the very opening lines of the novel; "Maman died today or yesterday may be, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: "Mother deceased funeral tomorrow faithfully yours. It doesn't mean anything. May be it was yesterday" (3). This is one of the most famous paragraphs in literature to show the indifference of individuals towards the worldly happenings. Here, the main character is confused concerning the exact date of his mother's death. Being based on the date of his

mother's death, he only talks about the telegram from the home. He is not sure whether it is today or yesterday that his mother died. This indifference to detail and time categories Meursault's personality throughout the novel. The details of the telegram which he does discuss only reinforce his uncertainty concerning the date. He mentions nothing else of the telegram's effect on him.

Meursault is so indifferent and careless about his mother's death that after getting two days leave from the office, he heads towards his home and on the way he falls asleep, which is not considered from any mourners. In home also, he does not become interested to look the dead body of his mother although the director asks with him about his interest to look the dead body of his mother. "The director spoke to me again but it was not really listening anymore. Then he said "I suppose you'd like to see your mother." I got up without seeing anything and he led the way to the door" (5).

Monsieur Meursault is in his own world of indifference and doesn't care about others. The director of his Maman's home speaks and asks with him about his interest to see the dead body of his mother many times but he becomes totally careless about his asking. He even doesn't wish to see the dead body of his mother for the last time. Rather on the next day of his mother's funeral, he swims with a girlfriend and attends a comic movie with her in the evening where he becomes involved in sexual activities with her. "I decided to go for a swim. I got a street car to go to the public beach down at the harbor [...] in the water, I ran in to Marie Cordona, a former typist in our office whom I'd a thing for at the time"(19). He again says:

I brushed against her breasts. I was still in the water when she was already lying flat on her stomach on the float. She turned towards me, her hair was in her eyes and she was laughing. I hoisted myself up next to her. It was nice, and, sort of jocking around, I let my head fall back and rest on her stomach. She did not say anything. So I left in there. I had the whole sky in my eyes and it was blue and gold. (19-20)

On the next day of his mother's funeral Meursault becomes involved in the immoral activities with his former staff in the office. In the evening, they go to see a film, there also, Meursault involves in sexual activities with the girl friend; "she had her leg pressed, against mine. I was fondling her breasts. Towards the end of the show I gave her a kiss but not a good one" (20). Meursault becomes totally careless about his mother's death the day before and become involved in immoral activities which can not be considered from a normal human being only on the next day of one's mother's funeral.

Seeing as Meursault is indifferent towards the death of his own mother, perhaps we should not be surprised that he is largely indifferent in his daily life as well. Camus is constructing a framework through the character and life of Meursault in order to explore his ideas of the absurd. Camus once said "What is absurd is the confirmation between the sense of the irrational and the overwhelming desire for clarity which resounds in the depths of man". Camus has created Meursault as an absurd character to give force to his absurdist philosophy in *The Stranger*.

In the book's most biting section he kills an Arab boy without any cause of killing. Meursault kills Arab not being negative towards him. He says he killed the Arab because of the Sun:

The sun was starting to burn my checks, and I could feel drops of sweet gathering in my eyebrows. The sun was the same as it has been the day I had buried Maman, and like then my forehead specially was hurting me, all the veins in it throbbing under the skin. It was this burning which I could not stand any more, what made me move forward. (58-59)

On the day of killing the Arab boy Meursault was greatly troubled by the sun as on the day of his mother's funeral. Meursault says with examining magistrate that he was inspired by the sun to kill the Arab. He again says about the event of murdering of the Arab as; "Then I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace and it was like knocking four quick times in the door of

unhappiness” (59). Meursault Kills the Arab boy without being negative towards him. Rather the sun of the day inspires him to shoot at the Arab. After the killing of the Arab, he had shot the Arab’s dead body four more times which led him towards the unhappiness.

Meursault’s this action shows his alienated mentality in the time of world war. He kills a man without any cause. He is arrested in the case of murdering an Arab but he is asked different unrelated and unnecessary questions about his childhood, love affairs, marriage, mother’s death and his escape from his mother. He has also been forced to repent his past activities. The court cannot understand his inner sentiments properly. Camus calls this world ‘Absurd and unreasonable’ (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 26). He says “The tradition of what may be called humiliated thought has never caused to exist. The criticism of irrationality has been made so often that it seems unnecessary to being” (27). Camus in this context writes:

Heidegger considers the human condition coldly and announces that existence is humiliated. The only reality is “anxiety in the whole chain of beings. To the man of lost in the world and its diversions this anxiety is a brief, feeling fear.” (28)

Meursault is a man easily driven by physical stimuli, who sleeps and walks when he chooses. He has never looked like a mourner. Even when his mother dies he spends his days with very romantic mood. He seems very free and without seriousness. But, after the Arab’s murder, it brings the end of his freedom and ability to enjoy the physical pleasures he loves most as well as the beginning of Meursault’s realization of what living life means and his subsequent vindication.

After the killing, Meursault has been arrested. He is quickly questioned to ascertain his identity. He is appointed an attorney though he is not interested to appoint. His indifference is also seen in the appointment of an attorney to defend his case. He says, “Then he wanted to know if I had hired an attorney. I admitted I hadn't and inquired

whether it was really necessary to have one” “why do you ask?” he said. I said I thought my case was pretty simple” (63). Meursault supposes his case very simple and doesn't feel the need of appointment of an attorney from his side. This is his totally absurd reasoning because every case in courts needs an attorney from both sides. This shows his alienated mentality.

Before the people attending the law court Meursault finds himself as a new comer on a vehicle. He thinks this idea as funny. He does not find the court members serious about his case he admits:

It was then that I noticed a row faces in front of me. They were all looking at me. I realized that they were the jury. But I can't say what distinguished one from another. I had just one impression: I was sitting across from a row of seats on a street car and all these anonymous passengers were looking over the new arrival to see if they could find something funny about him. (83)

All are indifferent towards others sufferings and they make fun of others pain and sufferings. Consolation to the sufferer becomes the matter out of the imagination. For Meursault and for Camus too, the state institutions stood as offensive and torturous. There is no sympathy and consolation for prisoners, cuprites or the criminals. Camus makes Meursault feel like a new passenger on a public vehicle where everybody looks at him and tries to annoy and ridicule him as if there is something the manner with him. Meursault says that he has nothing funny or to be annoyed, rather he was a culprit and the case was a serious crime. He himself says, “there is not much difference between a new passenger on a public vehicle and myself in the court it was the idea that came to me” (83).

The examining magistrate examines his case very minutely beginning his irrational and inhuman behavior on his mother's death. He doesn't lie on these questions and says everything clearly. He can no longer go on living the unexamined life.

Ironically, the examination of his case will become that of his life and indict him on what he thinks more than what he did. In this case, he tells everything being very sincere or we can also say he is indifferent towards his trial also at this time. The lawyer is disturbed most by Meursault's inability to lie about how he felt at his mother's funeral. He is a representative of the French institution since he is provided by the state and Meursault's character is completely foreign to him.

With reference to the sentence of his execution he takes it very lightly and doesn't give much importance. He accepts his sentence very properly and doesn't regret. His feeling of alienation and indifference is reflected in these lines; "what would it matter if he were accused of murder and then executed because he didn't cry at his mother's funeral? Salamano's dog was worth just as much as his wife" (121). He was totally careless about his mother's funeral rather his neighbour, Salamano, was mourning in the loss of his dog. He has taken the dog as important as his wife. But Meursault hasn't any human feelings on his mother's death also. He even doesn't wish to look the dead body of his mother.

So, we can take all these indifferences of Meursault throughout the novel caused due to the context of the society in which he lives. The society at the time of 1940s was full of depression and tragedy caused by the worldly tragic events of that time. Thus if we study the context of this novel's creation and the main character's behavior in a parallel manner, there remains no cause to become surprised when we consider Meursault's such indifferent behavior on every worldly happenings. These all behaviors are shaped by the context of the novel's creation because Edward W. Said says, "a written text of the sort we care about is originally the result of some immediate contact between author and medium" (1211).

II. Absurdity and Meaninglessness

It is well known that existentialists are very much occupied with the meaninglessness of life, and with the consequent need for people to assert their own

meaning to define themselves against the absurd universe that dictates that ultimately everything will come to naught, because they will die. There were varieties of responses to the crisis of consciousness especially during the mid twentieth century because of world's chaotic situation. The old values concerning human existence ceased to operate. In the evaluation of new vision, regarding man and his existence, no one is whole, rather one passes over a number of cross fertilizing influences. Critics support that the idea of absurdity and purposelessness of man emerged in literature with the publication of "*The Myth of Sisyphus*" in 1942. While writing preface on the very text Martin Esslin admits, "In one of the great seminal heart searching of our time, "*The Myth of Sisyphus*", Camus tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered beliefs."

Thrown in to an incoherent, disordered and chaotic universe in which individual destinies were obstructed and torn apart by the second world war people especially the philosophers or literateurs, couldn't believe in old concept like unity, rationality, morality, value and even in Christianity. They saw the world totally absurd, incoherent, disintegrated, disordered and chaotic, not governed by the laws of providence, but by pure chance and contingency. This feeling of existence without justification became the main proposition of the twentieth century. Ellmann and Feidelson note that:

Camus sees the affirmation of individual's worth only through the acceptance of absurdity repudiating the illusion of hope and ultimate meaning which enables the individual to recognize the peculiar meaning of his very condition [...] in a hopeless and meaningless state, the individual is liberated to make commitment but his liberation only affirms the continual revolt against absurdity like Sisyphus. (806)

The character of Meurasault, narrator cum hero of the novel, is central to the understanding this novel as an absurd and meaningless novel. The hero lives life of totally absurd and meaninglessness throughout the novel. Alice J. Strange writes;

Meursault's status as the stranger springs from his answer which is detachment from both his own emotions and those of others, making him unable to experience normal human connections. His failure to forge bonds is illustrated by his feeling of discomfort and confusion in social situations and his avoidance of verbal engagement where possible. (1, Proquest, Camus's *The Stranger*)

Meursault is found as a stranger because of his detachment from his emotions with others. His all actions are guided or motivated by the lack of his connection with others.

Meursault's relationship with Marie is characterized from the beginning by an absence of verbal interaction. Their first meeting consists of activities that require little conversation: a day in the water and an evening at the movies. She spends the night at Meursault's apartment and leaves before his awokenness in the morning, without conversation. Such events are represented as absurd and meaningless activities between these two. From the very beginning of the novel, Meursault appears in a ridiculous manner. His first sentence confuses the readers about the day of his mother's death; "Maman died today or yesterday may be, I don't know" (3). Makes the readers to think about Meursault and his meaningless existence.

Meursault is a young clerk at an export import office in Algiers. Although he is dutiful and loyal to the boss and the office, his condition is getting worse day by day. He has left his mother at the village where she has been declared dead. Meursault's absurdity can be observed when he comes home but shows no interest to see the dead body of his mother:

The caretaker stuttered a little. We put the cover on. But I am supposed to unscrew the casket when I stopped him. He said "you don't want to? I answered 'no' [...] he looked at me and then asked "why not?" but without criticizing as if he just wanted to know. I said "I don't know."(6)

These lines show Meursault's absurd feelings. He is not interested to look at the dead body of his mother even for the last time. He becomes totally careless about it even the caretaker asks repeatedly.

Even In the question of love and marriage with Marie, his mistress, he responds in confusing manner. Even Marie does not properly understand his answer which is absurd or meaningless. "That evening Marie came by to see me and asked me if I wanted to marry her, I said it did not make any difference to me and that we could if she wanted to" (41). These lines show Meursault's abnormal condition and his mental disturbance. The issue of marriage is also taken very lightly by him. This shows his absurd and meaningless feelings.

In the most biting section of the book, Meursault kills an Arab. The cause behind his killing has no significant justification. When he is presented in the court, he realizes and says that he never intended to kill the Arab and again adds that he did that because of the sun. He says:

I said, almost at random, in fact, that I never intended to kill the Arab. The judge replied by saying that at least that was an assertion, that until then [...] fumbling a little with my words and realizing how ridiculous I sounded, I blurted out that it was because of the sun. People laughed. My lawyer threw up his hands and immediately after that he was given the floor. (102-03)

With examining magistrate in the court, he blurts that he never intended to kill the Arab boy but he happened to kill the Arab because of the sun. How careless Meursault is and how lightly he takes life is clearly portrayed by these lines. He killed the Arab while not intending to kill him; this very reason is very ridiculous and totally absurd and meaningless. Meursault says, "everybody knows life isn't worth living" (114). Meursault's this view has played vital role in the killing of the Arab boy and his all other abnormal activities.

His absurd and meaningless existence and view towards life is clarified by him when he says:

It does not much matter whenever you die at thirty or at seventy, since in either case, other men and women will naturally go on living- and for thousands of years. In fact, nothing could be clearer whether it was now or twenty years from now, I would still be the one dying. At that point, what would disturb my train of thought was the terrifying leap I would feel my heart take at the idea of having twenty more years of life ahead of me. (114)

Meursault finds no difference between life and death. Ultimately he has to die one day either now or twenty years later, so he doesn't care about his execution and accepts it very normally. This feeling of his has shaped the novel as an absurd novel from its very beginning. Only after knowing his this type of feeling, readers forgive his indifference concerning his mother's death, and killing of an Arab without significant cause. He again adds; "we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how don't matter" (114). This also indicates towards his absurd and meaningless existence. From one side of thinking that it would be better to die than to live in this absurd and chaotic world. So he is happy and laughing even in his death penalty.

Meursault holds solidity that death brings only nothingness. This doesn't depress him nearly as much as it does the chaplain. Meursault wants to use his time left to live and relieve the moments of his life. Meursault acknowledges Camus's belief that this attempt at life is synonymous to death. One must live and make meaning in life without the pretext or motivation of God or the absolute. Only man is responsible and his life is worth no more than any others. He must make it meaningful so as to enjoy what he can out of it. "But if you don't die today you will die tomorrow, or the next day. And then the same question will arise. How will you face the terrifying ordeal" (117). Meursault is of the view that one day we have to die

ultimately. Either sooner or later we have to die, so there is no cause of being afraid of death. One day we have to face 'ordeal' ultimately, so it doesn't matter when to die. This feeling makes him happy to get experience of death earlier. Meursault's this feeling has made all the readers to celebrate his indifference throughout the novel.

Throughout whole life Meursault lives a life of absurdity and is interested only in irrational activities. In the last moment of his life he says:

Throughout the whole absurd life I'd lived, a dark wind had been rising toward me from somewhere deep in my future, across years that were still to come, and as it passed, this wind leveled whatever was offered to me at the time, in years no more real than the ones I was living. What did other people's deaths or the mother's love matter to me; what did his God or the lives people choose or the fate they think they elect matter to me.

When we're all elected by the same fate, me and billions of privileged people like him who also called themselves my brothers? (121)

Life for Meursault is utterly meaningless and worthless. It is only towards the end that he realizes about his absurd existence. For him the killing of the Arab is "neither a sin nor a crime." It seems that he equates life with death. If life is meaningless and absurd, killing is also the same so it is neither sin nor a crime, just a meaningless act. For Camus and Meursault too, it is death which renders human existence meaningless. Throughout the novel, Meursault has been presented as an absurdist hero not only because his life is meaningless, rather it lacks a particular kind of meaning.

Such absurdity and meaninglessness in the novel is because of the alienation of the hero due to the tragic and despairing situation of the mid twentieth century Europe. In this period not only Meursault, but all other individuals were alienated and indifferent towards other's sufferings. Every persons were willing to die rather than to live in this chaotic, politically instable world. Camus wrote this novel to show the absurd human situation in this world due to the worldly tragic situation.

III. Sun as a tragic symbol

Symbol is an image or object referring to something else. So, symbol is used to mean totally different thing in different cases. Symbols play vital role in the literary texts to give clear meaning of any other images. In the novel *The Stranger* also, sun and its heat troubles Meursault and is developed as a symbol from the very first chapter of this novel.

When Meursault receives the news of his mother's death and leaves for his home, he is troubled by the sun. He says, "I caught the two o'clock bus. It was very hot. I ate at the restaurant, at Celeste's as usual" (3). Here, Meursault talks about the outside environment which is very hot. Meursault is rendered by the tragic thinking of his mother's death and in the world also, he finds environment forcing to this tragic mood. In all the most biting sections of the novel, the hero talks about the sun and its heat.

This same sun and hot environment is represented as the cause of the execution of the hero when he says with the magistrate that he killed the Arab because of the sun. On the day of his mother's funeral also, he is greatly tormented by the heat of the sun. On that day he is troubled by the hot sun more than by the funeral of his mother, and describes his bodily experience in a great detail. On that day he says, "The sky was already filled with light. The sun was burning to bear down on the earth and it was getting hotter by the minute. I don't know why he waited so long before getting under way. I was hot in my dark clothes" (15). Meursault describes the effects of the sun up on him. He is hot in his dark clothes. He becomes greatly tormented by the sun and its heat on the day of his mother's funeral. He again talks about the sun "All around me there was still the same glowing countryside flooded with sunlight. The glare from the sky was unbearable. At one point, we went over a section of the road that had just been repaved. The tar had burst open in the sun" (16). Meursault talks about the sun which troubles him. He is found careless about his mother's death throughout the novel and through out the novel, he talks about the sun and its heat.

Even the act of killing the Arab boy is inspired by the sun. The day was very hot when he shot the Arab boy. Even in court he says he killed the Arab boy because of the sun. He says:

The sun was the same as it had been the day I'd buried Maman, and like then my forehead especially was hurting me, all the veins in it throbbing under the skin. It was this burning, which I could not stand anymore, that made me move forward. I knew that it was stupid that I would not get the sun off me by stepping forward. But I took a step, one step, forward. And this time, without getting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it up to me in the sun. The light shoot off the steel and it was like a long flashing blade cutting at my forehead. (58-59)

Meursault describes the environment of the day of killing the Arab boy. He killed the Arab because of the sun. Sun and its heat inspired him to kill the Arab. And the same act of killing the Arab boy brought Meursault's execution.

The effect of sun is pervasive throughout the novel especially the movement of part I chapter 6 of the novel is fully devoted to describe the sun's effect. In the same chapter, he has killed the Arab. Not only the event of killing the Arab but also the preceding events are described with the help of the imagery of the sun. Meursault says:

The sun glinted off Meursault's gun as he handed it to me. But we just stood there motionless, as if everything had closed in around us. We stared at each other without blinking, and everything came to a stop there between the sea, the sand and the sun, and the double silence of the flute and the water. (56)

Meursault took the gun from Raymond and shot the Arab boy. His taking the gun from Raymond and shooting is also fully inspired by the hotness of the day. He has described the effect of sun and the hot beach upon himself and Raymond.

The sun represents Meursault's tragic mood throughout the novel. In the beginning of the novel, also, he is tormented by the sun. On the day of his Maman's funeral, he is greatly tormented by the heat of the sun. He talks about the sun's bad impact on him. Whenever he is in tragic mood, he talks about sun, its glare and heat obstructing for his routinely deeds. And ultimately the sun becomes the cause of his death. Whenever Meursault is in crisis and is in tragic mood, sun becomes the affecting cause for these acts. The sun becomes the cause of Meursault's tragic desparing, chaotic and void situation of his mind as well as outer world:

I was walking slowly towards the rock and I would feel my forehead swelling under the sun. All that heat was pressing down on me and making it hard for me to go on and every time I felt a blast of its hot breath strike my face, I greeted my teeth, clenched my fists in my trouser pockets and strained every nerve in order to overcome the sun and the thick drunkenness it was spilling over me. (57)

The sun badly troubles Meursault. He feels his forehead swelling in the sun. Sun has obstructed his daily works.

The sun attacks Meursault's sensibility as he walks back towards his chosen route. His body tenses as the sun is symbolized as a knife, foreshadowing the knife which will set him off. He is dazed and feels drunk because his senses have been overwhelmed. It is Meursault's existential struggle against the world and other in it which moves him nearer to the encounter which will bring him meaning. He has the power to kill or not to he is influenced by no outside influence other than the beating sun and drunkenness of his senses. He becomes totally irrational in the presence of the sun.

At his trial Meursault says that he never intended to kill the Arab. We can begin to understand that he is telling the truth. When the judge then asks him to state the motive for that act, he blurts out it was because of the sun. He asserts that he killed the Arab because of the sun, which makes clear that he kills the Arab not being negative

towards him. As we go back to the murder scene, walking back to the bungalow after their first encounter with the Arabs in which Raymond is wounded, Meursault stood in the intense heat, his head ringing from the sun, “to stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing A minute later, I turned back towards the beach and started walking” (57). Camus’s Depiction of Meursault takes on a hallucinatory quality at this point, as though he were a sleep walker or as if his body were being moved along by a power entirely outside his mind on his will. He is totally tormented by the heat of the sun and is shown as having lost his control whether to go or to stay.

This sun and heat in this novel represents the hero’s tragic mood throughout the novel, who is alienated and indifferent towards all worldly happenings in the mid twentieth century. Meursault’s tragic, melancholic, alienated and indifferent mental state is picturized clearly by the use of the sun as a symbol to show his tragic mental state representing the chaos and tragedy caused by the world wars.

Meursault is totally disturbed and is in a painful state because of the worldly tragic happenings of the twentieth century. Meursault is depressed throughout his life and he wished to justify his life's meaning being different from others. His mood is shaped by the context of the society with in which he lives. Meursault is the representative of all the frustrated, alienated and indifferent individuals of the mid twentieth century Europe. The age in which he is living is the age of tragedy, despair, frustration and melancholy of the individuals caused by the devastating world wars and economic depression. So, Meursault being the representative of all the individuals of the mid-twentieth century suffers much in this world and accepts death happily at this period.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

As Edward W. Said has said, texts are “worldly”, involved in particular historical situations, this present text, *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, clearly represents the mid-twentieth century’s tragic situation and alienation caused by it, leading to indifference of individuals. In this novel, Meursault, the hero, is totally indifferent towards all kinds of worldly happenings. He is indifferent towards his own mother’s death. He kills an Arab boy without any cause and lastly he is indifferent towards his own execution. The worldly tragic and despairing situation leads for his alienation who seems alienated towards all kinds of worldly happenings. Meursault is alienated because the context of this text’s creation is full of tragedy and despair. In this period, not only Meursault but all the individuals were facing the same fate as Meursault. Meursault is the representative of all the individuals in this tragic and void world.

As context plays great role for the determination of meaning of any literary creation, the context of the novel, *The Stranger* by Albert Camus written in 1942 in the midst of Second World War, plays vital role for shaping the main character, Meursault's behaviour. All the time, throughout the novel, he is indifferent towards all the worldly happenings. Meursault’s indifference is not the matter of surprise when we consider the context of this novel’s creation which is full of tragedy and despair. Not only Meursault, but all the human beings in this world were facing the same fate faced by the main character of this novel.

The first half of the twentieth century was full of tragedy and despair due to the two devastating great world wars and economic depression of 1930s. In 1914, First World War started when Germany invaded France. This world war involved more countries and caused greater destruction for all the countries involved in the war. The casualties and destruction of this war was very great. And in 1918, this world war ended with Paris Peace Conference.

Although the war ended, the disastrous effects of the world war were pervasive everywhere. The decade of twenties was a decade of 'mounting despair'. The relative stability achieved after 1925 was soon shattered by a world economic crisis. This phase of economic break down started in 1929 with the collapse of New York Stock Exchange. This depression seriously damaged the economy of European countries. France was affected by economic depression from 1930. Great Depression caused mass unemployment and widespread poverty and despair throughout the world. This tragic and restless situation due to the economic depression pushed the individuals towards sufferings. The decade of 1930s also ended in the tragic and despairing situation for the individuals due to the worldly economic crisis. And in 1939 second world war began.

Second World War started when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. This war took more lives and caused more destruction than any other war. This war uprooted millions of people. By the end of the war, millions of people were killed, and millions were displaced or wounded. The first half of the 1940s, was the most critical situation for the humanity. In these years, whole world was greatly tormented by the tragic, restless and void situation of the Second World War. Individuals were greatly depressed and tormented by the tragic situation in this period. Every sector of the society was totally affected by this situation.

Most of the people were in search their life's meaning in this fragmented world. This worldly tragic and restless situation made the individuals of this time alienated. These alienated individuals were in search of their life's meaning in this tragic world. This alienation caused the indifference of individuals.

Meursault is one of the individuals of the mid-twentieth century representing the whole humanity tormented by alienated feeling. His alienation pushes him far from the historical events happening around him. In the novel, Meursault is unaffected by every kind of worldly happenings. In the very beginning of this novel, Meursault is found unaffected by his own mother's death. He doesn't show interest in looking at the dead

body of his mother for the last time. And on the next day of his mother's funeral, he goes to swim with Marie and attends a comic movie that evening with her after which they are involved in sexual activities.

In the book's climax, he kills an Arab boy without any significant cause of killing him. To the examining magistrate he says that he killed the Arab because of the sun. And with reference to his own execution, on the trial for the killing of an Arab, he says that it doesn't matter because he is going to die some day anyway. Thus, he becomes totally indifferent towards every kind of worldly happenings.

Meursault's indifferences are nothing but the impact of the historical context upon him. The tragic and chaotic worldly situation of the mid-twentieth century made him alienated, and this alienation caused for his indifference towards all kinds of worldly happenings. Meursault's indifference is nothing but the impact of historical context on him.

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