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Existential Experience of Solitary Heart in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*

Dr. V. Hema
Assistant Professor of English
S.I.V.E.T.College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

The aim of this paper is to highlight existentialism in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. The philosophy of existentialism emphasizes the individual existence, freedom and choice. It is the view that humans define their own meaning in life and to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. Its chief motive is assertion of freedom. To some extent, Camus follows the views of Sartre and Kierkegaard in his novel, *The Stranger*. However, the protagonist, Meursault is stranger to the society. He is a detached figure and also emotionally indifferent to others, even to his lover, Marie. He refuses to adopt to the moral order of the society. At last, he also accepts the gentle indifference of the world. This acceptance makes him happy.

Key words: Existentialism, freedom, existence, society, rational, choice

The philosophy of existentialism signifies individual existence, choice and freedom. It argues against definitions of traditional philosophy. An individual can define his own meaning in life and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. It focuses on the assertion of freedom which has been the result of a search for a new method. It will make appreciable advance in the understanding of basic ideas or in the treatment of fundamental subjects.

Sartre, known as the father of Existentialism, defines understanding human existence rather than the world. Their main idea is about human existence and believes that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence. They give importance to the individual's freedom and decision. They also stress the absurd condition of humanity. Existentialism is an old wine in a new bottle. It has recent origin but the philosophy is old. Critics trace its origin to Socrates, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Marx, and Bergson. Some find in Judaism and in the Bible. The 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard established the doctrines of existentialism that influenced the later critics. He stresses the factual existence of the individual.

The fact is man cannot be defined whereas he is a unique individual and a purely subjective personality. Only his personal experience can fulfill his religious and philosophical mission. Kierkegaard argues that man is responsible for his position, choice and commitment. It makes a person more human. The novel shares a comparison with philosophies of Nietzsche and Marx, "Basically the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain One's individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and lack of belonging" (Jain 15). Kierkegaard accepts that only man's personal experience can fulfill his religious and philosophical mission and not the abstract mental process. Jaspers writes, "Man is not a self-sufficient separate entity, but is constituted by the things he makes his own" (Mora 45). If a man tries to determine the convictions of existentialism, he would realize that there is an extreme atheist, theist, a Christian, an Anglican and a Unitarian existentialism.

To some extent, Camus follows the views of Sartre and Kierkegaard in his novel, *The Stranger*. The protagonist, Meursault, is a detached figure. He is emotionally different from others, even to his mother and his lover, Marie. He also refuses to adopt the accepted moral order of the society. Meursault's atheism and his lack of outward grief at his mother's funeral represent a drastic change in traditional

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customs in the society. He is so isolated from others, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and also physically at the end.

Everyone in this world is solitary and involvement in human relationships invariably leads to disaster. Existentialism often associates with anxiety, dread, awareness of death and freedom. Meursault, in *The Stranger*, believes that society is strange to him. He accepts that he is correct in his decision and doesn't believe the meaninglessness in the physical world. He fights for his own freedom and decision. He decides to lead a happy life without giving importance to moral feelings. Birth and death are quite natural. Everyone blames, even the lawyer divert the case to argue his character in the court. It is not a crime. But the people who attend the funeral become eye-witness and they explain to the judge about the incidents happened at the time. However, his mistress became witness and tells what happened in the next day. The novel portrays the dilemma in absurdity and also pictures the dark sides of human nature such as indifference and insensitivity towards relationships. Meursault doesn't take his mother's death into his heart despite a brief leave of absence to bury and continues his routine work.

Existentialism gives importance to liberation of the individual who do not rely on fate, God or chance to guide us through the path of life. Many existentialists believe that the greatest victory of the individual is to realize the absurdity of life and accept it. Life is a series of choices and humans try to make decisions without any negative consequences. Some may be irrational or absurd without any explanation. Meursault has full freedom to make decisions apart from his practical life. He attends his mother's funeral in an ordinary way. He smokes cigarette and drinks a cup of coffee without showing his emotion. He keeps vigil over his mother's body. That night, he happily arrives back to his working place. He spends the whole day with his lover, Marie Cardona, the next day. The two make a date to watch a comedy at the theatre and spend that night. When he wakes up, Marie is gone. But he stays there till evening to watch the people pass on the street. He is an ordinary human being with freedom of choice but fails to show his emotion in the right place. Existentialism focuses on awareness of one's choice and passion. Both are psychological feelings, should be understood before making decisions. Meursault wants the remembrance of his life in which he displays existence and passion.

The next theme is contingency. Life is unpredictable, filled with choices and chance for unexpected events. In the climax, the protagonist shoots the Arab which is an unpredictable event. He says, "I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional Silence of a beach where I had been happy" (S 74). Then Meursault is thrown into jail. The trial sequence in the second part represents society's attempt to manufacture rational order. As Bronner writes, "An irresolvable paradox exists between the objective judgment of an action and the subjective motivations behind its performance. Truth disappears, Therein lies the absurdity of existence" (Bronner 34). Bronner portrays that the theatrical nature of judicial processes that assesses crimes signifying the absurdity of existence. Camus indicates his idea of heat as a means to symbolize the growing intensity of the absurd over the course of protagonist's trial but, given the severity of the situation, it implicates even severe consequences: "it was getting hotter and hotter. As always, whenever, I want to get rid of someone I'm not really listening to, I made it appear as if I agree" (S 69). The lawyer seems disgusted at his lack of remorse over his crime and his lack of grief at his mother's funeral. Later, the Magistrate could not understand his action. He also brandishes a crucifix and demands that Meursault put his faith in God. He refuses and the Magistrate dubs him the "Monsieur Antichrist."

Meursault wants to live out of his individuality at the end. Death is an inescapable aspect of existence which humans must accept it. He wants a large crowd of spectators to witness death and also expects them to greet him with trees in spite of being hated by them, "I had only wished them there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate" (S 154). The final theme is reflection. It refers to unawareness of practical events. Meursault leads a pre-reflective life. He absorbs his daily events without reflecting on them. People blame the protagonist who behaves normally in the funeral and there is a controversy that the protagonist blames the society. The protagonist tries to attain the stage of detachment and freedom from the world of involvement and commitments. His problem is his conflict between reason and unreason, quest for freedom, love and understanding. He tries to maintain the problem of existing without losing his individuality. He is interested in the physical

aspects of the world around him rather than its social and emotional aspects. Before his execution, his determinate stream of consciousness helps his unsuited nature as an absurd hero. He recognizes the absurdity of human life by himself confronting death as a direct result of his overall inability to maintain the conscious rebellion towards his absurd environment.

Merusault is an honest man, being true to his presence in anywhere. He never exaggerates or gives consistency to his emotions, express his views very boldly. He leads his life with this principle, which his normal behavior made him faulty. His principle does not permit him to judge others whereas he refuses to analyze his own emotions. He fails to understand the feelings of others, even to his girlfriend. When she asks him to marry her, he replies unfavourably. He is true to his belief which could not inspire others. *The Stranger* is a story of a simple man without any heroic attitude who accepts the truth and ready to die for his belief. The protagonist refuses to live for others and at the same time, he refuses to lie about himself. He is admired by his behavior which makes him very interesting. He likes something that is rather removed by an ordinary man. His alienation from society leads him to maintain accessibility within the absurd.

To conclude, Camus shares Kierkegaard's views on existentialism in the novel. Camus argues that man is condemned to be free and the novel reminds us of Kierkegaard's emphasize on the human conditions such as anguish, freedom, abandonment and despair. In fact, *The Stranger* contains a strong resonance of Camus' philosophical notion of absurdity. Camus asserts that individual lives and human existence in general have no rational meaning or order. Merusault's friend Chaplain urges him to renounce his atheism and turn to God, but he refuses and shouts at him. For the first time, Meursault truly embraces the idea that human existence holds no greater meaning. He abandons the hope for the future. He also accepts the gentle indifference of the world. This acceptance makes him happy.

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