

‘Reflection of Existentialism in Albert Camus’s ‘The Outsider’



Manab Jyoti Bora

Abstract: Albert Camus is closely associated with French literature in Europe. He is one of the major contributors of Existentialism philosophy. His first novel that deals with this idea are, “The Outsider”/ The Stranger” published in 1942. Following ‘The outsider’ His novel ‘The plague’ and ‘The Fall’ were published in 1947 and 1956 respectively. It is for his novel ‘The plague’ that got him Nobel Prize for literature. Camus ‘The Outsider’ reflects the existential crisis of human life. It is through the action and works of the main protagonist and his relation with other characters, and thus we can consider the novel as existentialism, and we have critically analyzed the Novel.

Keyword: Existentialism, absurd, Camus, Philosophy

I. INTRODUCTION

Albert Camus was a French Algerian philosopher, author and journalist. He won the Nobel Prize in literature at the age of 44 in 1957, the second-youngest recipient in history. Camus was born on 7 November 1913 in a French Algerian family. Camus’s views contributed to the rise of the philosophy known as absurdism and also he considered to be an existentialist, though he rejected on several occasions. “The Stranger”, enigmatic first Nobel by Albert Camus, published in French as L’Etranger in 1942. It was published as ‘The Outsider’ in England and ‘The Stranger’ in the United States. Following “The Outsider”, The Plague, published in 1947, that tells the story of a plague sweeping the French Algerian city of Oran. For this Nobel he achieved the Nobel prize in 1957. “The Fall” published in 1956, and he wrote many short stories and plays, and gained many literary fame. Two of Camus’s works were published posthumously. The first entitled ‘A Happy Death’ and second was an unfinished novel ‘The First Man’, which Camus had written before he died. Many philosophers considered him an existentialist, even though he firmly rejected the term throughout his lifetime. In 1945, in an interview he stated that, “No, I am not an existentialist, Sartre and I are always surprised to see our names linked”. Though he rejects to call himself as existentialist, yet his themes and outlook are after sighted as examples of existentialism.

II. OBJECTIVE:

Existentialism is defined as “a philosophical theory or approach that emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining his or her own development through acts of the will”

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The novel exposes the true self and cold nature of human being, the freedom to choose and the choices and the characters and their actions paved a way for discussion and try to demonstrate the novel as an existentialism text.

Among many other novels written by Albert Camus, researchers try to discuss the novel ‘The Outsider’. Through this novel researchers seek to reflect the existentialism / human predicament in the world.

III. SOURCE

The primary source of this research the researcher takes Methew Ward’s ‘The Stranger’ which he translated from French to English, while preparing this paper. And the researcher has taken various journals, references as secondary sources of research.

IV. METHODOLOGY:

The sources of data, that are used in this study will be both primary and secondary. The data will be acquired from various books, journals and articles. Analytical method is mainly used in this study.

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The contemporary French literature is considered to be the richest literature in the whole world. The French literature is expanded around in three art movements, viz, cubism, surrealism and the third one is existentialism. Albert Camus one of the strongest writers of this existentialism movement. One such writer who is closely associated with the term existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre, was a French philosopher, playwright, novelist and literary critic. During Second World War, initially Germany defeated France and they ruled France for over 4 years. Albert Camus, with Sartre and many others worked very hard to form the independent France and they try to restore its literature and the art culture. Camus was highly influenced by the philosophical thoughts of Sartre, but after sometimes he started to oppose this philosophy. Though Camus’s philosophy was highly developed from the philosophy of Sartre, but he always tried to portray himself differently from Sartre so he named his philosophy as secular humanism. Many times he rejected to be called himself an existentialist but his philosophy is mainly based on the basis of existentialism. The major achievement of Camus’s science of philosophy was that he could influence the human mind to live in righteous manners. In a conversation he stated that whatever ideology a man subscribed to, there are chances of being pained by slight changes in such ideology. An ideology must have its own limitation, any deviation from such limitation might cause pain to human being, Camus stated.

V. EXISTENTIALISM:

Before we to discussing ‘The Outsider’ anexistentialism text, first we should learn what exactly existentialism is. It is a tradition of philosophical enquiry which takes as its starting point the experice of the human subject. It is associated mainly with certain 19th and 20th century European thinker, who despite have many doctrinal differences, shared the belief in that beginning of philosophical thinking. This philosophical movement is believed to have originated in the writings of 19th century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard Existentialism is basically a philosophy which developed as reaction to the Existing social situation of two world wars, this era witnessed the lack of respect for human life and dignity, it was this social situation that existentialism responded to. It is in existentialism that dignity and right of a human person is paid attention to. One of the most important issue it deals with the human authenticity. Existentialism views authenticity as the highest of all virtues. In existentialism, “The individuals starting point is characterized by what has been the existential attitude or a sense of disorientation in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world.” Existentialism became fashionable in the post world war years as away to reassert the importance of human individuality and freedom. It was during this time that existentialism sprtad all over the world and especially in Europe. The chief term of existentialism is “Existence precedes essence”. But the existence is more important than essence, for in essence; we are not able find out individuality the id, ‘ man is the centre of the universe’ in the man doctrine of the existential philosophy. Existence, thus is the first principle from which all else flows. It is only later , by living, thinking and acting that man defines he nature and forms what is called his essence-that which he in and will be. Sartre believes that human existence is the result of chance or accident. There is no meaning or purpose of his life other than what his freedom creates, therefore he must rely an his own resources. Among the most famous ideas associated with existentialism is that of ‘absurdity’ specially in the works of Camus; the notion of absurdity is explained very broadly. In his “The myth of Sisyphus”, he explained,“ The absurd is born, out of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.”The same view also shared by Sartre, is that humanity must live in a world that is an will forever be hostile towards them. The universe will never truly care fore humanity the way we used to seem to want it to. The philosophy that encompasses the absurd is referred to as absurdism. While may be considered as a brunch of Existentialism, it is specific idea that is not necessary to an of existentialist view. A key existentialist, soren Kierkegaard, all though religious, declared fight in god be absurd, since it impossible to know god, or to understand his purpose. It is on his book “Concluding Unspecific Postscript” the word ‘Existence’ in used for the first time and paularisiedleter. In Europe as well as in the world.

VI. REFLECTION OF EXISTENTIALISM IN ‘THE OUTSIDER’

The idea ‘existentialism’ is not only limited to philosophy but spread across many literature also. ‘Crime and punishment’ by Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky have seen the existential crisis to some extend. But the author has not mentioned any definition about it. In the works of Franz Kafka, Albert Camus and Sartre, all three formulate a foundation of the whole existentialism thinking. The existential idea of human being’s cold nature and true self is highly used reseed throughout the literary works ‘The outsider’ by Camus. Camus showed his existentialist beliefs by using his characters to make social commentary on multiple social situations, including marriage, time and society itself. It is through the novel’s protagonist Mersault the existentialist belief is reflected, his life experiences, his relationship with Marie, the death of his mother Maman, the murdering of the Arab and Mersault’s trial and execution, which show that Mersault’s life have no meaning. About The novel ‘The outsider’ Sartre comments “Amidst the literary production of our time this noitself was a stranger”. The first sentence of the novel-“Mother died today or yesterday maybe, I don’t know’ is enough to consider the novel as an existentialist text. The unattached response to the death of his mother shows Mersault’s existentialism; he accepts life or death without looking for a deeper significance. When he get to Marengo for mother’s funeral, he does not even want to see the body, instead of mourning he sits back and relaxes drinking coffee and smoking. Mersault seems more concerned about taking time off work to go to his mother’s funeral. That he has nothing to do with, the actual death of his mother. Another aspect of the existentialism portrayed in the outsider is that Mersault focuses mainly on physical sensation with his relationship with Marie. He believes that life has no meaning other than existence itself. The way Mersault handles his mother’s death also emphasize the ‘ accept everything’ viewpoint that existentialists seems to have. Similarly, the killing of the Arab seemed meaningless to him. He states that does not feel any true regret for the murder. What interesting is that before he shot the Arab, he never realyhad any intention to kill him. Even when the Arab withdraw knife, it was the intense heat of the sun which made him feel uncomfortable and lead to him shooting. When he discover he has to go to the court , he finds it difficult to understand, throughout part two he refers how the situation is ‘simple’ and that he must pay for action of murder. While in prison, Mersault seemsconstantly looking towards the future, imagining if he has to spend a long time in perison and how he will adjust. Again , the constantly looking forward in a very nature of existentialism, ignoring the past. At one point in the novel, he is standing by the sea, and says ‘I denied myself the water for a bit longer.’ The fact that he is ‘denying himself’ shows that he is going against what his body craves, but in a sense that makes him more in control.

He speaks as if he is two different individual, the person what is structured by society, expecting to feel certain emotions and reacting in certain ways, and what can be considered his 'true self'. Camus describes him as an 'outsider to society', as throughout the book we see him go against what would be considered normal human relations.

VII. CONCLUSION

The idea of existentialism is reflected in all of Camus novel. But the novel is truly based on human cold nature and Camus seem to suggest that there is no natural basis of morality in the novel. Going deeper into the text, a reader can easily find that it contains multitude in themes and meaning. Existential question and absurd realities have been cardinal parts of the protagonist's character. In the last part of the novel, he seems to have been quite satisfied with his eminent death, because 'he refuses to lie'. Albert Camus created Mersault as a singular and incomparable character that cannot be confined to a particular definition on final judgment. But from the reason and the protagonist's character and action we can consider the novel as an example of existentialism.

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