

AN ABSURD LIFE : FROM THE WRITINGS OF ALBERT CAMUS**Ananya Singh**

Absurdism is the conscious understanding of man of how irrelevant he is in the grand scheme of things. This creed of Absurdism gained popularity through the second World War. The rational, empirical and comprehensible were replaced by chaos, ambiguity and confusion as bombs were dropped and hundreds of people were wiped out without a second thought.

War shook the ground underneath what used to be concrete truth. This school of thought saw subscribers pouring in as facts weren't infallible and not every question seemed to have answers. The French resistance against Nazi occupation during the second world war was gaining traction. It is here where Camus was emerging as a writer for the French Resistance Newspaper, *Combat*. He explored literature and philosophy, scouring the depths of these disciplines to unveil the purpose of existence.

“any average city can be wiped out by a bomb the size of a football.” - Albert Camus, *The Combat*

This quote by Camus distinctly points to his awareness of the futility and vulnerability of human life. Camus, an existentialist, modernist writer was greatly influenced by the war. His lacking faith in humanity and belief in its disillusionment was strengthened by the theories he began developing. Some of his famous works are from the genre of philosophical fiction, for instance: *The Plague* and *The Stranger*. Some of the most exemplary essays on the subject of the human condition, social rebellion, and the undercurrent of revolution were authored by him. These being *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. Sisyphus or Sisyphos, the well known Greek mythological figure's infamy was partly because of his general trickery and partly for cheating death twice. The king of Gods Zeus condemned him to eternal punishment of rolling a boulder up a hill in the innumerable depths of the underworld (or hell) ruled by Hades. The myth is a lesson of the comeuppance delivered to those who escape karma. The essays by Camus however revolved around Absurdism, the philosophical line of thinking he was committed to. The focal point of these essays isn't the myth itself but the Absurdist idea it alluded to. This idea runs through the essay in strong undercurrents acting as a nexus for the individual links to the Greek myth.

The parts of the book explain absurdism in a tripartite fashion, the work ending with the story of Sisyphus. The parts are: *An Absurd Reasoning*, *The Absurd Man* and *Absurd Creation*. Philosophy describes the 'Absurd' as the internalized conflict between the human desire to attach meaning to everything in life and the catastrophic inability to sometimes find any. Being according to Camus is a state of living with it, accepting this fundamental contradiction and sustaining this consciousness while continuing life. This unfateful contradiction of life maintains that it is a series of circumstances which occur meaninglessly. As human beings it is well within our nature to seek meaning and ascertain why

things happen the way they do, yet this paradox is better once greeted with acceptance.

According to Camus the Absurd life has three characteristics to it, namely, a Person's Revolt, Freedom and Passion.

The Revolt is a characteristic in keeping with the disbelief and denial of reconciliation in this human struggle. The freedom is to think, feel, and do as one chooses. Passion qualifies the pursuit of rich and diverse experiences.

All three functional pillars deal with the fundamental truth that life is devoid of meaning. This revelation is weighty therefore Camus states the approaches one may adopt to deal with this reality. The first approach, as a matter of fact, is one that is the sole decision of the individual, no matter how amoral or insensitive to afflict someone with the burden of losing you. The first approach states that one may end one's own life.

The second approach is one that masses prescribe to, usually unknowingly, of resorting to a blind leap of faith. This comes from the unquestioning reliance on belief in the existence of God and afterlife. Kierkegaard, Kafka and many such existentialist writers showed an inclination for this approach despite their bleak writings.

Camus however, is recommended a third way of living. This was of acceptance. To live one's life knowing that there may be no purpose to it and definitely no higher meaning. He condemned suicide as a critical philosophical problem, of inability to overlook the barriers of one's own conditioning and layered delusions to accept the absurdity of the human situation. Suicide, just like hope is but a coping mechanism. People who equate the meaninglessness of life to the pointlessness of living it commit suicide. Those who discover 'meaning' find themselves inclined to kill or get killed in protection of it.

According to Camus, the feeling of Absurdity is similar to that of being exiled. The feeling of being an outcast from a state of being that once was the source of your comfort and refuge. The easiest yet not quite painless way of escaping the absurd life remains Suicide. The meaning behind attaching value, is to normalise irrational circumstances, is of consolidating belief that life ought to be different from the way it seems. The act of elusion, as Camus identifies it, or hope, keeps us from resorting to this escape plan.

In a subsection of his work, he tells the reader to view objects as naked things, stripped of the meaning they were once given, of the imagination and interpretation imposed to view them solely as they are. The human mind is not absurd and neither is the world. Yet their clash is what births absurdity. The desire for clarity amidst the irrationality of the world is a conflict we battle everyday. There is no truth and the school of rationality couldn't be farther away from this discovery.

Philosophical suicide occurs when those seeking answers wriggle away from the logic posed to them by absurdism. The universe's silence is unavoidable. To seek to understand not what is given to us, but

that what is beyond is a blunder many commit.

The unbridled freedom that comes with the acceptance enables one to live life to the fullest not expecting fruits for the seeds one sows. Human beings are reasonable individuals condemned to a short life in an unreasonable world before facing inevitable death. Hope and Suicide both are ways out of this conflict between answers and reality.

The absurd man experiences absolute freedom from this back and forth as he faces each new moment not abtained by actions one conforms to as part of society. In doing so, he's freeing himself from the snares of the future and the constraints of the past, leaving the present, a singular moment to rejoice in.