

CHAPTER 2

Individual's Struggle and the Reaction of Society in *The Stranger*

A Short biography of Camus:

Birth

Albert Camus was born into a poor family on 7th November in 1913 in Algeria. His father, Lucien was a poor agricultural worker and his mother was an illiterate house cleaner who was also deaf by one ear. From an early age, he had to suffer several blows at the hands of his destiny. First World War broke when he was just one year old and his father died in a combat the very same year leaving behind his mother and him as an infant. His mother could somehow bring him up.

Camus attended a local primary school from 1918-1923 where he got a scholarship for Lycee with the help of a teacher named Louis Germain. Camus did well in school and in 1923; he got admitted into the University of Algiers where he studied Philosophy. However, he could only study on a part-time basis since he had to earn his living. His work life started as a private tutor during his university days and in the course of time, he took many jobs like car parts clerk, teaching in a private school, and assistant at the Meteorological Institute etc. He completed his BA in 1936 and in the month of May of the same year, he had successfully presented his thesis on Plotinus.

During his university days, he cultivated fondness for football. He played for the university as a goalkeeper several times. He always preferred football to every other profession. He used to play very seriously and passionately which had earned him love and respect. However, his sports craze ended miserably at the age of 17 when he

contracted tuberculosis. Later in his novel *The Plague*, his liking for football has been given a voice.

His married life was not that successful. He, in fact, always denied and criticised the institution of marriage. He married and divorced twice as a young man and had several affairs. In 1943, he married Simone Hie but the marriage did not last long due to infidelity on both sides. In 1940, he remarried Francine Faure who was a pianist and a mathematician. He loved her but he kept mocking and making fun of marriage. He said that the institution of marriage is an unnatural one. He became father to a set of twins but it had not stirred his views on marriage. He had several other affairs. His affair with Maria Casares was more of a public affair. Camus's views on marriage are more or less found in his novel *The Stranger*.

His political involvement:

From an early age, Camus had a political inclination. In 1935, he joined the French Communist Party in order to fight for equality between Europeans and natives. In 1936 when the Algerian Communist Party was founded, Camus joined the Algerian People's Party which had a bad impact on his relation with the Communist party. He was considered as a Trotskyite and was banished from the Communist Party in 1937. After this, Camus associated himself with the French anarchist movement. Camus started writing for the anarchist publications. His political interest and his dislike for French colonization are found in his masterpiece *The Plague*. Being a political figure, he argued for the empowerment of the Algerians. During World War II, Camus joined hands to liberate Paris from the Nazis and during this military period he befriended Jean

Paul Sartre. He also expressed his disregard on America's bombing of Hiroshima. Some of his political interest can be traced in his literary productions as well.

Literary career:

Absurdism is his most important contribution to both literature and philosophy. So far his literary career is concerned; its roots go back to 1935 when he founded the Worker's Theatre. It was a place where the plays were staged for the workers of the area. The first publication of Camus was *Revolte dans les Austries* which was co-written by Jeanne Paule Sicard in 1936. In 1937 he wrote his first book *L'Envers et l'Endroit* which was dedicated to Jean Grenier.

Camus's interest in theatre is seen in his establishment of the Workers' Theatre in 1935 with which he was associated deeply. He acted and staged several plays on that theatre and he wrote his play *Caligula* at that time. In 1939, he published his *Bitwixt and Between* which contained his views on human condition and death. From 1937-1939 he contributed his intelligence to Alger Republican, a newspaper in which he reviewed many literature. In 1940, he left Algeria for Paris and worked with another newspaper for a short span. During the war, he left Paris and started living in North Africa where he worked as teacher and side by side continued to pursue his literary career. After a year he produced his two masterpieces *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. After the publication of *The Stranger* in 1941, he went back to Paris and associated himself with Combat, an anti Nazi cell which produced a newspaper by the same name. Camus became the editor of the newspaper in 1944.

In 1942, his two plays *Caligula* and *The Misunderstanding* were staged. In 1947, Camus published his *The Plague* which met with an immediate success. This

novel attained popularity in an after war era due to its high human predicament. After the success of *The Plague* he started traveling through South Africa but on his return he contracted tuberculosis again and he had to lead a secluded life for a few years. However, his literary venture did not stop and he completed his voluminous essay *The Rebel* by 1951. The book celebrated the development of rebellion and revolution which created a controversy. The controversy had led to an end to Camus's relationship with Sartre. In 1956, he wrote *The Fall* which was not much successful as *The Plague* but it was very much an influential book like *The Stranger*. In 1957, he earned the Nobel Prize for literature for his important literary productions.

During his literary career he wrote short stories, several essays and a handful of plays. His success in literature is equally important as the philosophy he brought in. It is mostly through his literary writings that Camus made a clear explanation of his philosophical ideas. Camus remained active and ambitious throughout his life. He used the money that he got with Nobel Prize to stage Dostoevsky's play *Demons*. His literary venture was long compared to the short life he lived. His last novel, *The First Man* remained unfinished due to his untimely death in a car accident.

Death

Camus died in a car accident on 4th of January in 1960 at the age of 46. At the time of his death, he was writing an autobiographical novel focusing on his earlier life in Algeria. This novel was later published by his daughter. His last belongings that were recovered from his coat pockets were a train ticket for his family which was not yet used.

Context of the novel

Camus's masterpiece, *The Stranger* was written at the backdrop of modernism which also bore the traces of the consequences of World War I. Due to its philosophical theme, the novel cannot be confined to a particular time-frame. However, the important role played by the surroundings can not be denied while considering the novel. Modernism showed a shift of focus on inward reality from outside world. The disillusionment faced by people due to the massive killings during World War I had brought a different worldview among the people. The growing importance on individuality, the growing sense of absurdity, the question of human existence, search for meaning of life are the important aspects that categorize the modern age. The atrocities brought about by the war like massive killings, death, hunger, crisis had made the people to question their lives and existence. The dehumanizing effects of war left people confused regarding the meaning of life. People lost hope and were devoid of happiness and security. This was what made people to wonder about the meaning of their lives.

It was a period when the impacts of World War I were still felt. This novel is an outcome of the ideologies that grew up as a result of World War I. The dehumanizing warfare affected the consciousness of people and left them as the wanderer of meaning in life. They had to live in a world where conscience got upper hand at the hands of power. Conscience can no more bar human actions and killing became common place. Therefore, the value of life started to be questioned. God did not answer to the cries of the people which made them to question the existence of God as well. This crisis led to their question regarding their own identity and their existence in the world. This

disillusionment is termed as existentialism which comes wrapped with the idea of the absurd.

Along with the realization of the godless world, another important aspect that contributed in the growing disillusionment of human existence is the growth of industrialization and mechanization. The efficiency of machines substituted machines for human laborers which, in turn, furthered the insecurities of human beings. Surrounded by artificial means that are quicker and more efficient than people, made human loose their value in the modern world. Therefore, it estranged people from the very world they were inseparable part till date. People started to realise that there is a substitute to everything and therefore, their position in the world is questionable. Darwin's evolution theory made a ground breaking revelation regarding human lives which also resulted in the loss of faith in God and religion. Thus, the source of salvation people believed in so far lost its value and people found nothing to turn to. This is what characterized the age in which Camus exercised his penmanship.

Existentialism, Absurdism, Fascism, Nihilism were the ideologies becoming popular at that time. Existentialism talks about the lost meaning of life. It also tells that the universe is meaningless and therefore, individuals have the sole responsibility of their own lives. Absurdism is another important concept that became popular at that time and Albert Camus himself holds the responsibility of popularizing this concept. It refers to man's failed attempt of finding meaning in the universe. This is based on the meaninglessness of life on the face of death. Due to the massive killings done during the World War I, people felt that life has no meaning for death is the ultimate goal which leaves no room for life.

It must be remembered that along with being an age of dread and despair, Modern Age also marked innovation and newness in the Western world. Following Ezra Pound's motto 'make it new', every aspect of life and the world were refreshed. New innovations brought massive changes in the outlook of the people. There was nothing left virgin by the traces of Modernism. Science and technology, literature, religion, philosophy and every other aspect of human life were changed at that time. It was a time of breaking the convention and bringing newness to the world. Man's position, activities and functions in the world were also viewed in a different way. In terms of literature, it was a time when the writers started trying new experimentations in their writings. Themes, forms, styles, approaches etc. were renovated by the writers. In earlier periods, the form adopted for literature was conventional. But as soon as Modernism arrived, everything started to appear in a different way. In literature, the inward reality got more focus than the outward reality. Focus shifted to individuality from society. Albert Camus's *The Stranger* is a novel which revolves around the absurdity of life, the need of individuality in modern society, objective view of life and the question of identity.

It is noteworthy that growing uncertainty has posited questions regarding human identity and individualism. Whatever people were displaying appeared unreal. Morality became a fake standard on the face of the massive killing that happened during the World War I and the peak was seen when the seeds of World War II were sown even after witnessing the dehumanizing aftereffects of World War I.

Albert Camus' writings are results of all these situations. The topic at hand for study is, to some extent, related to the fake standards of life and society, the question of identity and individuality.

A brief summary of the novel

The novel tells the story of an accountant of Algiers i.e. Meursault who receives a telegram announcing his mother's death. He takes leave from his office, boards a bus and goes to his mother's old age home in Marengo for her funeral. On the bus he falls asleep and after reaching the place, he is allowed to see his mother. However, the coffin was already sealed and therefore, Meursault decides not to see her face. That night, he is accompanied by the caretaker who offers him coffee and smokes with him. On the next day, the arrangements are made for the funeral and one of his mother's old friends Thomas Perez also accompanies in the funeral. After the funeral, Meursault goes back to Algiers.

Back in Algiers, he meets Marie Cardona, his earlier co-worker and goes for a swim with her. Then they plan a date for a comedy movie and spend the night together. Next morning he wakes up alone on the bed and stays at his home idly for the rest of the day. The next day he goes to office and works for the whole day. While returning home, he meets old Salamano, his neighbor who lives only with a dog but always swears at his sole companion. Meursault also meets Raymond, his other neighbor who is known as an immoral man. Raymond invites Meursault for dinner and tells him about his mistress and her brother. He tells Meursault about his plan to humiliate his mistress and asks Meursault's help in luring her back to him. Meursault writes the letter for Raymond and Raymond finds the letter very accurate.

The following Saturday Marie comes to Meursault's place where they hear Raymond's fight with his mistress. A policeman comes to the scene and calms the situation by slapping Raymond. At Meursault's, Marie asks Meursault whether he loves

her and if he wants to marry her. He replies that it does not mean anything and they can get married if Marie wants to do so.

Next Sunday, Raymond invites Marie and Meursault to a beach house which belongs to his friend Masson. They swim together and have lunch together, but while walking on the beach, the brother of Raymond's mistress arrives with his friends and they get caught up in a fight with them. Raymond gets hurt and they all go back to the beach house. Coming back to the beach, they again encounter the Arab and Raymond decides to kill him to which Meursault denies and takes the gun away. But later, when Meursault goes back to the beach alone, he again encounters the Arab and ends up killing him without intending to do so.

Meursault is arrested and his lawyer is disgusted by him. The examining magistrate forces Meursault towards faith but to no avail and ends up calling him 'antichrist' (Camus, 2010, 70). Marie visits him once and Meursault gradually adapts to his prison life and gets used to it. In the courtroom, he was not just judged for the murder but for his emotional detachment towards his mother's death. He was condemned to death after repetitive accusation of being cold towards his mother. In the prison, a chaplain tries to force him towards god who enrages Meursault and he assaults the chaplain. At this point Meursault declares that he has embraced the idea of the meaninglessness of human life and he becomes happy ultimately.

Analysis

The story line seems to be very simple. However, a closer reading opens up a variety of issues hidden in the novel. The existential theme of the novel and its exposure of the absurd are some of the most interesting issues of the novel. However a post-

modern reading of the novel helps to unravel other issues like the question of individuality and individual identity hidden in the novel. By post-modern reading, the reference is made to a present time approach to the novel which allows access to a text through multiple points of views without considering the 'intentional fallacy' (Wismatt, 3). The novel imparts insights regarding the game of individual versus society. The very title of the novel 'The Stranger' gives the hints regarding the issue at hand.

The individual in the novel

Meursault, the protagonist of the novel is the individual under discussion. The novel moves around his actions and behaviours and he consciously defends his individuality throughout. In the process, he seems egoist, selfish, indifferent and an emotionless robot but all these traits are associated with him only when he is looked at wearing societal lenses. But from the individualistic point of view, he is a perfect individual who compromises under no circumstances. He remains loyal to his beliefs and ideals and takes responsibility of his own actions. He does not blame anyone, does not judge anyone and expects nothing from anyone. Looking at him and considering his relations with other people will make him appear a stubborn person, but looking at him merely as a man does not raise much confusion. He is a man who only tells the truth, who only expresses what he feels, who is drawn by his physical impulses and the one who accepts reality as soon as he can. In this sense, he is a person with strong individuality. The character of Meursault is very much influenced by Camus's philosophy regarding life. Through his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus conveyed that living to the fullest is important, not living the best. This is what conveyed by Meursault too. His concept of death is quite convincing, since it is inevitable, sooner or

later does not matter. He also believes that a person needs to take the fullest of the time that is available to him. This very philosophy he himself utilizes when he goes into the prison.

Therefore, the individual in this novel possesses such an attitude and personality which is not understood by others. He is someone, who is not relatable to others. He is unique and likes to make his life the way he wants. Adhering to conventions and following what is instructed is not his attitude. He believes in remaining true to himself.

The society in Camus's novel

The society in this novel is no doubt a twentieth century society and its roots are still covered with emotional content. The society is held together by its conventions. The society in this novel can be better understood especially during Meursault's trial when most of the people openly talk about what they feel about a person like Meursault. The prosecutor, the chaplain, the caretaker and some other characters in the novel are closely associated with and are the active members of the society and all of them follow and believe in the conventions. Meursault's rejection to see his mother's face is given an emotional understanding by the caretaker whereas the prosecutor condemns Meursault for his peculiar behaviour. The chaplain tries to pursue Meursault towards religion and god. His mother's friends come to pay their homage and a close friend of her accompanies the funeral as well. Meursault's neighbors are also interesting. Raymond likes Meursault because he helped him in writing a letter and also agreed to whatever he has to say. Marie is a woman who loved him because of his peculiarity. But her love fades away after he was put behind the bars forever. All these people represent the society which conveys religious, moral and social obligations as a necessity. The

society in this novel judges the person who is not ready to accept what it offers. The hatred Meursault senses in the courtroom represents the fear of the society that has been hidden underneath; the fear of being un-followed, the fear of being challenged. Meursault challenges the society and falls prey to their contempt. It displays the protective nature of society, the stubbornness of society which refuses the entry of a person with a different approach to life from others.

Understanding the struggle:

The word 'stranger' refers to someone 'who is neither friend nor an acquaintance' (offline English dictionary). Camus's reference to Meursault as a 'stranger' gives certain ideas regarding how this person is going to be. He is already termed as a 'stranger'; this means that he is not someone known to all. Therefore, he automatically stands at the other side. The initiation of the game between individual and society can be detected at the very beginning of the novel when Meursault casually announces the death of his mother "Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know" (Camus, 2010, 1). This very beginning automatically raises suspicion regarding Meursault because it is known that a mother-child bond contains the strongest of emotional content. Meursault's casual announcement makes one automatically prejudiced towards him and he is proceeded to be looked at as a 'stranger'.

The suspicion regarding Meursault's behaviour has a long way back. Its roots are there in the beginning of institutionalisation. When the same action is followed with reciprocity by people, it becomes a norm and gets institutional recognition. "Institutions are inter-generational" (Spurling, 1977, 87); the same ideals are followed generation after generation which results in the permanency of those ideals. The reciprocity of the

actions binds people together into an institution. Society is the result of such inter-generational reciprocity. As it has already been discussed in the first chapter that the essence of an institution lies in the conventions set by the institution. Generations after generation, people have been fed with the conventions and norms regarding human behaviour. It has been taught that everyone is entitled to behave in certain ways at certain situations. Overwhelmed with this pre-conceived idea, the judgment regarding Meursault's character becomes automatically prejudiced.

The uniformity among people's behaviour is what strengthens the pillar of society. Everyone is given a particular role in the society depending upon their socio-economic, political and educational position. When the same role has been adapted by the people of the particular social strata, it gets transformed into stereotype. The issue arises when someone fails to match up with the given standard. A person displaying characteristics other than assigned to him/her becomes a stranger to the society. He/she becomes the odd one.

The creation of types is a long process. Any institution owes its strength to the consistency of its ideals. The longer the history, the stronger the institution. For example, patriarchal society has a very long history. Thousands of years have witnessed male domination in the world. It has been personalised and adapted by generations after generations due to which, till now, even in the twenty first century, it is difficult to demolish the prejudiced mindset completely. Once a mindset is fixated for a long period of time, it becomes very difficult to bring changes. Feminism has been addressing this issue for last three centuries, but still from some parts of the world, severe cases of discrimination are heard of. 'Women are weaker than men' has become the mindset and

no one knows how many years will it take to remove this mindset completely from among the people.

Just like patriarchy, the expected behavioural traits are also some types of conventions made up by the people with no rational framework in order to maintain the social life. Following these conventions, emotional content is given moral superiority than the rational aspects. Therefore, everyone is supposed to follow the emotional line set by the society. It has been put into everyone's mind from time immemorial and therefore, lacking emotional content makes a person an 'emotionless robot' in the eyes of the people. Meursault's lack of emotional response at his mother's funeral, thereby, provides an automatic standard to judge him. He is judged as a stranger for his lack of emotional expression without knowing his side of the story. It opens up another aspect of society of maintaining monopoly in controlling the lives of the individual.

"Social control is a collective term for those processes, planned or unplanned, by which individuals are taught, persuaded or compelled to conform to the usages of life values of groups" (Roucek, 1956, 3). The exercise of social control is done in order to maintain human behaviour, which is, in fact, very necessary for a peaceful society. Controlling human nature is very necessary because without order, communal living is not possible. Moreover, an individual is always enveloped in society. From birth till death, the codes of society influence an individual and it, in fact, gets reflected in one's disposition. Everyone knows how one is expected to behave in public and everyone practices it regularly. And the most interesting thing is that everyone is accustomed to social control to such an extent that it has been personalised by the people and everyone becomes conscious automatically when they come into a social situation.

Coming back to the lack of emotion of Meursault, he has been living away from his mother for several years. He could not afford for her and they would also get bored of each other due to which, they decided to keep her in an old age home with the people of her age with whom she can be friends. In his words “she’d run out of things to say to me a long time ago and she’d get bored of being alone” (Camus, 2010, 48). Therefore, his keeping his mother in old age home is perfectly justifiable in the light of the novel. Due to the distance for several years, his emotional attachment with his mother has been a little off. There is a proverb in Assamese that goes like *sokur ator hole monor o ator hoi* (when one goes far from the eyes, he/she will be far from the heart too) which indicates a common human behaviour that when someone goes far from someone’s proximity, the distance may result in the decrease of emotion for that person. However, Meursault is not totally detached from his mother. Whenever he refers to his mother, a childlike innocence can be sensed in his voice. He loved his mother like everybody else. He even wanted to see her face after reaching Marengo right away but the screws of the coffin were already sealed and it will require extra effort due to which he denied to do so. His kind of love is “I am not constantly thinking about the people I love, but I claim to love them even when I am not thinking about them” (Sartre, 1964, 113). Moreover, he walks on the ways shown by his mother “...it was an idea of mother’s and she often used to repeat it, that you ended up getting used to everything” (Camus, 2010, 75). He comes immediately after his mother’s demise, attends her funeral and does the required; therefore, he cannot be blamed. But as far the societal convention goes, he fails as a son; he is not the ‘ideal son’ who is willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of his mother. He gets involve in pleasure attaining activities therefore; he is very much liable to be judged.

Meursault's denial of looking at his mother's face is given a whole new meaning by the caretaker. Every action of his behaviour is tried to be justified on the basis of the prevailing situation. No one thinks or goes beyond the box to see what could be the real issue. The care taker gives his own understanding of Meursault's behaviour. He believes that it is due to emotional trauma, Meursault is not willing to see his mother's face because it might break his heart. However, the prosecutor had a complete different opinion. For the prosecutor, Meursault is a heartless person who doesn't have any feelings for his mother. He is considered being liable to be judged by the society because of his lack of emotion. However, the standard against which Meursault is judged is purely ethical in nature. Digging the roots of ethics, Ayn Rand makes an interesting observation. According to Rand, ethics has no fixed standard, it has no rational validation. She refers to the ancient days when the concept of ethics started to appear and writes, "No philosopher has given a rational, objectively demonstrable, scientific answer to the question of why man needs a code of values. So long as that question remained unanswered, no rational, scientific, objective code of ethics could be discovered or defined. The greatest of all philosophers, Aristotle did not regard ethics as an exact science, he based his ethical system on observations of what the noble and wise men of his time chose to do, leaving unanswered the question of why they chose to do it and why he evaluated them as noble and wise.

Most philosophers took the existence of ethics for granted, as the given, as the historical fact and were not concerned with discovering its metaphysical cause or objective validation. Many of them attempted to break the traditional monopoly of mysticism in the field of ethics and allegedly to define a rational, scientific, non-religious morality but their attempt consisted of trying to justify them on social ground,

merely substituting society for God” (Rand, 1964, 9-10). This extract from Rand’s *The Virtue of Selfishness* makes it clear that ethics has no rational standard but is based on the understanding of a few people and it does not have any objective validation. Therefore, to judge someone on this ground becomes questionable. The accusations on Meursault’s ‘unethical’ behaviour are somewhat questionable. Rand goes on further in discussing the issue of morality and ethics and writes that ‘the will of God’ has been substituted by ‘good of society’ which gave rise to the definition ‘the standard of the good is that which is good for society’. “This meant in logic, and today in worldwide practice that ‘society’ stands above any principle of ethics, since it is the source, standard and criterion of ethics since ‘the good’ is whatever it wills.....This means that ‘society’ may do anything it pleases, since ‘the good’ is whatever it chooses to do because it chooses to do it” (Rand, 1964, 10). Therefore, society’s condemnation of Meursault for the lack of emotional display is simply the exercise of power over individual and nothing else. The ethical code against which Meursault is judged is based on mysticism. The accusations should have been on legal terms for murder instead of against emotional standards.

The intensity of the moral concern is exposed here when the prosecutor narrates Meursault’s list of guilt: “... on the day after the death of his mother, this man was swimming in the sea, entering into an irregular liaison and laughing at a Fernandel film. I have nothing more to say to you” (Camus, 2010, 91). He has nothing to say because all the actions of Meursault are sufficient to prove his guilt. The convention demands must mourning at the death of a family member without considering someone’s genuine feelings. Meursault’s otherwise reaction startles the mass and thus, he ends up being guilty.

Albert Camus added a preface to his novel in 1955 which contains his personal explanation of Meursault. He clarifies what it meant to be a man with different attitude in a society. Camus goes on to expose the paradoxical nature of society and he writes “in our society, any man who does not cry at his mother’s funeral is liable to be condemned to death. I simply meant that the hero of the book is condemned because he does not play the game. In this sense, he is an outsider to the society in which he lives, wandering on the fringe, on the outskirts of life, solitary and sensual”(Camus, 2010: 118). Camus specifically mentions that Meursault does not play the game of the society. By the ‘game’ Camus means to take part in each and every aspect of society, to display the expected, to play the assigned role. The game of society is based on the conventions made by people and Meursault does not fit into the conventional role. His different choice of life pushed him off to the periphery and he is judged severely for his behaviour.

To behave in a socially appropriate manner may not be natural all the time and this is what keeps Meursault away from the society. In order to be acceptable, very often people need to pretend and fake their feelings. But Meursault refuses to lie, for him, to lie is to express more than what is felt “lying is not only saying what is not true. It is also, in fact especially, saying more than is true and, in the case of the human heart, saying more than one feels. We all do it, everyday, to make life simpler” (Camus, 2010, 118). However, Meursault is different. He prefers to remain natural at any cost. No matter what others call him, he remains honest throughout. He behaves the way he feels. His reaction to every situation is true to his nature and therefore, “He remains aloof from the preoccupations of those who are judging him, he is incapable of lies and deceit and he remains on the margin of the respectable society” (Maher, 276). In this sense,

Meursault is the only natural and honest man in that society who is honest and natural to his feelings.

There can be seen a kind of similarity between Meursault and Yudhisthira from *The Mahabharata* regarding their honesty and truthful nature. Yudhisthira from Mahabharata is someone, who would not lie at any cost. He only speaks the truth no matter what. The only 'lie' he ever tells is "*ashwathama hata kintu gaja*" (Aswathama died but it is an elephant). However it's not a lie but a truth. An elephant named Aswathama died but he used this truth to manipulate his opponent Dronacharya. Aswathama is the name of the son of Dronacharya who was the guru of the Pandavas. During the battle of Kurukshetra, Dronacharya was fighting on the Kaurava's side and the Pandava's knew that it is out of their capacity to kill their guru. Therefore, Yudhisthira, the epitome of truth, said those words in order to weaken their guru who is otherwise invulnerable. And the truthfulness of Yudhisthira was so well known that Dronacharya only believed when Yudhisthira informed him with the news. Like Yudhisthira, who used truthfulness as a weapon to protect his side during the battle, Meursault also sticks to truth in order to protect his individuality and his convictions. But his kind of truthfulness appears somewhat threatening to the society. In the words of Eamon Maher, "Refined society is not used to such brutal honesty and would tend to react in an adverse manner to people so unwilling to play the game by the rules of convention" (Maher, 276).

While negotiating the identity of Meursault, it becomes distinct that he is simply a man, not a son, neither a lover nor a murderer. He is simply a free man who is free from all the bondages. He feels free to make his own decisions without considering the conventions. His passive resentment is, in a way, the denial of the imposition of society

upon an individual. No matter what, he sticks to his own ideals. He has been forced by his lawyer to admit an emotional trauma which made him to behave otherwise but to no avail. Meursault refuses to lie and his only weapon is his honesty. Therefore, he is more natural than anyone around. He is a man who should be judged just as a man individually and not with any relations. This is his truthful identity.

Coming to the individuality Meursault possesses, he is a man with a strict individuality who does not get carried away by others. He is strong enough to resist all the impositions on him. He is honest and truthful which very often makes him appear unnecessarily selfish and rude. But he is a man with better understanding of the world. He understands the inevitability of death and its unpredictability. Therefore death does not shock him. Even when he himself was sentenced to death, he reacted passively because he understands that death is imminent. Sooner or later is just a matter of time and time itself loses its value for him when he was in prison because what remains there is just the idea of day and night.

Meursault is in complete possession of himself and he is responsible for making his life the way it is. He does not blame anyone, nor does he expect anything from anyone. He does not pass any moral judgments on others. He even understands the discontinuity of emotions and admits that “to a certain extent all normal people sometimes wished their loved ones were dead” (Camus, 2010, 65). The irony of the social standards is that, when Meursault utters these words, the lawyer makes him promise not to say these words again because it was not acceptable by the society. His truthfulness is what threatens his morality in the eyes of the society.

Meursault may seem selfish but he loves his mother like everybody else. However, he does not display it before others. His refusal to see his mother’s face does

not, in any way, confirm his lack of feelings for his mother. It is a matter of understanding between him and his mother that they decided to live apart.

Evaluating the traits displayed by Meursault, it is found that Meursault is an isolated individual who is detached from the social conventions, religious values, social codes and any form of moral judgments. His attachment to his individuality is what results in his detachment, because to be a member of the society, he needs to follow the conventions and following these conventions threatens his individuality. Meursault is different from everyone around him and “ the main way in which Camus’s hero is different from the mass of men and women is in his insistence on telling the truth even when diplomacy suggests he should pretend to feelings he does not have” (Maher, 276).

The prosecutor of Meursault’s trial is the representative of society who passes moral judgments on Meursault based on his actions. He condemns Meursault for his casual behaviour and says “not only did this man indulged in the most shameful debauchery on the day after his mother’s death, but he relentlessly killed a man in order to resolve an intrigue of unconscionable immorality” (Camus, 2010, 92). Along with failing on ethical standard, Meursault’s involvement in personal matters is what makes him selfish in the eyes of the society. While talking about selfishness, individuality shall also be given due consideration. When a person feels that the conventions are hindering his/her way in maintaining his/her individuality, the person might decide to stick to own ideals rather than giving up. Surrendering to something one does not agree with threatens one’s integrity as an individual. To retain one’s own value, it becomes necessary to follow what one believes personally, otherwise his/her personal identity will be compromised and he/she will end up submerging own individuality within the group.

Retaining individuality might appear 'selfish' but being selfish is not a negative aspect as it has always been misunderstood. Ayn Rand in *The Virtue of Selfishness* presents a detailed analysis of selfishness. It is very much important to talk about selfishness while talking about individuality especially of a person like Meursault. She quotes its exact meaning from dictionary as 'concern with one's own interest' (Rand, 1961, 1) which does not have any moral concern. It is perfectly alright to think about oneself. And it is frivolous to note that people who think about themselves are considered as bad whereas the people who think about others and sacrifices their happiness for the sake of others are considered as morally elevated people. As it has already been discussed, moral standards have no rational standing; therefore, condemning a selfish person is wrong. 'The attack on 'selfishness' is an attack on man's self-esteem, to surrender one is to surrender the other' (Rand, 1964, 7). Moreover, the people who could not stand the idea that Meursault did not cry at his mother's death are okay with Meursault's death sentence. This is the irony of social rules. Society works through double standards. Its root line is pretension. And this is what upsets Meursault about society. He denies being fake and remains natural and this makes him look selfish.

Moreover, all the actions undertaken by Meursault are instinctive rather than deliberate. He is what he appears but the moral judgment automatically goes against him because of the pre-conceived notions of social behaviour. At due times, there have been made references to the sun and heat in the novel and it is this sunshine that forces Meursault to pull the trigger. However, he had no intentions to kill the Arab. That is why he does not feel guilty after the murder. It was purely instinctive. And it is also interesting to note that even before the murder of the Arab; Meursault has automatically

been condemned for his extra ordinary behaviour. He has already been looked down upon by the people as the odd one who does not fit to the social standards “the consistency with which Camus’s character repeats his vision of life, his love of the sea and of the sounds of the city, his apathy with regard to the norms that govern most people’s lives, condemns him before he even pulls the trigger of a gun” (Maher, 278). Similarly, sleep, physical intimacy and coffee are his physical demands that he fulfilled without giving too much of thought. These are instinctively motivated just like the murder of the Arab. However, a detailed discussion is done on all his actions during the trial and are given a deliberate turn to them.

Judging society only from an individualistic perspective will be an injustice because it is known to all that society is one of the most important aspects which make communal living possible. Therefore, when someone comes in direct conflict with societal rules, he/she appears threatening to the integrity of the society. Just like compromise threatens individual’s integrity, individual rebellion also threatens social integrity. It is not only that the individual finds the society unacceptable, sometimes it may also occur that the stance taken by the individual may come in the way of the smooth functioning of society. Thus, the dismissal of the individual becomes the only way out.

The role society plays in human lives is undeniable. The importance of society is undeniable for it brings order and peace. However, too much rigidity in terms of convention is what makes it stale. Along with being a part of the society, individuals have personal interests and choices. Societal stereotyping forces individuals to lead a mechanical life by strictly following what is given. This is what carries an individual far from his/her true self. When a person decides to go against these fixations and tries to

create own rules for life, he/she becomes intimidating. Meursault, the protagonist of the novel does not follow what the convention dictates, but lives on his own way which makes him a stranger. Due to his non-stereotypical nature, the society condemns him to death. The society has no place for people like Meursault who is or appears to be indifferent, who does not display any intense feelings and emotions at times, who does not believe in god and who is brutally honest. Meursault's unwillingness to compromise is what makes him unfit for the society.

Society as a power structure exercises its power over its constituents. It controls and directs people and their behavioural patterns so that the civility is maintained. When an individual turns towards a group and joins hands together with other members of the group, he/she is ready to contribute to the total experience. The transition that takes place in an individual after being involved within a group is described by Rousseau as follows: "It is at the moment of that transition that the voice of duty succeeds to physical impulse, and a sense of what is right to the incitements of appetite. The man who had till then regarded none but himself, perceive that he must act on other principles, and learns to consult his reason before he listens to his propensities" (Rousseau, 1971, 48). Thus, after becoming a part of the society, an individual becomes a 'civilized person'. But at the same time, Rousseau also makes it clear that in this new state, an individual can not enjoy the same he/she enjoyed earlier. Because, in order to make the civil life possible, all the individuals need to compromise along with contributing their part for the betterment of the society. But this is what Meursault lacks, no doubt that he performs the necessary rituals, but sacrificing his personal needs for the society is not his cup of tea. For him, his personal choices come first and he is in no way ready to compromise.

As it has already been discussed, compromise is the very essence of society, but Meursault refuses to compromise; physically, morally and emotionally. He does not care about what society will make out of his behaviour. He does not need social approval for anything. This makes him the odd one who becomes intimidating to the unity of society. His behaviour and actions are all outside the 'rulebook' of the society, therefore, the only way to save the society was to decapitate him 'in a public square in the name of French people' (Camus, 2010, 103). When Meursault was in the courtroom, he could sense the hatred of all the people and the people hated him not for the murder but for his 'indifference' at his mother's death. It clearly indicates that society requires strict adherence to its rules and those who go beyond the rules are condemned.

The nature of the society is to focus on the rules and regulations and when violated, the individual is considered to be guilty of violation by the society. Unlike individuals who are ready to sacrifice their wishes for the common good, society, as a group, does not tolerate any breach. The people who go against or beyond the rules are clearly marked out and are looked down upon. However, it must be noted that being social does not always mean losing one's identity, it is, in Rousseau's words, a way of "acquiring civil liberty, and a just right to all he possesses" (Rousseau, 1971, 50). To be a part of society has some advantages which are otherwise impossible. Social identity, recognition, respect are some of the aspects of society which can be achieved through social activities. The one who is socially active and matches the social standard is respected by the group. Society helps in realizing social responsibilities. Therefore the role played by the society in a person's life is undeniable.

However, sometimes too much interference by the society becomes infringement. The understanding of morality in society is somewhat vague because it

encourages self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice is taken as the highest moral standard and on the other hand, considering personal gain is far from being moral. This is the one of the absurd things preached by society. “Observe what this beneficiary criterion of morality does to a man’s life. The first thing he learns is that morality is his enemy; he has nothing to gain from it, he can only lose; self-inflicted loss, self-inflicted pain...” (Rand, 1964, 6) Sacrificing oneself for others makes it obligatory for the other to sacrifice him for the first party whenever such a situation occurs. However, it is not compulsory but (morally) obligatory, the person has to perform similar act of sacrifice for the other party and the result of such mutual sacrifice is “mutual resentment not pleasure and that, morally, their pursuit of values will be like an exchange of unwanted, unchosen Christmas presents, which neither is morally permitted to buy for himself” (Rand, 1964, 6). It becomes necessary to note here again that no two individuals are alike. Everyone comes from different background, different personality and different sets of principles. Therefore, to expect the similar kind of behaviour from everyone is quite absurd. No doubt that the society has differentiated people on the basis of their status, but in order to maintain the social living, it is requisite of every member to display certain commonalities. Now coming back to the question of self-sacrifice, when the first party sacrifices for the second party, the situation demanding the sacrifice may differ from the situation when, the second party was obliged to sacrifice for the first party. It could be quite possible that it is the matter of obligation more than of consent in this sacrificing game. And this is where the failure of the society lies, even if the second party is not willing to sacrifice, he/she has to do the same and if decided otherwise, he/she is liable to be judged. Here it becomes clear that on the societal level, obligations play a huge role more than mutual consent. Now coming to the case of Meursault, he neither takes

from anyone and nor he gives to anyone. In this sense he has no obligations. He is free from all the give and take business. But he is still judged under emotional content.

Despite of all the differences, people tend to have common emotions however, displaying the emotions is not similar to all. Emotion plays a huge role in society, each individual of a group tend to have an emotional feeling for his fellow beings. If emotion is not involved, the group will be mechanical. And it requires proper display of proper emotions at certain times. Emotion is what binds the group together. There is every possibility that a person might not have any feelings for someone of the group with whom he/she has no personal relation. But if that person fails to display enough sympathy for the other person when the situation demands he/she would be judged as an emotionless person. In this way, the emotional content of the society also makes it obligatory, just like morality, to display proper emotions at times. Emotion is very personal thing but it also is, in a way controlled by the group. Meursault certainly loved his mother but his failure in displaying prolonged emotional distress made him immoral and a 'bad son' in the eyes of society. His understanding of life and death and his habit of getting used to everything (as his mother suggested) are something not considered as virtue but his lack of emotional display is found to be disturbing.

It is frivolous to note that society expected him to display prolonged emotional distress despite of his personal feelings. He is expected not to have any other longings at physical level after his mother's death. He is judged for physical intimacy, sleeping and for a cup of coffee which seems pretty absurd. Losing one's family member has strong emotional impact but it does not mean that the affected people need to leave away everything behind. Some people may suffer stronger effects but Meursault is certainly not among those. He is a rational man, but he also has feelings. He remembers the

lessons given by his mother, he wanted to see her face immediately after arriving at the spot, but his physical anxiety took over his emotional state. The popular proverb ‘a sound mind in a sound body’ indicates that a sound body is pre-requisite of a sound mind. Physical state highly determines mental state. After taking a bus journey in the boiling heat, Meursault was already tired and feeling dizzy, so he slept and had a cup of coffee. Similarly he had a longing for physical intimacy which is also justified in the light of Sartre “I am a sexual being, able to have relations with a being of other sex...” (Mairet, 1948). Moreover, physical needs and emotional needs are two different things, no doubt that they are interdependent, but sometimes they can function otherwise. Consider the following, if someone’s family member dies, will he/she stop being hungry or thirsty because of the loss? He/she might suppress the appetite for a time but when it grows and becomes difficult to suppress, he/she will decide to eat a loaf and have some coffee. If this was not the case all the family members of the deceased will die. Similar is the case with Meursault. He felt sad but physical impulses took over his emotions and he acted that way. He is troubled by his body and since he is a rational man, he accepted the reality as soon as he can and decided to get what his body demands.

S. Marc Cohen in his “Aristotle and Individualism” writes about what Aristotle understood to be an individual and writes that there is a qualitative difference between every individual. This difference is due to the fact that the qualities and attributes or all the ‘matters’ that are there in an individual can not be found totally in another individual (Cohen, 44). Therefore, no two individuals are similar. In this sense, expecting the same behaviour from all itself is an absurd demand. The society in Camus’s novel fails to

acknowledge Meursault's difference, fails to understand his personality and thus treats him as an 'outsider'.

Another interesting thing in this novel is the issue of religion. Meursault does not believe in god or afterlife. He simply likes to let the things happen without making any fuss about anything. Moreover, religion is a very personal thing and in a society, everyone should respect each others beliefs and faiths. But because of his atheistic attitude Meursault has been called an 'anti Christ' by the examining magistrate (Camus, 2010, 70). He was also tried to be convinced both by the magistrate and the chaplain when he said he did not believe in God "he told me that it was impossible, that all men believed in God, even those who wouldn't face up to him" (Camus, 2010, 68). The magistrate got 'exultant' when Meursault faked to agree so as to cut short the conversation and in a way, tried to impose the faith on him. When Meursault rejected again, he called Meursault a 'hardened soul' (Camus, 2010, 69). Again in the prison, a chaplain tries to force Meursault into religion. This is what happens when one goes against or do not agree to the common belief. Meursault's atheism is something unacceptable to the society and he was questioned regarding his faith, because there is no place for the people who do not go the way others go. It is the society's failure to see "that there are many different ways of living your life and dealing with your emotions" (Maher, 280).

Lastly, Camus's remark of Meursault as the 'only Christ modern civilization deserves' needs due consideration (Camus, 2010, 119). Camus had made this ironical statement due to the fact that since the modern society is so pretentious and fake, the only type of person who could save himself/herself untouched by all these is Meursault. Just like Jesus Christ who was crucified, Meursault is also condemned for something of

which he was not guilty. Eamon Maher writes “the criticism inherent in his comment is aimed at a society which has stubbornly tried to conceal its nastier side and which chooses to live by appearances” (Maher, 276). The society which so very emphasizes appearances does not deserve respect according to Camus. People who try to follow their ideals in a socially inclined environment will end up being lost. Therefore Meursault fits perfectly as a rebel who is very much indifferent to everything and everyone. “Indeed, Meursault’s undisguised indifference obliquely exposes the hypocrisy of a society which veils its lethargy by performing ritualistic acts, exposes the failure of a society to provide for a meaningful quest. Meursault’s non-involvement is his answer to a society that does not care about him” (Slochower, 293). What the society focuses is on holding its conventions up no matter what. Meursault does not care about what the society wants, the moral code, emotional standard or convention, all these are of less value to him but he is fairly true to himself. Since the society can not accept a man the way he is, Meursault refuses the society.