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**Concept of the Epistemological Thoughts of Major Human Conscience: A Paradigm Shift of The Cognition of Being Existence to that of Non-Existent of Camus' *The Myth Of Sisyphus***

SHANTANU SIULI<sup>1</sup>, SARBANI SIULI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, H&SS, ICAFI University Tripura, India  
Email ID: [shantanusiuli@iutripura.edu.in](mailto:shantanusiuli@iutripura.edu.in)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Science, K K College of Engineering & Mangtt. Biharsharif, Nalanda, Bihar, India.

ABSTRACT



SHANTANU SIULI



SARBANI SIULI

Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* strongly incorporates a fundamental conflict between what we want really from this universe and what we search in the universe, defining a clash between existence and being as non-existence. Though the story was based on Greek myth of Sisyphus, it allegorically symbolizes Sisyphus as the symbol of humankind and his work as the specimen of human existence too. Sisyphus deserved to be bound up for all his mischievous deeds that Camus investigated through the existence of humankind of this rough universe. By his psychological work *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus conveyed the journey of human beings as a futile, abash and vast prototype of apathetic life and managed to vouchsafe the strong establishment of human beings articulately. *The Myth of Sisyphus* projects a tyrannical and benevolent archetypal of the condition of the Greek legend Sisyphus symbolizing the dichotomy of the power and powerlessness, fortune and misfortunes, furthermore, quite unsymmetrical practices onto the projection of this universe. *The Myth of Sisyphus* is a fine specimen of aridness of misfortune of a hero who was coercion in nature by default, unable to ample to have a delectable deeds of life. The life of humans, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, is deluged and somehow, seems to be roused by an unprincipled demagogue. To be being is to be non-existent seeming rigorously self-denying. The story innocuously presents the very wretchedness of human conditions and seeks to reply the ultimate questions regarding human existence.

Key words: The human existence, non-existent of being, dolorous moments, dichotomy of the power and powerlessness, existentialism philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

*The Myth of Sisyphus* was first published in French in 1942 as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, at the same year of the publication of Camus' another novel *The Stranger* (as *L'Etranger*). It sympathetically demonstrates the contemporary nihilism with some strong sentiments of absurdism. The central essay is

of an eminent person of the mythological figure of Sisyphus, one of the wisest men on earth, extremely skilled in cheap and showy manner and the founder of Corinth. After plotting the gods, Zeus ostracized him into Tartarus, a prison like land beneath the underworld. Here Sisyphus endlessly performs the task of rolling the rock up the hill, just to have it roll

back to start a new. At the outset, the novel poses a critical question whether life is worth living and a mere substance of ponderous dilemma. Brought face to face with this absurd world, a person longs for the answers that would clarify his position and purpose in this universe, but being unable to find the satisfactory explanations he or she succumbs to despair. The very irrationality of human existence with regard to the world triggers this desperate dilemma of life's worthiness or worthlessness. This seemingly futile existence, devoid of purpose drives a person to the brink of despair and makes him contemplate suicide out of sheer despondency and hopelessness. In an attempt to provide a meaning to this meaningless existence, some philosophers commit, as Camus puts it, "Philosophical suicide" by espousing rationality with irrational beliefs in God and afterlife. For Camus, an ideal or authentic individual is one who rejects suicide, both physically and philosophically, and thereby heroically accepts his/her human condition without resorting to self-deceptive, religious illusions. However, this harsh reality with no consolation of eternal life offers freedom of action and choice and imposes no moral standards which would restrict individual's life and confine it to the set of outworn conventional values. Camus is always insisting in his essays that there is no ultimate difference between philosophy and poetry; and *The Myth of Sisyphus* is arrested with a host of symbolic figures in addition to the legendary sufferer of the title.

Allegorically *The Myth of Sisyphus* is the substance of human race of frailty, paralyzed with horror, fear or surprise and what Sisyphus did is a symbol of what we do in our daily life with the feeling of displeasure and indignation. Sisyphus recollects all the physical strength in his arms and giving the complete physical labour he pushes up the rock. It takes a long time to roll the rock up to the top of the hill but with in a second it rolls down and Sisyphus has to repeat again and again. He has to come down, the period of decent. Here the absurd is contradictory that can not be solved within the projection of human beings. And perhaps the most notable dissatisfaction of Sisyphus' life is his unbiased and dissociated relationship with his wife. According to Sisyphus' reaction, we realize that he

feels slighted by her not seeking to do best for her despite his explicit directions. There is no easy solution to the conflict, and none is given in the piece. What sort of value is to be seen both in the life of Joshua who used to toil herself in the mundane factory regularly and Sisyphus who was laboring on the hill? Absurdity, from an existential point of view, is reverberating to find its meaning when there is no meaning to be found at all. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus redefines how an honest affirmation of life can come into existence without gyrating it down to external influences. It is life which matters and understands, the pure ability to be part of this world.

Critics of the Western thoughts inspects that *The Myth of Sisyphus* derives as a philosophical spinning of a novel. Sisyphus has to accept the absurdity around him in order to overcome it. Camus uses the lack of information about Sisyphus to create his own story about the man alone with a rock. Nothing seems to be scarier than working for no results and always starting all over again, apparently with no aim. This is the point where Camus, like a lawyer, takes position for Sisyphus and works in his theory of the absurd. The feeling of Absurdity may bring about a crisis of meaning, or a destabilization of the set of commitments that we organize our lives around. It may manifest as a loss or an undermining of what we conceive to make life meaningful. We inherently desire some transcendent explanation by which we can understand our place in the world, or to generally make sense of it; we may seek to know the world itself as a whole, but we cannot. If we could understand the world as a whole, we would no longer have a place in it, because the world must be estranged from us as individuals—it must be beyond us. To have a relationship with the world, we must be separated from it, and we are. The world is simply not reasonable, and cannot be reduced to anything comprehensible, and within this void between the human desire for meaning and the absence of any comprehensible to us exists the Absurd. Though he definitely earns his punishment, many people have found connection with his plight. It seems like a lot of folks have moments where they feel like whatever stuff they're doing is as tiresome

and pointless as Sisyphus' endless task. Living without appeal, the viable third option and rebellion against the Absurd, is choosing to experience life even in the midst of the Absurd, to accommodate our perception of the world as only what we can know of it.

#### Discussion

Albert Camus belonged to the world of North Africa: a world of seedy, second-rate towns and the ruins of classical importance; but also a world of endless and versatile spaces, of the sea and the desert under an unmitigated sun that dispels all illusions. Camus has developed a rhetoric, rich and varied, a style quite surprising to anyone who has assumed that the narrative technique of *The Stranger*, disjointed, spare, dry, points out the real voice of the author. Eventually, he found some solace in the concept of nihilism fused with the aggrandizement of men. *The Myth of Sisyphus* is a deeply humanistic book indeed. Even though the word 'fate' appears several times, it is meant in terms of fear: fear of a (wrong) decision, a situation or a life – in short, representations of the absurd. Since this is no solid soil for an individual to grow on, this state of fear is only overcome by faith in the self. Camus' essay is a celebration of the individual without falling into self-indulgence or egotism. Nonetheless, Camus puts special emphasis on the community as shown in his later works like *La peste* or *Les justes*. A strong individual creates a strong community and can change the world. This change does not have to literally move mountains from a definite point to another, but can simply be caused by a change in perception, a paradigm shift. Living with the absurd, Camus suggests, is a matter of facing this fundamental contradiction and maintaining constant awareness of it. Facing the absurd does not intensify suicide, but, on the contrary, allows us to live life to its fullest.

The central conflict, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, is presented by Camus to be Sisyphus' fateful duty in the underworld of rolling a stone up a hill each day just to watch it fall back to where it started. But, it is preceded in the narrative by a few lines about the time between his putting Death in chains and his capture. "But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm

stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were of no avail. Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth." Comments about Sisyphus' persistent love of nature and existence seem antithetical to his awareness of the futility of his own fate, yet Camus is careful to indicate that Sisyphus is still consoled by nature, still warmed by the sun by the coast, still very much craving a life in the natural world. This is an important argument in Existentialism, because it confronts the idea that awareness about the futility of life should bring about apathy, spite and suicide. Through Sisyphus, Camus shows, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, why that isn't true; life is still rich in experience, though it lacks inherent meaning. Camus suggests that Sisyphus can be happy because of his capacity to be free. He can be free not by escaping his task, but by accepting the absurdity of it. Once he knows he is in this situation where no meaning can be found, Sisyphus is freed to create his own meaning.

Camus looks around at the world and sees people dying both for values that they deem more important than themselves, as well as because they are simply suicidal; and third, Camus understands that all other philosophical positions can be rescinded with ease, but the question of a value in life cannot. It is in its own world, and thus Camus seeks to evaluate it above all else. Camus then proceeds to give a mini genealogy of how he views suicide, namely, as an act done solely in one's heart (he likens it to a piece of artwork) and who's explanations must transcend the typical "oh, he was sad". In fact, Camus posits, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, a different view of suicide, one of confession when he says "...killing yourself amounts to confessing. Camus implies in his work that the only meaning that can be drawn from life must be intrinsic, since any extrinsic value or meaning is nonexistent or well beyond the realm of human intelligibility. Suicide and denial in the face of the Absurd are counteractive to good living. Acknowledging the notion of absurdity, the absence of concrete answers or formulas or meaning in existence, stands as an unavoidable concept beyond comprehension, which should not dictate any existence because of

its scope beyond true intelligibility, makes for good living. Life cannot be lived well without an understanding of the Absurd, because any understanding of existence or life absent or in denial of the notion of the Absurd would innately be false—and in that falsehood so could all other aspects of that life be perceived incompletely false. An understanding of and rebellion against the Absurd, as it is in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, must be attained and employed if one is to fully exercise their own existence. In doing this, we can live well in finding intrinsic value and meaning in our lives. In his study of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Kamber objectively evaluates the essay and makes critical remarks exposing some flaws in the work. Kamber critically examines philosophical ideas scattered throughout Camus's works.

Camus says that Sisyphus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, is happy and he should be happy because he has accepted the punishment given to him. When he is on the bottom, he has a hope that he will reach on the top. Even for a second he is on the top of the hill and looks up and smiles. It is his movement of happiness and scorn to the fate maker. He also suggests us that we should be hopeful of getting happiness but happiness is always momentary. He says that we should try to make our own fate and should hate the fate maker. Therefore, he says that there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn. He even says that there is no sun without shadow or happiness and absurdity are the two sons of the same mother earth. What he means is that, without facing the absurdity, we cannot get happiness but it is not necessary that happiness must come after absurdity. We should hope but should not be sure of happiness because it is momentary. As there is shadow after the light there is absurdity with happiness, so happiness and absurdity go together like the two sons of the same mother earth. What makes life absurd is our inability to know ourselves and the world's meaning even though we desire such knowledge. "...what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart." Sisyphus possesses the satisfaction of awareness, the modest pleasure of honest

confrontation with the bleak conditions of his existence.

"But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were of no avail. Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth. A decree of the gods was necessary."

(Paragraph 3; line 6-9)

It is a gloss on the life and works of Camus himself, an obsessively lucid author who refused the spurious consolations of actions and expressions that divert readers from the truth. Camus concedes, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, that some people can be understood via the "totality of their deeds" which means that, at some level, there is a way to create order, or at least understanding, in the world. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest— whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer. And if it is true, as Nietzsche claims, that a philosopher, to deserve our respect, must preach by example, you can appreciate the importance of that reply, for it will precede the definitive act. These are facts the heart can feel; yet they call for careful study before they become clear to the intellect. Camus' writing has captured the internal plight of much of the modern world. When a person begins to question their own monotonous reality, seeking to find meaning behind their daily motions of life and failing to find any at all, they come to contemplate that void. Camus implies that if one were to honestly think about "nothing," it would be the contemplation of the futility of most unanswered and answered questions in life.

Men, too, secrete the inhuman. Heidegger considers the human condition coldly and announces that that existence is humiliated. The only reality is "anxiety" in the whole chain of beings. To the man lost in the world and its diversions this anxiety is a brief, fleeting fear. But if that fear becomes conscious of itself, it becomes anguish, the

perpetual climate of the lucid man "in whom existence is concentrated." The world is peopled with such irrationals. The world itself, whose single meaning I do not understand, is but a vast irrational. If one could only say just once: "This is clear," all would be saved. But these men vie with one another in proclaiming that nothing is clear, all is chaos, that all man has is his lucidity and his definite knowledge of the walls surrounding him. The insignificance of human life in comparison to the infinite void of space and the abstract concept of time, which rules over humanity, is the notion which can manifest in the minds of men and bring about Absurdity. The notion of Absurdity may manifest in a young college student, raised Catholic and attending a Catholic university. Thrust into adult life, typical trial and tribulation may cause him to reject his faith, and he may realize the Absurd in the absence of what had been his false understanding of the world, a void now filled with his disappointment in the world's indecipherable complexity, despite his desire to understand it.

"It is said that Sisyphus, being near to death, rashly wanted to test his wife's love. He ordered her to cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife." (paragraph 3; line 1-5)

Camus's main thesis, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, is an answer to the futility of life. He argues that man ought to despise his fate and thwart the capricious nature of existence through an awareness of his poor state, and through continuing on the pursuits of his own vain desires. Camus remarks that existential philosophers generally try to evade this confrontation with the absurd. He is definite that he does not intend to discuss the thought of these philosophers as a whole, but simply their encounter with the absurd. Each one of them tries somehow to resolve the conflict between human reason and an irrational universe in one way or another. The irrational, the human nostalgia, and the absurd that is born of their encounter—these are the three

characters in the drama that must necessarily end with all the logic of which an existence is capable.

In all these cases, from the simplest to the most complex, the magnitude of the absurdity will be in direct ratio to the distance between the two terms of my comparison. There are absurd marriages, challenges, rancour, silences, wars, and even peace treaties. For each of them the absurdity springs from a comparison. Camus sees, through *The Myth of Sisyphus*, this question of suicide as a natural response to an underlying premise, namely that life is absurd in a variety of ways. But Camus also thinks it absurd to try to know, understand, or explain the world, for he sees the attempt to gain rational knowledge as futile. He makes the seriousness of the question clear by essentially threatening to think through the problem, come to an answer, and then carry out that answer, even if it means to die. Camus writes that it is essential that we do not die of our own free will because our embracing the absurd leads us to take all of life and give what we have. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus fabulously describes our human lives as similar to the torture of Sisyphus, who was condemned to roll the same stone up the same hill, just to have it roll down again, over and over until the end of time. Sisyphus was being punished in part because he had escaped the underworld once and lived some years enjoying life on earth. Now he is back in the underworld at his quintessentially meaningless task. Camus finds this absurd and he finds coping with the absurd heroic. Sisyphus perseveres and resists the lure of suicide. Camus holds that suicide tempts us with the illusory promise of freedom, but the only real freedom is to embrace the absurdity:

"You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth." (paragraph 4; line1-5)

Camus argues that life is meaningless and absurd. Still we can and have to revolt against the absurdity, and find some small modicum of happiness. Essentially Camus, through *The Myth of Sisyphus*, asks if there is a third alternative between acceptance of life's absurdity or its denial by embracing dubious metaphysical propositions. Can we live without the hope that life is meaningful, but without the despair that leads to suicide? If the contrast is posed this starkly it seems an alternative appears—we can proceed defiantly forward. We can live without faith, without hope, and without appeal. A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it. A man deprived of hope and conscious of being so has ceased to belong to the future. That is natural. But it is just as natural that he should strive to escape the universe of which he is the creator. All the foregoing has significance only on account of this paradox. Certain men, starting from a critique of rationalism, have admitted the absurd climate. Nothing is more instructive in this regard than to scrutinize the way in which they have elaborated their consequences. There is no higher destiny, Camus declares in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The absurd man is the master of his days. When he gazes backward over his life, he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, and like Sisyphus and his rock, the whole seemingly unreasonable effort turns out to have meaning, just because it constituted his life. We are stronger than our rock. Sisyphus and the rock can be a man and his tedious, repetitive work, but the rock is also life itself, even if there is no task to perform that is as onerous as the labor of Sisyphus. But Jaspers will provide us, in a form of caricature, a typical example of this attitude. As a result the rest will be clearer. He is left powerless to realize the transcendent, incapable of plumbing the depth of experience, and conscious of that universe upset by failure. Will he advance or at least draw the conclusions from that failure? He contributes nothing new. He has found nothing in experience but the confession of his own impotence and no occasion to infer any satisfactory principle. Avi Sagi suggests that in claiming this Camus is not speaking as an irrationalist—which is, after all, how he regards the existentialists—but as

someone trying to rationally understand the limits of reason.

#### Conclusion

Camus urges us to “die unreconciled and not of one's own free will”. In short, he recommends a life without consolation, but instead one characterized by lucidity and by acute consciousness of and rebellion against its mortality and its limits. Camus' genius felt on the way of how he derived the obligations of human beings' absurdity and uncertainty that measures the strong notion of non-existentialism. The creation and the creator define two dimensional poles, that Camus incorporated in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which can't be defined with the same ideology of existence and non-existence. We are defined, not in its fullest way, but we are subjugating by ultimate, we are absurd to be unknown of our knowings, and unlike Sisyphus we are to work with frailty, with nothingness and apparently meaningless too. Camus' way of interpretation of the human frailty and existence of life is nonetheless superlative with the ideology of stark note of absurd psychology. To be being, through and by the context of Camus' existentialism, in this web, is to be nothing like anything else to establish the identity, i.e. self identity. It's a psychological process of going of a being to attain the identity through the verisimilitude of the world of absurdity. Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, decreed that identity of human, in this projected world, is important but not the identifier itself because, according to his point of view, to find out the meaning of identifier is to raise the domain of absurdity, to nurture the non-verbal hypothesis of meta-identity, with which human beings are associated since the era of postmodernism. *The Myth of Sisyphus* heightens the message of desolation of human frailty paralyzing the human conscience and symbolizes the major question of the existence of human beings succinctly. Camus' intention of showing human beings as ruddy and sleazy through the character Sisyphus, was archetypal corroborating the notion of meaningless life. Camus advocates that Sisyphus might have enjoyed the task given to him. But the moment when he tried to communicate his past remarkable and memorable life with that of his present, destiny

lurked on him. Camus concedes that acknowledging “crushing truths” like the misfortune of his fate is sufficient enough to give them less quelling.

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