

## *Chapter - III*

### *CONCEPT OF ABSURDITY*

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The word absurd first came into light in Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of Absurd* in 1961. In his book he states, "*Absurdity originally means 'out of harmony' in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition: out of harmony with reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable, illogical.*"<sup>1</sup> In the view of Eugene Ionesco, "*Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose.....cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.*"<sup>2</sup> Albert Camus writes:

*A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty is a familiar world. But in a universe suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and the setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.*<sup>3</sup>

The above quoted views give an idea of absurdity. There is a correlation between existentialism and absurdism. Existentialism which refers that human being has his own responsibility to give meaning of his life, henceforth, is free to make decisions and choice and asserts on nihilism. While existentialism asserts on providing a purpose to life, absurdism deals with meaninglessness of life. To follow or to crave for a particular object or goal in life has no meaning, so it is meaningless to give meaning to life.

An absurd discards the reason and logic and one of the perfect examples of 'Deconstruction'.

This phenomenon of absurdity or meaninglessness, a layman confronts several times; some struck with it and lost touch with the world and believe living as futile process. Keeping aside religious, aesthetic and spiritual views an absurd tries to make himself happy with present having no future and no any past. In the eye of absurd one each moment has its own worth to live; indirectly an absurd automatically connects with the purpose: purpose of living the moment. Man is still ignorant of his beginning and this ignorance creates hurdles. Man should attain "*a tranquil homeland where death itself is a happy silence.*"<sup>4</sup> The delusion leads him towards absurdism. Absurdism is a way of living with new interpretations and completely detached with old ways of living.

Although, in Indian context it is very difficult to find a complete absurd like Camus' Meursault in *Stranger* but growing and developing India's inhabitants have also some peculiar traits of absurdity from which they are ignorant. An analysis of these traits in Deshpande's characters, plots and theme of the novel has been done to show absurdity which is touching Indian surface. The concept of absurdity arises after Second World War in the art of drama and this theme is quite popular, now, in all genre of literature. Martin Esslin writes:

*The Theatre of Absurd, however, can be seen as the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time. The hallmark of this attitude is its sense that*

*the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and some-what childish illusions. The decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism and various totalitarianism fallacies. All this shattered by the war...*<sup>5</sup>

### **A Matter of Time**

*A Matter of Time* begins with the concrete and elaborate descriptions of the old big house of Kalyani whose ancestors belong to Peshwa. The comprehensive presentation of the old big house is good enough to demonstrate the prosaic and dry life of inhabiting people in it and we sense the feeling of absurdity which runs through the theme of the novel. In fact, the novel begins with the Sumi, watching a circus scene in a movie. To depict the scene of circus, Deshpande visualizes the circus as a parody of human life, where acrobats in their unmatched, bright, multi-coloured costumes and painted faces and pointed concaved features, smile on lips make people feel laugh while hiding pain and suffering inside the mind and heart. In making her stories real, Deshpande chooses incidents and some movie so that realistic affect may be produced. The song played in circus '*Jeena Yaha Marna Yaha*' is taken from the world where we really exist. While hearing this song Sumi contemplates and analyses the song which visibly exhibits her understanding of absurd thoughts. To her the song signifies man's belief in no life after death and hence to think about another world after death is absurd. Sumi takes this song like this:

*That this world is all we have and therefore there is nowhere else for us to go? That we have to live here and die here? Or does it mean: this is what we have, this area of action is enough for us, we live here and die here, we need no more?”<sup>6</sup>*

The plot of the novel is based on the theme of absurdity and incidents are connected with easy efforts to make a balance in the story. The characters are divided into two categories: one that suffers even identify or pray of the absurdity and other one group that suffers the consequences of the absurdity felt by others. In this novel, Gopal shows most of the traits of an absurd among other characters. The speeches he utters are out of other’s understanding. Suddenly, Sumi’s husband Gopal feels absurdity and he decides to go away from Sumi and his three daughters: Aru, Charu and Seema and moves on in his life. His reason of abandoning his family is beyond one’s understanding. Camus says that when man becomes aware of his senseless existence in the world and he finds no charm in day-today activities the feeling of absurdity arises. To Camus, *“At any streetcorner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face. As it is, in its distressing nudity, in its light without effulgence, it is elusive.”<sup>7</sup>*

A man does not turn into an absurd suddenly but the feeling of absurdity is always deep buried in human mind. Camus again states, *“Like great works, deep feelings always mean more than they are conscious of saying.”<sup>8</sup>* Gopal does not accidentally leaves his family. From the initial stages of his life he develops absurd vision in his mind. The absurdity is visible at several places: he abruptly leaves his sister Sudha and her family

in Bombay and arrives at Shivpur without giving any reason and in the next spell of his life he leaves his university job and when Sumi decided to get married with him, he clearly expresses his absurd thoughts about life which Sumi could not comprehend at that time. But now, she gets the depth of the words: *“You said that at any time if either of us wanted to be free, the other would let go. We are not going to be tied together, you said. No handcuffs, you said.”*(A Matter of Time-221)

While Gopal familiarizes Sumi about his abrupt departure, she says nothing; even she does not make any effort to bring Gopal back to home. Her daughters are disturbed with the fact but more agonizing to them is the normal routine of their mother as if she has no interest in this. The acceptance of the fact never brings any anger, regret and distress in Sumi’s mind. She lets him go easily from their life and this is the real cause of Aru’s anger on Sumi’s part. To make balance what had happened with them, Sumi walks on her parents’ old big house with her three daughters. They all try to find out the reason of Gopal’s divergence and make their own maps in the mind but all in vain. They are truly unable to find the cause and what Gopal offers them is out of their understanding.

Sumi develops a unique relationship with Gopal out of the social pattern. She never asks Gopal anything of his decision. For his quitting a university job, she responds, *“for heaven’s sake, does it matter why he is doing it! He doesn’t want to go on and that’s that!”*(A Matter of Time-16) Bewildered they all try hard to cope with this abandoning of Gopal and for them this walking out is more painful and worse than the death because their mind is set to follow the pattern but this unusual happening stirs

them. The feeling of alienation leads them into the state of dead helplessness and yet a hope of returning of Gopal remains in their mind.

Camus says when once man feels absurd he tries to analyse what is true and what is false. He suspects in the working of universe and the ways of God and he becomes stranger in his own life and he sustains the void inside him. The feeling of emptiness hovers him all the time and at this stage he accepts the absurd. While accepting the absurd, man feels no meaning in life henceforth he tries to commit suicide but Camus asserts that suicide is not the revolt of an absurd. An absurd should enliven absurd inside him until it ceases itself.

Gopal is a perfect exponent of an absurd in Camus' term. When Gopal identifies the absurdity in life, he tries to rethink about each happening and no longer believes in the truths which are long deep laid in human mind. For Gopal, life exists only in what we have faith. If belief starts to shake, everything gets changed in blink. In his facing the absurd Gopal thinks what makes man is only his belief. He says, "*These beliefs are part of people's life; to do away with them is to make a rent in the fabric of their lives.*" (A Matter of Time-99)

After abandoning his family Gopal lives with his old student's home and works in his printing press. The news no longer remains hideous and it gets hold of his family. One by one all come to know the reason and they persuade him to return. Gopal rounds off his reason and shows his absurd feelings and thoughts; he prepares speeches to utter. When at first, Ramesh comes to see him, he fumbles the perfect words and sentences so that he

could let him easily tell about his absurd walk from their lives. He thinks, *“It’s a kind of illness, a virus, perhaps, which makes me incapable of functioning as a full human being, as a husband and father.”* (A Matter of Time-41) His disbelief in life is more clearly seen in the next speech he utters, *“I stopped believing in the life I was leading suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I knew I could not go on.”* (A Matter of Time-41)

Kalyani, the mother-in-law of Gopal, aghast and comes to persuade him. When her all surmises do not fit in Gopal’s account and she does not find any satisfactory and desirable reply she irritates and leaves him with complaint. Aru, too, visits with the same purpose as other did; she also tries to know on her way the reason but fails, and returns empty handed. Gopal wants to tell her that he was suffering from emptiness inside him which never let him to go on an easy way, he thinks to tell her, *“I was frightened, Aru frightened of the emptiness within me, I was frightened of what I could do to us, to all of you with that emptiness inside me.”* (A Matter of Time-50) He apprehends the void in him and unable to express. Camus states, *“Between the certainties I have of my existence and the content try to give to that assurance the gap will never be filled. Forever I shall be a stranger to myself.”*<sup>9</sup>

The same world of loneliness and emptiness Sudha feels after the death of her husband. She is terrified with the world; attaches with the basic truth of life, lives absurdly and never returns to the normal pattern of life. Samuel Becket in his *Waiting for Godot* never clarifies who and what is Godot. In his most absurd play, he leaves it to his readers to identify the Godot. To Gopal this emptiness is Godot. He says, *“Emptiness, I realized*

*then, is always waiting for us.”(A Matter of Time-52)*The only reality of human existence is endless waiting until death comes. Gopal finds himself alone having a beautiful wife and children at the age of 46. He feels stranger among them and sees life in different perspectives where to pay the responsibility towards other human beings in life is like drowning of a person to whom, other one in his hopelessness clings. For him, to live amid the relationships is forgetfulness. He says, “*some day, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth.* “ (A Matter of Time-52)

In the progressive India, where less people read Camus, Kierkgaard and other absurdist writers, it is very difficult for an average Indian to understand Gopal’s absurd leaving. In India, where rituals, puja, faith in God and the sense of responsibility or duty is the part of man’s life, it is almost a crime to leave three daughters: two of marriageable age and one a child. Like a true absurd he senses of being free from all responsibilities and duties. In his contemplations, he utters, “*was a man to be tied to his duties forever? Could he never be free?*”(A Matter of Time-45) Gopal could be free from all duties by embracing absurd as he did. Camus says:

*The absurd man feels released from everything outside that passionate attention crystallizing in him. He enjoys a freedom with regard to common rules. It can be seen at this point that the initial themes of existential philosophy keep their entire value. The return to consciousness, the escape from everyday sleep represent the first step of absurd freedom.*<sup>10</sup>

In his thinking of Aru's question of getting married and having children, he presents a bizarre fact which is unexpected in hearing: "*I wanted it all.*" (A Matter of Time-68) He presents contradictory views about life. He feels, "*a man is always an outsider*" (A Matter of Time-68) seems completely absurd thought. As Sartre reiterates that feelings and sentiments are "*merely the abstracting and the meaning of discontinuous impressions.*"<sup>11</sup> As an Absurd, Gopal presents different interpretations of each happening. He feels discrimination between male and female which nature has made by bestowing the power and blessing of creation of her own species to woman while man has left purposeless: "*A man has no meaning; no actual purpose for living. A man has to search for it, always and forever.*" (A Matter of Time-68)

The feeling of annihilation is seen clearly, when he quotes Camus, "*The body shrinks from annihilation- Camus is right when he says this.*" (A Matter of Time-69) He accepts the absurd in his life. In a place he metaphorically accounts his absurd circumstances. He symbolizes desires as a rain tree which grows up in humanly world (humanly jungle) and are increased in the process of living (futile activity) during the life span (road) but he is away from ill desires, wills and is ignorant about what is going about him:

*Like the rain- trees on the road outside so very mysteriously, wonderfully flourishing in this human jungle, which seem to have raised themselves above all the futile activity on the road below, I am untouched but all that is happening under my window.* (A Matter of Time-43-44)

Gopal's each relative visits to talk and solve the mystery of his leaving but his mind is beyond their reach. Premi, Sumi's sister, too, reaches there and she too gets what other had in the response; an unintelligible reason of him. Gopal tries to explain Premi the truth of life and death. He finds life as mere pretensions, a lie which people do not comprehend. He also expresses people's ignorance of their own death which is near to come a day. They go on and on in life while believing in mortality. The emphasis and assumption on suffering, old age, loneliness and death is made for others but not for their own. He further explicates:

*The day we face the truth that we too are mortal, this is our fate as well, it will become difficult, almost impossible to go on. And it happens to all of us, the human race will become extinct...it happened to me. I stopped believing. (A Matter of Time-134)*

In this concern, Camus opines:

*What we fancy we know and what we really know, practical assent and simulated ignorance which allows us to live with ideas which if we truly put them to the test, ought to upset our whole life.<sup>12</sup>*

He reacts favorably to the meaninglessness of human life and cast asides to be lived for others. *"The meaning has to be found in your own life."*(A Matter of Time-134) On Aru's emphasis Surekha fixes her meetings with Gopal and Sumitra but she gets only a bit from Sumitra's side. While going through a long discussion with Gopal, Surekha becomes

aware of his views which she does not easily digest like others. Gopal says to her, *“our journeys are always separate that’s how they are meant to be. It we travel together for a while, that’s only for a coincidence.”* (A Matter of Time-212) Through Gopal, Deshpande makes visible her sense of fleeting existence of happiness. In almost each of her novel the feeling of happiness is never claimed to be the thing of present. It always dwells in past and aspirations for future. Gopal finds life as a chronicle of happening having no reason. He thinks that happiness is momentum and can’t be held.

Like a true absurd, Gopal disposes the reason. He does not find any reason to marry Sumi. He thinks it was preordained: *“The truth that I was going to marry Sumi, was already there, waiting for me.”* (A Matter of Time-66) The novel widely shows Deshpande’s reading of great philosophers: Camus, Kierkegaard and Freud through the character of Gopal. In this novel, he clearly exhibits his reading of them in several places and this is the main reason that Gopal could easily understand his absurd situation when he quotes Kierkegaard and Camus: *“Life must be lived forwards, but it can only be understood backwards. Said Kierkegaard.”* (A Matter of Time-98) At one other place there is elusion from Camus’ writing to turn his character in absurd one: *“History exists in the final analysis of God.”* (A Matter of Time-99) Gopal’s interpretation of destiny resemblances with one of Freud’s theory of conscious and subconscious, when he says:

*Destiny is just us, and therefore inescapable because we can never escape ourselves. Certain actions are inevitable*

*because we are what we are. In a sense we walk on chalked lines drawn by our own selves. (A Matter of Time-26)*

He does not believe in Fate or Destiny or something which is responsible for human actions and is preordained. He thinks human consciousness is responsible for giving different contours to life. But at some places Deshpande puts contrary views as sometimes he finds some unknown forces working on human mind. Camus reiterates, *“If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable.”*<sup>13</sup>

The scene of spider webbing its web in a continuation motion without interrupting seems to Sumi as its business of life as Camus symbolizes the task of Sisyphus who rolls up a stone again and again with great speed. The futility of human action in the same way has been depicted by Deshpande through spider to enhance the absurd effect in the novel: *“Sumi can see the spider still working on it, scuttling to the centre and then back. Over and over again.”*(A Matter of Time-110)

An absurd thinks, he is a creator, henceforth, he is the God. He chucks out the idea of omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent power which we call the God. In Deshpande's novels, the presence of male characters is minimal but in this novel their presence is visible with different perspectives. Not only Gopal travels in the absurd world but the other male characters as Sumi's father: Shripathi and Kalyani's father too make journey. Three of them have no faith in God which is prominent traits of an absurd. Kalyani's father places the big size idol of Ganesha in

the niche above the front door in his big house without intending to offer any puja. Kalyani's mother had complaints of its size but he neglects and says, "*he doesn't need any pujas, just leave him alone, he said.*" (A Matter of Time-115) Sumi like Madhu too disregards the existence of God who is enfeeble in changing the destiny. She regrets over the working of God who could not do anything good for the female members in her family. She hopelessly says, "*Even the gods can not fight human destiny.*" (A Matter of Time-116)

Sripathi also suffers absurd and never returns on the normal pattern of life. He and his wife Kalyani lost their retarded son during a journey and could not get him back again. He searches him for months but without result. Sripathi's attachment with his son is such a deep that the distance from him leads Sripathi in meaninglessness and he ensconced with absurd and non-existential thoughts. He not only cuts himself away from all his surroundings but with his wife too and passes next years without talking to her. When Sumi returns to her home with her daughters, he still remains indifferent from the surroundings and their world. There were only some colloquies between Sripathi and Sumi; Sripathi and Aru. He never confined them and let them free by their own way. Irony of life is implicit in the fact that he remains disconnected from the worldly life over thirty years of his life and died accidently with Sumi.

What happened with Kalyani years ago happens with Sumitra too. Their husbands denounce them and they have no option to accept the fact but their way of accepting absurd is different. In the character of Sumi, we feel some sense of identifying absurd. She never asks her husband any

reason and does not regret over the matter. She, too, suffers from absurdity though ignorant. She goes on in life as Gopal wishes; and accepts his abrupt leaving and tries to cope with the calamity with great efforts. She says, "*He's going his way and I have to go mine.*" (A Matter of Time-161) She further says, "*my father gave up everything and turned to solitude.*" (A Matter of Time-168) "*we are, all of us, always strangers to one another.*" (A Matter of Time-180) Her speeches realize us her absurd thoughts.

The introduction of death in the novel by Deshpande through Sumi is for the realization of sudden occurrence in human's life over which he has no control. Death is a point on which all efforts of humans go in vain and it is unavoidable. No preparations are made for this destination. Sumi's sudden accidental death shakes her family and the readers too. For Gopal, death is nothing but a battle against life and at a point the battle stops. Sumi's death too could not bring Gopal back in his family. Death leaves only nothingness and blankness but for Gopal it has nothing. He admits the fact and goes on in his way. He cognizes power of time which is a great healer. He thinks, "*Nothing is lost, each moment remains encapsulated in time.*" (A Matter of Time-238) For him "*acceptance is all*" (A Matter of Time-244) After few days of Sumitra's death he left Aru and Kalyani to let them go on their way. Philosophers assert that:

*when man gives up his compulsion to change the world and avoid death, he can then find happiness and will then no longer be a stranger to himself.*<sup>14</sup>

Suicide is never the path on which Camus' absurd run. Gopal, after facing the absurd does not commit suicide. He remains absurd throughout his life and never accepts God's ways of life. Camus thinks that many people commit suicide because they do not find any meaning in life but the same meaning causes the reason of their death. Camus' absurd asserts that life should be lived whether it has meaning or not: "*Living is keeping the absurd alive.*"<sup>15</sup> He says, "*In its way suicide settles the absurd. It engulfs the absurd in the same death. But I know that in order to keep alive, the absurd can not be settled.*"<sup>16</sup>

Deshpande interprets different incidents and characters of Epic like Mahabharata by Sumi and she finds absurdity in their conduct too. She sees the longing of human body to be free from each burden and human's search to be with himself in the characters of epic. Search for freedom always rests in human psyche. The accent of individuality runs through veins. Sumi sees Arjuna's and Draupati's disguise in Mahabharata with unique vision. She observes their disguise as mere an attempt to escape from the real world. She notices Draupati, "*she had often wanted to be by herself, to sleep alone, to be free for a while, of her five husbands.*" (A Matter of Time-85) and she analyses Arjuna's disguise by thinking, "*Arjuna, tired of the male world of war and violence...became Brihannala, the eunuch, so that he could enter the gentle world of women... and become an insider in this world.*" (A Matter of Time-86)

Novels of Deshpande present the turmoil in India. In *Small Remedies* massacre of Babri masjid is the ground on which the plot of the novel revolves. This very novel is the cry of human soul. And in the novel

*A Matter of Time* Kalyani is bewildered on the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The remark of Kalyani is the satire on the development in India: “‘*We’ve progressed, Gopal*’, Kalyani says. ‘*They killed the Mahatma with a pistol, Indira with a machine gun and now they’ve used a bomb on Rajiv.*’”(A Matter of Time-241) She projects the picture of terrified human psyche who feels unprotected in such circumstances by saying, “*How will our children live in this world, Gopala? Where did we go wrong? What have we done to them?*”(A Matter of Time-242)

The novel is pillared with philosophical ideas. Some have been told by third person narrator and others are related by Sumi and Gopal in first person narration. Some passages of the novel are the glimpse of befuddled human will. The realization of having one chance of living chills the human soul to fulfill the enormity of human action significantly. The situation raises the feeling of despair and they try to accomplish all dreams and wills by which they can fill the gap pleasantly. The novel shows the inevitability of moving on by surpassing whatever life brings in the way. So while going through the hardest moments of life an absurd is apathetic to human suffering and happiness and thinks that all is well as the characters of the novel feel. The essence of the concept of absurdity and life lies in the fact that “*all is well, everything is permitted, and nothing is hateful.*”<sup>17</sup>

Aru is disturbed when she is unable to remove the ruffles in her family and fails to bring her father back then her belief in pattern is shaken. She could not easily digest that and has no desire of going on in life with the muddle. While making the deep analysis of Yamuabai’s life she comes

to know what Arjuna knew years ago is that humans are instruments and their endless search of something is always corroborate in their mind. The plot advances with the progressing mind of Aru, who thinks about each happening and makes her vision to develop her psyche. The novel ends with the hope of Aru's part when she will understand her father's decision of leaving them in future.

### **If I Die Today**

In *If I Die Today* Deshpande explores death, meaninglessness of human relationship, fear from the confrontation of truth and murder in the sense of absurdity which exists only for the short period in the lives of the characters but at the end they conquer this sense of absurdity and accept the normal ways of life. *If I Die Today* often called crime novel deals with the concept of absurdity also. Throughout life man pursues one goal or another and creates the ambience of comfort about him, but at a sudden point he starts to contemplate about the happiness, about his possessions. All his efforts in life are directed in pursuit of endless series of deeds with a purpose of getting happiness. But suddenly he thinks if all efforts do not bring any happiness then it is useless to involve in them. At this moment his all efforts/adventures are seen to him meaningless, well to say absurd. Same actualization comes to Manju's psyche when she senses no happiness amid all comforts of her life: "*But looking back, I have to wonder whether there was any moment when I said to myself- I am happy.*"<sup>18</sup>

An absurd lives his life in present therefore to him happiness is the thing of present. People who are striving hard accomplishing any goal forget its presence in present and live miserable life. Manju contemplates, *“happiness was or will be. It never is.”*(If I Die Today-4) Manju has everything in her life what she wished: her husband is a pathologist in a well-known hospital; she works as a lecturer in a college; both had planned their lives and arranged it in their way. A comfortable family life, three years daughter, Sonu and a Nanny to take care of her and with next step they planned another child.

Manju always used to be craved being at home but now when she is at home because of her pregnancy she is bewildered: *“I am staying at home and honestly, it is getting on my nerves. I hate it.”*(If I Die Today-14)The pattern on which her life was speeding shrinks and there evolves another pattern with which she is unable to cope. At this point she feels her pregnancy a burden; a new pattern brings boredom, loneliness and inactivity in her life. Each day comprises of morning, afternoon, evening and night; the work is divided or set up according to the different periods of time. Each day is same but different. Monotonous routine and repetition of same pattern brings the feeling of absurdity in her mind. While going through the process of ‘maternity’ same routine affects her mental condition and she feels absurd, she says, *“One child more or less what does it matter?”*(If I Die Today-11)

Hopelessly she thinks life as a ‘cosmic accident’ which means meaningless occurrence. In the next speech, she further expresses her absurd thoughts, *“one sperm one ovum coming together- it’s just matter of*

*chance; what meaning can there be in it? Human life on this planet itself seems a bizarre chance.*"(If I Die Today-12) In the Plague, Camus suggests that, *"boredom or inactivity causes the individual to think. This is similar to the idea of meditation, an almost motionless activity, allowing the individual to think with clarity."*<sup>19</sup>

Manju fills the void of her life by thinking, watching what is going about her as Meursault in *Stranger* encounters his absurdity in the prison by memorizing what had happened in the past. Her absurd thoughts visualize time to time with the development of the plot. When she had to attend a get together organized by dean and his wife Rani she thinks while standing outside their home at the door: *"The same people, the same food, the same conversation. How damnably dull life was! Or, more accurately, how damnably dull we made it."*(If I Die Today-23)

Imprisoned in her pregnancy, Manju symbolizes human beings who is caught and trapped in this hostile world quests for freedom. Her other speech makes visible her absurd sense when she says, *"Motherhood, I thought.....it's a trap.....you forget what the word 'Freedom means."*(If I Die Today-49) She feels stranger in her own life when each beautiful relationship seems her disconnected. Her husband creates the ditch of desolation between them and her three years old daughter seeks her way in the company of Kamala. When Manju emphasizes doing something on her part, there is a clash among them. Manju sets so many small goals in her life but when things go out of her control she feels absurdity in her life. Adele King says:

*The absurd emphasizes man's freedom, a freedom where no good or bad choices can be made man's desires conflict with the indifference of the universe.*<sup>20</sup>

Through Manju, Deshpande figures the reality of an average Indian who in different periods of time experiences the absurd situation or absurdity. The stark comments over her circumstances are apt to demonstrate absurd in her life: *"I am failure.....Inevitability, which comes from being what we are."*(If I Die Today-46 ) /*"For all of us there comes a time when we can no longer hide our knowledge of what we are from ourselves."*(If I Die Today-48) Her craving for freedom from all relationships and traditional boundaries is modern human's cry to change all accepted beliefs and norms.

Camus states that man, after being conscious of his meaningless and senseless existence in the world discards the uselessness of his daily actions. Now, he is tired off his mental and physical agony and sees absurdities in his life. He says, *"Those flashes of reality come to him in the oddest places and at the oddest time."*<sup>21</sup> Realization of absurd directs man to be stranger in his own world as it happens with Manju. Deshpande insinuates Guru in some starting pages of the novel until the end. When cancer patient Guru arrives in doctors' life, there are ripples. They are muddled at this point of arrival about their own doings and flabbergasted on what type of life they were continuously living. Jiangzhu in his research paper reiterates:

*Disease, death and hunger are often regarded as the themes to discuss. Evil, crime and violence are often thought to be natural things in the society. When people come across these occasions, they would feel sad and sympathetic for the dead of the patients. But in the 'Theatre of Absurd, people consider it at an indifferent attitude. The world makes people feel unconcerned and even unmerciful.'*<sup>22</sup>

Like the characters of a conventional novel Meera and other characters feel helpless to confront a man who is about to die. When they become familiar about Guru's disease and death, they are compelled to think, "*What do you say to a man who's dying what you talk about.*"(If I Die Today-6) But Guru an unconventional tone is not afraid of his death. Like an absurd he accepts the unavoidable harsh reality of life and enjoys calmly and peacefully his remaining part of life. When he says, "*If I die Today, you die tomorrow*"(If I Die Today-8) reminds us Meursalt, Camus' one of the major absurd characters he states, "*all alike would be condemned to die one day*"<sup>23</sup> He easily accepts what comes next as Meursalt does. Guru, a gregarious impresses each one especially female folk because of his interest in other's life heading off his own life which really has no purpose. His amiable tone brings him close to each character of the novel.

In Camus's Stranger Meursalt's encounters with worldly life seem absurd to a layman. He is typical but complete absurd in the novel that has some noble and innocence values in his heart and never regrets over his deeds. Guru, in the novel, at some instances reminds us of Meursalt. An

absurd does not believe in any God and moral ethics. In his view all religious, moral and social codes are obscure and somehow responsible for man's predicament. A conventional character runs his life in believing these codes but Guru never does so. He leaves his pregnant beloved in the mid path of the life and passes ten years in exile; and after return he never seems to remorse over it. Emotions cultivated by moral, social and religious codes suppress the truth and brings absurdity in the lives of characters: *"To waste this one life you have in pretences in fake emotions, is a crime."*(If I Die Today-42)

Prabhakar Tambe's death in the novel is like the murder of the Arab by Meursalt where the hostile universe is responsible for the murder of an Arab. When the sharp shining knife shines in sun light and flashes on Meursalt's eyes he triggers on the pistol. The same thing happens with Shyam when he operates Tambe: *"there were multiple adhesions- he accidentally cut through major vessels/ he had a cardiac arrest and was gone."*(If I Die Today-106) It shows man's helplessness towards the indifferent universe. When he says, *"Sometime one just can't understand how things happen."*(If I Die Today-106) Meursalt does not make any effort to save him in the trial; he presents incidents as they were. He does not add any logic and goes on without contemplation. All the doctors involved in Tambe's operation take the responsibility of his death inwardly but they do not feel guilty. Camus writes:

*A man imbued with the absurd merely judges that those consequences must be considered calmly. It is ready to pay up. In other words, there may be some responsible person, but*

*there are not guilty one in its opinion. At very most, such a mind will consent to use past experience as a basis of its future actions.*<sup>24</sup>

One of the major traits of an absurd is that he accepts things as they are in life without any reason and judgment. Doctors, in the novel bury deep the secret of Tambe's death and this silence of them to Tony is absurd. Childlessness brings the feeling of absurdity in Tony's mind. The realization of the fact leads Tony and Cynthia in the abyss of absurdity. They sense meaninglessness and nothingness in their relationship. The acceptance widens the scope of loneliness and burden. The lack of child destroys the easiness between the two and they behave like stranger to each other. To Camus:

*Just as there are days when under the familial face of a woman we see as a strange her we had loved mothers or years ago, perhaps we shall come even to desire what suddenly leaves us so alone.....that denseness and, that strangeness of the world is absurd.*<sup>25</sup>

Man's quest for fulfilling and getting more in each sphere of life breaks the old tradition and values. When man crosses the moral and social values and devalues traditional husband wife relationship then this situation leaves him in absurd conditions. Ashok, having relationship with Leena crosses his boundaries but when awakened he finds his act absurd and wants to return to his wife. Both Ashok and Tony return to God's ways of life. After facing the absurd, Tony overcomes the feeling and wins

his faith in God. He wants to return to his parents for espousing to old ways of his life. His speech is modern man's cry to return to his homeland: *"It's like a dream calling me, my parent's home, the beaches, the churches, the old ways of life."*(If I Die Today-88)

Deshpande uses symbolic images of nature in a praiseworthy manner to exalt the beauty of language, thought and to introduce what comes next. She uses the description of the nature to produce and to reduce the absurd effect in the novel and also for presenting the mental vision of the characters. After heavy rains outside, Prem comes soaked and changes. Manju thinks, *"Prem came in drenched. I heard him moving about as he changed."*(If I Die Today-91) She symbolizes drenched by gulping, overcoming all emotions, all guilt and all isolations of Prem with Manju. She senses the change inside his mind. By talking with Prem, Manju conquers her absurd thoughts and returns to normalcy. As water cleans the impurity so her talk with Prem kills absurd from their life as she describes, *"The water ran down.....carrying away....all the debris of summer."*(If I Die Today-103) Rieux in Plague believes that man can strive for love and happiness while facing the absurd, so it happens with Manju. In the line *"The stumbling footsteps crunching on the dry leaves."*(If I Die Today-90) Deshpande symbolizes dry leaves to man's belief which was crunched by footsteps (working of human mind). Emily Zants says, *"this is a force strong enough to compel men to survive the destructive elements of the world of absolutes- the world of the absurd."*<sup>26</sup>

The temple built by Sethji symbolizes God, day time indicates good time and dark to bad time. When there is a good time and ringing bells of happiness and belief is about human, he is deep attached with God but

when dark means bad time hovers him, he scared to go on that path which he was following. In this dark hour the idea of God seems him absurd. The idea follows in the some lines of the novel: *“The clump of mango trees .....On the traditional lines....in the day time it a cheerful place.....it seemed dark....I regretted having come this way.”*(If I Die Today-89)

### **Small Remedies**

While believing in God human makes some plans and asks Him of fulfilling them but those plans and patterns do not match with the plans of God. Then at this point his belief starts to shatter. Sometimes incidents occur in such coherence that one has never imagined and man feels disoriented, deconstructed of which confrontation is not easy. Confrontation leads man in the absurdity, as it happens with Madhu in *Small Remedies*.

Madhu's differences with Som because of the sudden revelation of the past incident and her son's death take Madhu in utter desolation. She lost touch with human and no longer remains lively, spirited human but a morose, lifeless object. The world seems to her hostile; each relationship a betrayal. Now she is merely a stranger to herself and to the world also. She says, *“I am so unused to physical contact that I can feel myself drawing back..... I find the odour of human strange and disturbing.”*<sup>27</sup> At this stage of her life she meets absurd. She evaluates and re-evaluates all happening of her life, her beliefs and her existence. She contemplates what is true and what is false. To her entity of God is unreal who could not save humans from destruction. She finds God helpless like others and herself. Camus

says, *“Every man has felt himself to be the equal of a god at certain moments.”*<sup>28</sup>

The feeling of suspension arises in her mind for the existence of God and the entire cosmos. Madhu turns a nihilistic one. *“God is dead”*<sup>29</sup> idea roams in her mind. She absurdises all pujas offered to God and she questions in the existence of the God: *“A God in Heaven looking after us, God, that last resort of humankind. But the comfort is not for me.....I’ve believed in people.”*(Small Remedies-308) She declines the value of God for which sake Adit has been killed. She even develops disbelief in human’s connection with the universe. As an absurd, she does not believe in anything but herself:

*We no longer believe that there are any links between our lives and the ebb and flow of the sea, the movements and conjunctions of the planet, the phases of moon.*(Small Remedies-299)

Man in his life quests after a goal for advanced and higher purpose but at a sudden moment he considers all his actions futile and the feeling of nothingness bounces in him. Madhu, who after her marriage did nothing except rearing up her child and after him nothing remains in her life. Her life is mere a figment of emptiness, nothingness, loneliness, fear, angst, nihilism and the absurd. She sees absurdity in her existence which has no purpose, loses meaning and runs on the track of life colorless: *“Without others, we are nothing. A blank slate.”* (Small Remedies-170) In this concern critic Nathan Scott states that man accepts futility and absurdity

when *“the mind’s hunger for coherence is countered by the irremediable incoherence of existence.”*<sup>30</sup>

In her process of facing the absurd she means of each thing, each thought. Each new upcoming moment or event, she fails to confront without Adit. She thinks about the value of time that runs on its pace and after a great change nothing changed. In her discovery of life she asserts life to believe only being a spectator of her own and others’ life. She avoids any kind of celebration but she knows that she has to move on to confront the truth of her life. Her absurdity springs from her thoughts, when she utters, *“One day like another, none differentiated by any significance?”*(Small Remedies-195) Madhu finds absurd to accept the death of her son because it was destined to her: *“What kind of comfort is that, what kind of solace is that thinking- he would have died anyway?”*(Small Remedies-113) For Camus:

*The mind’s deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man’s unconscious feeling in the face of his universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity.....That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama.*<sup>31</sup>

When man becomes stranger in life he accepts the absurd. While unintended involving in facing the absurd it is essential for Madhu to accept the facts. She understands the value of confrontation which is an essential part of an absurd: *“To understand that it’s a package deal: you*

*get the happiness, you've got to accept the sorrow and pain as well. You can't get one and escape the other.*"(Small Remedies-81) Camus clarifies:

*I am thus justified in saying that the feeling of absurdity does not spring from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression, but that it bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it. The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation.*<sup>32</sup>

Events are concrete having no emotional tie for an absurd soul. He experiences life without giving it proper meaning. After Adit, she stops living her life and searches reason of what has happened with them but she admits, *"There aren't always clear cut reasons for actions, rarely such definite motive which we can pinpoint."*(Small Remedies-169) Camus clarifies, *"The absurd man on the other hand, does not undertake such leveling process. He recognizes the struggle, does not absolutely scorn reason, and admits the irrational."*<sup>33</sup>

At the age of fifteen, Madhu's relationship with her father's friend is irrational and has no place in her life but to convince Som, her husband who seeks reason of such happening. She suffers human's endless struggle to understand how and why things happen. To Madhu, it was just an absurd happening having no tie of it with her future but no use and this ruffles the smoothness in their relationship: *"To an absurd mind reason is useless and there is nothing beyond reason."*<sup>34</sup> But at the end of the novel, Som's discernment goes far away from reason. He calls Madhu not only to accept her but to mourn the death of their son too. Madhu, too accepts the death of her son:

*So many of us walking this earth with our pain our sorrow concealed within ourselves, so many of us hiding our sufferings, going about as if all is well, so many of us surviving our loss, our grief.”*(Small Remedies-315)

After Adit, Madhu has no definite purpose; she fills her void by writing Bai’s biography. Camus states although man should not pursue higher goal rather some small one to pass life without any expectation as Madhu did. Her views of art or creation are similar to those of Camus’ interpretations of absurd creation: *“Invention, creation, is sometimes the greater possibly the best part of life.”*(Small Remedies-165) Camus further clarifies that the work of art is not the shelter for an absurd mind but *“it is itself an absurd phenomenon.”*<sup>35</sup> Madhu also emphasizes man’s endless waiting. What comes next lies only in waiting and future brings nothing as it is always with us: *“Instead there is this great unknown waiting for us, a hostile stranger uncovering of our desires, our hopes and dreams, wholly unconnected to them.”*(Small Remedies-112-113) She asserts that life exists only in waiting of new discoveries.

Through Madhu, Deshpande symbolizes the increasing absurdity in metamorphosing psyche of an Indian who with unawareness lives an absurd life. Not only Madhu, but Bai also demonstrates some traits of absurd mind. Bai’s character as depicted in the novel is in unconventional tone. She finds solace in the work of art; her life exists only for music and singing. She is a perfect example of existentialism who leaves everything for singing and faces its results. Without singing, life is absurd to her; at the end of life she frustrates for not being able to sing: *“Rubbish! What kind of life do I have now? One day is like another.”*(Small Remedies-126)

Bai never makes any explanation of her act; she only experiences and lives her life. Bai exhibits the transcendent psyche of human who alters his opinion about life and makes pace with time and no longer remains aloof from the rest of the world. Camus opines, "*For the absurd man it is not the matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing. Everything begins with lucid indifference.*"<sup>36</sup>

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