PREFACE

"At the centre of European man, dominating the great moments of his life, there lies an essential absurdity."

- Andre Malraux

Kafka and Camus are two great names in modern European literature. Volumes have been written on them by writers of global reputation highlighting various aspects of their literary genius. In this work I have made a limited attempt to focus attention on a particular theme - the experience of the Absurd - which they share and to which they give such compelling expression, though in their distinctive ways.

Kafka and Camus are deeply committed to the urgency of their time. Their vision of the Absurd offers an image of the perplexity of the modern age resulting from certain tearingly felt contradictions and from the malaise of the twentieth century. The works of these two writers represent not merely the mirror-image of this age, they depict with fidelity the lived experiences of the writers. In their works we can see the living human predicament in the midst of the terrible tensions and conflicts of existence, the failure to preserve the wholeness of being - the predicament which makes for the feelings of dread, anguish and world-weariness.
Owing to the constraints of time I have had to restrict the scope of this study to the examination of some selected works of Kafka and Camus. I can only hope that this does not weaken the strength of my argument and the points I have tried to make. I have divided the entire work into four chapters, namely, (1) The Introduction, (2) Kafka and the Absurd, (3) Camus and the Absurd and (4) Conclusion.

In the first chapter I have presented a general background of the vision of the Absurd and have attempted to identify the Absurd with alienation as a social phenomenon. I have also tried to present a picture of the milieu which made the emergence of Kafka and Camus almost inevitable.

Chapter II deals with Kafka's vision of the Absurd with particular reference to his *The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial* and *The Castle*, where Gregor Samsa, Joseph K. and K. are perplexed beyond endurance by the intricacies, equivocations and ambiguities of the world and they find themselves in the midst of the unfathomable darkness extended to endless dimensions where their attempts to escape or advance prove abortive and they are seen eventually either to grope in the void or perish.

In Chapter III I have tried to present Camus's vision of the Absurd with reference to *The Outsider* and *The Plague*. *The Outsider* is a case-study of Meursault's feeling of the absurdity of existence. The society in which Meursault lives demands that
from birth to death, every action of a man should be formalized in deference to certain conventionalised norms. But Meursault refuses to disguise his feelings and to perform the set hypocritical rituals. This brings contradictions which make his existence absurd. In *The Plague* the individual predicament of *The Outsider* takes a universal shape.

The final chapter, 'the Conclusion', recapitulates and reinforces the findings recorded in the earlier chapters. It also attempts a brief comparison of the insights of the two authors as reflected in their characters and situations.

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