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**Deconstructive Analysis of Albert Camus's Novel, The Outsider
by using Derrida's Deconstruction Theory**



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Abstract

Albert Camus' novel "*The Outsider*" consists of an uncountable number of meanings which can be unfolded through Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction Theory. This theory addresses that meaning is always complex, unstable, unfixed, evolving and dynamic. The act of reading a text always creates a new meaning and interpretation. It also deconstructs the constructed binaries and the ideologies behind them in the text. The novel, "*The Outsider*" invites various interpretations of the text in order to show the hidden meaning. The protagonist of the novel Meursault, is an unusual character who seems indifferent to the world of rationality. Society judges him through the lens of his relationships with his mother and over her burial and murder of an Arab. The aim of this study is to uncover the folded and concealed meaning of the text as well as to deconstruct the culturally constructed binaries and to identify the ideologies behind them. The protagonist of the Camus always goes against the constructed norms of the society which will be deconstructed through Derrida's Deconstruction Theory as my perspective. I would apply my own model of analysis followed by three steps: Identification of binaries, to deconstruct the binaries and finally to find out the ideologies behind them. To understand the meaning and language of the text as the play of signifiers, close reading will be applied to comprehend the linguistic features of the text like individual words, syntax and structure of the sentences which uncover the ideas will be used as a method of research.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Binaries, Ideologies, Signifiers.

Introduction

This research paper aims to discuss about the socially and politically constructed binaries in the text and to examine those words and characters through which researcher could deconstruct the privileged term existed in the binary. *The Outsider*, Albert Camus' beautifully crafted novel tells us about his protagonist, Meursault who is stranger and doesn't live outside the society but a person who is a stranger within the society that's why this novel is called *The Outsider*. He says, "My mother died today. Or may be yesterday, I don't know" (*The Outsider*, p. 3). Society judges him through his words and actions that he is not confirmed about the death of his mother

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not even interested to know about the exact day of her death. The society judges a person through his words and actions not from his intentions and deeds. Meursault, a young Algerian got a news of his mother's death, and then gets ready to go the funeral and says, "I asked my boss for two days off and he couldn't say no given the circumstances" (Camus, *The Outsider*, 2013, p. 3) . When he reached in Marengo which is eighty kilometres away from Algiers, at the vigil and the next day of funeral of her mother he shows no pain, grief or sorrow over her mother's death rather he feels physical exertion then he takes coffee and enjoys cigarette. When he backs to home after attending the funeral, he goes out for swimming with his girlfriend Marie, and says, "I had difficulty getting up because I was still tired from yesterday. While I was shaving, I wondered what I should do and I decided to go swimming" (p. 17). He is not interested in his career when he gets the news of his promotion, transfer to Paris and his rise in position and then discusses about his boss's plan with Marie and says, "I told her about my boss's plan and Marie said she'd like to get know Paris. I told her that I'd lived there for a while and she asked what it was like. 'It's dirty,' I replied. There are pigeons and dark courtyards. Everyone looks pale" (p. 39) . He has friendship with Salamano and Raymond. Raymond is cheated by an Arabian girl and he wants to take revenge and says, "That's when I knew for sure she'd been cheating on me. So I left her" (p. 28) and then he calls her to his apartment beats her badly. In order to get the revenge Arabs follow him and one of them was killed by the Meursault on the beach.

The second part of the novel moves around the trial of Meursault where everyone except the protagonist wants the reasons why he murder of the Arab. They gave different reasons and opinions about him but none of them is right. Meursault shows no remorse over his act rather he accepts his fault and says, "At the same time, though, I realized this was ridiculous because, after all, I was the one who was the criminal" (p. 62) . His lawyer warned him that his unusual attitude will put him into the trouble and he should be remorseful over his act but he refuses to express any kind of regret. He said the only reason of killing an Arab was the sun. "I said, rather confusedly, that I hadn't intended to kill the Arab" (p. 93). Then he continues, "I said rather quickly, muddling up my words a bit and completely aware of how ridiculous I sounded, that it was because of the sun" (p. 93) . He accepted his death happily and

says, “I understood that I had been happy, and I was still happy. So that it might be finished, so that I might feel less alone, I could only hope there would be many, many spectators on the day of my execution and they would greet me with cries of hatred” (p. 111) . Hitendra kumar M. Patel has well said that, ‘For Meursault everything whether it is death, love, incarceration or law and rule, is a part of life’ (PATEL) . Therefore, in the novel he shows no flexibility in his character he remains same throughout the text from beginning to the end.

Thesis Statement

This research paper aims to deconstruct all the possible binaries in the text, which are socially and politically constructed and some important objects which bring change in the life of Meursault, the protagonist of the novel *The Outsider* by Albert Camus. In binaries one term is always privileged over the other, one is always preferred over the other. This paper would deconstruct the socially constructed and privileged term in the binary and extract the new meaning out of it which is already mantled in the text. By deconstructing the binaries, the researcher would find out the ideologies existed behind them.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research paper are as follow;

- To explore the binaries existing in the novel *The Outsider* by Albert Camus.
- To identify the ideologies behind the binaries present in the text.
- To deconstruct some important words in order to uncover the hidden meaning and their impact on the life of Meursault, the protagonist.

Research Questions

- What are the important binaries present in the novel *The Outsider* by Albert Camus?
- What are the ideologies behind the binaries present in the text?
- What are the main words which bring change in the life of Meursault, the protagonist?

Significance of the Study

This study will provide new meaning and perspective to the text because Derrida says that meanings are unstable and unfixed. Every act of reading gives new meaning, “The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts,

institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and boundaries they currently occupy” (Caputo, 1997, p. 31) . By deconstructing the binaries which are socially and politically constructed offer new dimensions and comprehension to the text. “Derrida writes in reference to the terms of any classical or binary opposition and so in this respect the opposition is never of the order of a neutral difference but always of a violent hierarchy” (Lucy, A Derrida Dictionary, 2004, p. 13). This research paper will break the hierarchy present in the binary opposition which bring inequality in the society and the ideologies behind them by using the Deconstruction theory of Derrida.

Literature Review

The aim of literature review is to provide the understanding of previous literature by reviewing their works and finding the gap present in existing literature as this study based on deconstruction of binaries present in the text: *The Outsider* by Albert Camus. The Outsider by Albert Camus has been viewed differently by various researchers, According to Mozaffor Hossain, there is a conflict between the protagonist and the old conventions. He does not act according to the wishes of the society and the major conflict occurs in his life due to the presence of sun which is deconstructed by the writer and he believes that life is meaningless or absurd that’s why crying on his dead mother does not change the irrationality of human beings, he raises different questions about the protagonist which lead to the theory of deconstruction. (Hussain, 2017) This paper majorly focussed on the conflict between the societal norms and the Meursault which is due to his truthfulness, he doesn’t pretend to the society what he actually not from his inner self, he says what he feels.

Hamza Karam Ally compares the Albert Camus’ novel The Stranger with Kamel Daoud’s Meursault Investigation. He sees the novel through the lens of colonialism and otherness. In this paper he presents Meursault as an orientalist who kills Arab by considering them as “Others”. The major episode of this novel is the murder of Arab and colonial encounter (Ally, 2018).

S. Ragapriya discusses the meaninglessness of the protagonist in the novel The Outsider, according to him Meursault takes life meaningless, death is meaningless because it is not avoidable so he enjoys the rest of his life even after the death of his mother. His ideology of life’s meaningless is also obvious when he goes against to the

Christianity and the character of Meursault reflects the ideology of Albert Camus who also believes in absurdum and doesn't believe in the existence of God therefore, struggle for the meaning of life is useless (Ragapriya, 2017). Hitendrakumar M. Patel in his research article also views the same absurdity of life and death, protagonist's relationship with the society, it also gives a new perception of psychological impacts on the life of Meursault (PATEL, 'Absurdity in Albert Camus': The Outsider, 2013). According to Dr. Sujata Bamane, Meursault is the man of truth when he appears at the end of the text, refuses to lie, avoids the falsity of the society. His strong faith makes him a man of dignity, accepts his crime and denies the redemption of God at the end of the novel (Bamane, 2014).

This literature review provides researcher for her current study a new dimension for applying a Derrida's deconstruction theory because there is a gap present in the existing literature regarding deconstruction of binaries and identification of the ideologies behind these binaries opposition becomes the centrepiece of researcher after reviewing the literature.

Research Methodology

I have applied Derrida's Deconstruction as my perspective and the method of analysis. Deconstruction as my perspective has helped me out for the deconstruction of the binaries in the text and how the cultural hegemony present in them. The application of the Deconstruction in the text acts as a conceptual framework. I have applied close reading and deconstructive analysis as a method of research.

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), was a French philosopher and a pioneer of "deconstruction". His way of criticism was not only for both literary and philosophical but he also criticised the political institutions. He became a popular figure with a word deconstruction in every field of life whether it was art, literary criticism, architectural or political theories. Structuralism says that language is a chain of signifiers + signified and deconstruction is a response to Structuralism that's why it is also called Post-Structuralism, "So far deconstruction, language doesn't consist of the union of signifiers and signified; it consists only of chains of signifiers" (Tyson, 2006, p. 252).

Deconstruction is a reaction against to the Platonism and Structuralism having belief that existence is based on the opposition and difference which is called binary

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opposition that is hierarchical. In this hierarchy one term is always worthwhile than the other which creates injustice and inequality in the society. For this reason Derrida wrote a book “*Of Grammatology*” in which he deconstructs the hierarchical system of binary opposition of speech and writing. That speech is always preferred over the writing but Derrida deconstructs this position, “By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing.” (Derrida, 1997, p. 6). He says if we forget the language it will be misleading us to the adventure and the survival of language is not possible, “death of the book undoubtedly announces (and in a certain sense always has announced) nothing but a death of speech (of a so-called full speech) and a new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1997, p. 8). It means that the death of book (writing) is the death of speech ultimately is the death of civilizations. In this way Derrida deconstructs the western cultural hegemony in the form of binaries. Similarly he deconstructs the capital punishment and police brutality and constructs a new wave of Abolitionism in his book *The Death Penalty*.

Derrida questions all the western philosophies and challenge the concept of “Logo-centric” means that our understanding of the world revolves around the centre but according to Derrida it’s a great illusion on the part of western philosophy. “For Derrida, the answer is that no concept is beyond the dynamic instability of language, which disseminates (as a flower scatters its seeds on the wind) an infinite number of possible meanings with each written or spoken utterance. For deconstruction, then, language is the ground of being, but that ground is not out of play: it is itself as dynamic, evolving, problematical, and ideologically saturated as the worldviews it produces. For this reason, there is no centre to our understanding of existence” (Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 2006, p. 256)

Model of Analysis

I have applied my own model of analysis for the text that is Deconstructive analysis to deconstruct the binaries and unfold the ideology associated with them by following the three steps as given below;

1. Find out the Binaries:

In this step, by continue act of reading, I have identified some important binaries present in the novel by using the technique of close reading because every close reading gives new meaning to the text. With binaries I also got some important words which are too significant.

2. Deconstruction of the Binaries:

After the identification of the binaries and the word (object) I have deconstructed them and then reversed the constructed hierarchical system with new meaning.

3. Identification of the Ideologies:

In this step, I have identified the ideologies associated with the binaries present in the text.

Analysis of the Data

The story begins with the death news of Meursault's mother, the protagonist of the novel *The Outsider* by Albert Camus when Meursault shows his indifference towards his mother's death: "My mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know" (Camus, *The Outsider*, 2012, p. 1). Here the text refers to the breaking of binary that is 'Life' vs 'Death', in which death is taken to be a serious matter in our society. People mourn at the death of their loved ones. The pyres, the rituals the tears have become a part of the custom. There is tremendous grief on the death of blood related relationships but Meursault shows no emotions, tears and pain over the death of his mother rather he refused to caretaker to unscrew the lid of the casket, "We closed the casket, so I have to unscrew the lid for you to see her. He started walking towards the coffin but I stopped him. You don't want to?, he asked. I replied: 'No'". (Camus, p. 6). So he doesn't take death as a serious matter for mourning and grief rather he prefers death over life as a step of freedom because life is meaningless for him, "Mama must have felt set free, ready to live once more. No one – no one – had the right to cry over her. And I as well, I too felt ready to start life all over again" (Camus, p. 110). He also embraces his death with hope of having lots of spectators on the day of his execution so he might feel less alone, "I could only hope there would be many, many spectators on the day of my execution and that they would greet me with cries of hatred" (p. 111). He is not afraid of death neither shows lament over his mother's death because life is nothing for him. The above lines show the major component of Camus's

ideology is the idea that human life has no redeeming meaning or purpose. Camus argues that the only certain thing in life is the inevitability of death, and because all humans will eventually meet death, all lives are all equally meaningless. Meursault finally comes to a conclusion that having hope for sustained life only makes him believe that death is avoidable – hence, he believes he is liberated from these false hopes and he is not remorseful at the death of his mother neither his own execution.

At the time of vigil of his mother, he remains in his thoughts, thinking about the appearances of the women sitting around the casket of his mother instead of being in grief, “I looked at them as I had never looked at anyone before, taking in every detail of their faces and clothing” then he continues, “Almost all the women wore aprons tied tightly around their waists, which made their stomachs look even rounder. I had never noticed how old women could have such big stomachs” (p. 9). These lines shows his lack of concern with the mother’s death rather his attentions were towards the people around him because death is not a sad occasion but a step for freedom that’s why he says no one need to cry over his mother’s death because once again she is ready to live and he himself is going to relive.

Keeping in view the Derrida’s deconstruction theory, binary opposition of life vs death has successfully deconstructed.

The next binary breaks by the text is ‘Truth’ vs ‘Lie’ in this binary opposition truth is always privileged over the lie which is socially constructed but characters in the novel want to hear the lies instead of justifying the truth and admit the truthfulness of Meursault expresses his genuine feelings and he is honest in confessing the truth before the judge but all the people in the society are habitual of listening lie. When he explains his feelings what he felt at the funeral of his mother to his lawyer then his lawyer suggests him to speak lie but “I said: ‘No, because it is not true.’ He looked at me strangely, as if I disgusted him slightly” (p. 59). This truth leads him towards the death and people started thinking about him that he is a ‘hardened soul’ which means society prefers deception and wants to listen lie instead of truth. It clearly asserts the deconstruction of binary Truth vs Lie.

Another binary is deconstructed in the text is ‘Subjective’ vs ‘Objective’. In binary opposition, objective is considered to be privileged over subjective because subjective feelings are always clouded by personal preference, expression of belief

and opinion. Throughout the whole text we can find the subjective approach of the Meursault, he deals with the events and incidents with his subjective feelings. When prosecutor explains his guilt to the 'Gentlemen of the Jury' he doesn't feel any regret because he looks at the things subjectively he says, "I would have liked to explain to him, politely, almost with a hint of emotions, that I have never truly been able to regret anything. I was always preoccupied by what was about to happen, either today or tomorrow. But given the position I was in, I couldn't actually speak to anyone that way. I didn't have the right to show that I had feelings or good intentions" (p. 91). These lines shows his personal opinion about the happenings of the life that's why he never regret on those things which happened whether it was the death of his mother or the murder of an Arabs but at the time of his trial he doesn't give right to speak up about his feelings or good intentions. He always overwhelmed with his sensations and feelings as he gone for swimming with a young woman Marie, the day after the funeral and then to watch the 'Fernandel movie'.

Another binary that breaks the text is Conformity vs Non-conformity with the society. Those who conform to societal norms are considered to be preferable but in this text we can see that Meursault doesn't conform to the society neither he has any disappointment by showing his indifferent attitude towards the society despite of non-conformity, he is still a protagonist of the novel, his indifference to mother's funeral, his drinking of coffee, "I like coffee, I said yes", then his smoking with the caretaker when he offers him, "I didn't know I should smoke in front of Mama. I thought about it: it was no importance whatsoever. I offered the caretaker a cigarette and we both smoked" (p. 8) shows his non-conformity with the society.

When Meursault and Raymond meet and begin to talk, they realize that they share the same detachment sentiment about humanity and relationships. "The woman kept screaming and Raymond kept on hitting her. Marie said it was awful and I didn't reply" (p. 32). Raymond understands Meursault's mentality of not openly speaking about his mother's death and his emotional with Marie. They share the feeling of wanting to be alone, without other disturbing their solidarity, this presents the non-conformity with society by violating the societal norms and traditions.

His non-conformity is also obvious when his boss wanted to know, "if I'd be interested in going there (Paris) to work" and "I could live in Paris and also travel part

of the year” (p. 38) but he refused because of having no ambition and not interested to change his life, shows his detachment with the society. This deconstruction of binary leads the text to another binary opposition that is rational vs irrational, by showing his detachment with the society asserts his irrationality throughout the novel.

Deconstruction of the Sun

Sun plays important role in bringing the chaos in the life of Meursault. Sun is the proper noun and always has positive connotation but in this text sun disturbs the balance and harmony of the protagonist's life. He starts claiming about the sun at very beginning of the novel when he is at the mother's funeral, "The sun had risen a bit higher in the sky; it was beginning to warm my feet", he enjoys the beautiful scenes of Marengo, the countryside, "but today the sun blazing down upon the shimmering landscape made it inhuman and depressing" (p. 14), and due to hotness of the sun "the procession was moving quickly now" claiming more about the sun that, "the dazzling sun was unbearable" (p. 15) whenever he goes outside he is disturbed by the intense heat of the sun, "The sun beating down on the sand and its brilliance reflecting off the sea was almost unbearable. The beach was deserted now" (p. 48) , he continues claiming about the sun, "My mind was a blank because all that sun on my bare head was making me feel drowsy" (p.48) because of sun he feels sleepy and could not able to respond properly. He continues walk with Masson and Raymond on the beach and says, "The sun was now scorching hot. Its light crashed down, shattering over the sand and the sea" (p.50), describing his physical condition, "I felt the same dazzling explosion of blazing sun. The sea grasp for the breath, sent rapid little waves to wash over the sand. I walked slowly towards the rocks and I could feel my forehead swelling up beneath the sun. The intense heat beats down on me, as if trying to force me back" (p.52). He feels the same relentlessness of the sun when he buried his mother and now when he confronts with Arabs, "The burning sun struck my cheeks and I could feel drops of sweat gathering above my eyebrows. It was same sun as the day I'd buried Mama, and like then it was my forehead that hurt the most and I could feel every vein throbbing beneath my skin" (p.53) the inciting impacts of the sun leads him to commit the murder of an Arabs, "I shook off the sweat and the sun. I realized that I had destroyed the natural balance of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I once been happy. Then I fired four more times into the lifeless body,

where bullets sank without leaving a trace” (p.54) this sun brings the disastrous change in the life of Meursault. At the time of his trial he claims that the shooting of an Arabs “was because of the sun” (p.93) and he turns into murderer. His tone sounds very upset and helpless when he complains about this annoying sun under which he gets burnt and from whose circumference he cannot come out.

Identification of the Ideologies

Camus’s ideology becomes obvious after the deconstruction of the binaries through the mouth piece of the protagonist, Meursault that life has no meaning, it is irrational act of the human being who go in search of meaning of the life therefore, it is vain to cry over the deaths of others because it is unavoidable truth of life that everyone has to confront. Same ideology has been identified after the deconstruction of truth vs lie in which author’s faith and protagonist’s truthfulness becomes apparent, he denies the lies of the life though they bring him towards the death point but he stick to the truth, shows his true nature and strong faith and his subjective approach and non-conformity to the society asserts that he is apolitical, alien to the society. These binaries unfold the ideology of narrator as well as author that they both reflect to each other. They both view the world with same lens of meaninglessness.

Conclusion

A deconstructive analysis of *The Outsider* shows that, text does not hold fixed meanings, the meanings are always hidden in deep level which reader can unfold it through deconstruction. Every new as well as close reading of the novel gives birth to unprecedented and multiple ideas. Focusing on binaries that are being used in the text and unfolding these binaries by differentiating between the superior term and the inferior term in a binary, one reach to the ideology (in a binary one entity is always superior and the other is inferior) which is overturn by the Derrida’s deconstruction theory.

For Meursault death, imprisonment, killing, punishment and suffering is a part of life that’s why he is not concerned that what is happening around him. He is the hero of the novel, an honest man, always speaks truth but his detachment with the society makes him irrational. The first part of the novel shows his physical sensations and how is disturbed by the natural phenomenon and the second part shows his

sufferings but there is no transformation could be observed in his personality he remains same from start to end.

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