

ANALYZING EXISTENTIAL STRUGGLES AND ABSURD REALITIES IN MUNIR'S UNFETTERED WINGS

Kashmalah Ashraf (corresponding author)

Lecturer, Department of English, Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan, Pakistan.

kashmalaashraf@isp.edu.pk

Saniya Fatima Gilani

Lecturer, Department of English, Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan, Pakistan.

saniya.gilani876@gmail.com

Maryam Dua e Fatima

MPhil English

danialmariam1@gmail.com

Abstract

Man's quest for meaning has been the topic of debate among philosophers for ages. According to existentialism, man derives meaning in life by making choices through his own free will. While absurdism says that there is no meaning at all. Both existentialism and absurdism focus on human actions, free will, freedom of choice, meaninglessness, nothingness, limited freedom, dread, alienation, social isolation, revolt, and pessimism. The present study aims to explore the themes of absurdism and existentialism in Munir's Unfettered Wings (2018). The study utilized Albert Camus' theories of absurdism and existentialism to provide an in-depth descriptive qualitative analysis of the existential struggles and absurd realities faced by the main characters of the selected novel. The research concluded that Munir's Unfettered Wings consists of various aspects of absurdism and existentialism. As the main characters continuously face the absurd realities of life but regardless of these absurdities, they often attempt to create meaning for their existence.

Keywords: existentialism, absurdism, search for meaning, alienation

1. Introduction

Human beings' constant struggle to find meaning in this seemingly irrational universe is as old as man's existence. The question of human existence attracted the attention of many philosophers, but is answered best through existentialist philosophy. Existentialism is a literary philosophy that began in the late 19th century and became popular during the 20th century. According to this philosophy, "human beings are responsible for defining the meaning of their life in this meaningless world by making rational decisions in this irrational world" (Rasheed et al., 2021). This movement became popular after the two deadly world wars, as man started thinking that there was no supernatural being that could save them from the absurdities of life. Thus, human beings have to accept the nothingness of life and create their own meaning of life through free will. This philosophical stance of existentialism overlaps with absurdism.

According to Albert Camus' theory of absurdism, life is meaningless, and man's search for meaning is also meaningless. Camus stated that absurdity occurs because of the occurrence of conflict between man's expectations and reality. Expectation of a rational universe and an actual irrational and meaningless universe (Cline, 2018). Because of this absurdity, human beings go through three stages of life: philosophical suicide, physical suicide, and acceptance. During the first stage, man seeks help from supernatural and divine beings. During the second stage, man sees this life as meaningless and thus tries to end his meaningless existence. Finally, during the third stage, human beings accept that life is meaningless and embrace it along with its absurdities. The existential and absurdist philosophy mainly focuses on human actions, free will, freedom of choice, meaninglessness, nothingness, limited freedom, dread, alienation, social isolation, revolt,

and pessimism (Rehan & Zohra, 2021). Both of these philosophical frameworks provide profound insights into human experiences and their struggle with meaning, identity, and freedom in this irrational and meaningless world.

According to Sartre's concept of existentialism, "*existence precedes essence*," which means "*humans have no predetermined purpose and to exist one has to be responsible for their actions and choices*" (Ezeugwu et al., 2021). Females often face subjugation as "others" in a patriarchal society. Thus, Beauvoir revised Sartre's concept of existentialism as "Equal freedom of both men and women is necessary for meaningful existence of human beings" (Ashraf et al., 2021). This study aims to analyze the existential struggles and absurd realities of life faced by the protagonists of Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings; Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women* (2018). For this purpose, the study will explore how the protagonists of the selected novel seek to find meaning and purpose in their lives using Camus' *theory of Existentialism and Absurdism*. Munir's *Unfettered Wings* (2018) is a collection of ten short stories where the main characters face the absurdities of life. Through her female protagonists, Munir represented a wide array of social and cultural issues from child marriage, rape, and honor killing to staying single by choice and many others (Syed et al., 2021). She explored how human beings have to face the absurdities of life but still try to create meaning through their actions and choices. She portrayed how characters grapple with their sense of identity and experience isolation in this patriarchal society.

One of the major characteristics of Existentialism is pessimism, which offers a pessimistic vision of this world and seeks to answer sensitive issues such as the purpose of human existence, the meaning of life, and the existence of God. Another major characteristic includes freedom of choice; according to which every individual must have the agency to choose, but when this does not happen, it creates absurdity. Emotions are also an important characteristic of existentialism as they allow individuals to make choices and important decisions. Similarly, the characteristics of absurdism are closely related to existentialism, such as nothingness, meaninglessness, isolation, and alienation.

The selected novel consists of ten chapters, each of which portrays a different short story. Every chapter of *Unfettered Wings* is named after the female protagonists (Farida, Reema, Maria, Summi, Habiba, Nazia, Saima, Beena, Meera, and Eman) of that story and talks about the struggles faced by them. This research closely examines the features of existentialism and absurdism in Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings; Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women*. This novel is full of existential struggles and absurd realities faced by the main characters in this meaningless existence.

2. Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following question;

1. What are the elements and features of existentialism and absurdism that are present in Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings; Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women*?

3. Literature Review

Rasheed et al. (2021) investigated the absurdist and existential aspects in Kafka's fiction, *The Metamorphosis* (1915) and *The Trial* (1925). This study conducted a descriptive qualitative comparative analysis of these selected novels using Camus' theory of existentialism and the theory of absurdism. The study explained that according to existentialism, "human beings have to define the meaning of their lives while being in a meaningless world." This philosophical stance of existentialism overlaps with the theory of absurdism as it suggests that "man searches for meaning in his life, but at the end, he comes to know that all of this was meaningless." This research concluded that both novels contain aspects of absurdism and existentialism.

Another research by Rehan and Zohra (2021) in their article explored the themes of absurdism and existentialism in Matt Haig's novel *The Midnight Library*. The study explained how existentialism and absurdism contradict each other, as the former suggests that meaning can be established through consciousness, while the latter emphasizes that life has no meaning at all. This paper utilized Albert Camus' theory of existentialism and absurdism to qualitatively analyze Haig's *The Midnight Library*. The study concluded that elements of existentialism and absurdism are found in *The Midnight Library*.

As Camus said, absurdity is the only bond between man and the world. Man often demands clarity, but the world has none to offer (Mondal, 2018). Kafka is also an absurdist writer, and he tried to explain the exact absurd situation in his novel, *The Trial*. Mondal (2018) in her article explained how Kafka portrayed various follies of this society in his work. For this purpose, the study explored Kafka's *The Trial* in the light of absurdism and existentialism. The analysis represented that the universe is absurd, as shown in the novel.

Syed et al. (2021) aimed to explore how the protagonists of Munir's *Unfettered Wings* (2018) tackled the extraordinary situation that women faced in a society that did not always align with their needs. The study qualitatively analyzed how Sana Munir represented women in her short stories using the theory of feminism. Through her ten exceptional short stories, Munir represented how women face psychological, social, financial, and emotional issues living in Pakistani society. The study concluded that despite these struggles, the female protagonists are still brave, strong, and realistic.

Similarly, Hyder et al. (2022) illustrated a journey of female subordination through Reema's character. The study qualitatively analyzed Munir's Reema (a short story taken from *Unfettered Wings*) to portray women as 'others' in a patriarchal society in the light of Beauvoirian phenomena of Defloration and Altruism. The research explored how women face oppression in a patriarchal society and are restricted from speaking about it. The study concluded that the traumatic defloration of Reema forced her to behave altruistically in the patriarchal system, and thus she became a metaphor for subordination throughout her life.

Women lack basic freedom of choice and thus often face an existential crisis (Ashraf et al., 2021). This study aimed to analyze the lack of freedom faced by women in Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings; Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women*. For this purpose, Ashraf et al. (2021) qualitatively analyzed the thematic structure of selected novels using Beauvoir's Existential Feminist Approach. The study concluded that both men and women are bound by social and cultural norms through socialization, but women lack basic freedom of choice in a patriarchal society.

In the same way, this study aims to focus on the traces of existentialism and absurdism in Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings; Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women* (2018).

4. Methodology

The present study aims to explore Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings; Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women* (2018) using Camus' theoretical framework of Absurdism and Existentialism. This research is a descriptive qualitative analysis of the selected novel. For this purpose, the data was collected by in-depth and intensive reading of the selected novel, highlighting the text while reading and coding the text according to the themes of absurdism and existentialism.

5. Textual Analysis

5.1. Absurdity of Life

As Camus described, absurdity is the idea that the world is meaningless and the search for meaning brings man to conflict with the reality of this world. Humans are in a constant struggle to

either accept this reality or revolt against it. The novel, *Unfettered Wings* (2018), consists of these elements of absurdism as Munir portrays the absurdities of life through Farida, a ten-year-old girl, whose struggle began during the partition when her family had to move from Patiala to Lahore. The story explains the horrors of partition from the perspective of a child. Through her innocent eyes, the readers experience the drastic riots of partition and how it impacted many families. Munir's exceptional writing shows the absurdities of life and how human life becomes nothing, and despite man's efforts to create meaning through their choices, life is still absurd. "According to the philosophy of existentialism, humans deserve a chance of living with subjective consciousness, which can only be achieved through freedom" (Koala, 2011). Similarly, to make sense of the absurd situation during partition, Farida's father chose to stay in Patiala so that he could attend the lands while all other family members would leave for Lahore. But the world has something else planned for him, as he was killed by two unknown men in front of his daughter. The image of seeing the death of the whole family from Farida's eyes, the feeling of absurdity is aroused in the minds of readers as the young girl is left with no one other than her old grandfather in times of war. Another anxiety that strikes the minds of readers is how Farida and many other people are going to live in this world who lost their loved ones during the riots of partition. Such questions result in even more absurdity. Another incident described the absurdity of life when Farida reached Lahore along with her grandfather, Lala. She saw a helpless pregnant lady in the camps who was looking for her father. But because she was impregnated through an act of rape during partition, her father rejected her existence and abandoned her. Later, this girl was found dead as she ended her meaningless existence through suicide. The pain faced by the characters connects the readers to the reality of life. Later in this short story, Farida is forced to marry a man who is twice her age for the sake of refuge. This indicates that female lacks the agency to make their choices and thus struggle to find meaning in their lives. Farida had to get married as a child bride so that she would not be alone in this harsh world when her grandfather died. This represents that even after experiencing the absurdities of life as Farida did, the world will always be meaningless.

The story of Reema also illustrates the absurdities of life, as Reema was betrayed by her family members. Home and family are supposed to be the sanctity of human beings that can save man from the harsh realities of the world. But this was not the case for Reema, as she was raped by her uncle in her childhood. Her story explores the horrible and realistic image of a patriarchal society where female have to fight their battles on their own. It shows that unspoken words may never harm others, but in the long run, they shake your world upside down. The story begins when Reema is 80 years 80-year-old Alzheimer's patient and is continuously thinking about the time when she was betrayed by her uncle, Billo, at the innocent age of ten.

"However, the same cannot be said about Reema, who had for years, mentally stayed in that period when she was ten. You see she has Alzheimer's" (Munir, 2018, p.22)

This shows the absurd situation of Reema's life, as even when she is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, she remembers the most traumatic experience of her life. The novel explains that Reema was very fond of her uncle, as her parents treated him as their child, but because of his corrupt intentions, he made Reema suffer throughout her life. This indicates the existential struggle faced by Reema as she was guilty that she had spent her whole life carrying the burden of her past traumatic experience. She didn't even share it with her caring and understanding husband, as she was afraid that like her family (dearest uncle) rejected her existence and used her to quench his lust, her husband would also not be able to accept her. Thus, she faced the forever-conflicting expectations and reality.

Billu: "I got a new game for you, guess what?" Reema: "Yay! She jumped down from the bed, anticipating a sport of sorts." Billu: "No, come back we have to play here on the bed. He gestured for her to come to sit near his legs." (Munir, 2018, p.35).

Billu tricked her to find the chocolate in the blanket and raped her. She was in so much pain and was not able to think about what was happening to her, as she was just ten. Her uncle raped her and escaped the house for many years. She was shouting for her mother when her father found her. *"I want Mommy"* (Munir, 2018, p.37). Even though her father couldn't understand what happened to Reema, her mother understood that the bruises on her daughter were not from just falling out the bed. Such a traumatic and painful experience faced by a ten-year-old girl leaves the reader to think of life as absurd. As Reema didn't deserve this trauma for life. *"Her mother never talked about those bruises after that night"* (Munir, 2018, p.37). Both Reema and her mother never talked about this incident again as her mother was afraid that if anyone finds out that Reema was raped then they will never accept her in this patriarchal society. This shows how life is doubly absurd and meaningless for women, as they have to hide their traumas and emotions so that they can be accepted by society. But these unheard incidents make their life meaningless, and they carry the burden of their troubled existence throughout their lives. Reema confesses that her husband was very kind towards her, but her fears made her hide her absurd realities from him, and thus made permanent impressions on her heart and mind.

"I owe an apology to myself for not opening up about Billu to my parents or Peter. I pushed myself into isolation and social boycotts. I spent a lonely colorless teenage year. I needed help, but I refused to get it. I was made to feel that I was the wrongdoer" (Munir, 2018, p.40).

This indicates that even though Reema was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, the traumatic impression made by her uncle had not faded. It means that humans carry the burden of their absurd lives to their deathbeds. As Camus explained, *"Absurdity arises when there is a conflict between our expectations and the reality of this universe"*. Farida and Reema's lives became absurd as their expectations were not fulfilled since they were betrayed by their family members. Farida was betrayed by her grandfather as he stole Farida's right to make her own decisions. While Reema's uncle betrayed her as he stole her right to live as a carefree girl. Reema was also betrayed by her mother as she made her conscious of societal expectations and made her world even more chaotic.

Summi was an intellectual and loving wife of Murad. Even though Murad was in constant guilt of his childhood friend's death Summi's presence and empathy towards her friend's ill mother helped him to make sense of his guilt. It was not easy to deal with Nadir's mother as after her son's death she became hysterical. The sadness of losing her young son has led her to delusions as she lives in the continuous illusion that her son, Nadir has gone to the city to earn a living and will come soon. This shows how humans try to make sense of their chaotic world. Even though she was hard to handle for the love of her husband, Summi took care of Nadir's mother like her own. So that her husband's guilt could lessen, and for this Murad also awed his wife for her bravery and courage.

"When in actuality, he was in awe of her bravery and courage. He could not believe how tactfully and lovingly she dealt with the mad old woman" (Munir, 2018, p.86).

Moreover, Summi never complained of Nadir's mother as she was doing this willingly for her husband's sake.

"His wife was bearing the burden of his guilt while she sang a song for him being the bravest soldier in the land; she outsized him in valor, spirit, and selflessness. The

realization made him feel smaller than he had felt while turning away the old Afghan” (Munir, 2018, p.86-87).

Habiba is a bold and brave girl with a heart of gold, who took a bullet for her kindness. In this story, the writer explains how females live absurd and meaningless lives in a patriarchal society. Habiba is the daughter of contract killer, Rustom, she lives with her elder sister Ayesha, and younger brother Sikander. Ayesha being the eldest daughter takes care of her small house while Sikander is a hot-headed boy who helps his father in kidnaping people for money. Both Ayesha and Habiba live a purposeless life as their only job is to stay in their house, clean, and cook for their father and Sikander. The story dives into the struggle of Habiba’s existence when her father brought a new prisoner to their house and Sikander treated him badly. Despite being the youngest one, Sikander attempts to be authoritative in front of his sister for being a male. Since they live in a conservative tribe, Ayesha and Habiba are not allowed to leave their camps but Habiba is empathic towards the new prisoner and tries to make things easy for him but in return faces harsh and life-ending consequences.

“What are you doing here?” He almost barked. “Give him the blanket. It is cold out here.” She wasn’t bothered by his tone” (Munir, 2018, p.104).

This shows the aggressive tone of Sikander towards Habiba for considering the needs of the prisoner. Ayesha being the eldest one has already accepted her fate as she often attempts to stop Habiba from crossing her so-called limits created by her brother. However, according to Habiba, no one should be treated as an animal, even if they are prisoners. This shows how Habiba tries to create meaning in her life but ultimately, she is shot by her brother in the name of honor.

“Habiba complied and handed him over the bread. She was about to turn back when she saw that his ankles were bleeding and the wounds were gathering pus. She cringed a little but the prisoner could not see the alteration in her facial expression, not only because she was covered in a veil but also because he was eating hungrily like a famished dog” (Munir, 2018, p.109).

The murder of Habiba by her brother in the name of honor for giving medicines to a human being creates a sense of absurdity among readers. It shows that life is meaningless and humans have to follow the set patterns and if they try to create their meaning and purpose of life then he/she will face consequences.

Beena is a mother of a single child and a gynecologist who works vigilantly in both her personal and professional life. She faces the absurdities of her life in the form of her expectations. After five good years of her married life, she thinks that the romantic spark between her and her husband has faded. She wants her husband to love her back as he used to during the early days of marriage. While both are happy with their current life situations Beena’s expectations of an extra-romantic husband often leave her thinking that her life could be different. Since their marriage anniversary is about to come, she is planning something big for her husband to renew the spark.

“She was a doctor by profession-a-gynecologist, to be precise, the public hospital at which she worked, housed two hundred beds in the maternity ward. Although she was only one of the forty-three doctors in the obstetrics and gynecology department, she knew she was indispensable. The patients outnumbered the doctors, every day, in such situations; it was very tough to take a day off. However, she had a plan under her belt for an upcoming special occasion” (Munir, 2018, p.172).

But when her husband fails to reach her expectations, she gets disappointed. This shows how Beena is questioning her existence because of her expectations.

"She left him with his colleagues, who had gathered around to congratulate them both. He offered to drop her at the exit or at least, till the elevator, but she declined. "Save it for tonight". ' She smiled meaningfully at him and urged him to go play host for his colleagues. Feeling elated, for the plan was running smoothly ...Irfan came back to a perfumed, powdered and dressed-up wife who was embraced and fondled by the tired husband" (Munir, 2018, p.177).

Meera, a retired professor of political science at Punjab University, is facing troubles in society as she never followed the path of traditional societal expectations. She is unmarried and living the life of her dreams but still, she has to tolerate the judgments of society as she rejected the traditional norms of a patriarchal society.

"She was agile and active, and yet, there was no denying the fact that she had aged. The white on her head was not the only thing indicating her experience and observation in life, but also the wrinkles on her face, the smile and frown lines, the crow's feet, and the heather-colored bags under the sunken grey eyes- all were pointing towards the late sixties she was pushing through" (Munir, 2018, p.191).

5.2. The Myth of Sisyphus

In the third short story named Maria, the absurdity of life is illustrated through the character of Asif, a Persian rug trader. This story is told from a man's perspective who fell in love with wanton girl Maria and sacrifices his sleep by standing outside her mansion daily just to see her glimpse. Camus presented the idea of The Myth of Sisyphus in 1942, in which he described "the Greek myth of Sisyphus who was condemned for eternity, to roll a rock up a hill, only to have it roll to the bottom again each time and in doing so, he found his meaning of life." This myth is related to Camus's absurdity. Through the character of Asif, one can also identify this form of absurdity as Asif who had come to the posh area of Lahore to sell Persian rugs but forgot his purpose because he fell for the beauty of Maria, who is a prostitute. Asif somehow knew that for Maria, his feelings were nothing but he still found meaning in chasing what his heart desired. Asif's repeated actions of trying to gain the love and attention of Maria can be described through Camus' essay The Myth of Sisyphus. As Albert Camus described man goes through three stages of life in search of meaning; psychological suicide, physical suicide, and acceptance. When rejected repeatedly, Asif finally came to realize that Maria's love has no meaning, he accepted his fate and left his mansion with a broken heart. But the idea of Maria always stayed with him. As Camus said, *"A man searches for his meaning in life and in the end, he comes to know that his search is meaningless"*.

5.3. Alienation

Reema isolated herself throughout her life because of her traumatic experience. Even though her husband was understanding and caring she was not able to share her emotional and physical burden with him. This led to her living a traumatic life with no meaning. Thus, her whole existence is because of nothing. She was so much burdened by her past that now when she was 80 years old and suffering from Alzheimer's disease, she still couldn't escape her past that was caused by her family member.

Habiba and Ayesha, both were kept isolated from society in the name of honor. As in the conservative patriarchal society, the only purpose of women's lives is to stay and home and do household chores for the men. They were not allowed to have a purpose of their own and thus led a meaningless life. The one time when Habiba tried to reject the inhumane rules created by her brother she had to sacrifice her life. Sikander shot Habiba and killed her, this portrays that women's lives are nothing in a patriarchal society.

5.4. Limited Freedom

Limited freedom can be observed in many characters of *Unfettered Wings* (2018). Farida was never given a choice to choose her future and her family members decided everything for her without considering what she wanted. The same happened with the pregnant lady that Farida saw in the camps. She was raped and traumatized by the rioters but her choices and situations were not considered when her father rejected her to save himself from the sharp judgments of society.

Reema also had limited freedom of choice throughout her life as her choices were influenced by the societal pressures. She had to live with the fear that people might judge a ten-year-old for being raped by her uncle and she will not be accepted by anyone in the society. Thus because of this fear she carried the burden of her soul to the end of her life.

Habiba and Ayesha also had limited freedom as they had to survive inside a small tent which they called home because of the patriarchal society they lived in. Later, when Habiba tried to cross her boundaries by helping the prisoners she was brutally killed by her brother. Ayesha after the death of her younger sister was married off to her cousin so that she would be able to forget the loss of her only sister. Both were never given any choices about what they wanted for their lives.

5.5. Search for Meaning

In the first story of Farida, the mothers played a crucial role. As regardless of the riots they did all they could to provide a safe and comfortable environment to their children. Ultimately, all this ended drastically but the women of Farida's house tried to make sense of their absurd situations.

"The babies had nestled into the softest cushions of their mother's fleshy bodies" (Munir, 2018, p.3). "Her mother had huddled together Farida's two baby brothers and brought them closer to herself" (Munir, 2018, p.4).

Nazia is a single mother, who has fought her way out of an abusive marriage. This action can be identified as Nazia's response to life's absurdity. As in a patriarchal society, females face subjugation and have to live with their troubled fate. But Nazia rejected this notion and negated the unnecessary societal and cultural expectations from females. She acted as a strong woman, and rejected the traditional norms of society, despite the involvement of her abusive and unkind ex-husband in her life because of her son, Mustafa.

"No papa. She jerked herself upright to show her father that she was strong enough to take on the task herself. I shall be fine, she reassured him... so, she didn't want to physically stress him out as well" (Munir, 2018, p.132).

This shows that regardless of her absurd realities, she is fighting her own battles and not becoming a burden on her father. When she has to go to court, to meet her child with his father, she acts as a strong woman who regardless of her traumatic past, is now ready to deal with her situation. This shows how she is trying to create meaning in this absurd world.

"Nazia, too, had not forgiven Asad and was always reminded of all the agony he had caused her. There on the bench, sitting beside Imran, when she saw Asad staring at her with bloodshot eyes, she let go of all fear. She did not care anymore whether people would talk behind her back about having an affair with another man or sharing a paratha with him out in the open. She did not care if Asad would call her whore (that was his pet word for her all the time she was married to him)" (Munir, 2018, p.138).

Through the character of Nazia, the writer portrays that women can also create their own meaning of life in this meaningless and absurd world. Thus, she can be identified as an Absurd

hero, as according to Camus, “an absurd hero identifies the absurdity of his/her situations and continues to live it meaningfully.”

“Time up, she declared like an officer on duty. I was always right about you, he said between gritted teeth, looking at Imran but speaking to Nazia. ‘Yes, keep telling yourself that, Asad. Maybe the pain of your loss will lessen that way. Now my son needs me.’ She held Mustapha’s hand and hugged him tightly” (Munir, 2018, p.139).

Saima, is a strong woman, a caring mother, and a loving wife. She is also a police officer who is currently investigating the murder of a dead bride. Through this character, the writer attempted to portray another strong character who is trying to make sense of her life regardless of its absurdities. Although the male police headquarters was mocking that a female can never be able to solve such a complex case but she handles this bravely and shows the strength of her character.

“His voice was becoming smaller with every question. Saima observed him with interest. He was her suspect, alright, but she wanted to arrive to the conclusion of him being the culprit after knowing him through his words and not through the file a rookie officer had prepared for her (the file was complete with details starting from his birth certificate to his father’s death certificate)” (Munir, 2018, p.143).

This shows that even in a patriarchal system where females face judgments from society and often have to go the extra mile to prove their identities. Female like Saima can work their way out of such absurd norms of society. Ultimately, she succeeded in solving the case of the dead bride with her exceptional skills.

“His answer had been quite straight till now. But she was just warming him up. She closed the file, got up from her seat and walked behind him. He froze, not knowing what, she in mind. The fitted pants and shirts on a policewoman were quite intimidating for the man who sat in a loser’s position in the small cubicle, with one blood red colored build that only threw light on the table. With him sitting in the chair and her standing behind him in the dark, he was visibly petrified” (Munir, 2018, p.144).

Meera, a retired professor represents that a woman can also find the essence of her existence without following the traditional norms of patriarchal society. As regardless of societal pressure faced by a woman to get married at a certain age, Meera never married as she was never interested in getting a husband. Unlike most females who consider marriage as a crucial part of life. Meera was never impressed by the concept of marriage as she has seen traumatic experiences in her family. Her she revolted against the traditional patterns and expectations of society and created her own meaning of life. But despite her being a strong independent woman she was still judged by people near her.

“The one thing that really messed with Meera’s head was someone calling her Mrs. Meera Malik. She found it very presumptuous on their part to assume she was a missus. “Miss”, she hissed every time that she had to correct them. Her sharp nose, arched eyebrows and thin lips accentuated her curt and crisp voice” (Munir, 2018, p.183).

Zainab is another character that represents the strong nature of women. She found the essence of her life when she became the mother of a girl after two boys. Her daughter is suffering from down syndrome but she realized the true strength of women after her birth. As Eman, her daughter, gave her the strength to fight the world and she accepted that her daughter is a blessing in disguise.

6. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings; Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women* (2018) consist of various aspects of absurdism and existentialism. As the main characters continuously face the absurd realities of life but regardless of these absurdities they often attempt to create meaning for their existence. The selected novel consists of ten chapters, each chapter portrays a different short story. Every chapter of *Unfettered Wings*, is named after the female protagonists (Farida, Reema, Maria, Summi, Habiba, Nazia, Saima, Beena, Meera, and Eman) of that story and talks about the struggles faced by them. The analysis showed that how the main characters experience the meaninglessness of life and how they deal with it. The study observed themes of absurdism and existentialism like The Myth of Sisyphus, Nothingness, Limited Freedom, Alienation and Isolation in the novel. The characters portrayed the existential struggles and absurd realities of life but still tried to make sense of their troubled and chaotic lives.

7. References

- Abdullah, M. A., & Saksono, S. T. (2021). Alienation in Albert Camus' the Stranger'. IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), 26(4), 34-38.
- Al-Utoom, M. (2016). The Second Sex: An Analytical Study of Simone De Beauvoir's Influence on Arab Feminism. European Journal of Social Sciences.
- Anene Ezeugwu, C., Benneth Chukwuebuka, U., Odoh, O. E., Kate Ojukwu, C., Orabueze, F. O., & Onuoha, M. L. V. (2022). Sequence of Conformism and Revolt in Albert Camus' The Plague: A psycho-analytical confrontation of religious exploitation in the contemporary society. Cogent Arts & Humanities, 9(1), 2015882.
- Ashraf, K., & Hassan, M. (2021). Identifying Beauvoir's Idea of Equal Freedom in Munir's *Unfettered Wings; Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women*: An Existential Feminist Approach. Journal of Languages, Culture and Civilization, 3(3), 157-168.
- Beauvoir, S. (1989). *The second sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Camus, A., & O'Brien, J. (1991). *The myth of Sisyphus, and other essays*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Camus, A. (1990). *The myth of Sisyphus*. London: Penguin.
- Cline, A. (2018, March 4). Retrieved from ThoughtCo : <https://www.thoughtco.com/albertcamus-biography-249944>
- Francis, S. Existential Approach to Franz Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis' Sameer Francis, b Diwakar Prahaladaiah.
- Holmes, B. (2019). Is human life absurd?. *Philosophia*, 47(2), 429-434.
- Hyder, S., Fatima, R., Majeed, R., & Akbar, M. A. (2022). A Story Of Female Sub-Ordination: An Analysis Of Sana Munir's Reema In The Light Of Beauvorian Phenomena Of Defloration And Altruism. *Webology* (ISSN: 1735-188X), 19(1).
- Mondal, D. (2018). The Trial by Kafka: In the light of absurdism and existentialism. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*. doi:10.14662/IJELC2018.041
- Munir, S. (2018). *Unfettered Wings*. Rupa Publications. Print.
- Nagel, T. (1971). The absurd. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68(20), 716-727. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2024942>.
- Rasheed, N., Khan, M. Y., & Rasheed, S. (2021). Philosophical Exploration of Absurdism and Existentialism.

- Rehan, M. (2021). Philosophical Exploration of Existentialism and Absurdism in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*. *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 5(II), 451-460.
- Salsabila, I., & Tjahjani, J. (2020, August). Absurdity and The Significance of the Idea of Death in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger*. In *Proceedings of the 1st Conference of Visual Art, Design, and Social Humanities by Faculty of Art and Design, CONVASH 2019*, 2 November 2019, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1955). *No exit, and three other plays*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sartre, J.-P. (2003). *Being and nothingness* (H. E. Barnes, Trans.; 2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Syed, A. F., Aurangzaib, A. A., & Naz, S. Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings: An Insight into The Lives of Seemingly Commonplace Yet Contextually Phenomenal Female Protagonists*.
- Verma, S., Mahavidyalaya, M. G., & Kheri, L. (2016). Existentialism in Upamanyu Chatterjee's Novel "English August". *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*.