Existential Philosophy: A Brief Survey

Existentialism has been a major influence in the evolution of world literature during early sixties and late seventies. So dominant was its sway on Indian Fiction in English that led to the emergence of a new breed of second generation of novelists like Arun Joshi and Anita Desai, as we have notice in the previous chapter. They have reshaped the thematic concern of Indian English fiction by replacing the existing social themes with the existential ones, from outer world of their protagonists to the ‘dark recesses of mind’. The individual facing the identity-crisis has been placed to the centre of fictional imagination. His frustration, alienation, disappointment and sense of loss- all these have attracted much attention in the West; became the staple of Indian English fiction. This was natural because after the agony created by the Second World War; modern society has become a synonym with human crisis. Here, one continuously confronted the hostility and impersonality of the outside world. Devoid of all social and emotional warmth, the individual staggered through life and its rational matrix with utter casualness and perfunctoriness.

Modern circumstances imbued life and living with a sense of boredom and futility. This is because of decrease in human values due to the over-rationalization of philosophy and over-mechanization of science. Both have engendered the feeling of anxiety and perplexity in human life. The individual is ‘thrown’ in a modern world where he is totally different from what he should be, or what he wants to be and what he really is. He has not fully left the platform of religious and mythical support and as a result, he possesses, a split personality living under an immense confusion, and in spite of so many substances of pleasure, he has ‘neither peace within nor calm around’. He is self-alienated, a stranger and an ‘outsider’.
Existentialism grew out of such experiences of modern man which is essentially an attempt to grapple with the ontological enigma of his angst-ridden existence. It emphasized an individual’s overriding need to assert one’s individuality or freedom and one’s sense of responsibility to one-self in the very conditions of existence that seemed to negate or invalidate him. It emerged as a vision against traditional philosophy which is based on the belief that construction of logical system was the most adequate and authentic way to reach the truth. By and large, it emerged as a revolt against rationalism, essentialism and determinism. Walter Kaufmann writes: “Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against the traditional philosophy” (347). Existentialist philosophers emphasize the inexplicability of reality. In short, existentialism offers an ontological perspective of man’s concrete existence: his uniqueness, his contingent and incomprehensible nature, his ambiguities and contradictions, his anguish and despair, his absolute freedom and consequent responsibility for what he does and makes himself to be.

Although the peak of existentialism came in the 1940's with great thinkers such as Sartre, de Beauvoir, Camus and Merleau-Ponty, the seeds of existential thinking can be traced back in the remote past with the development of intellectual urge in human mind to know the phenomena around since it has always become the tendency of human mind to conquer nature and its resources. Western philosophy has always tried to be true to the etymological meaning of philosophy in being essentially a quest for truth lying beyond the visible world but for a long time it did not concern with the existential situation of the individual. It was the desideratum of the Western philosophers to find out the substance underlying the world. Proff. Werner writes in his *Yoga and Indian Philosophy*:

> Philosophical thought is noted for its generalized approach in dealing with reality, including man, and although the concept of
man as based, in the first instance, on our having an individual and
direct experience of being individual men… concern for the
individual seems to have been banned from the main-stream of
philosophy for reasons never properly stated.(1)

The history of existential thinking begins from the Greek having its
reflections on the nature of the world or universe. At the dawn of Greek history,
The Greek mind was preoccupied with the individual and the question concerning
his destiny and its relationship with the unseen forces of nature. In Greek society,
writes Proff Werner:

There was a revolt against the one sided objective approach to
reality which disregarded that quality of mental life manifested in
the human personality which is capable of moral judgments and
actions. (2)

Finally, this approach gave birth to the Sophists who concluded the dictum
that man was measure of all things. The Sophists violently attacked the traditional
beliefs of the time because, in fact, they were pragmatists whose chief concern was
the man in everyday life; man, not revolting or thinking individual but an acting
one. They ignored the rational part of man on the behalf of his instinct and passion.
Thus, they may be called the forerunners of existentialism.

At the peak of Sophism, it was Socrates (470/469-39BC) whose noble
mission was to restore the values of morality based upon reason and not unruly
passions. He represented a new beginning to the objective probe of human reality.
He emphasized to ‘know thyself’ and sought the help of questionnaire method to
find out the true definitions of general and universal ethical terms as only such
definitions were helpful to enable their possessor to escape from the
epistemologically unstable and morally precarious state of mind known as belief or
opinion (doxa) and to attain true knowledge (episteme). By his own method, Socrates tried to differentiate what was right and what was wrong because all wrongdoing in the world was the result of ignorance. Whoever knows this difference between good and evil, he will never act contrary to his own knowledge. Socrates’ attempt was to establish an objective and independent farm of nature which would be valid in every situation and to every individual.

Socrates’ successor and disciple, Plato (424-347 BC) continued Socrates’ tradition and he considered moral and ethical values higher than the reality itself. For him, the entire world was a faint reflection of the ‘absolute’ and ‘ideal’ world and he provoked the individual to concentrate towards this absolute idea because ideas are ‘true objects of knowledge’. Plato was a true founder of that scientific enquiry and objective approach to reality which was carried forward by his successors one by one and flourished in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Unfortunately, it was acknowledged as the mainstream of Western philosophy which also seems natural only because the Western society, and later on, the whole civilization is the result of the extraverted attitude of the Western mind to conquer nature and her resources. Aristotle, in the beginning contradicted his teacher’s ideas but could not place the individual at the center of his philosophical investigations.

After Aristotle, the socio-political scenario of Greece began to change rapidly. Under the impact of oriental philosophy that crept in through Persia, the philosophical thinking tended towards the individual; but it was interpreted in the terms of religion and mythology. The individual was established only because there was no peace in the outer world and hence, it was suitable to search for it within the heart of the individual. This gave birth to Skepticism where the life and entity of God all were put on question and a search for pleasure in life was the
chief aim. Epicurus was supposed to be the founder of such philosophy hence these ideas were designated behind him as Epicurean.

Influenced with Aristophanes and Cyrus and perhaps the oriental thoughts, Zeno of Citium (334-262 B.C.) tried to establish the Stoics school since he advocated of the moral and intellectual concerns as chief aim of life. He echoed existential concerns and with him, for the first time, the individual was placed at the centre of thought.

Before the plant of existential thought transplanted by the stoics grew into a tree, it was suppressed by the religious thoughts of Christianity and it could not re-blossomed before the efforts of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). He was the first philosopher who questioned the existing way of philosophy. Beginning with doubt, he attempted to bridge the gap between the philosophy and science, if any, and thus he insisted upon the use of logic and empirical knowledge which is accessible to everyone. It was the true beginning of modern existentialism when Descartes proved his own existence by his famous *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) because to think, it is necessary to exist hence, the existence of individual is above all and self-proved. This thinking object is at the same time the preceptor also and therefore, it is absolutely certain.

The successors of Descartes like Spinoza and Leibnitz both were rationalists and tried to solve the problems of human existence though the logic of mathematics and rational thinking and unfortunately Descartes’ ideas of existential analysis turned towards the rational thinking of philosophy once again.

Whereas Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz insisted upon the rational explanation of the universe; John Lock, Barkley and Hume emphasized its empirical aspect. For John Lock, the source of knowledge is perception (posteriori). His incomplete ideas were completed by Berkley. He was another landmark towards the existential thinking. He provided new approach to existence
and he clearly viewed the dictum esse est percipi thesis (to be is to be perceived or to perceive) but he could not develop his existential ideas and wasted his energy in reconciling religion and philosophy.

In-between, the true predecessor of existential philosophy was Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) who took keen interest in the problem of human existence. He discards:

What a chimera then is man. What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy. Judge of all things, imbecile worm of the earth; depositary of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error: the pride and refuse of the universe (online)

Pascal emphasized self knowledge of the individual and thus accelerated the quest of identity not form without but within. David Hume was his true successor but he confused himself between the terms ‘imperious’ and ‘ideas’. He also opposed the work-cause relationship which was the base of contemporary science.

The long going debate between rationalism and empiricism was finalized by Immanuel Kant who established the ‘transcendental philosophy’ and presented a critical analysis of philosophy for searching a moral path common to all which leads towards the goal of ultimate realization of highest good. Hegel (1770-1831) followed another way to describe himself, although he tried to attain the scientific cognition of truth but his abstract ideas failed to help man to understand his problems in this universe.

In this way, philosophy, which succeeded to free itself from the bonds of religion, failed to free man from general abstractions. Religion offered salvation if individual gave up his identity and leaves the world in the search of abstract truth. Political theories, more or less, based on the Hegelian absolutism, promised man temporary salvation on earth, practically at the same price.
As a result of the background prepared by the objectivity of values, the experiencing individual finally lost sight of- and he was still missing in the structure of our scientifically oriented objectivist civilization. The 20th century Western existentialists re-established this individual as the most important factor of reality. This was a protest against the inadequacy of philosophical thought and religious insufficiency of Protestantism since both of these maintained an impersonal dogmatism not very different from Christianity. This came out from a philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) who was fully religious committed and for whom truth was subjective and it was not possible to realize by the objective and intellectual method of his predecessors. He criticized the intellectual philosophy which was based on the dichotomy of the knower and the knowable and argued that in fact, both are not separate from each other. Truth is not something which was outside but everything within. Truth is adoptable, not knowable. Kierkegaard emphasized "I do not know truth except when it becomes life in me"(Kierkegaard TIC 47). Truth, for Kierkegaard is subjective means it cannot be imposed upon the individual from outside but it is "an objective uncertainty that helps fast in an appropriate process of the most passionate inwardness"(Kierkegaard, CUP 182).

Kierkegaard refused all the useful objective criteria of truth whether based on scientific evidence or on the rationalized dogma of religious establishment. The truth for him was personal and (at this point he criticized Christianity also) could be acquired through various ‘spheres of existence’ such as 'aesthetic', 'ethical' and 'religious' stages of life. He concluded religious stage as 'theological suspension of the ethical' and a way to God. Thus Kierkegaard could not refuse the necessity of God in his philosophical system but this necessity was purely personal and based upon the individual choice whether to accept the God or not.
Kierkegaard has made God as a subject of individual choice and left it upon his discretion but Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), more rhetorically declared that for the modern man 'God is dead' and he insisted upon the personal 'free choice' and 'will power' of the man. Like Kierkegaard, he also believed in the glorification of human will and 'being' and advocated 'authentic living' that stands for 'transvaluation of all values'. As stated in the beginning, by nature man wants to prevail and overpower the entire universe. This will to power has been reformulated by Nietzsche in his concept of 'superman'. He proclaims:

Life itself is essentially appropriation injuring, overpowering the alien and the weak. It is oppression, hardness, imposing ones from-life just is will to power- It is a consequence of the will-to-power which is but the will to life. (BGE, 141)

The ideas of individual and his destiny were further clarified by French philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) by offering 'a meta-physique of hope'. His philosophy is a result of dissatisfaction of intellectual efforts to understand man and his destiny. As a side effect of 1st world war (in which he worked as head of the information service), he came to realize that long prevailing intellectual analysis and scientific methods have made man a 'thinking object' and 'acting machine'. His centre of study, therefore, is modern man who is detached from his own reality and consequently leading an un-peaceful and problematic life. For him, this life of this 'functional man' is not a problem but a mystery and it can be detangled by completely absorption into it. To remain complicated into problem is 'to have' and the feeling of mystery is 'to be'. This feeling of existence is not to gain but to assimilate. This having and 'being' is pointed out by Marcel in his Tragic Wisdom and Beyond where he attaches deeper significance to 'being' than 'having'. Having implies possession, a burden, and an impediment. Being suggests freedom
from encumbrance of all possession and it prepares for entrance into the life eternal. Marcel’s explanation of human existence is based upon his relation with the world around him. This relation is twofold, between 'I' and 'It' and 'I' and 'thou' which gradually reaches to 'absolute thou' which can also be identified as God. Human freedom or freedom of will is a link between 'I' and 'absolute thou'.

So far as the problem of evil is concerned, Marcel believes that all the wrongdoings of our society are the outcome of individual’s refusal to appeal earnestly to God. Man is 'homo victor', always on the way to self realization. This essential note is inherent in his existential humanism where he declares: “To be man, to continue to remain man” (Macquarie, 56).

The German professor Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), for the first time, used the term ‘existential philosophy’ in his analysis. His centre of thought, like his predecessors, is man surrounded by the modern culture and thus doomed to failure. He seems to be worried about the ‘humanity’ in human being and struggles to rescue it. He proclaims to wisdom, “the way in which man approaches his failure determines what he will become” (19). As a result, he never forgets to analyze the ‘boundary situations’ (surroundings around man) and wants to save humanity preserving the particular qualities of the individual. The world around man is constantly changing and therefore every time a new world appears before the individual and consequently he is approaching a new problem in a new universe. These rapidly changing 'existenzes' have been called as 'encompassing' by Jaspers that is constantly widening up to the level of transcendence. The word 'existenz' used by Jaspers is not the same as used by other thinkers. 'Existenze' for him are the objects of the world. Jaspers’ existence is 'dasein' which Kierkegaard terms as 'being there' and Sartre treats as 'being–in-itself'.

Jaspers is vigilant for individual consciousness towards its own subjectivity so that he may be aware of his existence. Here he faces the true problem of
philosophy. The individual exists, first in subjectivity and then in the universe. The
dualism between these two existences is the motif of Jaspers. The individual is
captured between the dual snare of the world and the self and his attempt is to lift
him up beyond this duality. This is the way to transcendence as suggested by him.
It is the ultimate reality of human life. Thus, the entity of world and self become
the parts of philosophical thought in Jaspers.

Jaspers advocated the three 'modes' of entity- ‘being oneself’ (thinking
individual), ‘being there’ (subject which is thought) and a third entity which is
beyond these two modes which he named 'being itself'. The faith is the important
link between being oneself (thinking individual) and the ‘being itself'. Jaspers also
talks about the inductive situations responsible for leading the individual from
'being oneself' to 'being itself'. He calls them the ‘ultimate situations' like death,
fear and anxiety. Sartre terms those 'nausea'. Here, the individual finds himself
either in the 'encompassing which we are' (I have been fastened in the world) or in
the 'encompassing that is being itself' (I have fastened the world). But in both the
situations, the ultimate form is transcendence that feels to those only who live an
'authentic life' i.e. where the individual lives his life being aware of his
individuality. Life other than this becomes - 'in-authentic'.

The above-mentioned philosophers have proved for the first time of Socrates
that philosophy is a personal quest for truth rather than an objective enquiry into
the nature of the world around.

In so far as these points are incorporated in the existentialism, it can be
claimed as possessing the qualities of humanism. At the same time, scientific
progress was introduced into philosophy in which the dominant method of analysis
initiated from phenomenology. The most successful existentialist to apply
phenomenological analysis to human situation was Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).
He described humanism in the terms of phenomenology and thus enabled modern
existentialists to make some fundamental discoveries for philosophy and conceptualize man's everyday psychological experience. The basic two discoveries, the 'uniqueness of individual' and the 'human existence in the world' have been further elaborated by Heidegger who tried to solve human problems through a fundamental ontology. His Being and Time is a perfect analysis of human existence. He finds man in a painful situation and paves the way from 'beings' to 'being'. This 'being' ( dasein) is human existence which can never be externalized or objectified. Although, the individual forms a concept of humanity but it is not an objective content, but only an expansion of everyman's concrete subjective awareness of existing as a particular human being among others. For Heidegger, the base of being can be discovered in the analysis of human existence.

Secondly, Heidegger recognizes the various structures of human existence that involve his awareness of being in the world having a poetical relation with it. This world is a basic structure of human existence characterized by 'possibility', 'factity' and 'fallness'. The being in the world is to establish relation with these three structures. Therefore, the existence of one individual is virtually different from the other depending upon his relation with these structures. These structures of the being of man constitute different approaches of living such as 'care' or concern (sorge). Being in the world also implies the 'authentic' or 'in-authentic' existence. When the individual lives in the world being aware of his humanism, his life is 'authentic' but on the contrary when he forgets his individuality and makes himself an object among other objects of the world, his life becomes 'in-authentic'.

The third discovery is somewhat a complicated problem and it can be the subject of historical inquiry ranging from ancient to modern. It is expressed by existential dictum that 'existence is prior to essence'. It rejects any definite structure of man prior to his existence. This dictum was provided by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) in late 20th century. For him, man comes before his very idea of
'manhood'. The first consciousness of existence is the result of subjective confrontation of the individual that has no universal or common form. Expending human existence in his *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Sartre deals with various dimensions of human existence, mainly three: the object or 'being-itself' (en-soi), the individual or 'being-for-itself' (pour-soi) and other individuals as 'being-for-others. Being-itself denotes "non-conscious being" that are the things around man. The 'being-for-itself' is the conscious man “who is what it is and which is not what it is” (Sartre, 617). This has been recognized by Sartre as a form of consciousness in which the individual is always aware of a 'lack' or 'nothingness' within him. The 'being-for-others' is the 'others' existence for whom the individual becomes an object (us-object). The existing individual (being-it-self) is centre of Sartre's thoughts and the basic structure of its existence is based on an eternal confrontation between the other dimensions of his existence. This conflict implies choosing to live in a certain way and just that is the recurrent act of forming man's essence, which thus undergoes constant modifications throughout his life. In this way, Sartre emphasizes the creative role of the individual personality and the being of man as a process rather than a static entity.

Unlike other existentialist thinkers, Sartre could not provide a definite platform to the existing individual. Although he talked about the self-transcendence in the individual but strictly opposed the necessity of God in his philosophy. Notwithstanding, he acquired political overtones later on and acknowledged Marxism as the only philosophy today.

With the upheavals caused by two subsequent world wars, the existentialists turned towards the social assumptions of their ideas. Sartre provocatively phrased that everyone has the war he deserves and we were never as free as under the occupation, which shows his involvement into a social existentialism. The political
overtone of Sartre and Heidegger’s unfortunate involvement into the world of politics is another example. Sartre, in his *Critique* elaborates his understanding of how social groups and institutions can possess qualities that surpass their individual members without dissolving the latter’s freedom and responsibility.

Having agreed with Sartre in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that there is no woman nature, Simon D. Beauvoir (1908-1986) now insists that there is no essence of the famine and for the same reason ‘existence proceeds essence’, it does not follow it. She takes this as an invitation to move from ontology to sociology and politics. Beauvoir developed the concept of ‘situation’ by underscoring the role played by gender and its social construction. In her most famous phrase of *The Second Sex*, she writes ‘one is not born a woman, one becomes women’. She devotes a large part of her study to the historical genesis of ‘woman’ and the role assigned to them in the patriarchal social system. She founded the base for existential feminism and put the basic question how did women become ‘other’ in the human race. How did hers become the ‘second sex’?

In what we now recognize as integral to the existentialist tradition, liberation of individual is always possible, but in the socially conscious dimension of the movement, one realizes that one cannot act directly on the freedom of either the oppressors or the oppressed. This is the fact lying behind De Beauvoir’s text which is treated a call to action. Not only it rises over consciousness to a social problem, it describes the vehicles of the oppression and in this way suggests the means to rectify our efforts aimed at changing what Sartre called ‘the base and structures of choice’.

Maurice-Merleave-Ponty (1908-1961) captured the realistic optimism of the existentialist position in the social arena when he extended Sartre’s humanist assumption to the social realm. The question he observed is to know what part freedom plays and whether we can allow it something without giving it everything.
He raised the basic problem of the place of human being in the material and cultural world. He was against the materialist, specially the dialectical materialists and emphasized that human being is more than the sum of physical, psychological and social forces. That more is our consciousness, by which we can assess and respond to these very forces. He summarized existentialism focusing his primary attention on our lived bodies. He called existence that movement through which man is in the world and involves himself in a physical and social situation which then becomes his point of view on the world.

Pounty’s contribution to existential thinking was cut short by his sudden death at the age of fifty three, but he presented a close analysis of our bodily being and of the ‘interworld’ of social existence that the early Sartre seemed to discount, if not ignore completely.

The Existential philosophy found its place in the literature by the successful efforts of Albert Camus (1913-1960). He was pre-occupied with the question of the nature and meaning of man, his hopes and aspirations. He was a true positive humanist with a slogan “to create, to transform, the humanity of the world into the image of man, to humanize what is inhuman- in short, to civilize” (online). His hero has to create personal value for him because meaning has to be created, not found, and it has to be created by the individual out of the actual experience of revolt.

Revolt seems to be one of the essential themes in Albert Camus. He explains- “I rebel therefore, I exist”. He has experienced the absurdity of life and declared “suicide and murder are thus two aspects of a single system, the system of an unhappy intellect which rather than suffers. Limitation chooses the dark victory which annihilates earth and human”.

Camus’ contribution in the field of existential philosophy is his experience of the absurd which was inherent not only in physical suicide but also in
intellectual and philosophical suicide by way of self-destruction and self prevention. For him, neither the modern man nor the world around is absurd, but it is the relationship between man and incongruous world. The absurd can arise in many ways but always ends with death.

While analyzing the basic structure of human existence, the existentialists have also analyzed other inevitable problems of their philosophy such as despair, death, freedom and absurdity. For Sartre, problems occur due to the ceaseless conflict between the conscious human existence and other dimensions of existence in which he is surrounded namely 'being-itself' and 'being-for-others'. Sometimes these dimensions of existence prove to be hindrance in human freedom and give rise to nausea and anguish or despair. In Sartre's ideology there is no place for God. For Heidegger, the source of despair is man's being thrown upon himself with respect to choosing the course of his actions. For all the existence, man is alone among the vast probability and free for his choice, even to choose God. Man's realization of this loneliness facing inescapable limitations like death, suffering, conflict and liability to error, while being absolutely responsible for choosing his own course of actions by which he determines his essence for himself.

Death, as an inevitable fact of existence, seems absurd to Sartre. It deprives life of all its obvious meanings and there seems no remedy, hence it should be accepted. Heidegger feels it a definite future and complete certainty of human existence. There is no escape from it and it represents man's personal possibility which is supreme among all as it allows him to extinguish them all. But whether chosen, accepted as it comes or banished from man's consciousness, death is the essential constituent of the structure of personal existence.

Another inescapable part of man's existence is freedom and the fact of being free. It has been dealt by all existentialists, theist or atheist. Even the place of God in Kierkegaard and Jaspers is subject to the private choice of the individual. Man is
condemned to be free under all situations and thus a maker of his own destiny even if he tries to hide it from himself behind a (chosen) adherence to any external authority. For Sartre freedom implies freedom of will and includes a sense of responsibility too. Based on his freedom of will, the individual moulds his essence because there is no support of God. The existentialists have shown that freedom is a structure or a mode of human existence rather than a property of human nature. It is not 'a form of being but a form of doing, of choosing and making itself'.

These structures of human existence are far from the reach of science and vital to man as the problems are faced by everybody. As long an individual ignores these structures, he lives a sort of life that the existentialists call 'in-authentic'. This is so when the individual ignores these basic structures because of ignorance or because of his acceptance of any objectified explanation of his existence given either by science or religion. In each of these cases he lives an 'in-authentic' existence refusing to live fully in his human capacity.

As being free is an aspect of being a man, the attempt to ignore the basic structures of existence is a free choice of an 'in-authentic' form of existence which does not enable a man to escape from full personal responsibility for it. Consciously facing of the facts mentioned above with the implied necessity to choose its direction, means to lead a real life which is categorized as 'authentic' by the existentialists.

In his 'in-authentic' existence, man wants to escape from his sense of responsibility or even his own freedom of will and he makes himself an object among other objects of the world by living himself at other's will and thus losing his specific humanity, dehumanizes himself. His life becomes a borrowed life -yet another form of 'in-authentic' existence.

The most urgent call to 'authentic' existence comes from the fact of death itself. When a man thinks about death, he questions the truth and turns to the
'authentic' life from the synthetic one. For Heidegger, 'authentic' life means to relate human existence with the being. It implies that a man should live his life with all its probabilities preserving his own specific humanity.

Some existentialists have shown the possibility of 'authentic' existence in the form of transcendence but it remains to be the subject of personal choice as God is also a matter of individual's own selection. God is subject and exists only for subjectivity in inwardness. Jaspers admits it as one can bear witness to the transcendence and this witness also comes as a personal choice and does not need theoretical formulation. In this way, existentialists have kept on the possibility of transcendence as a possibility to 'authentic' existence. This possibility has been recognized by Kierkegaard as 'theological suspension of the ethical' and it is 'absolute thou' for Marcel whereas Jaspers finds it in the form of 'encompassing'.

Although the materialist existentialists awake the authentic existence through their experience of dread in the feeling of being 'thrown', they ignore the possibility of transcendence which is the peak of conceptual thought with Jaspers, Marcel and even in Heidegger. Sartre has proved it indirectly. If the step toward individual encounter with the transcendence is not taken, either there be a step toward religious faith as in Marcel or the thinker will take the help of external doctrine for this action and it may be a form of revolution or social reform but in both the cases, it will be an escape from the full responsibility of the philosopher and virtually a choice of an in-authentic life. Sartre took the shelter of Marxism but it is not a solution as it diminishes the individuality for the sake of collective responsibility. Thus, it seems quite natural and logical for consistent existentialism to point or lead in the transcendence, and then to live it to the individual to work out for him any further conclusion and steps.

Form the forgoing discussion we have seen that Western philosophy has always tried to be true to the etymological meaning of philosophy in being an
intellectual quest for learning. But Philosophy in India has always been a vision as well as an instrument of vision (darshan) rather than an intellectual quest for truth and the central problem of philosophical investigation has always been the individual and his self. 'See the self' has been the key note of almost every school of Indian philosophy. Thus, Indian philosophy has always been concerned with the existential situation of the individual and has emphasized the need of practical realization of truth which was the final salvation of man. This supreme happiness can be realized through the means of shravan (hearing the truth), manan (critical analysis) and nidhidhyasan (practical realization).

Vedas and Upanishads are the oldest extant literary monuments of the Aryan Mind that are true embodiments of individual's curiosity to explore the world around him. In this holy investigation man is needed to be explored at first because he is recognized as the smallest part of the cosmos and nearest approach to the absolute. This necessity to 'know thyself' has also been realized by Socrates in Greek philosophy.

The central subject of Upanishads’ investigation is individual and only he stands self-proved and immediately felt and known. The Upanishads established him as the highest approach to the absolute. Thus it was for the first time that individual was established as a light or small part of the absolute. His essence is divine and his aim is to identify himself. He is mistaken due to the ignorance and therefore the Upanishads justify a way from ignorance to knowledge. The senses, the mind, the intellect, feeling and will, the organs-all are the products of avidya (ignorance) and they invariably surround the individual self and constitute his individuality. But the true self is really above them, being a part of the absolute and to realize his true essence is the aim of individual. Therefore the motif of Indian philosophy can be said to be an attempt to self-awareness. In Chhandogyopanishad, we find Narad telling Sanatkumar: "I know the Rigved sir, I
know the Yajuh, the Sam, with all these I know only the Mantras and the sacred books, I do not know the self. I have heard from the persons like you that only who knows the self goes beyond sorrow” (Chapter 7.2). This 'self' is viewed as atman and sakshi (deponent) of the actions performed by the individual. In a dialogue between Prajapati and Indra, narrated in the same Upanishad, we find a development from bodily self to that of empirical self leading to the supreme bliss. The dialogue presents before us the essential nature of empirical self long before the empiricism came into existence in Europe. The empiricism of Lock and Bradley, the skepticism of Hume, the flux of Heraclites and the critical evolution of Kant and Hegel along with all other modern thoughts have been long before anticipated in the Upanishads. John Locke treats mind as 'tabula rasa' i.e. a blank tablet on which experience writes with the finger of sensation and perception. Therefore ‘in sleep and trances the mind exists not' says Berkley. Hume declares “I can never catch myself, whenever I try; I always stumble at some sense impression or idea” (online). William Hume finds self as 'stream of thought'. The empiricists and the skeptics along with the pragmatists have been failed to know and describe the true self and they found it only as 'a bundle of ideas'. Whereas Indra finds the same problem in the dialogue mentioned above but the Prajapati enlightens him the true nature of the self as the ultimate subject, the self-proved, self-luminous and fundamental postulate of all knowledge.

The gist lying beyond Upanishads’ philosophy is that individuality is 'true self' and its realization leads to the absolute truth or the supreme bliss. The articulation (authenticity) of human life is to know this absolute reality and thus to attain salvation. But due to ignorance the individual keeps on engaging himself in sensuous pleasures and worldly attachments ignoring his true self and consequently he takes birth and dies again and again carrying an inauthentic life. The root cause of this dolorous life is avidya or maya (ignorance) and to destroy
this darkness of ignorance through enlightenment of knowledge is the chief aim of the Upanishads.

The final achievement of human existence as decided by the Upanishads is salvation and it is possible by realization of supreme truth which is addressed as Brahman. This Brahman is the almighty who manifests itself in various forms (Mundakopanishad 2.10). He is the cause of production, maintenance and destruction of universe. The Upanishads have described Brahman in two ways. It is cosmic, all comprehensive and full of good qualities and it is also quality less, indeterminate and indescribable. The former is called God while the lower is absolute. The cosmic Brahman is cause of production, maintenance and destruction (Tatriyopanishad 3.1) hence it is the transcendental absolute. It is indescribable, Anivarchiniya, the fundamental consciousness and fundamental postulate of all knowledge. It cannot be interpreted through our senses (Kenopanishad 1.6 to 1.8). Only this absolute Brahman is knowable. By knowing him, the individual can get rid of sufferings and delusion and can across the ocean of birth and death; there is no other way for liberation (Ishavasyopanishad,7 Shvetashwatropanishad, 10).

The Upanishads present a fundamental knowledge of Indian philosophy. All other schools of Indian thoughts have elaborated these Upanishads in one way or other. Jainism borrowed the idealism and doctrine of action from them. Buddhism was imbued with the absolutism, idealism and monism of the Upanishads and its theory of nirvana is similar to the Upanishad’s salvation. Sankhya philosophy takes the doctrine of Purush and three gunas whereas Yoga philosophy is deeply rooted in the Shvetashwatropanishad.

The Gita can be said a summary of the Upanishads’ philosophy where the centre of thought is individual and his existential dilemma. The central teaching of Gita can be summarized in this sentence of Annie Besant:
It is meat to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation, where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights where desires are dead and where the Yogi dwells in calm and ceaseless contemplation, while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot in life” (Sharma, 32).

The Gita prepares a way for the individual to enable him to cross the ocean of suffering and pain and this is possible through individual's own effort of knowledge and action. Yoga in Gita, has thus been presented as essential and predominant path of Knowledge.

Later on, Buddhism fully based upon the individual and his destiny, tries to get rid of all sufferings inherent in human life. Like modern existentialists, Buddhism needs no creator to this universe as this postulates no ultimate beginning to this world and regards it sustained by a natural law. Thus, it has nipped in the bud the famous theological problem of evil. The individual is central force behind Buddhist theology as he is responsible for his own actions. His actions play vital role even in his rebirth. He is the master of his own self. Contrary to the early Upanishads and Gita, the law of action is seen as a natural law like the law of physics. It is no more operated by Brahma of the Upanishads but the so-called Gods are himself under this doctrine. Buddhism prepared a scientific way to redeem the individual from sufferings and to make him to realize himself. The root of suffering is spiritual ignorance and Buddhism sought help of certain Yoga exercises to purify the individual and attain final salvation which is called Nirvan - an end to the process of rebirth and re-death. Nirvana has been presented in Buddhism similar to the salvation in the Upanishads however it can also be attained during life owing to the individual efforts of man as there is no need of any outside power. Nirvana of Buddhism is similar to the sthitapragya situation described in the ethical teachings of the Gita (2.55).
It does not mean that Indian 'seers' of truth failed to understand the nature of world but they never looked at the world as an objective reality entirely independent of perceiving subject. Indian schools of thought succeeded to develop specialized disciplines like theory of knowledge and logic but even in them, the driving force was concern for man and his final destiny as salvation. In this way, Indian philosophy neither became too objective nor too subjective.

Besides the facts mentioned above, the other noteworthy point in Indian philosophy is that it has not been developed as a result of religious dissatisfaction. Philosophy has never become subservient to religious dogma and religious thoughts have never ignored the results of philosophical investigations. Philosophy and religion in India mostly have been developing either side by side or influencing and often collaborating each other. This is the cause why most of the schools of Indian philosophy developed from religious establishments. For example, the annihilation of three kinds of pains - physical, mental and natural sufferings and realization of supreme happiness is the end of individual efforts whereas hearing, thinking and practice are the means - in almost all the Indian philosophy. Some philosophical systems such as Yoga philosophy paved the way for individual efforts to attain his goal.

In this way we find that Indian philosophy has always been preoccupied with the existential situation of the individual. However it had not drawn a sharp division between the individual and world. As a result of it, neither the individual feels alienation from the world around him, nor does he feel as having been ‘thrown’ into the cosmos without having any influence on the matter as common to the individual situation as raised by western existentialists. Consequently, man is not left in an indifferent world of solid matter along with some objective process going beyond him but he is left with the struggle going in his own consciousness.
and this was to be analyzed and understood in order to get to know his exact existential situation.

This may be recognized as a phenomenological approach which was adopted by Indian philosophy long before European phenomenology came into existence. In the Western philosophy, Descartes identified himself as a thinking subject hence he guaranteed the existence of the thinking individual but ultimately he could not prove the existence of his individual only on this basis. Descartes initiated a good step but his followers raised forward only the idealist suggestions contained in his arguments. Indian philosophy was mysteriously saved by such dead ends because the very condition of human existence was recognized by Indian thinkers. They adopted practical approach to solve the existential problems of the individual. Yoga is a fine example which was developed as a practice of self observation and mind control which can be compared with modern phenomenological and psychoanalytic schools.

As we have seen that man is the centre of Indian thoughts, hence Indian philosophy may also be said to be possessed with the ideas of humanism. The final solution of authentic human existence is salvation or nirvana but it can be attained by the individual efforts only.

The famous existential dictum that existence is prior to essence has also been dealt in Indian philosophy. As it has been described above, the self in the Upanishads is said to be the true reality of the individual and it is the smallest part of the absolute. The senses, the mind and the intellect- all serve the purpose to realize the true self inherent in the individual. The true self is the essence of individual and his body containing organs, is true embodiment of existence but the sole purpose of body is to know the true self (essence) and thus to approach the absolute. Western philosophy has erroneously described incarnation as mere transmigration of souls. Indian philosophy bears no definite essence of manhood in
the individual. The life of individual is a dynamic and progressive process of self realization of a will to live, and to experience. A man is what he has chosen to be and he is fully responsible for what it is and he will be.

Three other preoccupations of modern existentialist philosophy—despair, death and freedom have also their place in Indian philosophy. Despair is reflected in suffering which is the result of individuals own volitional actions and the world has not been interpreted as alien reality but a sum total of individual’s own actions. Death is viewed as an interfering and senseless repetitions. Indian philosophy never places death as an act of freedom and escape but it means only a change of scene for the life of individual and the veiling of his memory. After recognizing the situation, death becomes a reminder to transcendence his limited existential situation to have an ‘authentic’ life.

Freedom comes not as a philosophical problem in Indian philosophy. From the Upanishads and Buddhist texts, it is observed that preacher's ideology has not been imposed upon the follower but some kind of freedom of choice between various courses of action is still left. In other words, individual was left to create and form his essence.

The question of transcendence in Indian philosophy is a higher metaphysical reality where European thinking stops. This achievement in Indian philosophy is regarded as a final solution of the individual existence.

Thus we have seen that seeds of modern existentialism and various schools of psychology have so many points common in Indian philosophy and such development leads to a desirable reconciliation of various tradition and cultures of the world and it will demolish the assured superiority of occidental thought upon oriental ones.

When the world was torn into pieces by the chaotic conditions prepared by subsequent world wars, the place of individual in this cosmos needed to be re-
examined along with the effects of science which has replaced religion and provided unrest as an exchange. The post-war-scientifically-oriented world marked the age of anguish, despair and loneliness. As literature is the mirror of society, some famous authors like Jean-Paul-Sartre, Albert Camus, Kafka, Samuel Becket and many others all over the world have dealt the existential themes in their works. In the tradition of Indian English fiction, Arun Joshi is not an exception and he has successfully dealt the existential situations of his heroes in his fiction.

Returning to the discussion posed at the beginning of this study, we find that Arun Joshi’s protagonists are lonely individuals thrown into an indifferent world. He has no satisfaction, subjective or objective. O.P.Bhatnagar comments in his article “The Art and vision of Arun Joshi”: “A certain awareness of man's rootlessness and the consequential loneliness and anxiety is the keynote of Arun Joshi’s unique vision of contemporary Indian English fiction.” (Dhawan, 49)

Arun Joshi’s protagonists are continuous seekers like the hero of Arnold's *The Scholar Gypsy* because they do not have subjective satisfaction in the materialistic values of modern urban societies, whether in India or abroad. This dilemma is an ineluctable experience of Sindi Oberai, Billy Biswas or Som Bhaskar, the heroes of Joshi's *The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, and *The Last Labyrinth* respectively. For them, every human relationship is an apparition, casual, objective and self-interested, whether in India or abroad. The situations around them enhance their conditions and dilemmas. They are haunted by the duel behavior of the outer world and simultaneously the duel code of conduct in their inner world in the name of tradition, custom or sanskar. Although their inner-self gives them personal satisfaction, yet they are not free to act. Accordingly, if they are found doing so, they are treated as rebel by the world and sometimes killed like Billy of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Their consciousness does not allow them to neglect the inner-self, consequently, they
leave in ‘no-man's’ land. This dilemma reminds us of Camus' "Sisphusian Dilemma". The metaphor of spider in Joshi's *The Foreigner* and ant in *The Last Labyrinth* are some other examples. Sindi's dilemma is that he failed to establish an authentic moral system till his life came to the end. He expresses his failure, his rootlessness in this so-called system of morality. In spite of his authentic search for the eternal truth, this frustration caused by the repeated failure makes him suspect about the God and his system. Sindi, in this mood of despair, wants to know if someone has seen the God. The faceless God is prominent in Billy and Som’s inner thoughts.

Joshi’s heroes are modern individuals having the split-personality and locked up into the dilemma of being, yet they are not indifferent to it like Camus' *The Outsider*. They step out of themselves and question not only the atmosphere which impinges on their consciousness but their own self indulgent attitude keeping them away from facing the truth. They fail to resolve the mystery because they attempt to detect the cause of such events in the human existence and to prove it at the touchstone of the intellect. Som says," I want to know, probably I want to believe. But one cannot order believe. I must have evidences,"(The Last Labyrinth 127). Ultimately they conclude that loneliness is the essential condition of human existence and only death is the ultimate reality.

Arun Joshi is thus pre-occupied with certain existential themes in his novels. He finds a sense of foreignness in his protagonist as Dostoevsky finds them ‘possessed’, Camus’ ‘outsider’, Kafka’s under the ‘trial’ Beckett as ‘absurd’ and Elison finds as ‘an invisible man’. All these authors deal with the existential problems in one way or other. To quote:

Arun Joshi.... uses the images of foreigner as a myth. In all his novels, his heroes act as foreigners because they are exposed either by their sensitivity, lack of identification with the world around or
knowledge of themselves. Joshi uses this motif so extensively that it takes on the character of a myth. Sindi is foreigner in the fullest sense. Billy is a foreigner because he cannot identify himself with the society of which he is a product. (Dhawan, 65-66).

Despite the sense of futility, Joshi's protagonists continue to search for a meaning in their existence in spite of its uncertainty. Later on, this turns out into their subjective evolution and a quest to "create a symphony of meaning out of the epiphanies of life" (Prasad, 140). This clarifies Arun Joshi’s true existential vision which is neither pessimist nor the nihilist but a practical and spiritual approach to life and reality. That shows the effect of Indian existential thinking where the practical realization of truth by means of self-awareness is essential for salvation of the individual. His action (karma) is superior, neither its result, nor an attachment with it. Arun Joshi seems to emphasize a practical approach to life and action which one means to counteract the alienation and futility of life.

The subsequent chapters analyze this anguished soul of Arun Joshi’s protagonists in order to understand his own existential vision of life at some length. These have been studied in their chronological sequence with special reference to the existential issues therein.
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