CHAPTER – IV

LITERATURE, CREATIVITY AND FREEDOM

According to Sartre, human freedom is inextricably tied up within the contingency of his ‘situation’, and imagination, emotion, literature and art are the possible routes to free ourselves from such absurdity and contingency. Freedom is the recurrent theme in many authors through which contingency can be overcome. As an intellectual and philosopher he has consciously used literature as a means to freedom. I have already discussed how in every moment of his life man tries to get a free foundation of his own existence and how all his attempts to get any justification are condemned to frustration. In this chapter, I shall aim at showing how Sartre attempts to justify human beings as essentially free in spite of their contingency and superfluousness. I shall try to highlight the various possible escape routes through which human beings can enjoy real freedom. These roads to freedom can be found by a combination of creativity and action, viz., praxis.

Sartre does not want to exhibit human freedom on any transcendental ontological level. The justification of human freedom in Sartre’s theory is not based on the distinction between transcendental and empirical freedom as the transcendentalists have done it. In his interpretation of human freedom, Sartre adopts an absolutely individualistic approach. Sartrean concept of freedom involves a definite
attitude towards life, a definite movement towards an uninterruptedly free life-style in which a man realizes himself in his totality, a movement to bring the possibility of bad faith and contingency of his situation under control and to encounter the ‘transparency’ or ‘translucence’ of the for-itself. Sartre, therefore, wants to actualize the concept of freedom in man’s day to day living through imagination and creativity.

4.1 The Revelation of Contingency

Let me first discuss how Sartre conceives this experienced world and its object as essentially contingent. The existence of each thing, including ourselves appears to him as superfluous, gratuitous, and supernumerary. Sartre himself recognizes his superfluousness when he thinks, “………. I was superfluous, I wanted to be missed, like water, bread, or air, by everyone else in every other place.”¹ Existence appears to him superfluous, because it is something, which cannot be literally grasped by any concept or thought. The main theme depicted in Nausea is the absurdity of human existence as well as the contingency and superfluity of the external world. Sartre’s character Roquentin intuits this contingency when he feels, “the essential thing is contingency. I mean that, by definition existence is not necessity. To exist is simply to be there; what exists appears, lets itself be encountered, but you can never deduce it….. contingency is not an illusion, an appearance which can be dissipated : it
is absolute, and consequently perfect gratuitousness. Everything is
gratuitous, that park, this town, and myself." Sartre conceives man as well
as nature as absurd because they can never be deduced logically and
are "born without reason". Roquentin writes in his journal, "The word
absurdity" is now born beneath my pen; a little while ago, in the park, I
didn’t find it, but then I wasn’t looking for it either, I didn’t need it: I was
thinking without words, about things, with things. Absurdity was not an
idea in my head, or the sound of a voice, but that long dead snake at my
feet, that wooden snake. Snake or claw or root or vulter’s talon, it doesn’t
matter. And without formulating anything clearly, I understood that I had
found the key to Existence, the key to my Nausea, to my own life. In fact
all that I was able to grasp afterwards comes down to this fundamental
absurdity."

Sartrean being exists only in the measure in which he creates
himself. Not being determined by any concept of essence or human
nature presented by any super-human authority, man’s existence, Sartre
says, lacks necessity; it is completely contingent and gratuitous. "We are
hopelessly contingent beings, thrown, as Heidegger would say, into a
world which could logically have existence without us, being itself
radically contingent at every point. And this is what absurdity deeply
means: not silly or meaningless or insequential, but contingent." Sartre
characterizes such people as salads of bad faith, who try to flee from their
contingency, do not want to recognize their superfluousness, believe
themselves to be necessary to the world and society and claim for their
rights, while they have no right to claim for their rights. Thus we find
Roquentin thinking: “there are people, I believe, who have understood.
Only they have tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a
necessary, causal being. But necessary being can explain existence:……
those who live on the Coteau Vert and the others – try to hide from
themselves with their idea of rights. But what a poor lie: no body has any
rights; they are entirely gratuitous, like other men, they cannot succeed in
not feeling superfluous. And in themselves, secretly, they are superfluous,
that is to say amorphous and vague, sad.”

Sartre believes that nature which is absolutely absurd without any
laws and reason can in no way protect us. Like Hume, he says, it is only
due to our habit and custom that we say nature acts in a uniform manner,
while there is no reason to suppose that nature will always act uniformly. “I
see it that nature, I see it … I know that its submissiveness is laziness, I know
that it has no laws, that what they consider its constancy doesn’t exist. It
has nothing but habits and it may change those tomorrow.” Sartre has
exemplified that some possible change can always be conceived in
nature or things can behave in flagrant discrepancy in many instances.
The following are two of such possible instances.
(1) A mother, Sartre imagines, may suddenly see a crack in her child’s cheek and the appearance of a third eye which laughs, and there is no contradiction involved in our thinking that (II) our clothes suddenly may become living things. “That may happen at any time,.......For example, the father of a family may go for a walk, and he will see a red rag coming towards him across the street, as if the wind were blowing it. And when the rag gets close to him, he will see that it is a quarter of rotten meat, covered with dust, crawling and hopping along, a piece of tortured flesh rolling in the gutters and spasmodically shooting out jets of blood. Or else a mother may look at her child’s cheek and ask him: ‘What’s that- a pimple?’ And she will see the flesh puff up slightly, crack and split open, and at the bottom of the split a third eye, a laughing eye, will appear. Or else they will feel something gently brushing against their bodies, like the caresses reeds give swimmers in a river. And they will realize that these clothes have become living things.”

Sartre conceives every creature in nature as something, which reveals world’s absurdity. We hear Roquentin’s saying, “And all those existents which were bustling about the tree came from nowhere and were going nowhere. All of a sudden they existed and then, all of a sudden, they no longer existed; existence has no memory; it retains nothing of what has disappeared; not even a recollection. Existence
everywhere, to infinity, superfluous, always and everywhere; existence—which is never limited by anything but existence.”

Innocent plants also appear to him as monsters revealing the world’s absurdity. “That plane tree with its scaling bark, that half-rotten Oak – they would have wanted me to take them for vigorous youthful forces thrusting towards the sky. And that root? I would probably have had to see it as a greedy claw, tearing the earth, snatching its food from it.” Sartre gives the name boredom or nausea to that metaphysical disposition which arises as a result of our reaction towards the gratuitousness, superfluousness and absurd existence. Roquentin discovers the obscene overabundance of the world around him, and his own solitude induces several experiences of psychological nausea. Roquentin, has a ‘nauseating’ encounter with the root of a chestnut tree. “I was in the municipal park just now. The root of the chestnut tree plunged into the ground just underneath my bench. I no longer remember that it was a root. Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things, the method of using them, the feeble landmarks which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, slightly bent, my head bowed, alone in front of that knotty mass, which was utterly crude and frightened me. And then I had this revelation. …..If anybody had asked me what existence was, I should have replied in good faith that it was nothing, just an empty form which added itself to external things, without changing anything in their
nature. And then, all of a sudden, there it was, as clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost its harmless appearance as an abstract category: it was the very stuff of things, that root was steeped in existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass on the lawn, all that had vanished; the diversity of things, their individuality, was only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses in disorder-naked, with a frightening, obscene nakedness......I realized that there was no half-way house between non-existence and this rapturous abundance. .....We were a heap of existents inconvenienced, embarrassed by ourselves, We hadn't the slightest reason for being there, any of us, each existent, embarrassed, vaguely ill at ease, felt superfluous in relation to others. Superfluous: that was the only connection I could establish between those trees, those gates, those pebbles. It was in vain that I tried to count the chestnut trees, to situate them in relation to the Velleda, to compare their height with the height of the plane trees: each of them escaped from the relationship in which I tried to enclose it, isolate itself' overflowed. I was aware of the arbitrary nature of these relationships, which I insisted on maintaining in order to delay the collapse of the human world of measures, of quantities, of bearings; they no longer had any grip on things. Superfluous, the chestnut tree, over there, opposite me, a little to the left. Superfluous, the Velleda..."10 Roquentin is not only impressed by
the solidity of the stones on the sea shore but feels similar kind of horror when he contemplates the world of bourgeois banality. “Nobody is better qualified than the commercial traveller over there to sell Swan toothpaste. Nobody is better qualified than that interesting young man to fumble about under the neighbour’s skirts. And I am among them and if they look at me they must think that nobody is better qualified than I to do what I do. But I know. I don’t look very important but I know that I exist and that they exist. And if I know the art of convincing people, I should go and sit down next to that handsome white-haired gentleman and I should explain to him what existence is. The thought of the look which would come on to his face if I did makes me burst out laughing.”

11 The rationality and solidity of this world, Roquentin thinks, is a veneer. Here Roquentin recognizes that the distance between the tree and any description of it is meaningless, and cannot be overcome by mere words, no language in any way will be able to transform this chestnut tree.

A.C.Danto mentions that there is a difference between the contingency of a human being and the contingency of the object of consciousness. “For while Roquentin and the root have a common bond of contingency, and are in a way more than can ever be said, the structures of a conscious being must differ from those of the objects of consciousness, and a line will have to be drawn which prevents Roquentin or any of us from collapsing on to the objects of his or our consciousness.
..However contingent the root may be, both in the sense that its existence is not given by its concept and in the further sense that its classical structures are never necessary - and so it can and even might behave differently - it can never be contingent in the way we are, for because it is a thing it is not conscious, and because it is not conscious it cannot be free. Freedom is our essence, in that we are our freedom, and not something separate which just happens to have freedom or could exist without this property or character. But this means that we have no essence in any further sense; there is nothing other than freedom which we are;"12 It is by anxiety that man becomes conscious of his freedom, because freedom, for Sartre, as we have already seen, is a freedom of choice.

The feeling of nausea leads one to anxiety, where one feels a kind of floating sensation and aloneness. This feeling of aloneness is similar to that which arises when one realizes about himself standing on a threshold of death. Roquentin feels this kind of floating sensation when we find him saying, "everything starts floating about,"13 and sensation of isolatedness occurs to him when "ran along the docks" he is saying to himself, "Where shall I go? Where shall I go? Anything can happen."14 From his utterance, "I am alone in this white street lined with gardens. Alone and free. But this freedom is rather like death."15 It seems clear that Roquentin feels uneasy with this isolated freedom. The feeling of alienation and frustration and
nausea overflows Roquentin as he realizes the void, the nothingness of existence. This nausea is a kind of dizziness in the face of one’s freedom and responsibility for giving a meaning to reality. Roquentin becomes sick when the contingency and absurdity of the external world is revealed to him and when he realizes that he cannot escape from this external world. At the time of writing Nausea, Sartre had a belief that only through words one can discover or explain the world. In Nausea we find that these cathedrals of words fall down suddenly when Roquentin discovers that existence is unique and concrete which cannot be described or grasped by words. He writes, “Things have broken free from their names. They are there, grotesque, stubborn, gigantic, and it seems ridiculous to call them seats or say anything at all about them: I am in the midst of things which cannot be given names. Alone, wordless, defenceless, they surround me, under me, behind me, and above me. They demand nothing, they don’t impose themselves, they are there.”

4.2 Imagination: The Primary Way of Overcoming Contingency

The primary way of overcoming contingency is to take recourse to imagination. Sartre has made a distinction between the real, contingent world and the irreal imaginary world. His view about the estranged relations between the two distinct worlds plays an important role both in his early writings as well as in his later writings. The capacity to imagine, to present to oneself that which is not real, Sartre concludes, is not a
contingent character of consciousness, far from being a mere adjunct to consciousness, it is consciousness itself "in so far as it realizes its freedom." In classical thought it is believed that in imagination the content of perception is twisted and moulded in a new fashion. But Sartre believes in creative imagination through which something new is created. Sartre himself says, "The idea that sensation was not identical to the image, that the image was not sensation renewed. That was something I felt in myself. It is bound up with the freedom of consciousness since, when the conscious mind imagines, it disengages itself from what is real in order to look for something that isn’t there or that doesn’t exist. And it was this passage into the imaginary that helped me understand what freedom is." It is only because human being has the ability to perceive things not only as they are, but as they are not, he can freely act in any given situation, according to his own choice. Though for-itself is defined first of all as a being ‘in a situation’ he is not determined by his situation in any way. "……no matter what the situation might be, one is always free.....a worker is always free to join a union or not, as he is free to choose the kind of battle he wants to join, or not join." A man can nihilate any given situation as not being what it is and conceive any possible change of that situation and by means of this nihilation through imagination he can intervene in the situation to change it.
If man could not realize while in experiencing any present situation that he is free to adopt whatever attitude he pleases toward his situation he has neither motive nor capacity to overcome the contingencies of his situation. As a man can exercise his power of imagination to form an image about anything, which doesn’t exist, he has the full freedom to act in any given situation. Image, according to Sartre, is an indubitable psychic reality. In perception we merely experience something as given but imaginative consciousness is “......spontaneous and creative; it maintains and sustains the sensible qualities of its object by a continuous creation. In perception the actual representative element corresponds to a passivity of consciousness. In the image, this element, in so far as it is primary and incommunicable is the product of a conscious activity, is shot through and through with a flow of creative will.”

Imagination, for Sartre, is a fundamental mode of consciousness and it is closely related to the sense-giving activity of consciousness. “The object represented in imagination is ‘made present’, ‘represented’ or embodied as a ‘synthetic totality’.”

This synthetic totality achieved through imagination is an aesthetic synthesis. It has already been mentioned that Sartre accepts Husserl’s dictum that every consciousness is consciousness of something. Sartre holds that consciousness is always positional and every image, which is constitutive element of consciousness, is an image of something. Although imaginative consciousness always posits its object, there is no
immediate relation between such consciousness and its corresponding object. In the concluding chapter of *L’Imaginaire* he introduces his discussion of “the art of drama” with the statement “It goes without saying that the actor who plays Hamlet makes use of himself of his whole body, as an analogue of this imaginary character.”

Perception, for instance, posits its object as existing. The image also includes an act of belief, or a positing action. This act can assume four forms and no more; it can posit the object as non-existent, or as absent, or as existing elsewhere; it can also ‘neutralize’ itself, that is, not posit its object as existing*.” (The ‘*’ is from the original)

This irrational element in imagination helps us to realize the beautiful. The beautiful can be realized only in and through a totalization of ourselves. But the question naturally arises, in Sartrean theory how the totalization of ourselves is possible? In that case how does one realize the beautiful? In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre holds that as in imagination it is possible to ignore the Law of contradiction, we can imagine totalization and thus realize beauty. “I apprehend an imaginary object across an imaginary realization as a totality of in-itself and for-itself.”

Imaginative knowledge, as opposed to perception, is a consciousness which transcends itself, posits its object as “out of reach.” Perception merely yields what we already know, imagination structures a transcendental world. Imagination “brackets” and transcends the real
world of action. In drama, for example, it is the actors who render themselves imaginary in their role. The world in which we live is the world of action which we can reach, whereas the world of “story-telling” is the world which cannot be reached and is accessible through imagination.

Husserl’s intentionality theory of consciousness rests on the distinction between thing perceived as actually existing on an empirical level and object of one’s intentional consciousness which is ‘ideal’ or ‘unreal’. Sartrean theory retains the distinction of Husserl in drawing the distinction between perceptual consciousness where consciousness posits something as existing and the imaginative consciousness where consciousness posits something as non-existing. Imaginative consciousness “.....can arise only at the cost of the annihilation of perceptual consciousness.”

For Sartre, the relation between essence and existence is such that a union of the two is aimed at but never be achieved. Beauty, which is aimed at, can never be achieved in this world, it is only apprehended as a transcendental ideal. The value of beauty can be realized by consciousness through imagination. The imaginative consciousness ‘brackets’ something as really existing and endows it with some transcendental meaning. “The mental image cannot be investigated by itself. There is not a world of images and a world of objects. Every object, whether it is presented by an outward or an inner perception, can function either as a present reality or as an image, depending on what center of reference has been chosen. The two worlds, real and imaginary, are composed of the same objects: only the
grouping and the interpretation of these objects vary."\textsuperscript{26} Imaginative 
consciousness thus serves as a foundation upon which human freedom 
rests.

\subsection{4.3 Human Consciousness, Emotion and the World}

Emotion is another possible way in which human consciousness 
confronts his \textit{being-in-the world}, i.e., his contingency. According to Sartre, 
emotions are modes of awareness, by means of which for-itself is aware of 
the world. Through imagination and emotion we question reality and give 
it meaning. In order to do this a certain ontological distance is needed. 
Consciousness introduces such a distance. The introduction of a distance 
by consciousness is invoked by emotion. Emotions like every 
consciousness are non-thetic and posits its object "The emotional 
consciousness is at first non-reflective, and upon that plane it cannot be 
conscious of itself, except in the non-positional mode. The emotional 
consciousness is primarily consciousness of the world."\textsuperscript{27} The exigencies of 
for-itself’s own actions spring not from his own subjectivity but from his 
conscious engagement with the world. When the world before the for-itself 
poses problem of understanding he cannot interact with the world. 
He feels the need to act in a situation where all the paths are barred. In 
order to fulfill the urgency or urgent demand of such a world he then tries 
to seize or change the world’s form, to seek an escape from his situation. 
Emotion is this transformation of consciousness in its modality. Once an
imaginary image is created we also react emotively to that image. Sartre also maintains that in “emotional behaviour we believe in the world that our emotion has created for us.”*28* Consciousness, on the other hand, may direct our body which is a part of the world or facticity to give the world a new form. “The emotion”, Sartre says, “is a specific manner of apprehending the world.”*29* Through emotion we can engage the situation in a ‘new fashion’. When victimized through emotion, consciousness transforms “the determinist world in which we live, into a magical world.” And “‘magic’ governs the interpsychic relations between men in society and, more precisely, our perception of others.”*30* Emotion, Sartre says, is a transformation of the world. “When the paths traced out become difficult or when we see no path we can no longer live in so urgent and difficult a world. All the ways are barred. However, we must act. So we try to change the world, that is, to live, as if the connection between things and their potentialities were not ruled by the deterministic process, but by magic.”*31*Like imagination emotions also involve a transcending of reality. Emotions, like imagination and perception, are means of apprehending the world. Emotion is a sense giving activity and purposive way of dealing with the world. Sartre argues that the emotions aroused by the aesthetic object are free because they are not caused by external reality. The emotional response involved in an aesthetic experience is associated with psychological freedom.
A world created through imagination and emotion is an ideal world where a man can transcend his Facticity and realize his freedom. But his freedom is not a transcendental one and his ideal world created through imagination and emotion is not a Berkelean world. Sartre “discovered the world through language” and “mistook language for the world.” In the book Words, he claims himself to be an idealist where he says, “A Platonist by condition, I moved from knowledge to its object; I found ideas more real than things......I met the universe in books: assimilated, classified, labelled and studied, but still impressive; and I confused the chaos of my experiences through books with the hazardous course of real events. Hence my idealism which it took me thirty years to undo”.

Many insist, however, that Sartre’s idealism differs from that of Berkeley. Sartre is an idealist in so far as he encounters the universe through words, whereas Berkeley is an idealist in so far as he tries to explain the universe with reference to some idea or other. And these ideas are not essence of the universe. About any existent thing, Sartre says, “To exist was to have a registered trade name somewhere on the infinite Tables of the Word; writing meant engraving new beings on them or........ catching living things in the trap of phrases : if I put words together ingeniously, the object would become entangled in the signs, and I would hold it.”
4.4 **Escape from Contingency through Literature**

According to Sartre, literature is a social phenomenon, which is another way of transcending Facticity and gaining freedom. As an intellectual and philosopher he has consciously used literature as a road to freedom. As a project and as an instrument he has used literature at one level and at another level he has philosophized about literature and has shown that it is literature, through which human being seeks permanency. Sartre thinks that only by words, i.e., through writing one can achieve immortality amidst the mortal existence. “To write was to add another pearl to the Muses’ chain, to leave to posterity the remembrance of an exemplary life, to defend the people against themselves and against their enemies, and to bring down on men the blessing of heaven through a solemn Mass.”

Only Literature can not be explained in an imaginary unreal world nor can it merely suppose the co-operation of a concrete subject who does not exist in space and time. Literature requires the cooperation of a concrete subject who has a spatio-temporal location. The writer conveys his thought and images to the reader and the reader receives those images with an open mind. In Sartre’s theory of literature two periods can be distinguished. His earlier discovery was that one can reflect oneself as something and so the writer can be conscious of his literature. *Nausea* is a novel about an individual reflecting by himself. But in *What is Literature*?
we see a change in his opinion. In What is Literature? Sartre argues that
the novel must be a novel of social reflection. "For the subject of literature
has always been man in the world." Sartre introduces the concept of
committed literature. For Sartre, literature to be an act of freedom should
be committed or engaged. It is to the reader’s mind that the literary works
becomes an objective work of art. The aim of literature is to make the
reader conscious about his responsibility. Objectivity is reserved for the
reader who gives the work completion. The reader’s mind gives meaning
to the sentences out of which a book is composed. Literary works are fully
determined by the conjoint effort of author and reader. Or in other words,
the writer makes the words, he does not read them; reading requires a
wholly different attitude and position of knowledge about the words,
which the writer uses. Writer requires a reader and writes for him. Literature
requires “the conjoint effort of author and reader…….There is no art
except for and by others.” The responsibility of the author is to reveal the
authentic picture of the concrete world rather than an imaginary or
partial or biased presentation of prevailing situation and the responsibility
of a reader is to take part authentically in the project of changing the
world. “Thus reading is a pact of generosity between author and
reader.” No writer therefore writes for himself, he writes for a reader who
will read his work. If a writer is able to reveal man and the prevailing
situation to his readers so that each and everyone can assume their full
responsibility then the writer is a committed writer. Committed literature is possible only when both the reader and the writer recognize each other as freedoms, as well as become conscious about their responsibilities. The writer starts a project to change the world “in order to submit it to freedoms on the foundation of a freedom.” If both the author and his reader can freely write and read according to their own choice the world can escape contingency. “Thus whether he is an essayist, a pamphleteer, a satirist, or a novelist, whether he speaks only of individual passions or whether he attacks the social order, the writer, a free man addressing free man, has only a single subject freedom.”

Writers who are committed, should write for renewals, i.e., should write to renew the prevailing situations of the world. Writer’s commitment is a commitment to the cause of humanity, to social reality. Thus the writer who is a freedom, is giving a project to change the world and is submitting this to the readers who are also freedoms. The relation between author and reader as Sartre has tried to show is a relation of respect.

Literature “is a product of man: he projects himself through it and recognizes himself in it; this critical mirror alone shows him his image.” Just as the writer enjoys full freedom to create his act, similarly reading is a free act of the reader’s mind. It is through the freedom of the reader, through reader’s free choice to believe in his work, that the literary work of the author exists. It is the reader’s intellectual and emotional activities which
give significance to the author’s creation. As A.C. Danto explains this point, “Thus reading is a creative act and conceptually entailed by the concept of writing— which is after all more than making marks on the surface— is a striking but not an especially novel thought. What is novel in Sartre is the thought that reading is an essentially free act, not merely a response to some words but the constitution of an object—the work—which does not exist anterior to its constitution and is not identical with the words, which cannot cause the act of reading. ‘The appearance of the work is a new event which can not be explained by anterior data.’ Writing presupposes the freedom of readers to constitute works, which would be only words without them. But so is writing itself free, for since distinct from the words themselves, neither work nor words can cause one another. In a typical sort of phrase, Sartre says: ‘The work of art, from whichever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men.’” Sartre conceives the spectator or reader as a re-creator who ‘re-invents’ paintings or literary works because it is to their freedom that writer’s freedom is addressed to. The readers can judge the literary work because they have “a will” (The term has been borrowed from William James) to act freely on it. Literature, Sartre says, is an appeal to pure freedom. The author’s creation gets fulfillment through the freedom of the readers who at the same time appreciate the author’s freedom to re-create something. The reader in a sense constitutes something.
“Literature”, Sartre says, does not “reveal any secret: what it does is no more or less than record the full scope of how a particular period in history views the world and its people.”

A writer must write for every new situation arising in a given period. “...he will know that his job is not adoration of the spiritual but rather spiritualization.”

According to Sartre’s own words, “(through philosophy) I wanted to express my vision of the world while at the same time making the characters in my essays experience it in their lives.”

According to Sartre, poetry cannot be committed like prose. In What is literature? Sartre has made a radical distinction between prose and poetry. For Sartre, poetry like other art objects is different from prose not only in form but also in content. “The Prose writers designate, demonstrate, order, refuse, interpolate, beg, insult, persuade, insinuate.”

As the writer is not supposed to give partial or distorted pictures of a society so his expression should not be ideological, rather it should be really oriented. Though both the poet and the writer use words, in their literary works, the poet Sartre thinks use the words not as signs but as things. “The empire of signs is prose; poetry is on the side of painting, sculpture and music.”

Unlike the prose writer “poets are men who refuse to utilize language.” Poets turn words as well as poems as a whole into musical rhythm which metamorphosis poetry. Instead of giving pictures of reality, as prose depicts, poetry leads to a magical world. “The poet does
not utilize the word, he does not choose among different senses; each of them, instead of appearing to him as an autonomous function, appears to him as a material quality which melts before his eyes into other senses. Thus solely by the effect of his poetic attitude, he realizes in each word the metaphors which Picasso dreamed of when he wanted to make a matchbox which was completely a bat without ceasing to be a matchbox." That is why Sartre while writing What is Literature? came to the conclusion that poetry cannot be committed and therefore non-communicative. It is through language that the writer reveals, and communicates his experience of the prevailing situation in order to change it. For Sartre, it is only prose, which is capable of a purposeful reflection of the world, whereas poetry which sometimes becomes metaphor is unable to communicate anything about the world. “Poems are things rather than about things, even if they are made of words; and the poet is a kind of transformer or maker, as the concept of poesis etymologically recommends. In prose, by contrast words are used transparently transporting us to a reality beyond themselves, and we recognize them as having no substance of their own to arrest the understanding. …..The difference in function between prose and poetry in the literary act comes to this: poet use words in just the wrong way for poets to be ‘engaged’ whereas the prose writer uses them in such a way that he cannot but be engaged. Instead of putting things into words he
uses words, as the speakers do, and does something by means of them:”\(^5\)

Just after completing *What is Literature?* Sartre’s view about poetry started changing. In 1948-49 in an article ‘Orphee Noir’ (Black Orphus) Sartre praised black poets, whose poetry generated revolutionary aspirations, as committed. From then onwards Sartre has accepted and has argued that poetry like prose can also be committed and can reveal the reality with all its urgency like prose. At last in 1965 Sartre upgraded the poets to the rank of ‘ecrivain’ (the writer) and declared that “poetry and prose are” “complementary rather than mutually exclusive modes of writing.”\(^5\)

In *What is Literature?* Sartre has made a distinction between literature and other art objects also. According to Sartre, besides literature, music, painting, sculpture and so on are not able to reveal the real world because these are not able to start a project of changing the prevailing situation and can not provoke the others to join the project. Painter’s painting and singer’s song create something, which signifies the thing alone, not anything beyond the thing. The painter never draws signs on the canvas, which can express any particular historical moment or even the creator’s personal emotions. “One does not paint meanings; one does not put them on to music.”\(^5\) It is only words, which are described by Sartre as signs which are able to reveal the world to start a project to change it. Committed literature “constantly corrects, judges,
and metamorphosis itself, the written work can be essential condition of
action, that is, the moment of reflective consciousness."^53

4.5 Freedom through Art

Works of art are the roads, which are the escape routes for the for-
itself from that which is superfluous and contingent and lead him towards
freedom, or in other words, as works of art do not exist, so they promise an
escape from superfluousness and contingency. Sartre has assimilated the
intentional structure of consciousness to the structure of works of art. Every
art is a creative work of the artist where the artist reflects himself. This spirit
of an artist has been revealed in the passage where Sartre says, "Those
who do attempt "self portraits" study themselves from without, in a looking
glass. They are the true prophets of objectivity. But imagine a lyrical
sculptor: What he tries to reproduce is his inner feeling, the boundless
vacuum that surrounds him, leaving him defenseless and exposing him to
the storm."^54 Work of art, Sartre says, in a sense, "....does not exist, since it
has nothing superfluous: it is all the rest which is superfluous in relation to it.
It is."^55

Besides Sartre, since late nineteenth century, the absurdity of
existence was felt by many thinkers. From Simone de Beauvoir’s
autobiography we come to know that at that period both she and Sartre
thought that only through art and literature one could escape from this
absurd world to the world of immortality and give a meaning to one’s
existence. Another two famous philosophers, Arthur Schopenhaur and Friedrich Nietzsche also tried to overcome the absurdity through art. Simone holds that her longing for being a writer is due to her recognition that because the artist creates a world where there exists “all sweetness and light in which everything has purpose.” She also writes “I wanted literature to get away from common humanity, and they delighted me by opening up a magic world for my benefit.” In Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche proclaims that, “Only as an aesthetic phenomenon is the world justified eternally.” As to this concern with the “primacy of art”, he writes, “I am convinced that art represents the highest task and the truly metaphysical activity of this life.” He was in favour of Greek artistic style,” Oh those Greeks! They knew how to live….. Adores of forms, of tomes, of words! And therefore-artists?” According to Schopenhauer’s point of view, man may free himself partially through artistic contemplation. Schopenhaur thought that human life should not end up in the blind pursuit of desire. Man should make efforts to raise himself, so that, he may explore the meaning or significance of life. He thought that the artist, saint or genius is able to subdue the will (Will is synonymous with desire from Schopenhaur’s perspective.) by means of his intellect. Schopenhaur expresses his great admiration for art, since artistic contemplation elevates our mind from its material interest. The art viewer or the artist, according to him, enters into a unique state of mind, at the movement of aesthetic contemplation
which is beyond common sufferings. Like Sartre, Schopenhaur also made a distinction between imagination and perception. According to him, the aesthetic mode of vision supersedes the common way of viewing the object. The bliss obtained from art—which assists us in conquering the restless striving of daily worries, drudgeries, and stress is the most valuable gift which art gives us. The Schopenhaur’s artist or art lover loses himself or herself in the object of artistic contemplation and is thus released from the dreariness of existence which he or she obtains through constant brooding over and chasing after the satisfaction of desires. The ‘holiness’ of art consists in the fact that it is able to release the mind from the bondage of selfish desire. The power of art by virtue of which we obtain temporary relief from the slavery of will, namely, blind desires, and obtain a pure joy has been expressed by him as, “the blessedness of will-less perception which casts an enchanting glamour over the past and the distant.”

Any art is a story depicted by the artist the meaning of which is supplied by the artist and is possessed by the artist alone. Art “is a precise manner in which” one can grasp the world through his creative activity. A piece of art always involves the structure and decisions of the artist. Art portrays an appeal of the artist. The foundation of any art work is the articulative and selective self consciousness of the artist. Thus Giacometti, “…. creates a vacuum from a plenum.” and he has attempted to create
a plenum from a vacuum. Artist creates phantasisms in the world of imaginary, which cause spectators to feel different types of emotions like irritation, fear, sorrow, joy etc. Sartre hopes that one day Giacometti will create such a phantom that, “....We shall feel a shock, the very same shock that we feel on returning late and seeing a stranger walking toward us in dark.”

Like the reader the spectator also, Sartre believes, can re-create something “at will”. Thus from “The alternation of appearance and disappearance, of flight and provocation” the spectator can imagine of “......Gelatea , who fled from her lover under the willows and desired at the same time that he should see her.”

So art work is “the intersection of two worlds, one of which we occupy and one of which we cannot; and the work itself is in but not of the world to which we are subject.”

Works of art play a fundamental role in human situation. Any work of art at the same time allows the artists to “realize his impressions” and “......to treat from every aspect the problems of his relations with others, ......” Sartre never thought that by writing a writer can bring any change in the world. Rather Sartre’s aim was to bring change in the consciousness of the reader or spectator,” to induce a critical praise de Conscience”. That is why in What is literature? Sartre describes literary action as a secondary action, an action of discloser. As he said, “The literary work is someone who is rebuilding the world as he sees it by means of a narrative that is not directly aimed at the world but which has to do with imaginary
works or characters. And that’s roughly what I wanted to do.”

Art work, Sartre says, is of such a nature that, “Through layers and layers of existents, it unveils itself, slim and firm, and when you try to seize it you meet nothing but existents, you run up against existents devoid of meaning. It is behind them: I can’t even hear it, I hear sounds, vibrations in the air which unveil it.” Works of art embody symbolically the intentions and imaginations of the artist which are the artist’s own possession. Whatever might happen to its materials nothing can destroy the figure or form it inheres. Works of art are “beyond- always beyond something” of its materials out of which it is composed. One cannot ask certain questions about their content. That is why we can touch the marble out of which a figure of someone is formed but the ‘figure’ always is “so far away- so far behind” the marble which we can’t touch. A painting “cannot be brightened by projecting a light beam on the canvas: it is the canvas that is brightened and not the painting.” In literary works also, there remains “...... behind the printed words, behind the pages, something which didn’t exist, which was above existence.” We cannot hear the melody but only can hear the vibrations of air. When the record of the melody is scratched or the singer of the melody is no longer alive it does not in any way disturb the melody, or in other words, the record, it may happen, is scratched but not the song. The song cannot be affected by the scratch
of the record through which it is communicated. "...... the melody says
the same, young and firm, like pitiless witness."71

For-itself, Sartre conceives, can overcome nausea, which is a state
of gratuitousness and absurdity of existence, by escaping into the
imaginary world of art. Sartre’s character Roquentin on hearing the song
played on a record,

"some of these days
you’ll miss me honey"72

escapes from his nausea. The melody finally escapes something, which
does not exist. According to Sartre, it is through literature and art that an
artist or a writer can be creative, saved and justified, because it is their
literatures and art which reflect them and confer some sort of necessity
upon the world which is essentially contingent. But in Sartre’s theory of art
there is no final destination point where we can take eternal shelter of
escaping contingency and superfluousness and absurdity. Art can
promise us only a temporary relief from the absurdity of existence. Works
of art are roads, which help one to get rid of one’s nausea, where we
travel to enjoy a more free life style but never get the ideal point of
freedom whereby we can stop traveling. Since, for Sartre, there is no
finished ideal state of freedom, the struggle will continue. Traveling
towards a free life does not in any way help us to become translucent
where we can gain more and more comfort but we become more and more efficient in our practice of transcendence.

When Sartre says, nausea can be overcome through artistic creation he is saying that the artist creates something non-contingent, i.e., something eternal. By creating something, which is what it is by the help of imagination man asserts his freedom. This freedom is asserted through disengagement from nature and through a positive creation of imagination. Man’s experience of being able to intervene in nature by disengagement and his experience of being able to transcend nature by imagination reassures him of his strength vis-à-vis freedom. When we find Sartre saying, man overcomes contingency through literature, we should not understand him to be proclaiming a methodology for overcoming man’s basic contingency. Literature does not bring about a fundamental difference in man’s ontology of freedom. An ideal authentic artist remains ‘what he is not’. The only difference that is brought about to nature is the creation of permanency through art the agent of which is man. Thus we find contingent man condemned to be situated among other contingent beings and amidst contingent nature. In the heart of all this nauseating superfluity when a man realizes his capacity to disengage, imagine and create, he finds a justification, a justification of his existence as a free being and as a meaningful agent who has the power to create something non-contingent and eternal.
The concept of ‘disengagement’ in Sartrean philosophy is not synonymous in meaning with Advaita-vedantin’s or the Mahayana Buddhist’s concept of ‘dissociation’. To make the meaning of the concept of ‘dissociation’ clear I may quote a passage from professor Kalidas Bhattacharyya’s article “Different Notions of Freedom Compared and Evaluated” : “……the Advaita-Vedantins , hold that the truncated ‘freedom from ……’ (the process of reflective dissociation) matures at every state of dissociation into some amount of freedom itself, i.e., reflective consciousness itself, which is some form of evident self-possession, though yet in the process of greater and greater ‘dissociation from…….’ …… This is the traditional Advaita-vedantic concept of (reflective) consciousness in-itself….The Mahayana Buddhists, very understandably, put forward the counter the claim that either the process of dissociation never ends, all that is ultimately there being only dissociating, or if we at all arrive at any final dissociation it is dissociation-in- itself, not consciousness in–itself.”\(^7\)

But Sartrean concept of disengagement is not an end- in-itself. It is a dissociation/disengagement which culminates in situatedness. Disengagement is a part of the continuous process of negation leading to situation giving rise to further negation and further situatedness. So disengagement is never a step towards transcending the physical world and passing into the transcendental world. Disengagement is a process of
moving from opacity to freedom. This entire movement takes place in
time and in this world of being.

The product of artist is not the reflection of some transcendental
essence, e.g., a platonic form or Kantian noumena. The eternity and
essentialism reflected in Sartrean art is not a priori. The essence is the
product of imagination and engendered by the artist’s free action.
However, though the central message of a piece of art persists even after
its material, contingent expressions are destroyed, yet this eternal
message should in no way be looked on as an addition to the ontology of
the world. This eternity has to be understood in a very special sense, as an
idea, different from Platonic forms or Berkelean ideas. That is why, perhaps
we find Sartre taking pains in his later interview to explain how he tried to
escape contingency through art. He also explains how he begun with the
misconception that art has a metaphysical status. This conception was
followed by a reviewed position where he says that a man cannot be
saved even through art. To quote Sartre’s own words, “There were two
periods, if you like. At the time I was writing Nausea, I had already
reached the point where I thought that the work of art is imaginary but
that it is based on a theory according to which the work is a real and
metaphysical fact, concrete, a new essence that one would be giving to
the world. Then, when Roquentin thinks that he’s going to be saved in the
end by the work of art, he screws up. He’s going to go to Paris, and once there he’ll do anything, it doesn’t matter what, but he won’t be saved.”

So in the later period Sartre believed that art work transcends reality and the work of art is non-existent and the artist tries to flee contingency of his situation by giving his art work the status of something outside nature but he cannot be saved in this way. Art work, according to this view, is such that it is an expression of certain feelings and aesthetic values which are eternal.

4.6 **Escape, Bad faith and Authenticity**

Till now I have discussed a number of possible routes of escape from contingency. Escape routes from contingency so far discussed may be broadly classified into two categories; (a) flight (b) submission.

(a) **Flight**

Escape from contingency and consequent enjoyment of a feeling of security and relative permanence can be enjoyed by willfully fleeing reality. The ways and means of doing this are generally rooted in a fundamental decision to explain one’s free status as being limitedly free (freedom of). While taking this stance one escapes the entire responsibility of one’s decision by sharing the responsibility with some mundane or supra mundane power. (This has been discussed in chapter II under the labels of ‘freedom of’ and ‘freedom from’.) Such a fundamental decision to partially forego one’s responsibility of an initial decision is an act of bad
faith according to Sartre. The interpretation of freedom as “freedom of” makes room for a certain amount of permanency and eternity in man’s life by making him a recipient of some form of a priori essence. But the intervention of such essence reduces him to that extent to a thing-in-itself. In this way by participating in essentialism and eternity man’s freedom is limited and degraded according to Sartre. Sartre strives for a fuller sense of freedom, namely ‘freedom from’. He is willing to opt for this even at the cost of embracing absolute contingency and anguish. That is why Sartre writes, “Once freedom lights its beacon in a man’s heart, the gods are powerless against him. It’s a matter between man and man, and it is for other men, and for them only, to let him go his gait or to throttle him.” In Sartre’s famous play The Flies, we find Jupiter uttering such an escape route: “By my command the gentle tongue of the tides laps the sand and draws back at the appointed hour. I make the plants grow and my breath guides round the earth the yellow clouds of pollen. This is not your home, intruder; you are in the world as the splinter is in flesh, and the poacher is in the forest of his lord. ……..The universe proclaims you wrong, and are but a mite in the universe…….Your freedom is a mange that makes you itchy, it is exile”

(b) Submission

The second form of escapism from contingency is submission. By submitting to the demands of a situation man does not attain eternity, but
attains permanency for a certain duration. Submission may take place in the face of natural determination or social determination. When man fails to realize ‘he is what he is not’ or willfully wants to avoid being ‘what he is not’ he submits to the determinations of being-in-itself (i.e., Body) or the definitions and interpretations imposed by the Other’s look. Such submission transforms free man through bad faith into an in-itself. He is no longer absolutely contingent in so far as he can be described and defined. He is transformed into being what he is. We may refer here Electra’s behaviour in the play The Flies. Electra’s behaviour at first seems that she wants freedom “At last you have come, Orestes, and you’ve made your decision. And here I am with you” but she shows an attitude of renouncing freedom in the face of real freedom. She wants to take revenge on the king and her mother to free herself as well as the people of Argos. But at the same time, she is not willing to accept Orestes’ act when Orestes kills the king and her mother. Electra’s behaviour here presents a good example of conflict between bad faith and authenticity. Perhaps Electra’s fundamental project is to take revenge and not to project her freedom. That is why we find that when Electra becomes aware of the real, absolute freedom after the murder of the king and his mother she finds, in horror, realizes the void of her existence as well as the anguish of freedom. She utters, “Thief! I had so little, so very little that I could call my own – a little peace and a few dreams. You took
everything, stealing from a beggar-girl. You were my brother, the head of our house, and it was your duty to protect me. But no, you must drag me into the carnage, I’m as red as a flayed ox, those hungry flies are swarming after me, and my heart is a horrible hive."\textsuperscript{78} Unwilling to face reality she escapes by taking refuge in remorse. The understanding of authentic freedom leads Orestes to revolt against the despotic king. These saying of Orestes that “Every men must find out his own way” and “I can only follow my path” implies “freedom lights its beacon” in his heart, and so nature is powerless to him. At that period Sartre was talking about individual freedom. We find that Orestes remains detached from the people of Argos and leaves Argos. This shows that Orestes has realized and has assumed his own individual freedom, while the people of Argos though become free by the act of Orestes yet they are left to ‘realize and assume their own freedom. That is why Jupiter says to Orestes, “Come now, not so proud. The solitude into which they have rejected you is the solitude of scorn and loathing you, the most cowardly of murderers.”\textsuperscript{79} Orestes’ departure from Argos after the killing of the king and the queen justifies Sartre’s view that individual as a freedom always surpasses towards new possibilities. The success of the play lies in the “message through “Orestes” awareness of isolation, anguish and a precarious future-an awareness which must accompany the realization of freedom and the exercise of pure reflection.”\textsuperscript{80}
In *Camera* Sartre’s another famous play through conversation, among Garcin Inez and Estelle, we find how they are victims of bad faith and thereby inauthentic in character. I have already discussed how in the first part of his trilogy *Roads To Freedom*, that is, in the *Age of Reason*, Mathieu feels the void of absolute freedom and at the same time hesitates to commit or engage himself. But in *The Reprieve*, the second part of the trilogy we find that Mathieu commits himself by deciding to join the war and thereby successfully avoids the anguish and emptiness of existence. “Mathieu sat up; he was now dry; he began to dust the sand off his bathing suit. “War must be a pain in the rear,” he thought. And when it was over? Yet another sea. The sea of the vanquished? Or of the victors? In five years’, ten years’ time he would perhaps be here on a September evening, at this same time, sitting on the same sand, confronting that vast expanse of gelatin, the same red rays skimming the surface of the water. But what would he then see?.........When the day of departure came, he would be quite desiccated, with nothing left to regret.”

The third novel of his trilogy *Roads to Freedom*, *Troubled Sleep* powerfully depicts the fall of France in 1940, and the anguished feelings of a group of Frenchmen, whose pre-war apathy gives way to a consciousness of the dignity of individual resistance to the German occupation and to fate in general and solidarity with other people similarly oppressed. Mathieu in *Iron in the Soul* (*Troubled Sleep*) dies the
death of a hero. “Bullets were winning round him free in the air. ’ The world is going up in smoke and me with it…… ‘Mathieu went on firing He fired. He was cleansed. He was all powerful; he was free.' 82 “The Roads to Freedom is a study in the morphology of authenticity in this sense. It shows how quite different sorts of men arrive at an internal understanding of their own freedom, and hence of their ultimate responsibility, which is solely theirs and cannot be shrugged off on to politics or sexuality or whatever. This is an understanding which they had all along but which they concealed from themselves through various mechanisms of bad faith that become at a certain point, transparent to victim.” 83

In submission one ceases to transcend one whereas in flight one aims at transcending oneself. But the transcendence achieved through flight results in a new submission. In flight man tries to flee from natural contingency only to attach himself to a supra mundane permanency. Once an identity of the individual with some permanent essence is achieved the individual looses the opportunity for further transcendence. Hence the identification of an individual with an a priori essence blocks the way for transcendence which is another name of creativity. If man wants to be free in order to act freely there must always have real options of actions open to him. The identity of man with an absolute essence forecloses real options. Sartre envisaged that either submission or flight would lead to a blind alley. Submission ends by reducing man to an
object and flight ends by raising man to a realm beyond space and time. Neither situation is conducive to creativity, the only possible expression of real freedom.

It may become clear from the above that ‘flight’ and ‘submission’ I have discussed are two forms of escape routes, both of which are due to and result in bad-faith. There is a third possible escape route found in Sartrean philosophy, viz., escape through imagination and art. In the following I shall discuss how escapism through art differs from escapism by flight or submission. The need and value of artistic escape through disengagement cannot be over emphasized in Sartre’s philosophy.

Creativity is the possible route of escape where man can freely act in any given situation he is immediately engaged in. Though we are our freedom we conceal it from ourselves when victimized through bad faith. In bad faith human consciousness cannot recognize his freedom, which is the very essence of being human. It is through literature, art, imagination and emotion, which are the symbolic expressions of man’s self-consciousness that man arrives at the understanding of his own freedom and authenticity. It has already been discussed in chapter II that man confers significance onto the things and the situation through his conscious engagement with them and it is through his engagement that situation gets its meaning. The authors and the artists engage themselves in the world and give interpretation to it according to their own choice
and intelligence. Through their emotion, imagination and engaged action the world is transformed into a number of possibilities and the creator chooses from those various possibilities which he will have to actualize according to his projected end. The creator can transform any circumstance into a situation by his selective articulation and by his free decisions to confer meaning. The artists through their free creative imagination and intelligence assign meanings to the world. So an author or an artist himself is responsible for the world which he has created. Creativity is the root by which all real options of actions are recognized by man.

It is through literature, art and imagination that man arrives at the understanding of his own freedom and authenticity. The author, Sartre conceives, creates something, which justifies him and so he is aware that the ultimate responsibility of his own creation rests on himself and cannot be annihilated under any condition. Creativity is the absolute point where one’s authentic nature becomes transparent. The conscious engagement of the for-itself with the world through creativity, emotion and imagination does not in any way curb or destroy man’s freedom; on the contrary, it facilitates his freedom, clears his path for transcendence and helps him to recognize his authenticity. Unlike submission and flight the path of transcendence is not closed to him; rather it is the only real path where
the for-itself can freely exercise his real freedom, can become more and more translucent to recognize his anguish and transcendence.

Sartre conceives man as a free legislator to constitute any law to guide his action. According to Kant, it is not in the phenomenal world but in the noumenal world that values are constituted the agent of which is the rational being. But Sartre believes that it is not in the noumenal level but in the phenomenal world that values are constituted by individuals who have the full power to take any decision and to exercise freedom. The decisions of man do not follow from any higher tribunal. Man can secure absolute freedom through creative decisions embodied in particular work of art and literary work. Since in action and creation man himself takes the decision and is in a position to legislate morality for himself his choice facilitates his understanding of authenticity. Through creative literature and art “human reality” escapes himself from the universal contingency and superfluousness and recognize his freedom, authenticity, transcendence and anguish.