CHAPTER TWO

EXISTENTIAL POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Scientific development has bestowed on mankind a new standard of living and newer ways of communication but not mitigated human misery. Men have not been treated equally. Instead they find themselves isolated, anxious and uneasy. Technology has also not been able to gauge the accelerating distance of human minds or the growing sense of frustration tormenting human psyche. Technological revolution has so metamorphosed our lives that one is always in a flux. In the rapidly changing system accruing from globalization and the tremendous demands on the individual, he feels doomed. The present becomes outdated quickly and what is modern gives way to postmodern. The hiatus between his aspirations and achievements crumple human spirit.

The essential nature of human existence and human life can be well understood if an integrated approach is adopted towards resolving the inherent dichotomies of existence.

i) A PARADIGM OF ESSENTIAL HUMAN EXISTENCE

The existential humanistic paradigm pays attention to the essential factors of human existence. Man learns the lessons of living or to spend life in a better way through human relationship. The basic question of literature is as to how to live and this question is appropriately discussed in literature through the manifestations of human relationship. Literature presents man's external as well as internal relations and its effects in a proper manner. Human relationships are the most important aspect of human existence. Without human relationship, there is no continuity of human existence in this world. Both human relationship and human existence are reciprocal to each other. In order to understand the human experiences based on personal meaning,
essential realities of human condition and to explore the meaningfulness of human existence, one must understand the **human psyche**.

In the course of experimentation in novel writing, this new trend opened out new horizons for the art of the novelist. It showed him the way to bring the reader into direct contact with all that is going on inside the human mind. The exponents of this new technique believed that all reality lies in the consciousness. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Consciousness is constant openness towards the world, a transcendent relationship with other beings and thereby with the in-itself.' Consciously is existence itself or as Jasper says that the ‘Manifestation of Being.’

In a psychological novel or stream-of-consciousness novel, action takes place and the plot develops through the mind of the principal character. The psychological aspect emphasizes on the exploration levels of consciousness and reveals everything through the psyche of characters. Thus, a psychological novel analyses the characters grappling with trying situations, search for their own identity, a new realization of experience and search for self-expression. In literature, the writers display a different attitude. The subjects, which were taboo earlier, now are openly expressed in their lines. They do not emulate, they express their thoughts, their feelings, their fears and insecurities. The reflections and deliberations come from within and they are the end product of life that has treated them, their trials, tribulations, struggles and ultimate victories.

It is rightly said by W.H.Hudson “Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it….”

Hence, literature influences views of the world, shapes our identities and defines our roles. Indian English fiction reflects the spirit of Indian culture and the Indian psyche. It is rightly said by Prof. Manmohan K. Bhatnagar,

... when one is throwing the net wide enough to talk of the literature in English of number of countries, communities, creeds and cultures, occupying distant segments of the globe and confronted with varying
issues which on the surface seem to have no similarities with one another. Even within culturally and sociologically homogenous text, one comes in contact with commitment to realism, modernism and post modernism in varying blends and proportions.iv

REALISM - SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL: A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

Realism is the doctrine that tends to regard things as they really are and they are characterized by practical view of life. It gives expressions to the feelings and needs of different social groups. It has found varied expressions in literature.

Social Realism records revolting voices of all oppressed sections of the society, emphasizing the social aspect of the society. It’s an exact documentation of the fact of life with sociological insight. It also intends the visible and the concrete to function as incitements to social change. Realism is rushed further into the psychological realm by attempting to reproduce the underlying process of thought.

Psychological realism is interested in recording inwardness of experience. It gives an insight in to the interior landscape and the inside of a character or character’s mind. Physical aspects are present but evasive.

Thoughts are sometimes memories i.e. that the narrative will flash backward and forward in time focusing on the character’s mind and memory instead of the daily journey. There is a creation of self by self for the characters.

The themes of psychological realism are: Alienation, loneliness, love, self…

POST-MODERNISM: A POST-MODERN APPROACH

In literature, Pre modernism, Modernism and Postmodernism as philosophical systems are the three different ways of looking at the world and
understanding the world. Post-modernism (after 1945) is a response and the after effects of modernism and the catastrophic World War II. Post modernism was also an extension of modernist tendencies in a sense it speaks about the enlightenment of every individual. Post modern literature is stated precisely by a disjointed, fragmented pastiche of high and low culture which clearly indicates the absence of tradition and structure in a world driven by technology.

Postmodern literature is similar to modern literature in many ways. Both are usually told from an objective point of view. Both explore the external reality to examine the inner state of consciousness of the characters and both employ fragmentation in narrative and character construction. The ideas of disorder and fragmentation, which were previously viewed as negative qualities are seen as an acceptable representation of reality by postmodernists. The common themes usually are irony, playfulness, pastiche, paradox etc., Postmodern art favours reflexivity, self-consciousness and ambiguity. Postmodern literature rarely has a closure. It is often open-ended. The writer never reaches a conclusion; rather leaves the conclusion to be formulated by the readers themselves.

Modern, Post-Modern society tries to smother individuality and a sensitive individual becomes alienated, estranged from within and with other. The lonely disoriented man looms large in a contemporary society.

Paul Brunton points out:

*Never before were so many plunged in so much uncertainty, perplexity and unsettlement.*

Modern man has become a synonym for all the maladies of today. Frustration, despair, ennui, isolation, rootlessness etc. can be identified under the umbrella term alienation and has become a catchword summarizing the salient features of life in contemporary societies.
Although the conceptual history of alienation is two centuries old, it has acquired popularity only after World War II.

Various philosophers have analyzed the conditions of the alienated individual, his quest for self-identity and during his journey of life self-realization with philosophical, social, and psychological bend of mind. They have voiced their concerns through literature. Such maladies are regarded as existential crisis and they come under the philosophy of existentialism. Thus, the themes of psychological realism and existentialism are overlapping and are similar.

**EXISTENTIALISM: AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH**

Existentialism is a philosophy of the twentieth century. It analysis the existence of the human beings and throws light on the way they find themselves existing in the world. Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th century philosopher is regarded as The Father of existentialism. He maintained that the individual has the sole responsibility for giving one’s own life meaning and with living life passionately and sincerely despite many obstacles and distractions including despair, angst, absurdity, choice, boredom and death.

Due to the Great Depression of 1930 and World War II, people all over the world were affected and a deep sense of despair prevailed in the society. It was then the existentialistic ideas came out in the society. The spirit of optimism in the society was totally destroyed by the World War I and its mid-century calamities. This despair has been articulated well not only in the 20th century but also in the 21st century.

Existentialism is a philosophy of reaffirming and regaining the lost status of man in the advanced scientific and technological society. In this modern society, the creator of science himself becomes a victim of his own creation and feels like a mere cog in a highly mechanized system. Various existentialists differ on the fundamental problems but agree on perceiving certain objective realities like the crisis in human values, the significance of
human anxiety, deprivation of human freedom and importance of human emotions. No emotional problem is more threatening than the existential problem.

(ii) MINDSCAPE OF VARIOUS EXISTENTIALISTS

Søren Kierkegaard, claimed that life for the individual is a risk-filled existence\textsuperscript{vii}, and it is on this basis that Existentialism is founded. David Cooper in his book ‘Existentialism’ elaborately explains that this philosophy offers a positive way through the themes of anxiety, alienation, uncertainty, possibilities and crisis. Therefore, there is a growing interest in Existentialism recently. Feelings of anxiety or angst can be manifested when one gets alienated.\textsuperscript{viii} The individuals are uncertain as to how the new world is going to emerge as these themes dismantle one’s world and leaves it in an unfinished state. A central focus is upon the individual rather than on the masses. Existential writings are aimed to engage each reader as an entity. Kierkegaard often referred to 'my dear reader' and the 'existing individual and Nietzsche often used phrases such as 'the sovereign individual' and 'the superman'.\textsuperscript{ix} Heidegger referred to Dasein, meaning literally 'being there' - to represent where the individual is at, with regards to her or his concerns for existence in relation to being.\textsuperscript{x}

One must note that no doctrine is more optimistic than existentialism. The destiny of man is placed within himself. Initially existentialism did appear to be a morbid philosophy because it deals with depressing themes such as alienation, anxiety, death and crisis. However the purposes of so many of the philosophers who have contributed to this school of thought have had a vision that is to allow people to experience a greater richness and happiness in their lives and to feel at 'home' in their world. In order to achieve a richer and more valuable existence however, the philosophy often refers to some 'uncomfortable' suggestions. For example, the individual is encouraged to stand at the edge of the abyss, to introspect oneself and to contemplate the terror of freedom and then to make a leap. At the point of departure there
cannot be any other truth than this, *I think, therefore, I exist*\textsuperscript{xi} which is the absolute truth of consciousness.

Thus, Kaufmann remarks: "the man who discovers himself directly also discovers all the others and discovers them as the condition of his own existence."\textsuperscript{xii} Existentialism lays stress on the existence of humans; Sartre believes that human existence is the result of chance or accident. We must rely on our own resources otherwise there is no meaning or purpose of our lives. Sartre felt that existence manifests itself in the choice of actions, anxiety and freedom of the will. In this way the responsibility of building one’s future is in one’s hands, but the future is uncertain and hence we cannot escape from anxiety and despair. We are always under the shadow of anxiety; higher responsibility leads to higher anxiety. Concluding his thought, Sartre states that existentialism is not pessimism and that it does not aim at plunging us in to loss of hope. The final aim is to prepare one through anguish, abandonment and despair for a genuine life and is basically concerned with the human condition as choice.

The dimensions of human condition are typically at the root of emotional difficulties: They are briefly explained so that they are understood thoroughly. It is rightly said by the father of existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard, in his maxim:

> ‘Life can be lived forward and understood backward.’\textsuperscript{xiii}

The mental health of the human being is of utmost importance and must lay emphasis on experiencing the unity and the world. Clement Vontress an existential counselor defined mental health as being balance and harmony with one’s inner self with one’s friends, family and colleagues with one’s physical environment; and with one’s spirituality.\textsuperscript{xiv}

The inevitabilities of human condition may give a bleak picture but existentialism has optimism and hope because of the potential the human condition has and all people have to transcend those inevitabilities.
An inherent aspect to this concept of freedom of choice is responsibility. The existential perspective developed here considers that the individual who exercises personal freedom of choice must also be willing to accept responsibility for these decisions. But, the individuals find it difficult to accept that they always have possibilities and are free to choose between them. They may not have the choice to affect the 'objective reality' of certain entities, but they do have possibilities in how they relate to their relations with other entities. This means that individuals are responsible for their subjective/inward existence, which can be a daunting challenge. Uncertainty produces challenges that can be overcome through an existential approach. It is concerned with the understanding of a person’s situation in the world and how he constructs meaning in his or her life.

The existential approach considers human nature to be open-ended, flexible, and capable of a wide experience. According to this approach, there is no essential, solid self, no given definition of one's personality and abilities, and thus we each have the potential to create our lives within a wide range of free attitudes and behaviour. Sartre says that man in discovering himself discovers also the other. He says that one does not get a true picture of his existence unless there is intervention of the other. So others are necessary for one's existence and self-knowledge. The knowing others through one's own existence is called by Sartre as inter-subjectivity. Human universality is the condition of man’s actions and these conditions are objective and they exist at all places. Existentialism should be called the philosophy of human action. According to Sartre, this philosophy is optimistic as it encourages men to act despite the harshness of reality and complexities of human actions. Psychology, which is a discipline helpful to self growth and social harmony, makes us aware of the gap between the academic pursuits and real life problems of people. Positive psychology wants to act as a social catalyst in the change process and has come to full circle to its existential roots.

Existential psychology is about human existence and the human drama of survival. It helps in overcoming or confronting existential anxieties and living an authentic life. Existentialist psychologists avoid treating a person as if they were isolated from events and situations in the world.
The features of choice, responsibility, and freedom in human lives are of particular importance in existential psychology. For both good and bad, people are expected to seize their freedom and take responsibility for the choices they make in their lives.

Choice is one of the most fundamental concerns in existentialism. We may not choose to be born but, once born, we are responsible for the lives we lead. We create the structure of the world around us and realize our self based on our choices and decisions, even though there are factors that aren’t entirely within our control.

The concept of Self-realization or inner self has become widely popular in the Western world, greatly influenced by some Eastern religions. In the Hindu religion self-realization refers to profound spiritual awakening. The branch of Advaita Vedanta is the one that has especially developed this concept.

(iii) HUMANISM: A HUMANISTIC APPROACH

Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, American Psychologists developed self-actualization in Humanistic Psychology. Maslow defined then self-realization as the “impulse to convert oneself into what one is capable of being.”

Self-realization, according to Maslow is that of psychological growth and maturation. The latent potentialities of human beings awaken and manifest when it hits the right chord.

Maslow’s main contribution to existential-humanistic psychology is his emphasis on the positive existential givens and the transcendent, spiritual level of human existence. This higher level of consciousness is evolved biologically in existential- humanistic psychology. The discrepancy arises when the perception of self and the real life experiences differ. Then one faces the problems of adjustment and personal growth. It gives rise to existential anxiety. The individuals do not accept themselves the way they are and pretend to be someone else and comply with others and give into their expectations.
Gordon W. Allport ventures to sum up Maslow’s point:

*Existentialism deepens the concepts that define the human condition. In doing so, it prepares the way for a psychology of mankind.*

A series of facts unites mankind. A human being is born of a father and mother, ordinarily conceived and nurtured in love. He pursues certain biological goals; but he also pursues other goals, which require him to establish his own identity to take responsibility, to satisfy his curiosity concerning the meaning of life. All the way he experiences anxiety, longing, pain and pleasure. The series of events is universal.

Joseph Lyons indicates: *Existential psychology is where existentialist conceptions are applied explicitly to the issues in the field of psychology.*

iv . **EXISTENTIAL POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY- AN INTEGRATED APPROACH**

Martin E.P. Seligman states: Positive psychology is the study of human strengths and virtues and nurturing what is best within us. Thus it helps human beings develop those qualities that lead to self-fulfillment and also for others. It aims to discover and promote factors that allow individuals, communities and societies to thrive and flourish. Existential psychology can learn from positive psychology its scientific methods and its clarity in communication. Therefore, Existential positive psychology represents a natural amalgam between positive psychology(PP) and existential psychology(EP). Six ultimate questions are discussed about human existence in Dr. Paul Wong’s *Handbook and Existential Positive Psychology* opens to new insights, wisdom and facts of life from all sources regardless of the paradigm of knowledge.

Dr. Paul Wong evinces and has rightly stated the essential anxieties required for human flourishing: *What qualifies Existential Positive Psychology as a*
positive psychology is its emphasis on the human capacities for positive change and growth.\textsuperscript{xix}

The following are the six types of existential anxieties essential for human flourishing:

1. From identity crisis to the quest for authenticity.
2. From the crisis of discontent to the quest of happiness.
3. From meaninglessness anxiety to the quest of purpose.
4. From isolation anxiety to the quest for community.
5. From freedom anxiety to the quest for responsibility.
6. From death anxiety to the quest for death acceptance and self-transcendence.

The first existential philosopher wrote the first book on anxiety in 1844. It has been translated as \textit{The Concept of Anxiety} or \textit{The Concept of Dread}. Rollo May, often considered as the father of Existential Psychology wrote his doctoral dissertation on anxiety in 1950 entitled \textit{Meaning of Anxiety}. Even Irvin Yalom (1980) has identified the existential anxieties as: freedom, isolation, death, meaninglessness, identity and happiness. These themes are recurrent in human existence even though they may remain unconscious or latent in some individuals.

New insights, interpretation, of various thoughts on existential writing have reached and appealed to a large audience. Louise Hay has rightly quoted in her book \textit{"You can heal your life"}

\begin{quote}
\textit{“We are responsible for all our experiences. Every thought we think is creating our future. The point of power is always in the present moment. Everyone suffers from self-hatred and guilt. The bottom line of everyone is: “I’m not good enough.” It’s only a thought and thought can be changed. When we love ourselves, everything in our life works….”}\textsuperscript{xx}
\end{quote}

American psychologist and psychoanalyst, Rollo May (1909-1994) in his excellent introduction to the pivotal volume Existence titled, \textit{The Origins Of
Existential Movement in Psychology describes the existentialist as who rediscovers himself in the midst of modern culture.

The problems of self-alienation, self identity and insignificance of existence are the major problems one faces and it is rightly stated by Walter Kaufmann timeless sensibility that can be discussed here and there in the past.

Self-Alienation is one of the themes, which characterizes existentialism. Alienation is a theme, which Hegel opened up for the modern world on many levels and in many subtle forms. In main stream psychology, alienation is defined:

We cannot express or eliminate our essential parts of ourselves without becoming estranged from ourselves.

For Hegel, the alienation develops in civil society between the wealthy and class four workers. He states that alienation is between his consciousness and its objects and he seeks to overcome it by mastering it in some way or the other.

R.S.Pathak catalogues a few modern man obsessions, pining for something unattainable and gradually growing out of some kind of alienation. Their inner crisis has made them alienated from themselves, their homes and surrounding and the community. There is a conspicuous absence of meaningfulness in life. The impact of the West on the Indian culture has made this age not only the age of anxiety but also ‘the Age of Alienation.’

Existential psychologists deal with such situations. They are not only concerned with being but also with “becoming” as well. They desire to help clients find the path in life that brings self-fulfillment. The term “existential” is often described as the “pains” of existence. These pains take the form of not only conflicts and harsh realities, but also the realization that one is inherently isolated in his or her experience, that life has no inherent meaning structure, that one is responsible for authoring his or her life story, and that one dies -
ceasing to exist at all. If confronted honestly, this realization helps one to live life more fully, but if not addressed, it can lead to a number of "living" or "being" issues and problems.

Existential philosophy and psychology provide an understanding of human experiences based on personal meaning and essential realities of the human condition. Existential positive psychology will bring about a change in the modern materialistic world.

Man has become self-centered and egocentric that he cannot help suffering from inner problem.—a conviction of isolation and meaningfulness in his day to day life. The existential problems like angst, alienation, authenticity, anxiety….Such type of existential problems are found right from Kierkegaard to Marcel and in literature we find in Albert Camus and Sartre.

Philosophically viewed irony begins when being cease to be simple and becoming begins. Evolution howsoever desirable to the natural scientist is but a process of growth from the homogeneous simplicity to a heterogeneous complexity. In this process, not only one becomes many but also this many becomes variegated. Irony is nearer the truth of life more realistic, more liberal, less deceptive and capable of greater integrity of presentation.

It has been proved that Kierkegaard theory of Self is found in the concept of irony. If we wish to retain the free play and open endedness the hallmarks of irony then we are forced to not abandon any possibility of serious meaning. Kierkegaard literary technique is irony—irony itself becomes a way to objectivity. Thus one can establish a relationship and between irony and objectivity, Kierkegaard says that Goethe is the master over the irony who succeeded in using irony to set both the work and himself free. Goethe was working on the conception of self-hood. It's all a part of becoming Self.

Irony plays an essential role in the accomplishment of human tasks. It is rightly claimed “No true philosophy is possible without doubt, so........ No authentic human life is possible without irony and there is every personal life
so much that must be repudiated by the philosophers: ……Here again irony is an excellent surgeon. Philosophically viewed, irony begins when being ceases to be simple and still and becoming begins. *Ironic philosophies produce passionate works* is stated rightly by Albert Camus.\textsuperscript{xxii}

Hence, existentialism came into an intellectual climate that was highly favourable to literature. It forbears Dostoevsky and Kafka. Some of the thinkers associated with it combined literary and philosophical writing. Literature and philosophy are linked and any discussion or criticism without the two becomes meaningless.

The meaning of the existentialism has its root in literature and insights of existential philosophy and existential phenomenology and many literary figures and philosophical thinkers have cried out for a deep psychological understanding. Psychological attributes as well as external stress have influenced the solidarity and continuation of human ties. Hence Man has to deal with the philosophical, psychological, literary and inter-disciplinary aspects of existentialism.

Even we find this portrayed by our Indian writers Anita Desai and Arun Joshi. While Joshi explores the helplessness of man, Anita Desai has tried her best to voice the mute, untold and psychosomatic miseries of the women particularly of the married women who are seen caught in the net of existential problems and predicaments. These two novelists shift from the outer world to the inner world and catches up with the modern western world. Such novels portray the psychological perspective of the author or stream of consciousness of the protagonist in the novels. James Joyce, Proust, Virginia Woolf. The protagonists live like complete strangers and are not able to communicate. But the protagonists of Albert Camus are completely opposites of Desai’s characters.

Anita Desai and Arun Joshi’s characters grapple with acute trying situations in human life. They are left to struggle for existence in their society. R.K. Narayan is not by design an existential novelist but existential principles seep
into his fiction just by the way. The situations and conflicts in his work are the clashes of ‘will’ and ‘freedom’ and so are of an existential nature. R.K.Narayan’s novels, explore the psychological and philosophical aspect of his protagonists and his existential approach towards the existential concerns. It is widely known fact that Narayan is the minstrel of human heart and his focus is on human relationship and human existence.’

There is no human existence apart from the world in which he exists. The human existence is not a self-sufficient point of consciousness to which a world gets added on. To exist is already to be in a world. And if it is true that the ‘human’ existent organizes his world, it is also true that the world has an independence over against him, that there are elements in it which stubbornly resist man’s efforts to comprehend things in a uniform order, that the world reacts on man as surely as man acts on the world. Narayan’s thoughts resonate with Jean - Paul Sartre words:

> Without the world there is no selfhood, no person; without selfhood, without the person, there is no world. xxiii

R.K.Narayan’s characters face all six existential anxieties at some point of time during their journey of their life and they overcome them by having a positive approach towards their crisis. He portrays the reality of the inner vision of his characters which transcends and transforms them to realize the sacramentality of life. His works reflect on the framework of the Existential Positive Psychology, which emphasizes on integrating negative experiences with positive ones. It stresses that only through struggle and fortitude, Man can uplift humanity and improve the human condition. The future of humanity hinges on the understanding and harnessing the unlimited potentials of meaning seeking and meaning making.

---


vii Kierkegaard, Soren (1849): Sickness Unto Death.


xi Sartre, Jean-Paul (1945): Existentialism is a Humanism, A public lecture.


xiii Kierkegaard, Soren (1845): Stages on Life’s Way.


