CHAPTER 1
Theorising Desire and Freedom

The aim of every society is to ensure a chaos-free life of its members which is done by creating some code of conduct. The codification of sexuality has been the hallmark of any civilized society. All societies prescribe and codify sexual activities and thereby legitimize some sexual practices and declare some others to be not legitimate. One of the several ways to codify sexuality has been to associate it to desire. This chapter will analyze the conceptualization of desire in society insofar as it has a role to play in curbing the freedom of the individual by laying down ideal norms regarding sexual life. The discussion about the concept of freedom moves parallel to the analysis of desire as the water-tight compartmentalization of the two concepts is neither possible nor analytically useful. To make the analysis more comprehensive an attempt has been made to analyze the problematization of desire in philosophical and psychological discourses also along with its conceptualization in various religions. This chapter, therefore, traces the concept of desire and freedom as perceived in different systems of thoughts like religion, philosophy, psychology and in particular Sartrean existentialism. It provides us with a theoretical background necessary to comprehend the dialectics of desire and freedom in the narrative. This chapter does not presume to be comprehensive in its scope, instead it offers a focused and accessible introduction to the dialectics of desire and freedom in order to best explore this dialectical relationship in subsequent chapters.

1. Religion: Desire as an Obstacle in the Ultimate Freedom

The basic concept upon which the whole religious philosophy rests is the concept of ‘other world’ which is completely opposite to ‘this world’. So the ultimate aim of every religion is to enable human being to make his way to this other world by saving him from the snares of this world which in other words means freedom from the bondage of the wheel of existence. But desires which ensnare man in the material pleasures of this world stand as a barrier to this ultimate freedom. The only desire which can save man from the web of the worldly desire is the desire for Brahman. This paradoxical definition of desire makes the relationship between desire and freedom more complex. Desire is the cause of both freedom and bondage. The understanding of the concept of desire is necessary to understand the dialectics of desire and freedom.

The concept of desire is one of the most controversial issues in religion. It is generally mentioned by adding the prefix ‘erotic’ to it, i.e., erotic desire which means “to enjoy, possess or
otherwise pursue an object of beauty or virtue for one’s own pleasure or gratification” (Long 31).

It is designated by the culturally specific term within each tradition, for example Eros in Greek, Amor in Latin and Kama in Sanskrit. Eros, Amor and Kama also occupy special position in their respective mythologies as the gods of sexual love. Amor is also called Cupido but he was not a native Roman deity. He was rather introduced from the mythologies of the Greek by poets and his name is the direct translation of the Greek Eros. In Greek mythology, Eros is mentioned as having double character. First he is described as a god who played a significant role in the creation of the world out of chaos. In this phase, he is represented as sorting the shapeless mass of the world with its conflicting elements into order and harmony and making productive what was barren before. In this case he is conceived as having existed before the other gods. In the second case, he is described as a mere god of love, a son of Aphrodite and Zeus. Here he is sportive and mischievous, and plays roughly with men, and shoots arrow of sexual desire into them (Murray 168).

Kama is the Indian counterpart to the Greek Eros and Roman Amor. Kamadeva is “the divine personification of sensuous attachment, desire, and erotic pleasure and is identified with the basal energy that derives the life force through every living thing” (Long 33). Many shades of Kamadeva are portrayed in our scriptures. One of these stories states that when Shiva was engaged in meditation, Kama discharged an arrow at him to divert his attention to his wife Parvati but Shiva reduced him to ashes with a glance from his third eye. In response to the plea of Kama’s widow Rati, Shiva restored her husband but only as his mental image representing true love and affection. As Kamadeva lost his body, he got another name ‘Ananga’ i.e. bodiless (Margaret 139).

The Indian epics and Dharamshastras distinguish between two widely divergent ethics on which a person may base his life: “the way of the worldling (pravrtti) and the way of the ascetic (nivrarti)” (Long 34). The driving force of the worldly life is the pursuit of the objects of desire whereas the governing power of the ascetic life is the conquest of all desires by observing the principle of restraint.

It is a paradox that in Hinduism, the Kama is associated with sexuality on the one hand, whereas on the other it is considered the basis of a value system that aspires to the development of a well-rounded and complete personality. This goal of life is achieved by successively pursuing the four types of values during the four stages of life. Kama i.e. pleasure and sensual
enjoyment comes at the beginning of these four aims, then comes Artha i.e. wealth and prosperity, third one is Dharma i.e. righteousness, and Moksha i.e. spiritual liberation from ignorance and rebirth is the last aim of life. Kama and Artha join hands to enable the individual to direct all his will and effort towards sense-gratification and material well-being. Dharma is concerned with the lighting as well as feeding the fire of knowledge but never allowing it to be quelled during a man’s earthly existence. Moksha is devoted to creating a sense of feeling in the individual that his life’s mission has been fulfilled and that he is in tune with the infinite. Reference to kama occurs for the first time in the Rigveda. In the hymn of creation, all the creation was said to be the result of the first seed which was kama:

Then was not non-existent nor existent
There was no realm of air, no sky beyond it . . .
Death was not then . . .
Darkness there was . . .
All that existed then was void and formless . . .
Thereafter rose desire in the beginning,
Desire, the primal seed and germ of spirit.
Sages who searched with their heart’s thought
Discovered the existent’s kinship in the non-existent. (10. 129)

A verse in Atharvaveda also states that:

Sensual desire was the first creation in the universe; neither the Gods nor men could fathom its depth; thou art the greatest destroyer of the universe, O KAMA, I acknowledge thy supremacy and bow unto thee. (9.2.19.)

The role of desire in our evolutionary heritage is again confirmed in our Upanishads. Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad states that in the beginning, this universe was the Self in the form of a person. Finding no one other than himself, he is frightened:

Verily, he had no delight. Therefore one alone has no delight. He desired a second. He was, indeed, as large as a woman and a man closely embraced. He caused that self fall into two pieces. Therefrom arose a husband and a wife.

Therefore this is true: ‘Oneself is like a half-fragment,’ as Yajnavalkya used to say. Therefore this space is filled by a wife. He copulated with her. Therefrom human beings were produced. (1.4.3)
No doubt the desire has been recognized as the first cause of the creation of this world in the *Upnishads* and *Vedas* but at the same time these scriptures emphasize desirelessness as the ultimate aim of life. *Brihad-Aranyaka Upnishad* opens with the sacrifice of the horse done by a king to gain sovereignty:

> Om! Verily, the dawn is the head of sacrificial horse; . . . .
> Voice, indeed, his voice. (1.1.1)

The horse allegory is an ensemble of collective metaphors intrinsically connected with each other. The sacrifice that is proposed here is not to be conducted but only to be imagined. *Asavmedha* is here meant to be a metamorphosis of the whole process of genesis. This sacrifice was done by a king to gain sovereignty but the supremacy that is aimed in the Upanishad is the supremacy of one’s own self. For human beings, killing is connected with what they hate. In the present case, it is described as what is the most pleasing. This horse sacrifice symbolizes the killing of all the desires for the sake of personal evolution and the transcendence of the physical. The importance of killing desire for achieving the essential silence of the ultimate truth has been conveyed by giving this philosophical allegory of sacrificial horse (Yati 279-280).

According to *Upnishads* the ultimate aim of life is the absolute unity with *Brahman* but the presence of desires and the craving to satisfy these desire acts as an obstacle in this union. In *Brihad-Aranyaka Upnishad* while replying to the king Janaka about the meaning of self, the great sage Yajanvalkya explains the psychology and praxis of desire:

> A person is made [not of acts, but] of desires only. As is his desire, such is his resolve; as is his resolve, such the action he performs; what action he performs, that he procures for himself. (2.3.2.)

It means if we control our deep desire we can control our destiny and can save ourselves from the next birth. It is only desirelessness which will make our union with the *self* possible. Without renouncing desires, we can’t come out of the cycle of rebirth. It says:

> He who is without desire, who is freed from desire,
> whose desire is satisfied, whose desire is the soul –
> his breath do not depart. Being very *Brahman*, he goes to *Brahman*.
> . . .When are liberated all
> The desires that lodge in one’s heart,
> Then a mortal becomes immortal!
Therein he reaches Brahman! (4.4.5-7)

In the second part of the third chapter of Mundaka Upanishad, desires have been described as the cause of rebirth:

He knows that Supreme Brahman-abode,
Founded on which the whole world shines radiantly.
They who, being without desire, worship the person
And are wise, pass beyond the seed [of rebirth] here.
He who in fancy forms desires, because of his desire is born [again] here and there
But of him whose desire is satisfied, who is a perfected soul,
All desires even here on earth vanish away. (3.2.1-2)

Similar concept is given in Chandogya Upnishad which relates freedom with the real desire i.e. satya kama. As real is only Brahman so the real desire is only the desire for Brahman.

In the eighth chapter concerning the nature of the soul it says:

Those who go hence without here having found the Soul (Atman) and those real desires (satya kama) - for them in all the world there is no freedom. But those who go hence having found here the Soul and those real desires - for them in all the world there is freedom. (4.2.3-4)

The Bhagavadgita, the most revered of the Hindu texts, has been generally considered the most important among all the ancient sacred texts that deal with desire. Acharya Vinoba Bhave calls it “Upnishad of Upnishads because Lord Krishna has drawn the milk of all the Upnishads and given it in the form of the Gita to the whole world” (3). As Arjun was unable to understand that in the battle of Mahabharta how can he fulfill his duty as a ksatriya and can remain detached at the same time. In its answer, Sri Krishna explains to him the philosophy of karamyoga. He says that what is needed for him is the renunciation not of action but of the desire for the fruits of the action. A karamyogi should be free from desires. If personal egoism of the doer is not there, the existence of desire is impossible. Here desire is not confined merely to the sexual desire between a man and a woman. It includes the indulgence in all the sense-objects. Howsoever much one may indulge in their enjoyment, desires are never satisfied. The more one indulges in them, the more one is entangled in the web of desires. Therefore, these are not
satisfied through enjoyment. Unfulfilled desires become the cause of anger which paves the way to the total destruction of man. Explaining the workings of desire Sri Krishna says:

While contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, and from such attachment lust develops, and from lust anger arises. From anger delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls down again into the material pool. (2. 62-63)

He further says that attainment of moksha is possible only for those who have controlled their desires:

A person who is not disturbed by the incessant flow of desires – that enters like rivers into the ocean which is ever being filled but is always still – can alone achieve peace, and not the man who strives to satisfy such desires. (2.70)

Desire has been given an important place in the religious tradition of reality but ultimately it must be uprooted in order to achieve liberation from bondage to the wheel of existence.

Buddhism also faces the phenomenon of desire very frankly and critically because it does not start with the external universe but with the heart of man as its first and final cause. The Dhammapada, an early collection of Buddhist teachings about the moral life and path to spiritual perfection, includes much on the subject of desire. It says that desire is a principal manifestation of the selfish craving and blind demandingness that, according to the four noble truths of Buddhism, is the cause of dukkha. The First Noble Truth is that this whole world is nothing but sufferings. The second truth is that this whole suffering is caused by ego-driven desires i.e. the desires that our sense of “I-ness” produces. “It is this thirst which produces rebirth and re-becoming, bound up with passionate greed. It finds fresh delight now here and now there, namely, thirst for sense-pleasures; thirst for existence and becoming; and thirst for non-existence . . .” (qtd. in Coward 134). The third noble truth states that this flame of desire can be blown out only by reaching the stage of nirvana. “The creeper of craving grows everywhere” and one must “cut off its roots by the power of wisdom” (qtd. in Delattre 310). The fourth noble truth tells the eightfold path leading to the realization of nirvana. The Pali term Nibbana is similar to Nirvana in Sanskrit. Nibbana is composed of the particles ‘Ni’ and ‘Vana’ where Ni implies negation and Vana implies weaving or craving or desire. It is this desire that weaves a cord connecting one life
with another. As long as the craving lasts one remains bound to the eternal cycle of birth and death but when the cord is cut once and all the forms of cravings are extirpated, one attains Nibbana (Silva 63). Thus self-negation is an essential aspect of it. This does not mean annihilation of the self but an experience in which the notion of ‘I’, ‘me’, and ‘mine’ disappears. The egocentric life of desires must be put to an end by the deliberate denial of the self.

According to Judaism, our ordinary life is dominated by senses or desires which distracts us from the path of righteousness. Only a disciplined life in accordance with Torah can save us from the disaster of desires and create a new social order dominated by a realized knowledge of the Lord. The fundamental basis of life for all Jews is to lead life under Torah i.e. God’s revelation in the Bible and in subsequent oral teachings. Failure to remain faithful to the covenant with God becomes the cause of disorder in life. Human condition can be summed up in three experiences: humans experience is good and evil because the human heart is divided between the tendencies to do good and evil; evil constantly threatens the soul; to maintain life and resist evil desires something more than human resources is required like strength from God (Coward 9). But the choice between good or evil rests entirely on human being as God has made humans with free choice. By choosing faithfulness to God, one finds life; by choosing sin which is direct result of desires, one fosters disorder and death.

In Christianity the term desire has been used interchangeably with other terms like longing, greed, craving and lust which express man’s inner striving for an objective which may be a person, a thing or an experience. According to The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology in the Old and New Testaments, two terms have been used with a little difference to express desire: epithymia for desire and lust and epithymeo for desire and want. In the Old Testament each term occurs about fifty times. They express: (a) a morally indifferent desire; (b) a praiseworthy desire and; (c) an evil desire which is opposed to God’s will. In the New Testament this concept occurs most of the times in Pauline writings. He uses epipotheo when desire is praiseworthy but except a few times, connotations of desire are negative. Theologically, those passages are more important where epithymia is used in a negative sense of evil desire or lust and where it refers to not only sexual desire but all kinds of material enjoyments also. By distracting man’s attention from the path of god, desires take human beings completely under their sway. The recognition that anyone who allows himself to be driven by his desires is already under the reign of sin occurs frequently in Pauline writings. It provokes a man
to action making himself the focus of life, to trust himself, to love himself more than others and
god. St. Paul equates this tendency with the ‘flesh’, the power which turns a man away from
God. Here by ‘flesh’ he means not the physical body but the whole of the unbelieving man –
body, mind, faculties, and desires. He commits sin when he says, “This is what I want and I
intend to get it” (Boyd 52) instead of doing what God commands and what this world needs.
Since epithymia is so bound up with man’s nature that constant attention is needed for a
Christian to save himself from its trap. He can conquer it if he constantly allows himself to be
controlled by the Spirit of God and lives by the will of God. The man who walks by Spirit has
the power to resist desire, because the Spirit replaces desire as the determining power in his life.
St. John traces the origin of desire even further back. According to him, desire does not originate
in merely man but in the world. World here means the sphere of enmity to God and Christ where
devil entices man with the lust of flesh and the pride of life. Since desire originates “from the
world”, it is transient like this world. He, who builds on it and allows himself and his life to be
determined by it, will “pass away” with it. (Schonweiss 457-458). This condemnation of the
flesh, which is viewed by some as characteristically Christian, is in fact of Manichaean and
‘heretical’ origin. According to the doctrine of Manichaeism which developed in the 3rd
century Egypt, there are two eternal first principles: God, the cause of all good; and the matter, the cause
of all evil. Matter or the spirit of evil is also a God equal to the other. It regarded body as the
work of the Supreme Bad Principle; the marriage is wrong and the begetting and bearing of
children is a crime. Cathar is a general term applied to the several sects which had their roots in
the dualist religion like that of Manes. It troubled Europe for four hundred years from the
beginning of the eleventh century. Its believers declared that God is love and so his creation is
spiritual. This material world, on the other hand, is created by some rebellious creature who
seduced Souls by showing them a woman of dazzling beauty who inflamed them with desire.
The Angel-Souls followed Satan and the woman of dazzling beauty and thus got ensnared in
material bodies. According to Catharism, salvation is possible only after renouncing the world
and abstaining, if married, from all the contacts with the wife. So according to this dualist
philosophy this material world which is evil is the result of desire and attainment of good or God
is possible only by renouncing all desires.

These dualistic interpretations quickly gave rise to the anti-dualist branch of Christianity
which rejected the universal ethic of celibacy and that of the division between spirit and flesh.
According to St. Augustine, who belongs to this group of ‘Orthodox’ Christianity, at the time of Jesus’ second coming the fleshy body will be raised spiritually i.e. the body of flesh will again, without effort, follow the dictates of the spirit in all things and man will no longer be capable of sinning. He was not against the sexual union of male and female. He said that God chose to make humans with gendered fleshy bodies as the natural habitat of soul. This means that God always intended humans to be fruitful and multiply by sexual union. But the aim of sexual union should be conception not pleasure because the ultimate aim of life is caritas not cupiditas. Caritas are the desires directed towards God and cupiditas are the desires directed towards worldly goods. So the driving force of life should be caritas which makes the union of flesh and soul complete. Whether it was dualistic philosophy or non-dualistic branch of thought, the worldly desires or the desires of the individual have always been considered evil.

Islam is a religion based on the universal principle of submission to God. The term ‘Islam’ has been derived from the “Arabic word ‘salaam’ which has a two-fold meaning: peace, and submission to God” (Ahuja 52). This submission requires fully conscious and keen efforts. One must give oneself intentionally and conscientiously to the service of Allah who is the creator of this world. He has created man in his own image and so given him freedom to choose. But his freedom is limited because he is a created being and it is only the creator who has absolute freedom. Islam defines man as a value-conscious being who is endowed with a fundamental discrimination between the good and the evil. Islamic notion of man’s nature is quite different from the Christian concept of sinful nature of man. Nowhere does it say that human nature is basically flawed and must be regenerated. According to Islam humans are not cast out of the Garden of Eden as a punishment to their sinfulness, rather they are exiled so that they can use their free will to choose to work with God in creating a moral and beautiful world (Coward 60-62). Islam recognizes that although man has both good and evil desires, he is guided by a feeling of responsibility for doing the right and avoiding the wrong. Chasing the evil desires fill him with a feeling of shame, repentance and self-reproachment. Though man is a value-conscious being but he lacks perfect knowledge. So God has set some limitations on his freedom which he cannot transgress. The Quran says that these are the limits set by Allah, so do not transgress them. Thus, man has been given freedom to choose but also with the obligation to observe the Law of God. Thus by choosing good and rejecting evil desires, human beings evolve morally and spiritually and attain ‘najat’ or salvation. Sawm or fasting is one of the five obligatory acts of
worship in Islam which are known as ‘five pillars of worship’. Sufism, which is a purely Islamic discipline, aims at “steering clear of lusts and sinful desires and realizing the Immediate Presence of God” (Valiuddin 6). Its source is Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy prophet Mohammad. It is an effacement of one’s desire in the will of God. Like other religions, Islam too allows the satisfaction of human desires but in a rightful and lawful manner. It does not allow celibacy, because it is against the Fitrah, i.e., the desire for sex. The only acceptable way for sexual satisfaction in Islam is a lawful “marriage”. It prescribes the following means to control and properly channelize human desires: Remembrance of Allah, Fasting, Lowering the gaze, Marriage, and fitnah i.e. Staying away from bad company and Staying away from places of temptation.

2. Philosophy: Desire as a Barrier to the Freedom from Ignorance

Philosophy is the branch of study dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. It is the result of desire to find the answers of ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’. Philosophers consider faculty of reason as a means to knowledge or truth. Reason which is a mental faculty is given upper hand over desires which are related to the emotional part of our personality. The realm of desires is so attractive that the individual comes easily under its sway and goes astray from the path of liberation from darkness of ignorance. This dialectics between desires and freedom has grabbed the attention of the philosophers from ancient to modern. Following discussion of philosophy throws light on this dialectical relation though sometimes the terms have not been used by the different philosophers as such.

Pre-Socratic philosophers focused their attention on asking the large cosmic questions but, failure to arrive at any uniform conception of the cosmos shifted the concern of the later philosophers to the study of man. The beginning of ethical investigation in ancient Greece is usually assigned to Socrates who was committed to the pursuit of truth and considered it his mission to seek out the basis for stable and certain knowledge. He devised the principle of ‘knowledge is virtue’ for arriving at the truth. His notion was against Sophists who believed that all knowledge is relative and so it is impossible for man to discover any stable and universal moral standards. In his notion, Socrates linked knowing and doing to each other and argued that to know the good is to do the good. By identifying knowledge and virtue, he meant to say that evil is the absence of knowledge. Wrongdoing is always involuntary, being the product of ignorance. He agreed that sometimes a person commits an act that can be called evil but he
always does it thinking that it is good in some way. He said that every act of human being is prompted by his inescapable desire for the happiness of his soul. So under the magical power of desire, he sometimes knowingly commits evil acts. As a thief may know that stealing as such is wrong, but he steals in the hope that it will bring him happiness. Similarly, men pursue power, property and physical pleasure, which are the symbols of success and happiness, confusing these with true grounds of happiness. His wrong choices are the result of his ignorance. So knowledge is required to be able to distinguish between what appears to give happiness and what actually gives. The goodness of acts depends upon their harmony with the true nature of man. Socrates believed that the fundamental human nature is constant and, therefore, certain moral values are also constant. He said that desires belong to the ‘lower nature’ of man which always tries to usurp the higher ideals of life. So he argued that individual’s desires must be controlled in order to arrive at the ultimate truth which is the aim of life. He not only preached the principle ‘scorn delights and live laborious days’ but observed it in his life also.

Taking this intellectual disagreement ahead Plato, Socrates’ disciple, supplied his notion with a philosophical elaboration of the concept of soul. In the *Republic*, he gave a tripartite division of human soul: rational, spirited and appetitive. According to him there is an awareness of a goal or a value in the very beginning and this is the result of the rationality of human soul. Then there is a drive towards action, the will to pursue the goal which he defines as the spirit. It is neutral at first but is guided by the reason ultimately. The appetite i.e. the desire for the things of the body comes at the end. Three are linked together but it is the rational part which has the right to rule the spirited and the appetitive parts. Desires or appetites lead human beings into a world of fantasy and deceive them into believing that certain kinds of pleasure will bring them happiness but at this stage reason penetrates into the world of fantasy and directs the desires to the objects that are capable of producing true pleasure and true happiness. Plato illustrated this condition of man in the *Phaedrus* by portraying the picture of a charioteer driven by two horses. One horse, Plato says, is good and “needs no touch of whip, but is guided by word and admonition only.” The other is bad, “the mate of insolence and pride . . . hardly yielding to whip and spur.” In spite of the charioteer’s clear vision of his destination and good horse’s cooperation, the bad horse “plunges and runs away, giving all manner of trouble to his companion and the charioteer . . . .” (qtd. in Stumpf 66). Here the charioteer, good horse and the bad horse symbolize the reason, spirit and appetites or desires, respectively. So it is the bad horse or desires
which needs careful watching and continuous curbing. False knowledge that desires bring happiness becomes the cause of moral evil. Plato discovers the cause of evil in the very nature of soul and in the relation of the soul to the body. Irrational or desire is an inseparable part of the soul along with the rational part but the body stimulates the desire to overcome the rule of reason. The soul’s entrance into the body is a further cause of the breakdown of harmony between the various parts of the soul. In addition to the other appetites, the body stimulates the desire for progeny which in turn becomes lust. In this way, the body disturbs the harmony of the soul by exposing it to the cascade of desires and prevents the reason from recalling the truth it once knew. Plato says that there are two ways to come out of this trap of desires: first is internal, i.e., the process of recollection which begins first of all when the mind experiences difficulties with the seeming contradictions of the sense experiences; and the second way is external i.e. when he is awakened by something or someone external to him. Thus, in *Phaedrus* he presents the view that the ultimate aim of man’s life is to put an end to desires but in *Timaeus* he says that the ultimate end of man’s life is desire for the Deity i.e. the ideal of holiness and knowledge which makes his description of desire paradoxical. On the one hand, he describes desires as a bodily lust, and on the other he associates it with the philosophical love which he calls the higher form of desire.

In his theory of morality, Aristotle says that the soul refers to the total person and it has two parts, the rational and the irrational. The irrational part in turn is composed of two subparts, the spiritedness and the appetitive part. In *de Anima* Aristotle uses ‘desire’ as an umbrella term to include spiritedness and appetitive part. The conflict between the rational and the irrational elements in man raises problems and thus, becomes the subject matter of morality. He says that morality involves action and all actions aim towards an end. To be an ultimate end which is happiness, the act should be desirable in itself not for the sake of another act. So the rational part should control the irrational part to achieve ultimate happiness. He says that the appetitive part or the desires are influenced by things outside of the self, such as objects and persons. Desires react to these influences in two ways i.e. love and hate. These passions taken by themselves could easily ‘go wild’ as in themselves these do not contain any principle of measure or selection. Questions like, What should a person desire? How much? Under which circumstances? How should he relate himself to things, wealth, honour, and other persons?, cannot be answered only on the basis of passions. Aristotle says that man, thus, does not automatically act in the right way
in these matters because morality is not a matter of nature but of developing the habits of right thinking and right choice. Unlike Plato and Socrates, who thought that to know good was sufficient to do good, Aristotle saw that there must be a deliberate choice to do good. The origin of moral action is choice and the origin of choice is desire. So desire is a process which includes deliberation and choice. Thus desire is the moving power in the whole conative process. This moving character of desire marks it off from emotion which is a species of feeling. In this way, neither reason nor desire is self-sufficient. It is only the combination of both which leads to the balanced development of an individual.

No doubt, these ancient philosophers had also concerned themselves with the question of man’s relation to the permanent structures of reality and to God but the synthesis of theology and philosophy in the middle ages became a precarious one. Doctrines of Christian theology became the starting point of medieval philosophy. The attempt to find out the reason of the existence of evil in a world created by God who is good led to the birth of the doctrine of dualism according to which there were two basic principles in the world, the principle of light or goodness and the principle of darkness or evil. These two are in constant conflict with each other as is reflected in the conflict between soul which is composed of light, and the body which is composed of darkness. Sensual desires are caused by the external power of darkness. In this way this theory of dualism seemed to answer the reason behind the presence of evil in a world created by good God. But it was not the end rather it was the starting of the debate between the dualists and the anti-dualists. This was only the brief outline of the relation between medieval philosophy and theology as this aspect has already been discussed in detail in our discussion about dualistic doctrine put forward by Manichaeism and the anti-dualistic stance of St. Augustine.

As the world of science began to open in the fifteenth century, the whole universe was viewed as a system of bodies in motion. Man and human thought also soon were to be viewed in mechanical terms. Thomas Hobbes was one of the early modern thinkers who used scientific methods to analyze human behaviour. His *Leviathan* is primarily a book on social and political philosophy, but he did not restrict his attention to this subject only. In it he presents his account of human nature, focusing on the basic desires and passions that motivate human action. He begins with describing the living of man in the *state of nature*, which is the condition of man before there is any state or civil society. The driving force in man in this state is his will to survive and everybody enjoys equal right to do whatever he considers necessary for his survival.
This struggle for survival results in an anarchic condition in which there is a war of all against all. The motivating force working behind such behaviour is a twofold endeavor, namely appetite and aversion. Desire or appetite is the endeavor toward something and aversion is the endeavor away from something, and these terms have the same meanings as the words love and hate. Good and evil are always relative to the desires and aversions of individual agents. Each person will call good whatever he loves and evil whatever he hates. There is nothing absolutely good or evil. As men are fundamentally egotistical, so they identify goodness with their own appetites. According to Hobbes, human beings not only desire the enjoyment of particular objects at particular times; but also the assurance for the permanent enjoyment in future also. Their success in doing so is a measure of how well they are living. He saw the creation of an artificial man, the great leviathan, called a state as the only way to curb desire of self-love at the cost of others and to avoid the state of anarchy.

In seventeenth-century, rationalists took over the field of philosophy. They set out to formulate clear rational principles that could be organized into a system of truths from which accurate information about the human behaviour and the world could be deduced. Rene Descartes, usually called the ‘father of modern philosophy’, was concerned chiefly with the problem of intellectual certainty. He gave the principle I think, therefore I am as the first and the most certain of all the truths. He described reality as a dualism consisting of two basic substances, thought and extension or the mind and body. He said that both exist independent of each other and the movements of the human body could not originate in the human mind or soul. The soul could only alter or affect the direction of motion in certain parts of the body. He said that soul does not interact with body directly but through mind. In Passion of the Soul, he said that emotions can affect the soul only via desires. He concludes that if one wishes to maintain complete rational control of oneself, one must control the desires. “Because these passions cannot lead us to perform any action except by means of the desire they produce, it is this desire which we should take particular care to control” (Descartes 437).

Spinoza was the greatest of Jewish philosophers. He was influenced by Descartes but was not his follower. Descartes proposed dualism whereas Spinoza proposed a monism, saying that there is only a single substance, Nature, which has various attributes and modes. He treats man as an integral part of nature. Although men think that they are free and are able to make choices, they are victims of an illusion. As human being is an intrinsic part of nature, so all human
actions, both mental and physical, are said to be determined by prior cause. All men possess as a part of their nature the endeavor called conatus which means to persist in their own being. When this conatus refers to the mind and body, it is called appetite, and as appetite is conscious, it is called desire. There is no intrinsic good or bad, we call something good if we desire it and bad if we dislike it. Here question arises if desires are also determined by external factors like everything else then what would be the place of morality? Spinoza says that morality is a matter of achieving higher forms of knowledge. Only through knowledge can we be liberated from the bondage of our passions. When we do not understand our emotions and when our desires are attached to perishable things, we become slaves of passion. The more we understand our emotions, the more we control our desires. To understand our emotions we should understand the whole order of nature because only then we would be able to understand all the events through the idea of God as cause. This knowledge will naturally lead to the intellectual love of God because human beings possess by nature the desire for higher degree of perfection which can be achieved through intellectual powers only.

Leibniz was next in the deterministic tradition of Descartes and Spinoza. Challenging their theory of substance, he put forward the notion of monads which is not matter but force or energy. This world is made up of monads which behave in accordance with a particular purpose with which it has been created by the God. Leibniz focuses on the issue of freedom instead of desire but he indirectly throws light on the place of desire in each monad. How can there be freedom in the determined world where each monad is involved in developing its built-in purpose. Leibniz tries to solve this contradiction by saying that freedom does not mean the power of choice but of self-development. In this sense freedom means the ability to become what one is destined to be without obstructions and also means a quality of existence when he passes from ignorance to knowledge. Though his dominant emphasis was upon determinism, at some points he speaks of freedom in terms of choice. Whether he succeeded in doing justice with his concept of freedom is certainly questionable but one thing is clear that by associating the concept of freedom with the theory of determinism, he left no room for human desire.

Throughout his philosophy, Immanuel Kant identifies desire as a part of the empirical world essentially outside rational control. He says that desires are subjective states which focus only upon self-interest. In Kant’s theory desire is always linked to pleasure. The satisfaction of desires is basically directed at producing pleasure in the agent experiencing the desire. Thus any
action motivated by one’s own desires is self-interested. So in this situation desires cannot be regarded as the strong basis for objective and universal moral rules. So the theory of morality can be based upon not desire but pure reason which is universal for all. A rational being strives to do what must be valid for all rational beings in a particular situation. The motivating force behind the act should not be *inclination* or *self-interest* but the well being of all. He says that the essence of a morally good act is the principle that a person affirms when he wills an act. Kant uses the term *autonomy* of the will when each person through his own act of will, legislates the moral law. He distinguishes *autonomous will* from *heteronomous will* which is influenced or even determined by desires or inclinations. Central to the concept of *autonomy* of the will is the idea of freedom. In *The Critique of the Pure Reason* he says that freedom presupposes us to be free from empirical determination in order to justify our sense of moral obligation and no one who acts from his own desire is a free and autonomous agent. Desires are the forces over which human agents have no control. These are the natural forces which make us passive and subject to heteronomy. If it is accepted that all our action are determined by existing natural circumstances and our choices play no role in determining our actions, then the whole notion of moral agency would be challenged. So when it comes to moral matters, reason must replace desires. Freedom is based on reason and this must not be restrained by the forces of desire.

Hegel who succeeded Kant transformed his critical philosophy into metaphysical idealism. Challenging Kant’s claim that metaphysics is impossible as it is not possible for human mind to achieve theoretical knowledge about all of reality, Hegel said everything that is, is knowable. He said that the ultimate aim of all knowledge is the Absolute Idea or God. He explains this concept of Absolute idealism with the help of his notion of the subject and the object. Absolute is not only the subject-object identity but the identity of the subject-object identity and subject-object non-identity. It is the category of self-consciousness i.e. a continuous process of self-development towards self-perfection. The self has to pass through several stages to reach this self-consciousness and desire is the first stage. Hegel says that the self’s first experience is that it cannot attain absolute independence on the level of animal desire. Desire by its very nature is the desire for something that one does not have. It depends upon an independent object which is something completely alien to oneself. Desires are sometimes satisfied but this dependence upon an independent object never ends as desire regenerates and it always requires another object to consume. As the desired object always exists independently of the subject so it
means there is non-identity between the subject and the object. When desire consumes its object, it leads to the identity between subject and object but this identity is not permanent as regeneration of desire again leads to non-identity. So the required identity of identity and non-identity is not achieved. So Hegel says that self-consciousness which is the paradoxical unity of itself in its otherness is achieved by transcending desire (Beiser 182-183).

Till Hegel, the thrust of all the philosophical discussions was to search the way to reach the Absolute or God. But Friedrich Nietzsche revolutionized the whole philosophical trend by declaring that ‘God is dead’. As most of the times the term ‘desire’ conveys the same meaning as the terms ‘passion’, ‘instincts’ and ‘impulses’, so Nietzsche’s views on desire are embedded in his criticism of traditional morality and his concept of Apollonian and Dionysian. He saw himself writing in a period characterized by the drastic decline in the belief in Christian God and fast emerging European nihilism in its place. “Nihilism is the state reached when the highest values of humanity devalue themselves” (Pearson xi). He said that in order to go beyond nihilism it is necessary to reassess the values which have so far determined human life. He rejected the notion that there is a universal and absolute system of morality that everyone must obey. The notions of good and bad are not natural. In fact these are the result of will to power which is central to human nature. He proposed aesthetic view of life as the most promising alternative to this unnatural system of morality. He believed that it were Greeks who discovered the true meaning and mode of human behaviour. He drew his fundamental insights about man from Greek conceptions of Apollo and Dionysus. God Dionysus symbolized the dynamic stream of life without any restraints or barriers. Apollo, on the other hand, was the symbol of order, restraint, and form, the power to create beauty through art. Greek tragedy is a great form of art which represents the conquest of Dionysus by Apollo. Nietzsche said that Greek tragedy illustrates that dark and surging forces of passion are an inevitable part of human life. But instead of abandoning oneself to the flood of instincts and passions, the awareness of these driving forces becomes the occasion for producing a work of art. He said that the Apollonian refers to the healthy element whereas Dionysian is the diseased one which can develop negative attitude towards life. But creation of art is a response to the healthy element and a challenge to the diseased frenzy of Dionysian. He said that this Greek formula of fusion of negative and positive provided the modern man with a relevant standard of behaviour whereas Christian ethics were unable to provide a balanced view of life.
3. Psychoanalysis: In the Real World Man has no Freedom to Fulfill his Desires

Both religion and philosophy deal with metaphysics and their aim is to reach to ideal. But psychoanalysis deals with the actual human behaviour in concrete situation. It deals not with the ultimate freedom but actual absence of freedom in the real social conditions. The real world has no place for the realm of desires. Thus, the real life is in complete opposition to the desired life of pleasures. Freud and Lacan have studied this opposition in terms of the conscious and unconscious, and imaginary and symbolic.

Sigmund Freud was the first to analyze human behaviour in terms of instincts buried in the unconscious. He saw all human behaviour as motivated by instincts or desires. Although many instincts exist, Freud divided them all into two broad categories: Eros, the life instinct, which covers all the self-preserving and erotic instincts, and Thanatos, the death instincts, which covers all instincts towards aggression, self-destruction and cruelty. Thanatos presses for the annihilation of life because life is the predominance of displeasure and tension. Eros desires life under the pleasure principle but the environment stands in its way and the pleasure principle is overcome by the reality principle. Herbert Marcuse analyses Freudian instinct theory in his book Eros and Civilisation. He says that Freudian theory which appears to be purely biological is fundamentally social and historical. Society allows instinctual freedom only within the framework of domination. Eros is always considered in opposition to civilization and that is why pleasure principle is transformed into reality principle. Marcuse calls this curbing of instinct unjustified and traumatic. He says that society could afford a high degree of instinctual liberation without putting a stop to its progress. But it presupposes fundamental change in social and cultural institutions.

Lacan, who gave linguistic interpretation of Freud’s unconscious, says that desire is always desire for the other. It starts with the split of the libidinal unity from the maternal body and the child becomes aware that it is a separate being from the mother. Desire here is a longing for a return to the original mother-child unity: ‘desire of the mother’. This desire is nostalgic. A return to unity would entail a negation of the very individuality of the subject and so desire becomes a longing for something that cannot be achieved and can never be fulfilled. Lacanian desire stems from an unconscious recognition of a lack rooted in a repressed Oedipal desire, an incestuous drive repressed by the Law of the Father. The gap between the child and the mother appears with the initiation of the child into the world of language what Lacan calls the
symbolic order. The society’s injunctions that desire must wait, creates a lack in the individual and the repressed desires continue to exert their influence on the conscious life. Lacan rejects the notion of any intrinsic psychical unity so he calls an individual merely a ‘subject’ rather than a self or an ego. The subject is made and remade in his encounter with the Other. ‘The Other’ can’t be defined in a single sense, in each of its incarnations it is that which introduces a lack or gap in the subject, incapacitates him for selfhood and in this way keeps desire in perpetual flight. So relationship between the Subject and the Other is characterized by desire, “Indeed it is quite simply . . . as desire of the Other as man’s desire finds form” (qtd. in Bowie). So whether it is the desire for pleasure as in Freud or the desire to return to unity as in Lacan, it is always in conflict with the real world.

4. The Problematics of Desire and Freedom

The above analysis shows that whether it is religion, philosophy or psychoanalysis, desires have always been placed opposite to values and norms of the civilized world. In all the major religions discussed above desire has been described according to the relational framework of binary opposites: mortal/immortal, selfishness/selflessness, rebirth/moksha, individual/god, body/soul. The terms in these binaries are related to each other hierarchically. The first term which is lower in this hierarchy refers to the baser desires and the second term which is at the higher level stands for the ultimate aim of human life which is the liberation from this mortal world. And this aim can be achieved only by sacrificing all the worldly desires as these pose a great obstacle in the path of moksha and unity of man with the God. The only desire acceptable in all the religions is the desire to reach the Absolute. The discussion on desire in Philosophy from ancient to modern is based on the desire/reason dichotomy where desire stands for darkness of ignorance and reason for light of knowledge. All the philosophers define desires as the negative forces associated with the irrational part of our mind which need control by the reason. The psychoanalysis presents before us the actual condition of man in ‘this world’. In the real world man is in constant conflict with his surroundings because of his desires as society imposes restriction on his freedom and makes him unable to fulfill his desires. Human desires are not associated with reality but with pleasure so these can be realized not in the real world but in the fantasy world only.

Thus, it shows that the individual desires whether concerning worldly things or one’s own body have no place in the society. As society is unable to root these desires out of human
mind, so attempt is always made to suppress or transform them by curtailing individual freedom. But in spite of all the societal restrictions desire to fulfill our desires has been an inseparable part of our life.

The dialectics of desire and freedom remains unresolved in society and when philosophy, religion and psychology prove inadequate then myths and folktales take over which are the sublimated expression of this never-ending dialectics. “A myth arises whenever it becomes dangerous or impossible to speak plainly about certain social or religious matters, or affective relations, and yet there is a desire to preserve these or else it is impossible to destroy them” (Rougemont 21). There is no need of myth to give some scientific truth but myth is needed to express the dark and unmentionable fact that desire is linked to life inseparably and God himself could not escape the power of desire. The essential condition to attain God is the extinction of desire but practically this conflict between desire and asceticism never ends. It is so, because the human beings always want to preserve desire, as desire, in turn, preserves their life by becoming its driving force. This force which is life-sustaining for an individual proves a threat to the society. So this irresoluble conflict between the personal and social perspective of the desire and freedom is reflected in our myths.

The myth of Shiva is one of most popular myths in the Hindu religion. It expresses and veils, at the same time, this dialectical relationship between desire and asceticism. Wendy O’Flaherty in Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Shiva has shown, for example, how in the mythology of Shiva, desire and asceticism, chastity and sexuality, quiescence and energy are invariably related. It does not clarify the inter-relationship between desire and asceticism but it affirms their inseparability and their power to transform each other. This tension is exhibited in part through the tension between Kama, the God of desire, and Shiva, the eternal brahmacharin. Shiva is the one man in the universe who can resist Kama but his chastity is dangerous for Gods. So they send Kama to delude him but Shiva’s anger burns him. Gods request Shiva to revive Kama as the world cannot exist without it. But Shiva replied in anger, “The universe must continue without Kama . . . I burnt Kama in order to give peace to all creatures, and I will not revive him, since he is the evil at the root of all misery. Now all of you set your mind on tapas.” The Gods and sages said, “What you have said Shiva, is no doubt the very best thing for us, but nevertheless, all of this universe was created by means of desire, and all of it is the cause of desire, and the desire cannot be killed. How can you have burnt Kama? You yourself made him
and gave the ability he has just used” (qtd. in O’Flaherty 144-145). In spite of his strong anti-erotic sentiments, Shiva is forced to acknowledge Kama’s value. He revives him as Gods beg him to marry Parvati and beget a son to slay the demon Tarak. Shiva’s paradoxical image as permanently ithyphallic and perpetually chaste which has always been a mystery in the Indian mythology is, in fact, a subtle reflection of the presence of eternal desire in human life. This image, on the one hand, shows his extreme eroticism and, on the other hand, represents his chastity as it is symbolic of the power to spill the seed as well as to retain it which is an ultimate act of desire and the conquest of desire. So in Shiva mythology asceticism and eroticism revolve around each other in the cycle of alternating ascendancy, and the balance of these energies is maintained through the control and transformation of desire.

Shiva mythology shows the inseparability of desire and life but the myth of Shiva – Parvati relationship portrays desire from male perspective. Female perspective has been reflected in the other version of Shiva myth portraying Shiva-Kali union. In Vamana Purana Parvati is called Kali because of her dark complexion. When Parvati hears Shiva use this name, she takes offence and performs austerities to rid herself of her dark skin. After she succeeds in this, she is renamed Gauri, the golden one who plays the role of Shiva’s docile wife whereas Kali is shown to play the role of Parvati’s dark, negative and violent nature. Parvati is always dominated by Shiva but whenever she manifests her destructive aspect, Kali is brought into being. In iconographic representations of Kali and Shiva, Kali always dominates the pair. She is usually shown standing or dancing on Shiva’s prone body. Although Shiva is said to have tamed Kali in the myth of the dance contest but she was never finally subdued by him. She is most popularly represented as a being who is uncontrollable and is more apt to provoke Shiva to dangerous activity than to be controlled by him. In the depiction of their sexual union, she is always shown above him. She appears to play the opposite role from that of Parvati who calms Shiva down, counterbalances his anti-social and destructive tendencies. But in the case of Kali, it is never Kali who tames Shiva but Shiva who must becalm Kali. She seems to be unbound by the moral order.

Saiva mythology gives civilized version of desire in the sense that it portrays desire within the bonds of marriage and that too with the aim of creation as Shiva revives Kama only to beget a son from Parvati and he spills seeds only with the aim of creation. But the other version of desire that is desire for its own sake is reflected in Krishna mythology. In Krishna mythology God Vishnu has been incarnated as the irresistible and playful cowherd dancing amidst the
cowherd-women, enchanting them with his songs, his glances and his caresses. His love with the cowherdess Radha outside marriage is worshipped in Sahajiya Vaishnavism. They do not make the distinction between sacred and profane love; the divine is for them the fullest blossoming and the finest distillation of the profane. In this tradition the literary motif of adulterous love became a religious motif. Radha is parakiya i.e. under the control of another man, either her father or her husband. Her love making with Krishna in defiance of Nanda, Krishna’s foster father, a representative of authority exemplifying the social order, is worshipped by Krishna bhaktas. In Gitgovinda, which is considered a sacred text in Vaishnavism, the twelfth century poet Jayadeva portrays Radha and Krishna as a dual divinity. The character of Radha has been described in detail for the first time in this poem. Jayadeva’s heroine is neither a wife nor a worshipping rustic playmate. She is a jealous, solitary and proud female who is Krishna’s exclusive partner in a secret love, a union that is contrasted with his communal sexual play with the entire group of cowherdesses. The paradox of Radha’s power over Krishna plays throughout the Gitgovinda, culminating in their reunion, from which she emerges as a triumphant heroine whose lover is in her power. In the end of the poem Radha places her foot on Krishna’s head. It symbolizes her victory over Krishna in union. Radha’s boundless desire for Krishna results in this inverse sexual union.

This description of desire in our religious mythology unfolds another layer of the problematics of desire that what is scorned as profane in this world is worshipped as pure in the other world. This sublimation is evidence of the fact that the existence of desire is undeniable but neither mythology nor philosophy provides us with a concrete solution of the problem. No system of thought gives us a coherent view of the complex relationship of desire and freedom. Instead of presenting a comprehensive view of desire, only partial views are presented like desire is the cause of creation of this world, desire is the desire for physical pleasures in this world, desire is always sexual desire, ultimate desire in man’s life is desire for the Absolute etc. These partial and disconnected views lead to a very limited and erroneous knowledge about the concept. This attitude is well-illustrated by an old Persian parable The Elephant in the Dark, the Reconciliation of Contrasts:

Some Hindus had brought an elephant for exhibition and placed it in a dark house. Crowds of people were going into that dark place to see the beast. Finding that ocular inspection was impossible, each visitor felt it with his palm in the darkness.
The palm of one fell on the trunk.
“This creature is like a water-spout”, he said.
The hand of the other lighted on the elephant’s ear. To him the beast was evidently like a fan.
Another rubbed against its leg.
“I found the elephant’s shape is like a pillar”, he said.
Another laid its hand on its back.
“Certainly this elephant was like a throne”, he said. (qtd. in Stralen 41)

Thus each system of thought is like the palm of a hand which analyzed only a part but described the whole on the basis of its analysis of the part. As one can get true picture of the elephant only when the different descriptions are put together, in the same way we can have complete understanding of the concept of desire when different descriptions are analyzed in relation to each other. But instead of reaching some conclusive explanation, such an attempt ends up with the following paradoxical statements:

First, desire is the cause of creation of this world which implies that it is only desire which makes life possible. But on the other hand it is said that all desires should be renounced as these make life in this world unbearable by causing pain and misery.

Secondly, our fundamental desire is desire for all kinds of material gains and pleasures, particularly sexual pleasure which is evil as it diverts the man from the right path which is the path of union with God. But it is also equally true that the gods like Shiva and Krishna who are worshipped as ideals by the human beings themselves manifest desire.

Thirdly, so-called noble desires should replace the evil desires i.e. desire for other worldliness should take over the desire for this worldliness. But it is also fact that desire existed prior to both existent and non-existent as desire was the first seed of creation and so, whether this world or the other world, nothing can exist without desire.

So the whole discussion about the different systems of thought presents us with the problematics of desire and freedom. In spite of presenting the detailed description of the concept of desire and freedom, not even a single system binds the different strands of desire in a single thread. Instead of seeing individual and society as complementary to each other, different philosophies widen the gap between them. Its reason can be found in the approach of all the philosophies in which more importance is assigned to the world, this or the other, at the cost of
the individual. Though the aim of every philosophy is to find the meaning of life by resolving the mysteries surrounding human life but it is ironical that in the attempt to understand human life, they pushed the individual into the background who is, in fact, at the root of all the philosophic discussion. About this state of philosophy Nietzsche rightly said, “to our scholars, strangely enough, the most pressing question does not occur: to what end is their work . . . useful?” (qtd. in Stumpf 460). The philosophical and psychological systems of thought dealt with the problems of human behaviour and the theory of knowledge in general and objective manner, which ignored the intimate concerns of man about their personal destiny. In an attempt to understand the higher reality, religion too ignores the meaning and purpose of individual life. At a practical plane, instead of finding new meaning of life, these systems of thoughts aggravated the sense of meaninglessness and chaos.

Rousseau’s words that man is born free but he is in chains everywhere, hint at the conflict between the individual and society. Structurally, society is opposite to the natural and that is why social definition of freedom is different from the concept of natural freedom. Every society works according to a system based upon the principles of morality and rationality. The aim of these principles is two-fold: first, to maintain discipline in society and second, to prepare the man for the life in the next world which is considered the ultimate aim of life. According to the religious philosophy this world is just a temporary shelter and the other world is the permanent destination of man. Freedom is limited in this world so that he can achieve the ultimate liberation. So the relation between the desire and freedom is two way. It is direct from the point of view of life in this world i.e. more indulgence in desires means more freedom from the rule of the society and vice-versa, and the relation is inverse from the perspective of the other world i.e. renunciation of desires for material pleasure will lead to the achievement of liberation from the vicious circle of life and death.

This concept of other worldliness is one of the reasons of conflict between individual and society. The other reason lies in its perception of freedom. Instead of seeing freedom as a relative concept, society perceives freedom as an absolute and strictly individual phenomenon. Thus, in society freedom of the one individual is not seen in relation to the freedom of the other but in opposition to it. In this way society isolates individuals instead of relating them to each other. In fact, freedom and desire are not the individual but the universal phenomena. Instead of being static, both desire and freedom are the dynamic entities which are related to each other.
dialectically and it is this dialectics which leads to the progress of the individual and society. So the relation between these two cannot be defined in deterministic terms but can only be discussed in terms of dialectics.

5. Contribution of Sartrean Existentialism in Understanding the Dialectics of Desire and Freedom

In this chaotic scenario Existentialism emerged as a reaction against the traditional philosophy which was too academic and remote from life. It rejected the traditional systematic and schematic thought in favour of a more spontaneous mode of expression in order to capture the authentic concerns of the conscious individuals existing in concrete situations.

Jean-Paul Sartre is undoubtedly the best known among existentialists. He was preoccupied almost solely with the existence of the individual. His classical formulation of the basic principle of existentialism, the existence precedes essence, is a reversal of traditional metaphysics, which ever since Plato’s time has said that essence precedes existence. Sartre says that we cannot explain the nature of man in the same way as we describe an article of manufacture. Sartre explains his concept with the help of an example of a paper-cutter. We know that it has been made by someone who had in his mind a conception of it, including the purpose for which it would be used and the procedure of making it. Thus, even before it is made, the paper-cutter is already conceived as having a definite purpose and procedure. In other words paper-cutter’s essence can be said to precede its existence. Even the thought of it will bring to our mind its purpose. When we think about man’s nature, we describe him in terms of God’s creation as the paper-cutter is the creation of an artisan. According to it each individual is the fulfillment of a definite conception in the mind of god. Although in eighteenth century began the suppression of the idea of God but the notion of a distinctive human nature still persisted. Taking atheism seriously, he claimed that there can be no given human nature because there is no God to have conception of it. So by saying existence precedes essence he means “Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards” (Existentialism Is a Humanism 395). Man as such merely exists and only later becomes his essential self.

5.a. Desire and Freedom: Mere Enjoyment or Responsibility

From the point of view of the first notion i.e. essence precedes existence, desires are inherent in the nature of every human being. But if it is so then the question arises: how can an individual be held responsible for his desires, physical or material, if his essential nature is
already given and fixed? And if society expects its members to have control on his desires then it implies that man has the power to interfere in his nature given to him by the God. In other words man enjoys freedom to decide his nature by choosing his desires. Thus man is not a thing which can be fitted in a framework of fixed features but he is what he chooses himself to be. In this way, man first of all exists, confronts the world and then defines his essence.

Sartre’s chief point in asserting that existence precedes essence is not that man is allowed to do whatever he likes. But its philosophical implication is that man has a greater dignity than a stone or a table as he has desire and freedom to push himself towards a future and is conscious that it is doing so. The aim of existentialism is to make every one aware that full responsibility of his existence rests on him and he is not only responsible for his own individuality but for all men. Sartre says that subjectivism has two meanings: “subjectivism means, on the one hand, that an individual chooses and makes himself; and, on the other, that it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity. The second of these is the essential meaning of existentialism” (*Existentialism and Human Emotions* 16-17). It does not mean that human choices are guided by general human essence but it means that when we choose this or that way of acting, we affirm the value of what we have chosen, and nothing can be better for any one of us unless it is better for all. Sartre is simply drawing attention to one of the clearest experiences of human beings that all men must choose, must make decisions, and although they have no authoritative guide, they must still choose and at the same time ask whether they would be willing for others to choose the same actions. Thus, existentialism which has been criticized for supporting anarchy by isolating individual from society is, in fact, a school of thought which brings individual and the world together and attempts to resolve this conflict between desire and value.

5.b. Man is “Condemned to be Free” and “Desire to Be”

Accepting the declaration of the death of God, Sartre says that nowhere is it written that we must be good and we must not lie because we are on a plane where there are only men. Taking Dostoevsky’s notion “If God didn’t exist, everything would be possible” (qtd. in *Existentialism and Human Emotions* 22) seriously, he says that everything is permissible and man is free to do anything if God does not exist. But here instead of saying ‘man is blessed to be free’, he says, “Man is condemned to be free” (*Existentialism and Human Emotions* 23). Condemned because he finds himself thrown into the world yet free because as soon as he is conscious of himself, he is responsible for everything he does. He says that man cannot find any
refuge even in his passions because he is responsible even for his passions also. Freedom is frightening for man because he does not find any pre-existing norms or values to relieve himself from the burden of his actions. There is nothing forcing him from behind to behave in a specific way. Human being is the only thing that exists. Without any aid and support of pre-established values, man is condemned to create values by making his own choices.

The driving force behind his choices is his desire. According to Sartre, “Fundamentally man is the desire to be” (*Being and Nothingness* 586). He says that desire is a lack and it is the result of a *priori* description of the being of the for-itself. He says, “Human reality as for-itself is a lack and that it lacks is a certain coincidence with itself. Concretely, each particular for-itself lacks a particular and concrete reality, which if the for-itself were synthetically assimilated with it, would transform the for-itself into itself” (*Being and Nothingness* 147). Sartre distinguishes between the two realms of Being, the *being-in-itself* and the *being-for-itself*. Sartre concludes his discussion about being that it appears purely as *in itself* in three forms i.e. “Being is. Being is in-itself. Being is what it is” (*Being and Nothingness* lxvi). *Being is* means that being is self-consistent to the extent that it is beyond the active as well as the passive. *Being is in-itself* means it is beyond negation as well as beyond affirmation. In this state it is not capable of self-consciousness. It is ‘itself’ so completely that the perpetual reflection which is an important feature of the conscious being is dissolved in an identity. It leads us to the third characteristics i.e. *Being is what it is* which means it has no *within* which is opposed to a *without* and which is analogous to a judgement, a law, a consciousness of itself. On the contrary being for-itself is ‘what it is not’, and is not ‘what it is’. It is human consciousness which is a realm of possibilities (*Being and Nothingness* ixiv-ixvi). He explains it by giving the example of a café waiter. He says that a man is not a café waiter in the same sense as a mountain is a mountain. He performs all the duties of a café waiter but he is conscious that it is precisely this person who he has to be and who he is not. It is only a ‘representation’ for others and for myself. Then he feels “But if I represent myself as him, I am not he; I am separated from him as the object from the subject, separated by *nothing*, but this nothing isolates me from him. . . And thereby I affect him with nothingness. In vain do I fulfill the functions of a café waiter” (*Being and Nothingness* 83). According to Sartre, nothingness is the property to question and negate. As long as man is alive, man never coincides with the idea he has of himself. Thus, man, the being for-itself, is full of negation, an ever questioning and denying hollow always projected towards future. This negation
is the birth of nothingness. Whereas on the other hand, the Being in-itself is free from negation, coincides with itself, and is what it is. Sartre says, “Nothingness cannot be produced by Being in-itself, the notion of Being as full positivity does not contain nothingness as one of its structures. We cannot even say that Being excludes it. Being lacks all relation with it. . . if Nothingness cannot be conceived neither outside of Being, nor in terms of Being, where does nothingness come from?” (Being and Nothingness 22). In its reply Sartre says that nothingness comes from the being which has the property to nihilate nothingness, to support it in its being and to sustain it perpetually in its very existence and such being is Being for-itself:

Human consciousness, nothingness, and being for-itself are equivalent terms in Sartre’s vocabulary. Each term represents merely a different aspect of the same phenomenon, which is called human consciousness because it is a characteristic of the individual human being, nothingness because it is a translucent awareness of something it is not, and being for-itself because through it being become aware of itself. (Greene 17)

The for-itself is not only awareness of the object, it is also desire for it. It is a desire to negate externality and difference, to be self-identical, to complete itself by becoming a being-in-itself. This is impossible, since that which is self-identical is no longer nothing, and awareness is essentially nihilation. The concept of lack links the for-itself as desire to the for-itself as nothingness. Sartre says, “The for-itself is the being which is to itself its own lack of being. The being which the for-itself lacks is the in-itself” (Being and Nothingness 586). This is what Sartre means when he says that man is desire to be which is an a priori description of the being for-itself.

5.c. Meaning of Desire: Inherent or Beyond

Thus, the concept of desire is the base of Sartre’s whole discussion about being. Sartre says that human reality identifies and defines itself by the ends which it pursues. Empirical psychology too believes the same when it says that man is defined by his desires. But they commit two errors: first, it considers that the meaning of desire is inherent in the desire itself. Sartre objects that if a man desires a house or a glass of water or a woman’s body, then how could this body, this glass, this piece of property reside in his desire, and how can his desire be anything but the consciousness of these objects as desirable? Second error, which is the result of the first, is to consider the arriving at the concrete ensemble of empirical desires as the ultimate
end of psychological research. It reduces a man to merely a bundle of drives and tendencies which empirical observation could establish. Comparing the analysis by an empirical psychologist to the job of a chemist he says that the psychologist would reduce the complex personality to a few basic desires as the chemist reduces compound bodies to merely a combination of simple bodies. He asks how desire can be described as what it seems it is. For example, how are we to believe that a desire to row is only a desire to row? Can we truthfully admit that it can be reduced so simply to what it is? Then he cites the examples from other scholars who believed that desire reaches beyond itself. He said that Pascal revealed that in every activity there is a meaning which transcends it and it would be absurd to reduce that activity to itself. Similarly Stendhal and Proust have shown that love and jealousy cannot be reduced to the strict desire of possessing a particular woman, but that these emotions aim at possessing the world in its entirety through the woman. Stendhal describes love as a mode of being in the world through a particular woman. Sartre says that it is not a question of finding abstract behind the concrete rather it is a matter of discovering in each inclination, in each desire the totality of impulse towards being and man’s original relation to himself and to the world and to the Other in the unity of a fundamental project. The fundamental project which is expressed in each of our empirically observed tendencies is then the project of being. In other words, each empirical tendency exists with the original project of being. Sartre says the desire to be is not different from the countless concrete desires. It is not so that ‘desire to be’ exists first and which is later followed by other concrete desire.

There is not first a single desire of being, then a thousand particular feelings, but the desire to be exists and manifests itself only in and through jealousy, greed, love of art, cowardice, courage and a thousand contingent, empirical expressions which always cause human reality to appear to us only as manifested by a particular man, by a specific person. (*Being and Nothingness* 586)

5.d. **Man and the God: Desire to Be**

So Sartre says that man is a totality not a collection. He expresses himself as a whole even in his most insignificant and superficial behaviour. Each desire – the desire of eating or of sleeping as well as the desire of creating a work of art – expresses human reality, and the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God. This assertion of Sartre appears contradictory to his earlier atheistic stand. In fact, maintaining
his atheistic position, he is only translating the definition of God as the being who is what he wants to be, into the categories of his ontology. Sartre defines God as being-in-itself-for-itself, or the self-conscious totality of being. He says, “the ideal of a consciousness which would be the foundation of its own being in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself . . . can be called God” (Being and Nothingness 566). He terms the flight of the for-itself towards in-itself as the ‘self-cause’.

5.e. Man and the World: Desire to do and Desire to have

Sartre says that to define desire solely in relation to the in-itself as self-cause is not enough. It is also relative to a concrete existent which is commonly called the object of desire. Since the existing man is not a mere subject without a world, he is always now and here, i.e., a man in the world which is called being-in-the-world. It means also being-with-others. So the object he desires can be anything in this world: bread, dress, automobiles, any work of art or any man or woman. In this way desire expresses a man’s relation to the one or several objects in the world. He classifies all kinds of empirical desires into three basic categories: desire to do, desire to have and desire to be.

The desire to do is, in fact, reducible to desire to have. One does something in order to enter into a certain relationship with it. Sartre says, “I cut a cane from a branch of tree (I do a cane out of a branch) in order to have this cane. This “doing” is reduced to a mode of having” (Being and Nothingness 597). It happens with all the activities even those which do not appear on the surface as reducible to the desire to have like creation of a picture, a drama or a melody. In this case the desire is not only that such a creation should exist but desire is that it should exist through me. The right of ownership which the creator wants to have on his creation reduces the desire to do to the desire to have. But the category to have has special significance as it signifies dual relationship between the man and the object. It is the desire that the object should be mine but not me i.e. in spite of my ownership, it maintains a separate existence. Sartre says that the creator stands to the creation “in the double relation of the consciousness which conceives it and the consciousness which encounters it” (Being and Nothingness 598). In fact, it is the synthesis of self and non-self which is aimed at and which will establish one’s ownership on his work. Sartre uses the term ‘appropriation’ to describe the subject’s dual relationship with the object. He calls knowing or the desire to know (598) also a form of appropriation. Scientific research is nothing other than an effort to appropriate. Though knowledge profoundly exists in the world but
when it is revealed by a human being then he becomes the creator and the possessor of that knowledge. The idea of revelation includes an idea of appropriative enjoyment also. “What is seen is possessed; to see is to deflower” (Being and Nothingness 599). Sartre explains these words by citing the example of Actaeon who clears away the branches so that he can have a better view of Diana at her bath. In this way every discovery, every revelation, every knowing, every investigation implies the idea of a nudity which one brings out in the open by clearing away the obstacles covering it. Sartre equates knowledge with a hunt and calls the scientist a hunter who brings a ‘white nudity’ to light. He uses the term “Actaeon complex” (Being and Nothingness 599) to describe the desire to know. The symbol of “digested indigestible” (Being and Nothingness 600) is used to describe the relationship of the knowledge to the knowing subject. In the movement from the object to the knowing subject, the known is transformed into the knower, indefinitely absorbed yet it remains indefinitely intact, wholly digested and wholly indigestible “as stone in the stomach of the ostrich or Jonah in the stomach of a whale” (Being and Nothingness 600). So the desire, in fact, is the desire to have something which can maintain its structure as in-itself and at the same time can be entirely assimilated by me and not dissolved into me.

When someone is thrown into the world, he finds himself not only surrounded by the objects but also by other people. Like the material objects, other beings also present reality for us. Our desire to have includes not only things but other individuals also. It becomes the base of the third modality of being i.e. being-for-Others. Sartre says that at the origin of the problem of existence of others, there is a fundamental presupposition: “others are the Other, that is the self which is not myself” (Being and Nothingness 254). So there is a negation in the constitutive structure of the being-of-others. The Other is the one who is not me and the one who I am not. The nothingness as a primary absence of relation becomes, in fact, the foundation of all relation between the Other and me. At first the other person appears to me as a mere being-in-itself, no different from all the other surrounding objects. It is through his look that the other person reveals himself to me as a being-for-itself, a subject, a consciousness which reduces me to an object. Sartre defines the Other as “the one who looks at me” (Being and Nothingness 281). So looking is the process by which I become aware of them as well as myself. He says that for example I am sitting on a park bench and another person walks by and raises his eyes to look at me and immediately I become the object, a body to him. Suddenly fear and shame engulf me and
in order to save myself from being reduced to a thing, I stare at him in such a way as to see him as an object. So the only possibility open in human relationship between two persons is that one becomes the being-in-itself for the other who is a being-for-itself. The fundamental project of the self towards the Other is twofold: first is to protect himself from the danger of being reduced to being-in-itself “which is incurred by my being-outside-in-the-other’s-freedom” and the second is to utilize the Other “to totalize the detotalized totality which I am . . . and finally to become my own foundation” (Being and Nothingness 403).

5.f. Sexual Desire as Desire to have

Sexual desire is the original attempt to get hold of the Other’s free subjectivity. Sartre describes sexual desire “on the level of primary attitudes which manifest our original mode of realizing being-for-Others” (Being and Nothingness 404). Though he does not consider sex as the base of life like Freud but he assigns an important place to sex. He accepts that sexual differentiation like particular sexual structure lies within the domain of facticity but he refuses to admit that the for-itself is sexual ‘accidentally’ because of the pure contingency of having a particular body. He also rejects psychologists’ view that desire is directly related to the nature of our sexual organs and it is only in connection with these that sexual desire can be understood. Challenging this traditional view that man is a sexual being because he possesses sexual organs he asks the question, “And if the reverse were true? If genitals were only the instrument and, so to speak, the image of a fundamental sexuality? If man possessed genitals only because he is originally and fundamentally a sexual being as a being who exists in the world in relation with other men?” (Being and Nothingness 405). He claims that sexuality is not a physiological but necessarily an ontological structure of our being-for-others. Infantile sexuality precedes the physiological maturity of sexual organs, and neither do eunuchs nor old men and women cease to have sexual desires. There are many modes of sexuality as it appears with birth and disappear only with death. Physiological sex or to make use of a sex organ fit to fertilize and to procure enjoyment represents only one mode of sexuality with the possibility of satisfaction. No doubt, body plays an important role but only physiological phenomenon can never explain or provoke sexual desire. So in order to have a clear understanding, it should be understood in relation to being-in-the-world and being-for-others. Sartre says, “I desire a human being, not an insect or a mollusk, and I desire him (or her) as he is and as I am in situation in the world and as he is an Other for me and as I am an Other for him” (Being and Nothingness 406). The first apprehension
of the Other as having sex does not come from his physiological features as the distribution of his hair, the coarseness of his hands, the sound of his voice or the strength of his body but from desire. It is desire which reveals to us our own sexuality and that of the other person. “Desire reveals to me simultaneously my being-sexed and his being sexed, my body as sex and his body” (Being and Nothingness 406).

The next question which needs to be answered is – desire of what? Sartre begins his discussion by straightforward rejection of the idea that it is desire of pleasure or desire for the cessation of a pain. It is not a desire for the ‘physical possession’ of the desired object, if ‘possession’ here means ‘to make love to’. It is only the association of the desire with the ‘physical possession’ that has allowed people to wrongly conceive of desire as an instinct whose origin and end are strictly physiological for example in males erection is termed as the cause and ejaculation as the ultimate goal of desire but “desire by itself by no means implies sexual act; desire does not thematically posit it, does not even suggest it in outline” (Being and Nothingness 407). Even very young children and adults, who are ignorant of the special techniques of love-making, are not devoid of desire. It is also not desire of any special amorous practice, as the prevalence of different sexual practices within different social groups prove it. “In a general way desire is not a desire of doing . . . it is purely and simply the desire of a transcendent object” (Being and Nothingness 407).

This discussion is followed by another question- what is the object of desire? Is it the desire of a body? No doubt, it is body which disturbs us. It is a desire for body but only in a very limited sense of the term. So before discussing desire for body, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the term ‘body’. Sartre says, “This object which the Other is for me and this object which I am for him are manifested each as a body” (Being and Nothingness 326). He says that either it is a thing among other things as I see my hand only in the way I see an inkwell or else it is that by which things are revealed to me as when my hand touches objects and reveals to me their hardness or softness. So he examines the body first as a being-for-itself and then as being-for-others. For human reality to be is to be there i.e. in some situation. It is an ontological necessity. This necessity appears between two contingencies; first, it is completely contingent that I am, for I am not the foundation of my being; on the other hand, it is also contingent that I will be engaged in some particular situation. Sartre terms this double contingency as the facticity of the for-itself. Thus he defines body “as the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity
of my contingency. . . The body is nothing other than the for-itself. . . body is not distinct from the *situation* of the for-itself since for the for-itself, to exist and to be situated are one and the same” (*Being and Nothingness* 333). In other words, I am given to the world through my body or my body manifests my contingency.

While discussing the second aspect that is the body-for-others, Sartre says that the way in which my body appears to Others and the Other’s body appears to me are the same. The Other exist for the self as an object and it is apprehended as a body subsequently. So the Others body is a secondary structure for the self. The presence of the Other implies that he is present as an instrument having certain sense organs but not necessarily some particular face or the other organs. These sense organs are nothing but “a contingent form of the Other’s necessity to exist himself as belonging to a race, a class, an environment etc. . . . What for the Other is his taste of himself becomes for me the *Other’s flesh*. The flesh is the pure contingency of presence” (*Being and Nothingness* 367). This flesh is ordinarily hidden by clothes, make-up, hair-cut and expressions etc. But in the period of long acquaintance a moment comes when all these disguises are thrown off and the pure contingency of the Other’s presence appears which becomes the cause of *nausea*. So the Other’s body cannot be perceived as *flesh*, it is true only for a corpse. It is originally given as a body in situation so it should be understood as the totality of meaningful relations to the world. Sartre defines three ontological dimensions of body:

I exist my body: this is the first dimension of being. My body is utilized and known by the other: this is the second dimension. But in so far as I am *for others*, the Other is revealed to me as the subject for whom I am an object. . . . I exist therefore for myself as known by the Other – in particular in my very facticity. I exist myself as a body known by the Other. This is the third ontological dimension of my body. (*Being and Nothingness* 375)

In the third dimension, the *self* has a new knowledge of my body through the Other. This new knowledge is gained during certain states of my body for example shyness. To feel blushing and to feel sweating are nothing but the consciousness of the existence of my body for the Other. We can never know our body as it *is*; only another who sees us in totality sees our body as it *is*. But the awareness that I am an object for the Other who sees my body as it *is*, makes me feel timid or ashamed and in this experience my body becomes known to me as body-known-by-the-Other.
It follows that body is not a sum of physiological elements but a total form in situation. So desire for body cannot be a desire for flesh or purely material object not in situation. Not flesh but a particular attitude which provokes desire. The organic totality which reveals not only life but also an appropriate consciousness is desirable. Sartre says, “A living body as an organic totality in situation with consciousness at the horizon: such is the object to which desire is addressed” (Being and Nothingness 408). Now in the answer to the next question, who is the one who desires? Sartre says that it is ‘I’ or the self who desires and desire is a particular mode of its subjectivity but the desiring consciousness is troubled as desire is a trouble. Desire is not a clear and translucent longing which directs itself through our body towards a certain object. Sartre explains it by giving the example of troubled water. Translucency of the water is troubled by an inapprehensible presence which makes one with it, which is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Sartre makes this analogy precise by comparing sexual desire with hunger which is another form of desire. Hunger supposes a certain state of body as impoverishment of the blood, abundant salivary secretion, contraction of tunica etc. which are manifested as pure facticity for the For-itself. But For-itself flees this facticity towards its possibles that is towards a certain state of satisfied hunger, which is the In-itself-for-itself of hunger. Like hunger, sexual desire also supposes a certain state of body in the form of physiological modifications because of which the desired body appears as desirable. But sexual desire would appear as a clear and distinct desire if we limit our description to some physiological features which can be easily satisfied like hunger. But it is not so as there is a great gap between sexual desire and other appetites. That is why Sartre calls sexual desire a troubled desire. It is not a question of grasping the Other’s shoulders or thighs or drawing a body over against one’s own body. It is an attempt to appropriate a body which would reveal to me my body as flesh. The Other’s body is not perceived as flesh or as an isolated object having external relations with other objects. It is originally a body in situation and desire is “an attempt to strip the body of its movements as of its clothing and to make it exist as pure flesh; it is an attempt to incarnate the Other’s body” (Being and Nothingness 411). In the sexual desire, caress has a special role to play. Sartre calls it shaping instead of simple stroking. Caress is to desire as thought is to language. Caress causes the Other’s body to be born as flesh through pleasure. In the caress which expresses desire, the self incarnate itself in order to realize the incarnation of the other. So in desire there is an attempt at the incarnation of the consciousness which has been earlier called troubled consciousness. In sexual desire, a lover’s
attitude is “let the other become me without ceasing to be the other” (*Being and Nothingness* 579). Here lies the similarity between sexual desire and scientific research which is a form of desire to know. The other who is incarnated as a body through caress is entirely within me and at the same time remains completely outside as the stone in the stomach of the ostrich. Sexual desire like the desire to know is nothing other than an effort to appropriate. Sartre says that ‘to appropriate’ or ‘to possess an object’ does not mean ‘able to use it’ as in a café we can use plates and glasses but these do not become ours. It is also not a question of mere external ownership over the object. The relation of the possessor-possessed is an internal relation of being. Some primitive ceremonies according to which the dead are buried along with the objects which belonged to them, are the examples of this type of relationship. Thus, to appropriate means to have bond with the being of the object. It is a wish to possess the world across a particular object. Appropriation is a project of possessing the world by the fusion of the For-itself as a detotalized totality which has to be what it is, with the world as the totality of the in-itself which is what it is.

At this stage, the two categories of desire - desire to have and desire to be are united. It is by the appropriation of the world that the desire to have aims at realizing the same totality as the desire to be. So all these desires like desire to know; desire to reveal; desire to paint, draw or create anything or sexual desire; are in reality inseparable. These are only two ways of achieving the same goal. One is the direct journey of the For-itself towards its being while on the other hand, the world is inserted between the for-itself and its being.

Every For-itself is a free choice and each of its acts are the result of this free choice. This is what Sartre calls freedom. Thus freedom is a choice of being God, either directly or by the appropriation of the world. Our choices are influenced by our desires which in turn lay the foundation for the creation of values. It implies that values are not separate from desires. Contrary to the popular opinion, Sartre firmly rejected ethical indifference and took an anti-relativist view of good and evil in his *Notebooks for an Ethic*. He views moral choice “as an absolute in the midst of the relative” (qtd. in Crittenden 6). The relative dimension is human being in the world facing specific problems in some particular situation. But the decision he takes in this situation is without any support or aid and that is why it is called absolute. The only foundation of values or his choices is freedom which itself is without foundation. Sartre appears self contradictory when he says at one place, “nothing, absolutely nothing justifies me in
adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values” (*Being and Nothingness* 76) and at the other place he describes, “killing a man as a wrong act” (qtd. in Crittenden 6). But his statement gets clear when placed in larger context. He says that acts are neither good nor bad in themselves but become so when analysed against other’s freedom. Human freedom not individual freedom decides good and bad. He says that whatever is useful to human freedom is Good and whatever is harmful to human freedom is evil which means freedom as a value for me depends on the freedom of others.

6. The Basic Thesis

It shows that Sartrean concept of desire and freedom does not isolate human being from this world as has been alleged rather it analyses man in relation to others in particular situations as a value generating existential being. Sartre says that only those individuals can recognize their desire and assert themselves as being-for-themselves who have overcome their “spirit of seriousness” (qtd. in Stern 78) which is a conviction that values exist in things independently of the human subject in such a way as to impose demands that call only for passive obedience. It is the dialectics of desire and freedom which helps an individual in establishing co-incidence with himself and co-existence with the others in the society.