CHAPTER SIX

EPILOGUE
Kierkegaard believes that all thinking remains confined to the limits of a preface and as such perhaps there can be no finalities in our academic and intellectual pursuits. Even the Greek wisdom of Socrates and Plato manifested itself into a form and a style of philosophical argumentation which had the aesthetic beauty and literary elegance approximating to what may be deemed aesthetically sublime in literature. Nevertheless, each dialogue of Plato eluded the conclusiveness on the theme which engaged their attention during the deliberation. Therefore, absolute beginnings and endings are recognized as utopian dreams by philosophers of antiquity.

However, the mind does seek certain clarifications regarding the key aesthetic questions of the age; namely, wherein lies the justification and beauty of all that Sartre assimilated and communicated in and through his writings? We have seen that for Sartre the aesthetic implies the moral and that at the heart of every aesthetic imperative he perceived a moral dimension. As such, beauty of literature according to Sartre is that which rescues man from the various forms of alienation and dehumanisation
imposed by an exploitative class structure. Literature rescues men by portraying the socio-existential situation of men through the critical reflection of the self image in the mirror of literature itself. The power and beauty of literature thus become synonymous with each other.

It is this kind of rescuing operation which Sartre has spoken of as salvation in his different imaginatively created themes of plays and other works of fiction. It is not by accusing pity for the men being destroyed nor by bemoaning this destruction, but by creating a literature of authentic human choices and commitments to the values of truth, beauty, justice, equality and freedom — values which Sartre conceives as attainable in a classless society.

Goethe had once asked this question: “when and where does a classical national writer emerge?” He had answered:

when in the history of his nation(s) he finds great events whose consequences result in a fortunate and meaningful unity; when he does not fail to capture the greatness in his countrymen’s convictions and the intensity in their sentiments and the impact and consequences of their actions...when imbued with national spirit he feels an inner capacity to sympathise with the past as well as the present...”¹ (Italics mine).
Weighed against the above criteria, Jean Paul Sartre stands out as an artist and as a man, as a philosopher and as a litterateur, as one who brought the revolution and the renewal of French culture, literature and philosophy. One who never vacillated in uniting his theory with practice and his committed writings with free choices. This is a complete fulfilment of the classical ideal of beauty and aesthetic excellence. And yet it retains its contemporary character as well in so far as Sartre seeks to overcome the ugliness, decadence, deformation and formlessness by appropriately transforming the content of life.

Sartre, as such, must be spoken of as a man who carved out a definite place for himself in so far as world literature is concerned. His book *What is Literature?* shall, indeed, remain an ideal presentation of the reflective capacity on the part of a philosopher-writer. Thus, making Sartre an epoch-making writer.

Reading and writing for Sartre were, ways of living in imagination, of one who was estranged from reality. Like his hero, Roquentin in *Le Meurice*, he yearned for a universe which is perfectly harmonious and necessary. He overcame his sickness with contingency, purposelessness and unending metaphysical quest through forms of literature. "In writing" he said "I existed... In fact I existed only
as one who wrote, and if "I said I", the "I" meant "I who write". Writing, not only became his existence, it was also his salvation.

Like Pushkin, what would make Sartre's works immortal would be the social basis of immortality. His novels encompass the French way of life, shade into irony, adduce so many concrete social motivations and contribute to the concrete illumination of the personal and interactive situations. His novels bring to light the social and individual conflicts and ambivalences that represent the totality. This is what makes them unparalleled and unique; thus affording beauty to the accurate reflection of reality. The reality which was future oriented, however, had its deep origins in the social past of the times. Literature for Sartre was nevertheless a reflection of ideology and new set of values which was taking birth through the critical reflection of the self-image mirrored in the literature of an age. As such, it was embodiment of beauty in the content of a human core which had meaning for humanity.

"Humility and Form", says Georg Lukács "are the central problems of all arts." And, Sartre, as we have seen has precisely tried to give glimpses of the dark abysses of humanity into the depths of which we fall. In his more introspective and psycho-analytically
oriented plays the desire to fall into such abysses is shown to be the hidden content of our lives. Sartre, as such, by depicting the various manifestations of consciousness, evading the reality, grapples with the question of content and form in the context of an abyss of human life.

Reaching the edge from the abyss is the most profound meaning of form which leads to a great moment of silence; which moulds the directionless and many coloured stream of life. Each abyss can be reached by many paths and yet, our questions always arise at the end of each journey out of astonishment. A form symbolises a necessity which is linked with life - a silence, a rustling, a noise, a music, the universal singing all around, and that is form.

A novel becomes the representative art form of the age because of the structural categories of the novel coinciding with the world as it is today. However, the communication of writer's conception and intentionality is possible if the reader also has creative freedom by virtue of which he can postulate a possible purpose and can create interpretations which he finds rewarding. The possibility of communication implies the notion of understanding without which analogues in the form of created characters cannot be perceived mentally.
Understanding creates its own norms and criteria in terms of which the internal structure, the specific characteristics, and justifications can be analysed; understanding is once again necessary for critical considerations of the social conditions which are fundamental for the very possibility of literature.

Nevertheless, the above account should not be construed to mean that the thought structure of Sartre is altogether free of blemishes. Sartre, inspite of his socialistic and humanistic views is constantly evading the notion of God. However, it appears to me that man cannot achieve salvation - a theme about which Sartre has been writing so prolificly in his various works, without unconditional faith in immortality of soul and a gratifying faith in God. Only on the basis of such a faith can man pursue the moral ideas of loving humanity at large. And only with such a faith can we keep our pride apart thus retaining our essential humanity and intrinsic humility within the bounds of reason.

The questions are many but the limitations of an epilogue circumscribe my efforts to take them up here. Sartre has given a sustained critique of power structures, political ends, notion of reality and meaning of life.
He has rejected tradition and recommended moral concern as a recipe for good writing. We shall wish to see how far he has succeeded in identifying the forms of language with forms of life.

REFERENCES


