



VISION OF EXISTENTIALISM IN THE WRITINGS OF ARUN JOSHI

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ABSTRACT

In his work, Arun Joshi explores a wide range of issues, including estrangement and inclusion, the meeting of cultures, the acceptance of difference, the pursuit of meaning, and the acceptance of complacency. He writes about lonely spiritual seekers and their anguish in his writings. They're a bunch of befuddled blokes who can't stop wondering where they came from and what their life's purpose is. After delving into Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*, it becomes clear that crises and the search for meaning are the driving forces in his literature. In *The Foreigner*, the author describes Sindi Oberoi's suffering as a consequence of his loneliness and his supposed rootlessness as he moves from a state of disengagement to an active participation in the world. Despite the suffering he endures, Sindi finally gains a sense of his spirit being refreshed and cleansed as a result of his journey for enlightenment. The reason he was sent on Earth becomes clear to him. He understands the significance of the Gita's portrayal of the detachment principle, which teaches that the opposite of renunciation is unselfish activity.

Key words: Arun Joshi, existentialism, imagination, culture, spiritual etc

The word Existentialism bears its significance in the first part of the twentieth century and was considered a new philosophy that emerged from the thought process of an afflicted man. The

writers of the times have brought prominence and lift through their writings and a new theory of philosophy, Existentialism, emerged as a result. —Existentialism, strictly speaking, is not a systematic school of philosophy in a clear-cut way but a fountainhead of several revolts in the past against traditional philosophy.

However, the theory attracted a lot of criticism and opposition owing to its complexity. Nevertheless, the theory did not get a proper definition owing to its complexity and vastness initially. The theory later underwent a metamorphosis and gained its stand over the years and is applauded by the writers and the readers. As such Existentialism owns no proper definition. Jean Wahl refers to it as "Philosophies of existence." While Morton White sees a controversial element in the term. Jean-Paul Sartre opines that "What then is this that we called Existentialism? Most of them who are making use of this word would be highly confused if required to explain its meaning'

Besides, he feels that the word is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all. The word in itself appears to be intense feelings beyond comprehension. In the book titled, Existentialism, Mary Warnock writes that —Existentialism is a compound of emotional and intellectual factors to an equal degree. The word, Existentialism is derived from the root word, Existence, and coined its adjective form as existential and adding '_ism' to evolve the theory of Existentialism. The word has its counterparts in different languages; '_existence' in French, '_existenz' in German language, '_existensia' in Latin while '_asti' in Sanskrit. All the words have the root meaning as existence or the state of existence. Humans by their very nature are unhappy and hence seem to exist all time rather than living happily. The same nature of man has become a plot for many writers to explore as a theme in their novels. Man always wants to be free with many choices yet the same makes him unhappy as he seldom gets his choices fulfilled completely.

Existentialism is one of the philosophies that have been prevalent in the twentieth century. It emphasizes an individual's existence, freedom and choice. It is a point of view that humans define themselves as making rational decisions despite their existence in an irrational world. The word at large focuses on human existence and strongly believes in the concept that there is no purpose of life in one's existence. The philosophy believes that there is no God or any transcendent force to create or find a purpose for one's life. Rather one has to face life on his own clinging to one's very existence. Hence by the very word it defies of any definition. Many philosophers have failed to arrive at a consensus on its definition.

Soren Kierkegaard is considered to have been the first philosopher who tried to put the thought of existentialism though not with the same name but with a different perspective. He proposed that every individual must try his best to add more meaning to life by his thoughts actions and by being a passionate, sincere and authentic person in life. The word existentialism is used in a way to describe the state of being or existing. But the philosophers believe that the word 'Existential'

is an act not merely existing. Existence, therefore, represents to act, in reality —In fact, Etymology: The word “Existentialism” was first coined by the French Catholic philosopher, Gabriel Marcel but was rejected by the then philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre. Later, Sartre changing his mind, accepted the term existentialism and used the same in his Paris lecture which was published as *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* (Existentialism is a humanism) a small book that popularized existential thought. Sartre proposed that —Existence precedes essence. He was of the opinion that the very existence comes before to the essence of one. It is how we add value or essence to our existence.

Just as the very nature of things is disorder, human consciousness by very nature is unhappy. According to Heidegger, Existentialist philosophy propagates no dualism regarding mind and body, no distinguishing between subject and object. His philosophy rejects the language of consciousness, experience and mind. Thus his analysis lingers around the concept of self-questioning as we are ontological and search for own-ness. The search for authenticity takes us to ever-renewed questions like; nature of the self, meaning of life and a morbid concept of ‘being-unto-death.’ Gabriel Marcel (1889—1973), was one of the first existentialist philosophers who believed that theistic existentialism always opposed Sartre’s perception of existentialism of isolated self, the death of god and that of living experience. Marcel being a literary critic, playwright and a concert pianist lived a life of an intellectual. Many existentialists believed that life is but to live and to bear with all the consequences and any relation with others goes in vain.

The philosophical approach known as existentialism is commonly recognized for its view that life’s experiences and interactions are meaningless. Many existentialist thinkers are led to conclude that life is only something to be tolerated and that close or intimate relationships with others should be avoided. Gabriel Marcel’s original philosophical voice was heard distinctly among this exposition of despair and dread. Marcel, a World War I non-combatant veteran, pursued the life of an intellectual and enjoyed success as a playwright, literary critic, and concert pianist. He was trained in philosophy by Henri Bergson. A prolific life-long writer, his early works reflected his interest in idealism.

Marcel in his philosophy propagated that his work was marked by an emphasis on the concrete and on the lived experiences. After converting to Catholicism in 1929, he opposed atheistic existentialism, and mostly that of Jean-Paul Sartre. However, Marcel was greatly dismayed at the Sartre’s description of the isolated self, the death of God and experience of life with "no exit." Regardless of his point of departure, Marcel throughout his life drew back at the designation of his philosophy as, "Theistic Existentialism." He argued that, though theism was consistent with his existentialism, it was not a necessary attribute of it. Rene Descartes in contrast propagated that consciousness in a man dominates humans while existentialists think that the human is transferred into a hardened world where existence comes first to consciousness. As Sartre puts it: —At first

[Man] is nothing. Only afterwards will he be something and he himself will have made what he will be". Existence is thus prior to essence in contrast with the conventional philosophy which Sartre later admitted.

Unlike René Descartes, who believed in the dominance of consciousness, Existentialists assert that a human being is "thrown into" a concrete, inveterate universe that cannot be "thought away" and therefore existence in this world precedes consciousness and is the ultimate reality. Existence, then, is prior to essence of life, contrary to traditional philosophical views dating back to the ancient Greeks. While Kierkegaard saw rationality as a mechanism human use to counter their existential anxiety, their fear of being in the world, Sartre saw rationality as a bad form of faith in an individual trying to impose a structure on a fundamentally irrational and random world of phenomena. The same bad faith deters one from finding the meaning of freedom limiting one to his every day's experience.

Kierkegaard also stressed that individuals must choose their own way without the aid of universal, objective standards. Friedrich Nietzsche further contended that the individual must decide which situations are to count as moral situations. Thus, most existentialists believe that personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth and that the understanding of a situation by someone involved in that situation is superior to that of a detached, objective spectator. Thus the protagonists of Arun Joshi as per Kierkegaard philosophy choose their own way of understanding as against the universal standards drawing their own convictions and arriving at their own existential enigma having taken life's experiences.

According to Albert Camus, when an individual's longing for order collides with the real world's lack of order, the result is an absurdity. Billy Biswas of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* with his longing appear to have collided with that the real order of the world resulting in absurdity of things. Human beings are therefore subjects in an indifferent, ambiguous and absurd universe, wherein, the meaning is not given by the natural order, but it is inferred by humans from their actions and interpretations.

Existentialism as seen above, it appeared atheistic or theistic or agnostic as per different interpretations of philosophers. As we see Nietzsche, an existentialist proclaimed that "God is dead" and that the concept of God is obsolete while Kierkegaard and others were intensely religious, even if they were unable to justify it. The existentialists in a way wanted freedom of choice to believe or not to believe. The concept of Existentialism is aptly dealt with by Arun Joshi in almost all the novels. Indeed Arun Joshi has tried his best to parallel some of the best existentialist writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Soren Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel and the like. The concept of existentialism comes to fore only when someone feels alienated. It is evident in the Bible as per Christian Mythology the very concept of alienation when Eve eats the forbidden apple and moves away from the grace of God. The first human race is fallen

from God's grace. This is but the first instance of alienation. God's word is broken and thus man is alienated from the ways of God. Now in the renaissance, man must restore his lost grace of God.

The element of existentialism cropped up in this world during both the World Wars when the hope and scope of the entire humanity were shattered with the death, estrangement, dread, meaninglessness, tension, anguish, despair, disillusion with which the people had to plough through. The question of mere existence came up during the same period which gave way to the concept of existentialism but in a state of dormancy. For some of the war-affected people, life became a question as to why they were living in the state of agony with broken legs, lost legs, wounded bodies and minds. The compulsive forces of emotions erupted across humanity so as to think of the very human existence. The literary artists gave vent to the general despair that evolved as the theory of existentialism, through their literary works, plays, poems and novels and such common media to give momentum to the concept of existentialism.

Writers like, Jean Pal Sartre, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Franz Kafka, Eugene Lonesco, Malraux, Graham Greene, James Joyce, William Golding, William Faulkner, Walker Percy, Proust, Virginia Woolf interpreted the idea of existentialism and propagated the same through their writings. The writings made the people read the concept and appreciate the same in the existential perspective. Indeed, at that time, the concept of existentialism though new, created a sense of thought and people started understanding in real terms the intricacies of life and its way forward. The concept of existentialism ushered in a new era of self-consciousness amidst the burning facet of social consciousness in the times.

The consciousness grew wider amidst the looming atomic war and its implications pulled the man into thinking about his very existence. Besides, the aftermath of the war brought in more poverty, unrest, selfishness, envy and uncertainty of life which compounded the concept of existentialism among people. The devastating war brought in more problems to man in the form of uncertainty which contributed to lack of love, joy, peace, harmony.

The protagonists of Arun Joshi belong to a highly educated and enlightened category of society. Yet they are struck with the materialistic element of life and make their lives miserable. Over thinking and less working make them enigmatic in their tragic flaws of alienation and existentialist philosophy. They live unhappily for most of the novel owing to their perceptions of life. While Sindi Oberoi lives in alienation owing to his false detachment and ignorance, Billy is culturally alienated. While Ratan is overambitious with life and alienates himself from his own self, Som devoid of spirituality alienates himself from his closed ones and to his own self. All the protagonists of Arun Joshi's novels being highly educated, they stay full of pride and carve a niche around them as if they are monuments of pride, intellect and erudition but they miserably fail to deal with their own lives. They are intelligent but they do not have the simple wisdom of a common man to live in harmony with the people around. They continuously crave for mental peace and tranquility which they lose terribly owing to their own pride and stubbornness. Thus, all the protagonists of Arun Joshi lay in an existentialistic phenomenon in the labyrinths of life till wisdom dawns on them.

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