

Existentialist Concerns: A Discussion

Abstract

Joshi was obviously influenced not only by existentialist writer. Joshi is deeply concerned with man's plight and imbrolios engendered by alienation and its concomitant angst and agony. His central motif is quest and all his characters are questers and seekers. His fiction is an expression of a distinctly Indian voice where one finds the richness of Indian heritage. Joshi's vision is essentially.

Keywords: Existentialist concerns, Arun Joshi, Indian Novels, I and Thou.

Introduction

Existentialist, through one of the most influential philosophies in twentieth century, is not a systematic school of philosophy. It is rather a fountainhead of several revolts in the past against traditional philosophy. It is by its very nature beyond a clearcut, an exact definition. It is actually an offspring of the combined attempts made by philosophers, thinkers, psychologists, sociologists, artists and litterateurs from different disciplines, periods and places of the world. It is said to have existed ever since men confronted his own frailty and the meaninglessness of existence. Hence it can also be understood more as a way of thought, an attitude to life, a vision, a way of perceiving the man and the world, a "timeless sensibility that can be discerned here and there in the past,"¹ a "style of philosophizing"² than an integrated system.

Taking note the controversialist of the term existentialism, Jean Wahl prefers to refer to it with a plural title, "Philosophies of Existentialism". Jean Paul Sartre, a noted existentialist thinker, observes:

What then is this that we called Existentialism? Most of them who are making use of this word be highly confused if required to explain its meaning.....The word is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all.³

To take account of its etymology, the word 'existentialism' is made by adding, the suffix 'ism' to the word 'existential'. It is an adjective and its substantive is 'existence'. The latin "existential", the German "existenz" the French "existence" and the Sanskrit "asti" are its equivalents. The word 'existence' is used in the sense of the "state of existing or being".⁴ But for the existentialists, the word refers to the act of existing rather than to the state of existing. Existence, therefore, is an act, the actual transition from possibility into reality.⁵ It is thus, a living, changing concrete fact.⁶

Existentialism, taken as a whole, is undoubtedly a philosophical movement. It deals with man's disillusionment and despair. Some thinkers have presented a very gloomy picture of it. The foregoing discussion leads us to arrive at the conclusion that Existentialist thought and manner broadly stress on the following:

1. Existence is always particular and individual –always *my existence, your existence, his existence*;
2. Existence is primarily the problem of existence, i.e., of its mode of being; it is, therefore, also the investigation of the meaning of Being;
3. This investigation is continuously faced with diverse possibilities, from among which the existent, i.e. man, must make a selection, to which he must then commit himself;
4. Because these possibilities are constituted by man's relationship with things and with other men, existence is always a being-in- the-world, i.e. in a concrete and historically determinate situation the limits or conditions choice. Man is therefore called *Dasein* ("there being") because he is defined by the fact that he exists, or is in the world and inhabits it.

With respect to the first point, the existence is particular. Existentialism is opposed to any doctrine that views man as the manifestation of an absolute or of an infinite substance. It is thus opposed



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to most recent forms of *Idealism*, such as those that stress continuous *Spirit, Reason, Idea or Oversoul*

Secondly, it is opposed to any doctrine that sees in man some given and complete reality that must be resolved into its elements in order to be known or contemplated. It is thus opposed to any form of objectivism or scientism since these stresses the crass reality of external fact.

Thirdly, Existentialism is opposed to any form of *necessitarianism*; for existence is constituted by possibilities from among which man may choose and through which he can project himself.

And, finally, with respect to the fourth point, Existentialism is opposed to any *solipsism* (holding that I alone exist) or any epistemological Idealism (holding that the objects of knowledge are mental). Because existence, which is the relationship with other beings, always extends beyond itself, toward the being of these entities; it is, so to speak, *transcendence*.

Starting from these bases, Existentialism can take diverse and contrasting directions. It can insist on the transcendence of being with respect to existence, and, by holding this transcendence to be the origin or foundation of existence, it can thus assume the *theistic* form.

On the other hand, it can hold the human existence, posing itself as a problem, project itself with absolute freedom, creating itself by itself, thus assuming to itself the function of God; As such existentialism presents itself as a radical atheism. Or it may insist on the finitude of human existence, i.e., on the limits inherent in its possibilities of projection and choice. As such existentialism presents itself as humanism.

From 1940 on, with the diffusion of Existentialism through continental Europe, its directions have developed in terms of the diversity of the interests to which they are subject: the religious *interest*, the metaphysical (or nature of being) interest, the moral and political interest. This diversity of interest is rooted, at least in past, in the diversity of sources on which Existentialism has drawn.

One such source has been the subjectivism of the 4th -5th century theologian, St. Augustine, who exhorted man not to go outside himself in the quest for truth, for it is within him that truth abide's. "If you find that you are by nature mutable, he wrote, transcend yourself".⁷

Another source has been the Dionysian Romanticism of Nietzsche, who exalted life in its most irrational and cruel features and made this exaltation the proper task of the "higher man" who exists beyond good and evil.

Still another source has been nihilism of Dostoyevsky, who, in his novels, presented man as continually defeated as a result of his choices and as continually placed by them before the insoluble enigma of himself.

As a consequence of the diversity of these sources, Existentialist doctrines have focused on several aspects of existence. They have focused, first, on the problematic character of the human situation, through which man is continually confronted with

diverse possibilities of alternatives, among which he may choose and on the basis of which he can project his life.

Second, the doctrines have focused on the phenomena of this situation and especially on those that are negative or baffling such as the concern or preoccupation that dominates man because of the dependence of all his possibilities upon his relationships with things and with other men; the dread of death or of the failure of his project; the "shipwreck" upon insurmountable "limit situations" (death, the struggle inherent in every form of life, the situation in which everyone daily finds himself); the guilt inherent in the limitation of choices and in the responsibilities that derive from making them; the boredom from the repetition of situations. The absurdity of man's dangling between the infinity of his aspirations and the finitude of his possibilities.

Third, the doctrines have focused on the inter-subjectivity that is inherent in existence and is understood either as a personal relationship between in existence and is understood either as a personal relationship between two individuals. *I and Thou*, such that the thou may be another man or God, or as an impersonal between the anonymous *mass and the individual self deprived of any authentic communication with others*.

Fourth, Existentialism focused on ontology, on some doctrine of the general meaning of Being, which can be approached in any number of ways: through the analysis of the temporal structure of existence; through the etymologies of the most common words-on the supposition that in ordinary language Being itself is disclosed, at least partly (and thus is also hidden); through the relational clarification of existence by which it is possible to catch a glimpse, through ciphers or symbols, of the Being of the world, of the soul and of God; through existential psycho analysis that makes conscious, the fundamental "project" in which existence consists; or finally, through the analysis of the fundamental modality to which all the aspects of existence conform-i.e., through the analysis of possibility.

There is, in the fifth place, the therapeutic value of existential analysis that permits, on the hand, the liberating of human existence from the beguilement or debasement to which it is subject in daily life and on the other hand, the directing of human existence towards its authenticity; i.e., towards a relationship that is well grounded on itself, and with other men, with the world, and with God.

The various forms of Existentialism may also be distinguished on the basis of the language, which is an indication of the cultural traditions to which they belong and which often explains the difference in terminology among the various authors. The principal representatives of German Existentialism are Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Karl Jaspers;(1883-1969)⁸ those of French personality Existentialism are Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)⁹ and Jean Paul Sartre (1905-)¹⁰; that of French Phenomenology is Maurice Merle Ponty; that of Spanish Existentialism is Jose Ortega Y Gasset; that of Russian Idealistic Existentialism is Nikolay Berdyaev; and that of Italian

Existentialism is Nicola Abbagnano. The Linguistic differences however are not decisive for a determination of philosophical affinities. Having developed in different and contrasting directions, Existentialism has furnished philosophy and the whole of contemporary culture with conceptual tools. Such terms as 'problematicity', 'chance', 'condition', choice, 'freedom' and 'project' can be employed usefully for the interpretation of existence. The various forms of Existentialism may also be distinguished on the basis of the language, which is an indication of the cultural traditions to which they belong and which often explains the differences in terminology among the authors.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of Arun Joshi's novels shows that he has been preoccupied with the problem of twentieth century man's dilemma and its repercussions. In an age when religious faith is fast disappearing and man feels culturally uprooted and socially alienated on account of his own (mis) doings, the message of serious artists like Arun Joshi is most welcome and called for.

Endnotes

1. *Walter Kaufman, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre (Cleveland and New York: Maridian Book, The World Publishing Co., 1968), 12.*
2. *John Macquarrie, Existentialism (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Book Ltd., 1986), 14.*
3. *Mukteshwar Pandey, Arun Joshi: The Existential Element in His Novels (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1998), 7.*
4. *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary, 373.*
5. *Paul Foulquite, Existentialism (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948), 49.*
6. *D.H.B. Hawkins, The Meaning of Existentialism (London: The University of Chicago Press Ltd., 1970), 1.*
7. *Quoted in Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol.7, 73.*
8. *Karl Jaspers, Way to Wisdom, tr. E.B. Ashton (New York: Russell F. Morre co. Inc., 1952), 23.*
9. *G. Marcel, the Decline of Wisdom, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 19.*
10. *Jean Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism (Cleveland and New York: Maridian, 1956), 56.*