
DECIPHERING THE MEANING OF LIFE: AN EXISTENTIAL-AESTHETIC REFLECTION

MOWCHHANDA GHOSH

Abstract: As a human being most of the time we are discontented because our desires are never fulfilled at all. So our minds are engulfed by feelings such as anxiety, dread, anguish, etc., which sometimes result in search for the meaning of our life which is difficult to decipher, and without life having any meaning, how can we live in this world? It is the proper place to introduce existentialist philosophers, who believe that the human beings are more than what it is. They believed primarily that human subject was not the only thinking subject but, emphasized on various aspects such as acting, feeling and living human individual. Among the many human activities which we come across, artistic practice is the most important. So it is also one of the privileged medium of revealing what the world is about. The power of art to reveal to a large extent is devoted in expressing the absurdity of the human condition. Philosophical ethics investigates what is the best way for human to live. The ideas on value enquiry were directed towards finding the meaning and purpose of human existence. Meanings are creations. The history of human activity has been interpreted in terms of creativity. We have to create our own meaning by a new creation. In this world the work of art and creativity is to keep the consciousness of men intact. Creation is the greatest mime of time immemorial. Creations yield to its destiny and are satisfied with the existence whose notion is of value only through revolt. To complete absurd experience a conclusion can be reached to the creative attitude. Art cannot be served by a negative thought, as its dark and limited side is necessary to understand a great work as black is to white. The wisdom that absurd thought says, is to work and create with much importance, is the way open to the absurd creator. This leads to the conception of the work of art.

Phenomenological base of aesthetic existentialism: The twentieth century's Husserlian phenomenology is the basis of existentialism and the artwork of existentialist and the phenomenological perception of aesthetic are closely related to each other. Phenomenology deals with consciousness and the consciousness implies the notion of intentionality. Intentionality is the central theme of artistic thinking. Actually human freedom is manifested very clearly by intentionality i.e. the object of imagination. Consciousness is always directed towards an object which articulates a meaning. The act of consciousness bears different types of meaning as a mental act. In this regard Sartre also speaks about intentionality. This automatically implies that the world already contains the meaning that consciousness reveals, because these meanings are potentialities from the point of view of human action. Sartre although believed in the independent existences of the world from the human mind but the significant meaning of the world depends upon the human mind. There are three types of consciousness: (a) perceptual, (b) conceptual and (c) imaginative consciousness. Although all the variants of consciousness always direct towards an object but among other types of consciousness, imaginative consciousness indicates the non-existence of the imagined object. The imaginative act results in the creation of unreal object. The structure of imagination is defined as "something which is nothingness in relation to the world and in relation to which the world is nothing" (C.L. Stevenson, 1944). The imaginative consciousness is only possible with

the annihilation of consciousness of reality. The imaginative object has its own space and time which starts and end with the imaginative acts of visualizing this object, although the imaginary object seems to be opposed to the external world but the same object can be visualized as an image or a reality. There is no pre-established dualism between the imaginary and the real, rather the particular intention of consciousness makes the distinction. It builds the essential framework of perceiver's image and thus, it is the consciousness of an image. Image being the product of the act of consciousness, visualizes an absent or non-existent object; is a mental analogy of the visualized object. The images are either rearrangement of the perceived object or mental world of feelings and emotions and the latter has no objective content. This ultimately means, the theme of the artwork is not always real, that may be a virtual object. The human subjectivity is manifested most clearly in a specific type of intentionality; it exemplifies the power of human consciousness. Meaning, beauty, revolt, emotion etc. are manifested by the content of consciousness. Existentialist aesthetic focuses on the unity that artist's expression brings to the world. Sartre shows the real relationship remains between the powers of human consciousness to "annihilate" (act of consciousness) the world and the internal coherence of the artwork. This implies that the consistency of the existential project through which the world is revealed in a special way, also command the consistency of the artwork. They emphasize on the articulation of the meaning insist on the essentially diacritical essence of the aesthetic

elements. For almost all existentialists the meaning is found in the form of silence. Meaning is not only the sum of the words, but its organic totality.

Metaphysical and ethical dimensions of human freedom: The existentialist says, among other existing beings, only human beings are free to decide how and what one should be done without any force. This popular theme of existentialism represents the tag: "man is condemned to be free". Positively human nature of reality is to taking responsibility for others and oneself. But almost all human beings by accepting pre-given roles refuse this boundary of responsibility and run away from it. In Sartre's language it is known as 'bad faith'. In every human being perception is followed by a value which influences it in advance, which ultimately determines its minor contents. Ontologically, we get to know that experience of being is not possible to conceive if we don't desire for it. This experience tells by itself that there is something at all in the world. The capacity of above process is based on the person's capacity to posit values accordingly.

According to an existentialist philosopher the art work reveals the inner capacity of human being to disclose the world and the basis of this capacity is ethical in nature of the human being. The artwork bears an extreme sense of ethical responsibility or engagement. In this world each aesthetic order brings forth a conception of human freedom, and gives a suggestion as to how to use it. Thus the artwork not only reveals the aspects of the world but also the human engagement. But the question arises whose freedom is in need? Without which the work of art is ambiguous. The essential choice of artwork reveals a fundamental existentialist attitude towards the world and this revelation is the subjective uniqueness of existence. They focused on the relationship with others and the world. The artist's presentation proposes others way to live in the way by possibility of various changes in it. Sartre says that every 'imaginary presentation of the world' is an act of 'a' freedom speaking to 'other' freedoms about possible ways of engaging freedom in the world. Then we could say from Sartre's definition of the novel that every artwork is an 'appeal' for something new.

Jean-Paul-Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty introducing the silent features of the world towards human quest is the 'tragic ontology' and is the prominent place to introduce existentialist's notion of absurd. Actually life is verifiably absurd, it is therefore even more absurd to counteract it. So answering the question that: Is human life devoid of any meaning, what is the purpose of living then? Or this realization of absurd requires suicide? In Camus' language it requires revolt against our condition (situation). Revolt may be one of the essential dimensions of human life. We

have to face life, we have to go ahead, although no searching can satisfy our quest but we cannot stop searching at all.

The locus of absurd is the conjunction between human quest and the silence of the world. So without life absurd cannot exist. The contradiction must be lived. Apart from being apodictic, absurd is paradoxical. If human efforts end up in smoke then everything would become the matter of indifference. If there is nothing, nothing has any meaning then there is no value either. As a human we are rational as well as emotional, so we can't live our life logically only rather there is something else through which one can able to live his/her life, i.e. their creative aspects. Life is significant only in performing the task assigned to it. The struggle itself towards the height is enough to fill a man's heart. If someone decided to live, it must be because he/she have decided that our personal existence has some positive value.

Actually existential philosopher thinks human being as a subject rather than an object. Not only thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual life is like a creation. We have the ability to face all types of opposition. It is the movement by which one can protest against his condition. The history of human activity interpreted in terms of creativity. To think is to create a world. We have to create our own meaning by a new creation. In this world the work of art and creativity is to keep the consciousness of men intact. Creation is the greatest mime of all time. It would be wrong to think that the work of art and creativity is considered as a refuge for absurd as it is absurd phenomena. It is one of the indications of pain which reflects in the thought of a person. During absurd reasoning, creation follows indifference and discovery and from here that absurd passions starts and reasoning stops. The work of art is a creation. Creations yield to his destiny and are satisfied with the existence whose notion is of value only through revolt. To complete absurd experience a conclusion can be reached to the creative attitude. Art cannot be served by a negative thought, as its dark and limited side is necessary to understand a great work as black is to white. The wisdom that absurd thought says, is to work and create with much importance, is the way open to the absurd creator. This leads to the conception of the work of art.

Creation is most effective and it is also the staggering evidence of man's sole dignity. It is the revolt against his condition and perseverance. It requires daily effort. It constitutes a routine disciplinary practice of oneself. When man overcomes his imaginations and comes closer to reality; the great work of art seems to him of less importance. When the abstract power is humiliated then the creator makes his creation, in all its absurd shine. Absurd man discovers a discipline that will make him the strongest conquest love or

creation consummates the utter futility of any individual life. Actually men are lazy and peace to the liberty of judging between good and evil. There are many things to suffer for the world but we shall achieve our aim and begin to think about universal happiness. The objective reduces human being to a passive perceiver; subjectivity arouses creativity in human being. We have to be aware about our own part in values.

Philosophical practice: the expression formula of existential art: Many existentialist texts have been written on aesthetic thinking, which designates the mystery of creativity. The quest for knowing the unrealized world gives birth to the freedom of the artist in regard of one's creativity. The work of art is the example of human consciousness. The practice of the artist is shown in the power of new horizon of thinking in the given world. The work of artists' expression is miracle, is accepted by the common people, another artist and also the philosophers. In existentialist framework although freedom is radically ambiguous due to facticity (by Heidegger) of human as the set of given factors, all types of given factor influences the decision of artist. But in a specific situation, one can also make a decision and it always happens in the case of an artist. The attempt to meaning giving activity, expression of literary works is admitted it in philosophical practice. The power of perception and the freedom is the formula of creative works. It is the style of philosophical notion also. Camus in his book *The Rebel* inclined the aesthetic dimension of rebellion by revolt against his present condition. It can also be said that art is the higher degree of communication. The artwork is the example of the fact which meaning is open to past, future of the expression of other human acts. Merleau-Ponty emphasize on the history of painting, which is the reflection of past in the modern society. The artwork can delete the gap between the past and present and billed up a chain to understand the action, utility, motive etc. of the past. The work of artist has the capacity to reach the transcendental world with the natural world and create a new meaning of the world. Radically freeness of our consciousness and determination of facticity by social, political, physical other circumstances of the world is the ambiguity of human condition. This human condition gives artist a special status as well as the audience also. Artistic activity is an essential choice through which we can realize the paradoxical nature of absurdity of human being and this paradox of absurdity is clearly shown by Camus book in the – *Myth of Sisyphus*(1942b,127). The book draws the

artistic expression of ultimate joy. The great artists show the power of expression in terms of newness, pureness, and coherences of the human. The artist's new perception of the world gives a positive thinking to live in the absurd world. The creative activity of human life deals with the absurdity of human life. But the creativeness of the artist is only successful, when it is recognized by the audience and appreciated by them and from this the subjective meaning took the form of objective meaning and thus the existentialist also emphasizes on audience or normal human being. So by changing their aspect of perception and adopting a new perception of the spectators, readers give the objective meaning of art. The artist's creations mobilize the power of expression and imagination.

Conclusion: Observing the broad spectrum of art, we find that whenever the outside sources disappoint us, we think our lives have become meaningless. The problem is that we have lost our power to bear tragedy. But the meaning of life is not only objective but also subjectively we have to live with tragedy and this is the life. If we realize Camus' statement .i.e. "to breathe is to judge", value is automatically derived from living our life and the meaning has to be created by our effort, then we would not search for our meaning in the world. We have to create our own meaning. Meanings are creations. Not everybody had been able to reveal that, the artist, novelist, composer have shown us how to live in the face of absurd. So in a world full of despairs and anxiety, art is the only hope. But the creativeness of the artist is only successful, when it is recognized by the audience and appreciated by them and from this, the subjective meaning took the form of objective meaning and thus the existentialist also emphasizes on audience or normal human being. So by changing their aspect of perception, the artist and the audience seem to be mirroring one another, since the artwork is the medium of expression and communication which is understood by some other medium. Theater, novel, poetry, music, cinema etc. are the instruments of understanding of the communication between the artist and the audience. All the above are communicative medium of art to present the tragic responsibility of human freedom of the fact i.e. "we are condemned to be free" in the world, which is inhospitable to us and from this condition artists gave birth to their creativity. The existentialist conception interprets its own artistic practice in terms of revelation and appeal to the other human being.

References:

1. Shivani Mehta, Dr. Iain Coyne, Workplace Bullying and Its Outcomes in A Social; Arts & Education International Research Journal ISSN 2349-1353 Vol 1 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 233-242
2. Jean-Paul. Sartre, "Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology", - Trans. With an Introduction by Hazel, E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1948, pp.27-49.
3. Pretty Chawla, Dr. Kennedy Andrew Thomas, Loneliness and Attachment in Adolescents ; Arts & Education International Research Journal ISSN 2349-1353 Vol 1 Issue 2 (2014), Pg 431-440
4. Albert. Camus, "The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt", New York: First Vintage International, 1991, pp.253-272.
5. Dheeraj Verma, Teacher Education From E-Learner to E-Teacher; Arts & Education International Research Journal ISSN 2349-1353 Vol 1 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 229-232
6. Albert. Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus", (French: *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*), Translation by Justin O'Brien, New York: Penguin Books, 1955, pp. 51-102.
7. Pradeep N, Information and Communication Technology; Arts & Education International Research Journal ISSN 2349-1353 Vol 1 Issue 2 (2014), Pg 428-430
8. Roman. Ingarden, "The Ontology of Art: The Musical Work, Painting, Architecture, the Film, Athens", Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989.
9. Dr.M.Latha, Phenomenal Woman- Life Defining; Arts & Education International Research Journal ISSN 2349-1353 Vol 1 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 250-251
10. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Essay in Aesthetics", Trans. By Wade Baskin, New York: Citadel Press, 1963, pp.82-90.
11. N. Venkadeswaran, Dr.Suresh Frederick , Improving Speaking Skill Through Film ; Arts & Education International Research Journal ISSN 2349-1353 Vol 1 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 243-246
12. Susanne K. Langer, "Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key", London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, pp.24-37.
13. Edmund. Husserl, "The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology", Trans.by David Carry. Evanston: North western University Press, 1970, pp.215-241.
14. Richa Malhotra, Dr. Sushma Suri, Psycho-Social Perspectives on Terrorism; Arts & Education International Research Journal ISSN 2349-1353 Vol 1 Issue 2 (2014), Pg 421-427
15. John. Dewey, "Art as Experience", New York: Penguin, 2005, pp.194-339.
16. Justus. Streller, "Jean-Paul Sartre: To Freedom Condemned, A guide to his philosophy", Trans. With an introduction by Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1960.
17. M. Nirmala Devi, The Use of Myth in Karnad's Hayavadana; Arts & Education International Research Journal ISSN 2349-1353 Vol 1 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 247-249

Mowchhanda Ghosh.
Research Scholar, University of Gour-Banga
Malda, West-Bengal.