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Existential Writers And Their Philosophy - A Review

Abstract

Existentialism is the recent trend in philosophy and literature. After the second world war man began to lose faith in life. Loss of countless human lives had left the man in deep sorrow and agony. The thought of existence became the prime concern. It was in this perspective that existentialism got importance in literature and philosophy. Rene Descartes, the French philosopher is regarded as the father of modern western philosophy. He tried to shape philosophy like mathematics. His 'Meditations' is the famous volume in which he has studied the subject. Reduce everything to reason was his motto. Jean Paul Sartre is known as atheist. He was bestowed with 'Nobel Prize' for brilliant literary contribution, but he refused to accept it on certain personal grounds. When one cannot seek consolation in the visible experienced world how can an invisible God provide the requisite succor to us? The most striking idea in his entire thought is 'freedom'. Man is born free. Defying the idea of existence of God, man is capable of evolving and professing human values as such his affirmed. The aim of this paper is to study the existential writers and their works. After studying the lives and philosophy of these writers we can deduce some common concepts in their thoughts.

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Human always want life to be happy and without any burden. French revolution of 1789 is a milestone in the progress of human civilization. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were the great principles. Common man was liberated. Intellectual field was influenced by Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesque. Religion and bad faith was the target of Voltaire. It is well said that history of human life is nothing but the story of his freedom.

Thus the cumulative effort of French revolution, industrial revolution, social contract theories, elevated the prime position of individual identity.

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studied the subject. Reduce everything to reason was his motto.

Emanuel Kant was the German philosopher who has written many books. In the process of gaining knowledge he brought mind at its centre.

Hegel was a famous German philosopher. Philosophy of mind, philosophy of History, and philosophy of right are his famous volumes. Hegel considered that the philosopher is the spectator of time and existence. In his opinion the whole universe is bound in a common thread. God and universe is a union.

Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher. He was atheist thinker having full faith on the existence of god. Man is mortal, incomplete and has his own limitations. In such a hostile situation leap in faith can alone save us.

Hence we must always remember God. Nietzsche is regarded as one of the most important thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote that God is dead and we have killed him.

He went saying to the extent "What are our cathedrals if not tombstones of God?" In the absence of God man is free and therefore at liberty to give

shape to his future accepting the responsibility there of. He is to decide values of life and give meaning to life. Eternal recurrence was his supporting theory. Creation of the same thing is repeated and hence superman would continue to take birth and he will bring peace, harmony and progress in the world.

Martin Heidegger was born in Germany. He refuses to get called as existentialist. Heidegger calls human existence as 'desin', the composition of which has been named as scorge (care) by him. There are three factors in 'care'.

1. Human existence is self-transcending and looks at future.
2. Man is aware of his existence in this objective world.
3. He is further aware of the fact that he is bound to this world in a way and hence his existence is part of care.

Gabriel Marcel was born in Paris in 1889. In his opinion 'traditional Christianity and irreligious thinkers had totally destroyed the natural character of society. He wanted a systematic social order and purity of Christian religion. 'Man' should be the centre of our study. Action is the main characteristics of his own existence. In his opinion faith and God's mercy alone, can guide us to unravel the mystery.

Carl Jaspers was a renowned philosopher. He despised old traditions of religions. In his opinion faithless thinker is an existenceless thinker.

Jean Paul Sartre is known as atheist. He was bestowed with 'Nobel Prize' for brilliant literary contribution, but he refused to accept it on certain personal grounds. When one cannot seek consolation in the visible experienced world how can an invisible God provide the requisite succor to us? The most striking idea in his entire thought is 'freedom'. Man is born free. Defying the idea of existence of God, man is capable of evolving and professing human values as such he affirmed.

Freedom is not absolute. It is followed by responsibility. Thus responsibility is corollary to freedom. Sartre is strongly equated with existentialism.

Albert Camus was born in Algeria in 1913. In 1957 he was awarded Nobel Prize. His entire literature bears a golden touch of his own life philosophy.

A sympathetic view of an abandoned and lonely man caught in a meaningless and inconsistent world is at the core of his writings. The devastation

and injustices perpetrated during world wars have compelled us to lose faith not only in the past but man has become helpless about his future also. In his opinion only two ways are left for man to escape from this hostile situation. Either one should run to the mercy a God or commit suicide. But he accepts neither. He preaches rebellion. We must strive to invent new values of life although the entire situation is discouraging.

Realisation of self respect rather ego should help us to rebel against. His thinking is not disappointing. It instills confidence and encourages 'Self' to live honorably with an optimistic view.

Martin Buber's area of interest was 'man among men'. Buber strongly opines that man should be considered only as a man holding a unique personal identity.

Franz Kafka was infected with diseases so he was introvert by nature. He was of mysterious personality. Compare to his diseased body, his spirits were high and he enjoyed a very powerful gift of imagination. The inconsistency of relations in man and his roots is always a matter of human inquisitive enquiry. Kafka also tries in his own way to unfold the mysteries in life. Sense of guilt and depression also find expression in his writing.

#### A Review

After studying the lives and philosophy of major existentialist thinker we can deduce some common concepts in their thoughts.

1. These thinkers's invariably belong to Germany, France, Italy, or Denmark. All these countries had a bitter experience of world wars.
2. Existence precedes essence is accepted by all.
3. These existentialists give preference to subjective thinking rather than objective approach.
4. Man and his problems are at the centre of thinking.
5. Self-transcending is a natural inclination and man tries to achieve it with the help of freedom.
6. Existentialists insisted on responsibility following freedom.
7. Extreme and absolute nationalism is discarded by existentialists. Rationality alone can-not solve human problems. Existence is a matter of experience.
8. Human life is limited within time and space. It is subject to decay and extinction.

9. Man must resist the existing hostile atmosphere.  
These existentialist writers believed in freedom of man. They tried to analyze anguish of existence in modern era.

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