

## Chapter 1

### Chinese Peasant Life and the Wang Lung

This study analyzes the peasant life of China as described in Pearl S. Buck's novel the *Good Earth* from the perspective of existentialism. Existentialism is a mode of philosophy, which deals with the issue of human existence. According to this philosophy, human being is isolated existent into an alien universe, but has freedom of choice to determine life. Wang Lung is the main character of this novel from the peasant society who struggles in his life with his poor father and other family members. After his first wife's death, he is surrounded by pain though he is not much affected by such pain and difficulties, and searches existence of life by struggling with problem. The main focus of this study is on the hypothesis that Wang Lung, though deprived of favourable situation, becomes a hero through continuous struggle to attain a respectable status in his society. He struggles to prove himself as an existential hero.

Wang Lung chooses a life of freedom, individual essence and the choice of himself. But this emphasis on freedom is not new with the existentialists. Renaissance humanists also focused on freedom. They celebrated freedom in the sense that they could enjoy immense human potentiality. Thus, for them, freedom was boon. But existentialists take freedom as a curse. Because of freedom, man himself is responsible for whatever he does. Wang's family forget pain and difficulties and continuously attempt to achieve success in life. In the course of life O-Lan and Wang's father struggle for existence and died in an early age due to hard work.

This novel has made Buck the winner of Nobel Prize in 1938. It has focused on the story peasant of Chinese reality mainly problem, suffering and struggle. Wang Lung attains wealth by struggling in his life. He becomes somewhat snobbish and begins to visit frequently tea houses and he loses his connection to the land. He is a

poor young farmer in rural area of China. During that time, the peasant of Chinese society was facing various problems. They searched existence in their lives. Wang Lung's family also faced the same problem and they struggled for economic upliftment.

The novel depicts the struggle of the peasant life of Chinese people. They have faced a lot of difficulties and natural disasters like drought, famine and flood at the same time lack of human sympathy and kindness too. Buck's novel the *Good Earth* clearly records the existentialism of human life through the main character Wang Lung who is also one of the peasants and struggles to live a meaningful life even in the unpleasant situation. O-Lan died in her early age due to hard work. After her death, Wang Lung's sons begin to rebel against his plans for their lives. They do not want to work as farmers and do not have their devotion to the land. Wang Lung is surrounded by grandchildren, but he is also surrounded by the family disagreements though he struggles and continues his life. He never escapes the fact that all good things come from the good earth and that all things are ultimately returned.

After Buck's birth in 1892 at Hillsboro, she was taken to China at the age of three months and she lived there most of her life. Compared with childhood of other Americans, she was extraordinary. At the age of four, she spoke and wrote Chinese as well as English. Because of her blue eyes and hair, her Chinese playmates called her a "foreign devil". She was bright, inquisitive and excellent student. She grew up on the Bible, Plutarch's lives, the traditional Chinese sagas and stories of Charles Dickens. Later she developed a keen interest in the works of Theodore Dresser and Sinclair Lewis. She delighted a lot in their detailed factual presentation.

Buck is a female writer. She was born in the USA and got schooling in Chinese peasant community. She published her book *The Good Earth*. She got

Pulitzer Prize in 1932 and gets Nobel Peace Prize in 1938 while she was in China. She enjoyed listening and telling stories since her childhood. Her mother's influence was crucial, since Caroline Sydenstricker insisted upon frequent written exercises apart from tutorial or school assignments. Her mother emphasized her to correct grammatical form and clarity. She used to give suggestions for revision and improvement. She encouraged her daughter to submit her writings for publication.

Pearl S. Buck was admitted at Miss Jewell's school in Shanghai in 1909. The school was a highly reputed school in Shanghai. She experienced some of her best and worst experiences there. She worked as a volunteer at the Door of Hope, a shelter for Chinese slave girls and prostitutes. As she could speak Chinese and was able to talk with women, she engaged on this sort of task. After a few months of living in Shanghai, Buck returned to Chinkiang, and then travelled with her family to the United States. She attended Randolph-Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia and earned good grades and a measure of acceptance from her classmates. She was elected president of her class in her junior years. After receiving her Bachelor's degree in 1914, she stayed at the college as a teaching assistant. She had intended to remain in the U.S. after her graduation but she was called back to Chinkiang to nurse her mother.

Buck saw the pathetic condition of poor people in China. She wanted to see the real identity of Chinese people through the main character Wang Lung. He is a young man but does not have any existence to lead a meaningful life. He never hesitates to fight with nature. He is living with his ill father where his father sets up a temple of the earth god. He always prays to the earth god. He gets O-Lan where she had been a Hwang's slave. Due to the poverty, they work hard in the field. The spouses give birth to too many children. They cannot settle their life in China because of the heaviest

drought and starvation. They reach the south where rich people live. Wang Lung's family beg in the south. At last, Wang Lung collects much land but does not want to sell. He returns to his native place where his ancestors are buried. So, he mentions his status and takes responsibility for his own nation.

Wang Lung is the personification of human nature in all its vagaries. He bears his burden with pragmatic stoicism and opportunistically snatches fortune's favor. O-Lan a slave on the other hand knows and suffers pain and suffering of human life. She requires only a husband and family to care for. The novel has some sort of connection with Buck's life. It depicts the reality of Chinese society at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The basic focus is paid in the northern society but it is not untouched with Southern as well as the other cultural variation. When the central government could not control all the parts of Chinese culture as well as geographical areas, there were different cultures with their social tradition, linguistic values and social norms and regulations. In the novel, one can see the combination of different cultures with their distinct identities.

Plot of the novel is eventful. It incorporates the eternal varieties: birth, marriage, success, failure, death, regeneration etc. A universal hunger increases up to the extent of cannibalism and infanticide. Wang Lung flees to the south by facing insurmountable obstacles. There, he finds a work of pulling rickshaw. He becomes a human beast of burden by destroying his body for a few pennies a day. The blind chance documents, his increasing prosperity, a rising affluence that reaches a symbolic climax when he buys the 'Great House' of Hwang family and moves into it with sons and grandchildren. Tired of O-Lan, he purchases a young girl named Lotus and installs her in a separate apartment in his house. Then, death of Wang Lung's father, uncle, servant and wife gradually takes place. On the other hand, there are born

many of his grandchildren. Finally, he faces many upheavals and regains prosperity though it was not permanent.

The novel brings the contrast between the simplicity and innocence of Wang Lung and the luxury, opulence, and decadence of the House of Hwang. For him, it is a luxury even to have a bath before he goes for his bride, and he has to measure out each of food so as to have enough to invite a few humble guests into his house. In contrast, when he arrives in town, he is made fun of by the barbers, and he feels uncomfortable and embarrassed at the House of Hwang.

### **Review of Literature**

Many critics have attempted to interpret *The Good Earth* from different aspects. The major criticism of s Buck's *The Good Earth* focuses on the realism of the novel and its depiction of peasant life. Florence Ayscough who represents the first, argues:

A beautiful book. At last we read, in the pages of a novel, of real people of China ... the China of fantasy so often exploited is absent from its pages. Instead we have the honest peasant, and his faithful wife; the singing girl, and her unscrupulous attendant; the rich earth, and a farmer's mud house; we have flowers, too, and the many courts of great houses, but it is all real so real ... Mrs. Buck's novel is so moving and so "actual" that I must note one or two points ... (12-14)

The realities of contemporary situation of Chinese farmer Wang Lung is depicted by the above lines. His life is based on agriculture though the land is not fertile for farming. The novel projects the reality of Chinese life. Without hesitation he continuously struggles with the land. Without help of his wife, he cannot progress in his life.

Francis L.K. Hus discusses the novel from the perspective of that Wang Lung the protagonist is not only a Chinese but a universal character. He claims, "I have read one of two reviews of Buck's book which spoke of its racial boundaries. There is a sense in which that is true. In that sense Wang Lung is not Chinese, but a farmer a man of soil whose lots happen to be cast in China" (286). Not only the critics but also the writer accepts the realistic concept in the introduction of novel *The Good Earth*. I am agree with the views of Francis because I have also known Wang Lung a farmer of man of soil.

Buck says, "I write because it is my nature to do and I can write only what I know and I knew nothing but China having lived there. I have few friends of my race, almost non-intimate and so I write about the people I do know" (xxv). Eda. Lou Walton examines the novel critically in a postcolonial perspective:

Such a novel as *The Good Earth* calls at once comparison with other novel of the general design novels of the soil in the one hand and novel concerning oriental life on the other. Any such comparison brings out that fact that despite Mrs. Buck's very good narrative style despite her familiarity with the material, her work has a certain flatness of the emotional tone Mrs. Buck is undoubtedly one of the best writers to treat Chinese life. (230-31)

Above comments show the Chinese life style. Critic has analyzed it from this perspective as well. This is the first novel written by western writer about eastern life style in this regard, Ed Lou Walton exclaims:

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good narrative style, despite her familiarity with her material, her work has a certain flatness of emotional tone ... Mrs. Buck is undoubtedly one of the best occidental writer's to treat Chinese life ... (230-31)

Buck clearly mentions the Chinese people by using her insight and day to day life accounts of Chinese people. By entering the reality of Chinese people, she has calculated the life of Chinese people where she feels compelled to write something about the protagonist Wang Lung.

Nora Stirling also gives the same type of response. She argues, "*The Good Earth* deserves to be discussed from the standpoint of an Oriental familiar with the standard that underlies Chinese life" (58). The process of struggle up to the state of cannibalism and infanticide is revealed in the novel. The writer says that Wang Lung never discourages himself nor O-Lan becomes hopeless. So, there are some critics who have accepted *The Good Earth* as an existential novel. Some critics have commented Wang's Characters by showing the nature of Wang without any hesitation, Buck Challenges with time and nature. Fighting with time and nature, he keeps his existence in Chinese society as an existential hero.

Similarly, Mary Yoshuhara comments on the novel from Marxist point of view about overflowing wealth and opium addiction in the house of Hwang. Another critic, Molcolm Cowley emphasizes the novel having a story of a poor farmer. "It is a story of Wang Lung a poor farmer who become land lord, But It is also a parable of the soil that sustains him. The plot deliberately common place in, is given a sort of legendry weight and dignity by paced in an unfamiliar setting" (qtd. In Belasco 246). With reference to this response from various critics that reflect their own perceptions:

It is worthwhile to protagonist 'existentialism' and their struggle for meaningful life. And it is the issue which is vehemently different from

other perspectives. Buck's *The Good Earth* up to this date has been the subject of discussion, as it has never failed to provide critic with raw materials for their reading. However, the critics so far have overlooked one of the important aspects of the novel - that is the role and significance of the earth itself in human life, the way it constitutes the material as well as mental fabric of our being. (22)

Since, Buck has denoted the details about culture, life, history and style of peasant in Chinese society, she sketches the vivid picturesque of Chinese life and ethnic people which is known by an anthropologist. Buck mentions the ethnographic sketch of contemporary China:

And Wang Lung went against the town and he bought pork, fat and white sugar and the woman rendered the fat smooth and white and he took rice flour, which they had ground from their own rice between their milestone to which they could yoke the ox when they needed to do so, and she took the fat and the sugar and she mixed and kneaded rich New years cakes, called moon cakes, such as were eaten in the House of Hwang. (47)

In Chinese society, there are different types of ethnic groups that followed confucius religious tradition and culture which was revealing contemporary society. Here the writer sketches the original realities found as biographical style.

Above criticisms and comments show that the novel has been analyzed from different perspectives. This study has analyzed the novel from the perspective of existentialism. To analyze the issue of existentialism, this has been divided into four chapters. All the four chapters concentrate on proving the hypothesis of the study.

The characters in the novel struggle for existence. By giving continuation of



Wang Lung, to keep his reputation in the society, he becomes an existential hero.

### **Organization of the study**

The study has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction that includes the background of the study, literature review and the organization of the study. The tool for analysis of the thesis is existentialism which is discussed in the second chapter. The third chapter is the textual analysis. In this chapter, the novel has been analyzed using the existential philosophy. The last chapter is the conclusion of the study that re-state the major points in condensed form.

## Chapter 2

### Existentialism: Meaning and Practice in Literature

Existentialism is the philosophical school which is devoted to an interpretation of human existence. It is started with opposing the doctrine that viewed human beings as manifestation of an absolute value. As a mode of thought, it becomes prominent in the second half of the twentieth century after the two world wars. After the shock in the Second World War, people in the West, began to think that human rationality does not work at all. The world finds the traditional values shattered and gives rise to the feeling of despair and split from the established order. Holocaust, alienation, anxiety, absurdity, and uncertainty ruled the fragmented world.

Pearl s. Buck sees the world incoherent, disintegrated, chaotic, and disordered because the concept like unity, rationality and even Christianity stopped working. This leads to the idea that the human beings have to create their own values in the world. This situation of the mankind is known as “existentialism” which is long before perceives but coins in the twentieth century by Jean-Paul Sartre. The feelings of existence without justification become the main proposition of twentieth century.

Existentialism draws attention to the risk, the void of the human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world in which pain, suffering, frustration, alienation, isolation, sickness, contempt, malaise and death dominates. So, as a self-conscious movement, it is primarily a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon and embracing. People want to be freed and settle their lives without getting any torture of others. Existentialism gives stress on concrete individual existence, freedom and choice.

Existence means to stand out in the universe that is against us, and existentialism means ‘pertaining to existence.’ Now the term existentialism is used to

describe a version of the condition and existence of man, his/her place and function in the world and his/her relationship or lack of it with God. It is a, “very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest for selfhood” (Ellmann and Feidelson 803). Sartre defines existentialism as an attempt to continue life by creating a system in which one realizes human loneliness and, “human subjectivity” (*Existentialism* 10). The focus of existentialism is on ‘being’ and ‘subjectivity’ as opposed to logical reasoning and ‘objectivity’ which is based on individual experience rather than abstract thought and knowledge is foregrounded in this philosophy.

Existentialism is a set of ideals that stress the existence of the human beings, the anxiety and depression which pervade each human life. Existentialism is a less of an ‘ism’ than an attitude that expresses itself in a variety of ways. Because of the diversity of positions associated with existentialism, not single strict definition is possible. However, it suggests a major theme that is the stress on concrete individual human existence. We have to struggle to lead a meaningful life. With a single word, we can’t define the word existentialism.

Therefore, existentialists really mention the problems of man. They focus on man’s concrete existence and his personal freedom of choice. There is no single definition of existentialism for its principal theorist do not adhere to common body of doctrines. As a doctrine emerged worldwide, the existentialist thinkers also differ emerged worldwide; the existentialist thinkers also differed greatly in a various ways. Because, during the Second World War, the Europe was threatened by materialism and she faced spiritual decay. So, the negative aspects of human existence such as pain, frustration, sickness and death become for existentialist the essential features of human reality. Existentialism has had an enormous influence outside philosophy, on, for example psychology, and although it is compatible with atheism, as well as

Christianity, similarly on theology.

Existentialism as such entails no particular political doctrines, but its stress on responsibility and its aversion to conformism and to whatever impairs human freedom can be conducive to political activism (Sartre). Although most existentialists have disregarded Kierkegaard's exclusive recommendation of 'indirect communication', the importance of specific situations and autonomous choices implies that existential truths can be conveyed in drama and fiction as well as in direct philosophical discourse. The concerns of the movement have inspired a large body of imaginative literature (Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir).

In addition, the philosophy has provided a means of articulating and interpreting these same themes as discerned in works of literature from all periods. For example Sophocles, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner and other existentialists are often seen as a revolt against traditionalist philosophy. It contradicts view that man is open to the world and its objects without intermediary stratum of ideas or sensation. Also, there is no distinct realm of consciousness on which one might infer, project, or doubt the existence of external objects. Existentialists are more concerned with being rather than with knowing, which is a rejection of Cartesian dualism.

Soren Kierkegaard, Danish Christian philosopher began for existentialism as a distinct philosophy in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In contrasting philosophy from Plato to Hegel with authentic Christianity, Kierkegaard emphasizes the concept of individual, of choice, of dread, and of paradox. He swerves the study of the philosophy to the subjective, emotional and abstract of human existence as against Hegel's philosophical system analyzes being or existence in an abstract and impersonal way. But Kierkegaard discusses that man's essence consists by the existential predicaments and limitations such as on hope, despair, and anxiety and so

on. In *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder acknowledges that "he thought that both the idealism of the Romanticist and Hegel's Historicism had obscured the individual's responsibility for his own life" (377). Therefore, obviously, existentialism is opposite of idealism, abstract thinking and objectivity.

The development of modern tradition of existentialism is preceded by the works of the German Phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859-1979). He is immediately followed by the modern existentialists. German existentialism is represented by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), French existentialism by Jean -Paul Sartre (1905-1980). The most forceful voices of existentialist thought are the works of the French existentialists: Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus.

Existentialism has its root in the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger who focus on the internal role and attitudes of the individual in the production of emotion or belief rather than the external world. So, the existential notion of individual can be considered as the systematic growth of the phenomenological concept of intentionality. In this regard, Skirbekk and Nils Gilje define the term phenomenology as:

Phenomenology aims to describe the everyday items that we use, as they appear to us: the pencil with which I am now writing is described as it is in this context. Phenomenology attacks the view that this school aims to reconstruct the universe in all of its diversity and fullness, with all of these qualities, as opposed to one-dimensional standardization based on scientist philosophy. (440)

Martin Heidegger is considered to be the central figure in contemporary existentialist work. His central concern is the analysis of the way in which human

beings, as distinct from things, exist, which he calls 'Dasein'. According to him, "man exists in an already existing world which is his world, which can no more exist without it. He exists only as a particular 'he'" (Wiener 193). Heidegger talks of the fact that man is born into a world which he does not make and which, hence, sets limit for him. His another book is first *Metaphysik?* (1929) where Heidegger has elaborated das Nichts (nothing) which means, the no-thing and given phenomenological approach to the situation of human existence.

Another prominent French existentialist is Albert Camus (1913-60). He himself lays no claims to be an existentialist. Camus is concerned with the freedom, and responsibility of the individual, the alienation of the individual from society, and difficulty of facing life without the comfort of believing in God or in absolute moral standards. Camus opines that human existence is absurd. The modern world is full of injustice and millions work in repetitive exploitive jobs. He thought that men should rebel against these absurdities by refusing to participate in them.

In *Myth of Sisyphus* (1943) Camus mentions that by refusing to surrender, Sisyphus, the representative of modern man can create meaning through a free act of affirmation in which he gives meaning to a situation which until then had none:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and rises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe hence forth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stones, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (70)

An existentialist is always stranger than other and certainly going to have no patience with conventions the isolation produced by existentialist value, decision also explains why few existentialists are self-identified as such. If we can give a common basis to make a connection with them, that is inauthentic existence. If it just happens by chance, that our own decision produce something that matches those of someone else, well then we have a connection, but is likely to be volatile. As we make new decisions, the probability of our connection with other is going to decline. We are isolated by our own autonomy. The values and decision of other, whether authentic or inauthentic, will be foreign or irritation.

Camus believes that anxiety, despair and crime have emerged from World Wars I and II. The external supports in which the public belief rested. Camus, like many other existentialists, believe that the decline of religious belief in modern period forces people to realize the dilemma of Sisyphus.

Likewise, Heidegger declares that the individual has to face the absolute problem of being, that is, one has to decide one's own existence create one's potentiality and make cliché and promises. Sartre praises the freedom of the individual human being. He describes existentialism as a means of confronting the result of World Wars and issue of world that wants on absolute power like God. He focuses on freedom of choice, commitment and responsibility. Sartre claims that there is no absolute reality at all but in action.

Heidegger is known as the leading existentialist thinker despite denying having anything to do with existentialism. Although he claimed he was not an existentialist, his influence on Sartre and the existentialist movement is unavoidable. He distinguishes between 'being' and 'Being.' The oblivion of 'Being' (individual) into the beings (group) has made us lost in unreal existence. To get back the lost

Being, Heidegger suggests us to return back into the ground of metaphysics and find the roots of our existence. According to Heidegger, to consider individual only the representation of mass is the recurrent mistake of metaphysics.

Heidegger was interested in the 'question of being.' For him, being is not realized in normal situation. It does not occur all the time. It is realized in the state of boredom, anxiety or ill-at-ease. So he states in *What is Metaphysics?* "It irrupts when one is bored, profound boredom drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence, like a muffling fog, removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals being as a whole" (4).

Heidegger was the critique of western metaphysics. For him, western philosophy is obsessed with the problem of knowledge and it is less concerned with the issue of existence. Like other existentialists, he is interested in the study of 'Dasein' who believes that we have been living in an incomprehensible, indifferent world. The universe is alien to us. We have to choose a goal, with the awareness of certainty of death and meaninglessness of one's life. For him, the principal object or investigation is the search for the being (skin) and more particularly man's being (Dasein).

Heidegger considers human existence as tied by temporal dimension, which is the existential time. He accepts that one cannot escape the historical context because he always bounded by conditions and outlooks inherited from the past. Heideggerian existentialism stress on existence, boredom, goal, choice and freedom. But in freedom, there is dread and anxiety (angst) that compels the human being to select and take charge of his being. Anxiety shows the light of dynamic existence.

French novelist, playwright, and exponent of Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, defines existentialism as an attempt to continue life by creating a system in which one



realizes “human loneliness” and human “subjectivity” (*Existentialism* 10). He emphasizes subjectivity but says that is not free from others. “The other is” as Sartre states, “indispensable to my existence and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself” (18). As Sartre says, “Man is a useless passion.” He identifies this idea of perfectly self-sufficient beings who are the cause of their own existence as the traditional idea of God. He says each of us wants to become God, and God cannot possibly exist. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1964), Sartre presents his political and sociological theories, which he considered to be a form of Marxism. In his first novel, *Nausea* (1938), he describes the horror and mystery which a man experiences when he considers the unexplainable fact of a things’ existence.

In his chief philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre investigates the nature and forms of ‘existence’ or ‘being’. He presents that human existence, which he calls ‘being-for-itself’, is radically different from the existence of such inanimate objects as a table, which he calls ‘being-in-itself’. Sartre opines that only human existence is conscious of itself and of other things. He argues that a person is not a coward, for example, in the same simple way that a table is only a table. A person is a coward only by choice. Sartre says that a person, unlike a table, has no fixed character of “essence” that has been assigned. Primarily, people ‘exist’ as beings who must ‘choose’ their own character or ‘essence.’ Thus, in his essay, *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946), he defines existentialism as the doctrine that for humankind, “existence precedes essence” (19).

Sartre believes that people are completely free but are afraid to recognize this freedom and to accept full responsibility for their behaviour, which such freedom implies. Thus, people tend to deceive themselves about their true situation. They

should have been responsibility of themselves and should quest their life.

Sartre is the leading advocate of Existentialism and French philosopher who is offered the Nobel Prize for literature in 1964, but he makes the Existentialist choice of refusing it. Though there are no perfect causes, he believes, the human being must support the cause least undesirable in order to act. Sartre thinks that there was no fixed human nature or essence and so the individual has to choose his/her being. This choice brings with it responsibility. Those who do not choose, but base their lives on pre-arranged moral and philosophical systems are said to be acting in bad faith.

Sartre first gives the term 'Existentialism' general currency by using it for his own philosophy. He declares Marxism is the only contemporary philosophy; so Marxism must come to recognize the human being's existentialist freedom. He, however, never joined the communist party and denounces Soviet intervention in Hungary. For him, political commitment meant taking the side of the proletariat and calling for authentic and free values.

Sartre makes contrast to a divine viewpoint on the world and on human nature with a human viewpoint where there is no divine element. God thought about creating the world, he conceives it first-he has in mind what the world is going to be and what human nature is going to be. These are the 'essences' of the world and of humanity, the things that will make them what they are. Then God creates everything and gives existence to the essences. Thus, to God, 'essence precedes existence.' Now, Sartre does not believe in God, so there is no place for the essence of humanity to be before human existence. To us, existence comes first. The essence comes later.

Indeed, the essence is whatever we decide it is going to be. So, from our point of view things are just the opposite of what they would be for people who believed in God. Unlike Kierkegaard, Sartre is an atheist. As God does not exist, there are no

‘essences.’ By essence, Sartre is talking about a pre-defined human nature. By the phrase ‘existence precedes essence’ Sartre mean - if there is no cosmic designer, then there is no design or essence of human nature. Human existence of being differs from the being of objects in that human being is self-conscious. This self-consciousness also gives the human subject, the opportunity to define it. The individual creates his/her self by making self-directed choices.

I would like to mix up my ideas with Sartre that, by praying to the God, we can not get our achievement. First, we have to create good environment to exist in the earth. By staying on the lap of good human being can not exist their lives. To keep repetition in the society, we have freedom, equality and pursuit of happiness. These are the inherent subject of human being.

Human existence is self-conscious with being pre-defined, we, as autonomous being, are ‘condemned to be free’ - compelled to make future directed choices. These choices induce anxiety and uncertainty into our psyches. If we, as individuals, simply follow custom or social expectations in order to escape this angst, we have escaped the responsibility of making our own choices, of creating our own essence. This is the acting in bad faith. To act authentically, we must take responsibility for our future. A man cannot choose what gender, class, or country he is born into, but he can choose what he makes of them.

We are free to create our own interpretation of ourselves in relation to the world, to create a project of possibilities, of authentic actions, as the expression of freedom. Thomas Mautner mentions the nature of existence in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, “The structure of *Being and Nothingness* is clearly Cartesian, despite the strong influence of Heidegger at the time. On the one hand, there is consciousness (‘being-for-itself’ or pour soi) and on the other, the existence of mere things (‘being-in-itself’ or ensoi)” (379).

Ensoi is the being of an object that is fixed and static. Pour soi is the being of

the human being that is fluid and free. It is open towards the future. The human being is nothing at birth and in life he is just the sum of life. To refuse in bad faith is to despair freedom. The human being, Sartre declares, is the maker of his destiny and is condemned to make his own decision. The human being exists but is only a contingent matter of fact, as there is no more reason for non-existence. Yet, in this hopeless world, the human being can develop his own essence; for the human being is what he projects himself in actuality. Hence, the human being is responsible for what he is. The human being uses his freedom to create and to be committed. The psychological problems of life are portrayed with an incomparable literary brilliance, creativity, and imagination on Sartre's philosophical essays, novels, short stories and plays.

Sartre's philosophy is explicitly atheistic and he declares that human beings require a rational basis for their lives but are unable to achieve one, and thus human life is a 'futile passion'. Sartre nevertheless insists that his Existentialism is a form of humanism, and he strongly emphasizes human freedom, choice, and responsibility.

Albert Camus is a journalist, novelist and a philosopher for whom the absurdity of life is the first concept. Fredrick Olafson genuinely remarks that "Camus believes in fraternity and humanism rather than in nihilism" (12). Camus sees the condition of modern man similar to that of Corinthian king Sisyphus. Sisyphus is the master and teacher of all modern man who because of his disobedience to God and this passion for life suffers eternal torture heroically. "This universe," states Camus, "henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile" (852). Camus reaches to the conclusion to declare the condition of man absurd when he realizes that the speculative system of past provides no reliable guidance for life or guarantee any foundation of human values.

According to Camus, when the absurd man becomes aware of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and hopelessness but he does not surrender himself in the mouth of death. Instead, he acknowledges the consciousness of absurdity as a reality and clarity has made the world more complex and inexplicable, terminating itself to a mere hypothesis. The only predictable truth is that the world is absurd and unintelligible. But suicide cannot be the solution to the discomfort of absurd man if he is conscious of human pride which always negates the nihilistic attitude of life.

Sisyphus continuously rolls the boulder up the hill that makes him happy because he is fully aware of his absurd task. Camus makes this explicit thus:

Suicide is repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day to day revolt he gives proof of his only truth which is defiance. (824)

While thinking on the common condition of men Camus is also considering about human rights. The revolt against the injustice done upon man is as relevant as the revolt against the absurd condition. Sisyphus maintains at one and the same time the revolts. The injustice done upon him by God has made him conscious of his absurd task. Camus was careful about the unjust practices being carried out by the totalitarian political system such as Fascism and Nazism. He is of the opinion that no one has the right to take life of another being. Political revolt is violent revolt, as much unwanted as the metaphysical revolt of Nietzsche and others. The metaphysical revolt, according to Camus, anticipates either a suicide or demonic desire to destroy the world (Olafson, Camus).

Camus hates the destruction of the world and mankind as carried out in World

War I and II to get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, one may go to the rules of God or he may submit himself to the hand of death. But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The living absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this absurdity. Thus, Camus's philosophy is not pessimistic and anti humanistic but optimistic and humanistic. As Ellmann and Fiedelson note, he sees man "arriving, through admission of absurdity, at an affirmation of his own worth" (806). He focuses on struggle against absurdity for humanism and optimism.

Alienation in the existential philosophy occupies a significant place. Gwynn Nettler defines "Alienation is a certain psychological state of a normal person, and as alienated person is one who has been estranged from, made unfriendly towards his society and the culture it carries" (672). Alienation bears the constant notion of having the feeling of being a strange or an outside.

It is in exile - exile from the milieu one lives, from one's products and even from oneself. Eric and Mary Josepson comment that "alienation is an individual feeling or state of dissociations from self, from others and from the world at large" (13). Thus, sense of alienation engages an individual in conflict within himself and with the 'herd' as well. Alienation, in the simplest understanding, refers to the arrangement of individuals from one another and from a specific situation. The term is applied as the summation of the individual emotions and it comprises (1) meaninglessness, when the individual believes his activity will fail to yield the result he seeks, (2) isolation, that is, estrangement, of the individual from values of his society, (3) self-estrangement, which is the individual's estrangement from the self, the feeling that his own self and its abilities are something strange.

The existentialists point out that all of our personal human relations are

poisoned by feelings of alienation. Alienation, arise within the family between parents and children, between the husband and the wife between the child. Alienation affects relation and most cruelly, it dominates the relationship of love. Existentialist are obsessed with the meaning of life. They focus exclusively on the individual. Though life is very difficult and does not have any objective or universally known value, yet, existentialism attempts to find happiness and meaning in a modern world characterized by alienation, isolation, loneliness, frustration, in authenticity, and absurdity.

Existentialism deals with man's disillusionment and despair. Existentialism maintains that man is full of anxiety with no meaning in life, just simply exists, until he makes a decisive choice because he creates his self by making self-directed choices. Man's autonomy, assertion of his subjective self, his denial of traditional values, institution and philosophy, his exercise of choice and freedom, and his experience of the absurdity and the meaninglessness of life are some of the existential theme as which are reflected in the writings of the exponents of existentialism.

Existential predicaments mean the dichotomy between real experience and logical apprehension of the world. It is the recollection of past, evaluation in present mental activity. The novel presents through the consciousness of the narrator and narrator's ability to interpret existential experience. There are two problems: What happens to the character and what is the attitude of the narrator toward what happens. The first problem is insoluble if by what happens in the real experience of the other human. The right tracks if by what happens means the narrator think happens. For the solution of the first problem, it must investigate the mental process of the narrator.

Narrator thinks speculate in terms of opposite and narrator's ability to recognizing person as a human being is the second characteristic. The narrator fails to

recognize essential identity of another human being. So, narrator lays claim to a superior in perception and arouses tension within himself if other disagree with him. The narrator may have deductive thinking, she/he makes law and categories human being and wants to include to all within it. The narrator's perception of the world is real or not but he is the soul reporter who can't distinguish between real experience and logical apprehension. Reality for the narrator is ideational or does not experience ideal feelings. She/ He sees human relationship as a parallel to mental process and confusion to choose the world. Therefore, she fails to distinguish between experience and logic.

The attitude of the narrator toward what happens evaluates the narrative technique and to what extent does she/he understand his/her predicaments. She does not understand the world, and moral issues secured by the society or the personal affairs to the world. The narrator just, equates intellectual activities with creativity which is the emotional life. The narrator concludes mistakenly that the superior perception and highly developed consciousness caused by the predicaments. The consciousness is the knowledge and awareness of the narrator's own existence, sensation and cognition. In this regard Henry James clarifies in his essay that, "Closely allied with this lack of understand is his attitude toward perception and consciousness. On the one hand, he apotheosizes them; on the other hand, he realizes that concomitant with the increasing depth of perception and ultimately the developing of consciousness" (209). Therefore, predicament is that the narrator fails to get out of his/her self-perception or self consciousness.



### Chapter 3

#### Existentialism in Buck's *The Good Earth*

Wang Lung, the main character of the novel, searches existence in his life by rebelling against the ongoing situation. He is a poor farmer who bears a lot of difficulties of living a hand to mouth. The novel projects the life of him whose economic status is based on agriculture and gains success from good harvesting. In both time, he searches his existence in his society. While he was poor, he got married with a poor woman O-Lan and latter he neglects her and has affair with other woman. It shows that he violates the moral obligation, and the rebel of ethics searches his existence.

In his life, O-Lan comes as a new bride and his luck begins to change. Not only does she bears him a son but he soon makes enough money from his harvest to extend more land. Forced to relocate to the city when famine sets in, it is again O-Lan unexpectedly finds their fortune giving them the opportunity to return to the land that Wang holds so dear. With his new-found wealth, however, Wang also decides to take a much younger and prettier second wife. His fortunes seem to change. It is only at the end that he realizes how important O-Lan was to have a good life he has led. Wang says, "Wang Lung dipped some into a bowl, and then, after a moment, he opened a glazed jar that stood upon a ledge of the stove and took from it a dozen or so of the curled dried leaves and sprinkled them upon the surface of the water" (4).

Wang Lung becomes wealthier. He too is able to hire laborers and becomes obsessed with women such as Lotus. He falls into opium addiction. He buys the house of Hwang and moves into it. Wang Lung's children grow older. But being raised in the lap of luxury has severely eroded their own sense of duty to their father, their respect for the land, and the religious observances on which he and his father base

their lives. After being rich, he is conscious about his existence and concentrates on physical pleasure. In this regard Buck says, “Wang Lung went in to his own room then, and drew about him again the long blue robe and let down the braid of his hair. He passed his hand over his shaven brow and over his cheeks. Perhaps he had better be newly shaven?” (7).

Wang projects his obsessive desire and searches the position of his family in his society. When he attains wealth, he becomes somewhat snobbish and frequently begins to visit tea houses as he loses his connection to the land. At one tea house, he is mesmerized by Lotus. He spends most of his time with Lotus and gives expensive gift to her. When his uncle tells his wife that Wang Lung has been frequenting the tea house and consorting with Lotus, he arrogantly brings her into his home and builds rooms for Lotus. Such activities are the main cause of his suffering though he does not hesitate to continue such activities. When he was young he could not do such activities. The narrator states, “Wang Lung had suffered that she must not be pretty. It would be something to have a pretty wife that other men would congratulate him upon having. His father, seeing him mutinous face, had cried out at him” (8).

Wang’s family face various problems in their life though they struggle for exist in their land. Due to fertility of the land, they can achieve economic. The situation of Wang before being rich is in crisis. In this regard, “Wang Lung sat on the sun climbed upwards. The waiting boy lounged about impatiently. “If you are buying nothing more,” he said at last with much impudence, “You will have to pay rent for the stool” (12). He lives in poverty and struggles for survival as “Wang Lung saw at last that the man wanted money of him.” I am a poor man, “he said pleadingly” (14). Wan Lung family fall in existential crisis because there is no option to live in his land. Drought and cold wind create problem for farmer and they migrate from the land.

Buck describes the situation as:

When Wang Lung takes from O-lan the pearls that he has allowed her to keep from those she stole in the city, and she says nothing about his disrespect, crying great tears silently. Wang Lung stood still. What was there to say to this thing, then! She stooped to pick up a bit of broken bricks and threw it out of the furrow. (30)

Above lines show the situation of O-Lan and Wang Lung both are victim of poverty and struggle in their life for the existence. Wang Lung is ruthless in his life and relationship between O-Lan and Wang is not so good, “But Wang Lung sat upon a bench by the table in the darkness and put his head upon his folded arms. Out of this body of his, out of his own lions, life” (31). Wang’s family believes in confused ideology which is one of the main thought of Chinese spread in rural area. Wang does not fully believe in old tradition and not so sophisticated to follow new one so he is in between and search existence.

This mixture of deference to the ancient philosophies and to the spiritual world was typical of everyday Chinese religious practice. However, the more established religious institutions seem to be the more they preserve the educated people. For a simple farmer like Wang, even when he becomes rich, the little earthen idols gods of the renewal of life are supremely powerful. Although he treats them badly and blames them for misfortune, he is afraid to reject them totally, and he ultimately returns to them since they have power over earth. In this regard Buck states, “They came forth steadily and without break, albeit slowly, and he realized that she had planned this whole thing for herself. When she had been working in the fields beside him she had been planning all this out! How astonishing she was” (33). O-Lan’s life is also in dame fate which compels her to search existence in her life. The following lines of the

novel relate Wang Lung family:

Wang Lung waited anxiously for the rains. And then the rains came suddenly out of a still grey day when the wind fell and the air was quiet and warm, and they all sat in the house filled with well-being, watching the rain fall full and straight and sink into the fields about the dooryard and drip from the thatched ends of the roof about the door.

(43)

Wang family struggle in their life and believe that they are going to achieve financial success in life.

For achieving good life, O-Lan works hard in life but Wang Lung neglects her and Wang's father helps her in the field. Her position in her house is not so good because Wang Lung loves Lotus more than O-Lan though she struggles in her life and contributes Wang family. Buck presents:

And Wang Lung went again into the town and he bought ought pork fat and white sugar and the woman rendered the fat smooth and white and she took rice flour, which they had ground from their own rice between their millstones to which they could yoke the ox when they needed to do so. (47)

Wang Lung and his father live in a village without any hope of being rich. Their desire is nothing to exist in this earth.

They worship earth and hope to get better in their life. This shows, the faith of Wang family that is related to the existence of god. When they feel difficulties in their life, they memorize which Buck describes, "Wang Lung's uncle began at this time to become the trouble which Wang Lung had surmised from the beginning that he might be. This uncle was the younger brother of Wang Lung's father" (59). Wang Lung

family is struggling with poverty though Wang neglects the problem and tries to rebel with villagers, “Wang Lung stood sullen and immovable, conscious of his fault but angry to the bottom of his heart against this man who was his uncle” (63). Nature of Wang Lung is not like other people because he searches his existence and neglects morality, and is guided by obsessive desire. The following lines of novel show the situation as:

Wang Lung picked up his hoe and threw it down again. “Come to the house,” he said shortly. “I do not carry silver on me like a prince,” and he strode ahead, bitter beyond speech because some of the good silver with which he had planned to buy more land was to go into this palm of his uncle’s, from whence it would slip on to the gambling table before night fell. (64)

Above lines indicate the nature of Wang Lung. He neglects the social and family problem. He is not only guided by obsessive desire but also searches existence in his life. By forgetting the toils of his wife and father on the field, he enjoys on relaxing. His father and wife work in the field and worship earth for the better crops. Buck portrays the situation as, “The young rice beds which Wang Lung sowed at first were squares of jade upon the brown earth. He carried water to them day after day after he had given up the wheat, the heavy wooden buckets slung upon a bamboo pole across his shoulders” (67-68).

Wang Lung and his family members fight with poverty and spend many days in hunger though they are with the critical situation. In this context, Buck writes, “Now Wang Lung had heard here and there that for the House of Hwang it had been a year verging upon poverty. The old lady had not had her dole of opium to the full for many days and she was like an old tigress in her hunger so that each day she sent for

the agent and she cursed him and struck his face with her fist, screaming at him” (68). Situation of Wang family is worse than normal famine. During the time many people died by famine. So the situation is existential crisis. In this regard, Buck highlights, “Now Wang Lung’s ox he had cared for as long as he could. He had given the beast a bit of straw and a handful of vines as long as these lasted and then he had gone out and torn leaves from the trees for it until winter came and those were gone” (71). During the time of 1920s and 1930s Chinese people faced great problem which is a tragic event of human history. Many people were killed by famine. Wang Lung is one of the representative characters who struggles in his life to live like existential hero.

In the novel, Buck portrays the existential feature of Wang Lung who fights to fulfill his obsessive desire. He does not like the village people. For this, O-Lan says, “At first there had been hostility in the village against Wang Lung because it was supposed that he had silver which he was hiding and food stored away” (73). O-Lan faces many problems in her life because of her husband’s behavior. Wang Lung becomes proud and does not care his wife during the time of sickness takes some hopes to do something to his wife. Because he remembers his past time where he was with her like his own heart. The following lines of novel, “Wang Lung sitting at the threshold of his door, said to himself that now surely something must be done. They could not remain here in this empty house and die. In his lean body, about which he daily wrapped more tightly his loose girdle, there was a determination to live” (76). In the above lines Buck portray how Wang Lung struggles in his life to live with O-Lan time and again. Wang and his family behaviour compel O-Lan to die. She struggles last time as, there was a day when his neighbor Ching, worn now to less than the shadow of a human creature, came to the door of Wang Lung’s house and he whispered from his lips that were dried and black as earth” (78).

Wang's family is very much guided by traditional norms and values. They give less priority to human being and fall under the crisis of existentialism. In Buck's view, "Wang Lung laughed bitterly. "Why, that," he cried, "That is taking my land for a gift. Why, I pay twenty times that when I buy land!" (86). The relation between Wang Lung and O-Lan is guided by existential urges. Buck describes, "The boy Wang Lung carried in his bosom until he saw that the old man would fall and then he gave the child to O-Lan and stooping under his father, he lifted him on his back and carried him" (89). O-Lan is guided by traditional concept of life and live with Wang Lung's family. While she lives with Wang Lung, she searches her existence in Wang's house. Here, again, "Wang Lung in days past in the tea shop had heard men tell of these Wargon's, chained one to the other and drawn neither by man nor beast, but by a machine breathing forth fire and water like a dragon" (91).

O-Lan lives in Wang's house and searches her existence though Wang's obsessive desire creates problems. O-Lan says, "Wang Lung withdrew a little from the others and turned himself about to the wall and secretly with his hand griddled. There was enough for the six mats and enough each for a penny for rice and beyond that he had three pence left" (95). Wang's father faces problems in his life. Wang also participates with his father's attempt. O-Lan says, "Wang Lung at first began to tell him that he was too new at it to run, but the old man was deaf, for he heard nothing of what Wang Lung said, only motioning to him tranquilly to lower the shafts and let him step in" (102). Chinese culture is guided by the existential crisis during the time of 1920s.

O-Lan is one of the representative characters who struggles herself to lead a meaningful life with her husband. Without any hesitation to do any work, she always supports her family. Even she is able to establish her existence in Chinese society in

other hand, Wang Lung never thinks burden because he is guided by the existential philosophy. Here, Buck says, “Wang Lung said nothing then, but he was angry and afraid in his heart because his sons were growing into thieves here in this city” (111). Wang Lung’s family is conscious about the family existence. Buck describes the situation, “Wang Lung living among these who labored at feasting others, heard strange things of which he took little heed. The older men and women, it is true, said nothing to anyone Greybeards pulled ricks has” (114). The following lines further describe the situation:

“Wang Lung’s breath caught.

Now, I would not sell a child! He said loudly.

“I was said,” she answered very slowly.” I was sold to a great house so that my parents could return to their home. (117)”

Above lines show the existential ethos of Wang Lung. Wang Lung’s ancestors lived in the village where now Wang lives. Both Wang Lung and his ancestor search existence. O-Lan describes, “But Wang Lung that night could not sleep for thinking of silver and gold and pearls on the other side of this wall against which his body rested, his body clad in what he wore day after day” (119).

Wang lung memorizes the situation of his family and searches the position. He neglects O-Lan and thinks for romance with an other woman. It shows that his obsessive desire of making romance is related to the existential quest. So, Buck says, “But Wang Lung thought of his land and pondered this way and that, with the sickened heart of deferred hope, how he could get back to it” (121). She further identifies the nature of Wang Lung.

“Surely this was a very evil man to be thus hung.” But Wang Lung was fearful of the picture and pondered as to why a foreigner had given it to



him, whether or not some brother of this foreigner's had not been so treated and the other brethren seeking revenge. (124)

People living in rural area of China are hunted by some existential quest shows inhuman behavior. Wang lung is one of the representative characters of this issue. O-Lan describes like this, "Wang Lung crouched low behind the cauldrons and the soldiers clattered down the cobbles to the west, and when the sound of their leathern boots was gone Wang Lung darted out and seizing his rickshaw he ran with it empty to the hut" (128). This circumstance shows the life of Chinese people who are seeking for the existence in each and every work and struggle in life. They hardly believe in morality and human right and give emphasizes on traditional believe that is related to survival.

Buck portrays, "Wang Lung groaned and held the child to him and said over and over to her softly, "Oh, little fool-oh, poor little fool." but within himself he was carrying as a man cries out when he is caught in a rushing flood and cannot stop to think" (133). There is nothing remain for happiness though they are searching their existence. The followings condition:

Only Wang Lung in the confusion took nothing. He had never in all his life taken what belonged to another, and nor at once could he do it. So he stood in the middle of the crowd at first, dragged this way and that, and then coming somewhat to his sense, he pushed with perseverance towards the edge and found himself at last on the fringe of the multitude. (136)

Above lines indicate the state of Wang Lung. Wang is facing various problems in his life. He has nothing remained for happiness though he searches his existence from zero level. Wang's situation is similar to the existential hero mentioned by Martin

Heidegger. Burk projects, “Then Wang Lung set himself robustly to the soil and he begrudged even the hours he must spend in the house for food and sleep” (142). Wang lives in confusion and he has no idea of betterment though is ready to accept the result comes out from confusion. O-Lan describes the situation, “Wang Lung did not know what to do after this replay. It was impossible to talk of buying land directly to the Old Lord” (148).

It shows the traditional belief of China. In China, people respect land and hardly sell to other. Existence of human being is related to land. They worship land for preserving from epidemic. Wang Lung also influences with that belief and never sells the land though his house is robbed by thieves. In this regard, Wang speaks. “Well, and beyond the starving of people, which is no news, the greatest news was the robbery at the House of Hwang.”

It was just what Wang Lung hoped to hear and the man went on to tell him it with relish, describing how the few slaves” (154). Wang Lung never feels bore in his life and because there were many slaves who are living bore life than his family. In this regard, he says, “Wang Lung had, therefore, at this time no sorrow of any kind, unless it was this sorrow, that his eldest girl child neither spoke nor did those things which were right for her age, but only smiled her baby smile when she caught her father’s glance” (159).

Wang Lung imagines about making good life and tries to fulfill his obsessive desires. Buck projects Wang Lung fantasy as, “Wang Lung’s built upon a hill, and these hills stood up like islands. And men went to and from town by boat and by raft, and there were those who starved as they ever had” (165). Wang feels pride on his life and good crops though he is not satisfied because he wants to fulfill his existential quest. Situation of Wang Lung in the following lines as:

And Wang Lung, hearing this sat down with seeming carelessness, but his heart swelled with pride at what he was. But on this day when he had reproached his wife even the deference he received did not please him and he sat gloomily drinking his tea and feeling that nothing was as good in his life as he had believed. (170)

Wang Lung lives in obsessive desire so he always searches the existence in his life. He is not pleased with O-Lan to whom he got married earlier. He dislikes facing the situation of his family and feeling fear. The situation Bucks projects, “Wang Lung hesitated upon the threshold and he stood in the bright light which streamed from the open doors. And he might have stood there and gone away, for he was fearful and timid in his heart still, although his blood was rushing through his body fit to burst his veins” (177). He partly believes on the circumstances that occurs in his life and struggles for achieving the quest. The following lines of the novel clarifies.

Wang Lung heard, although he disdained to answer, although her words smote him like a dagger thrust because he feared that he looked indeed what he was, a farmer. But he went on stoutly when he remembered the good silver in his girdle, and at last the woman struck a closed door harshly. (179)

Above lines show the situation of people living in rural China. People are living in hard life due to poor household economy. Wang Lung household situation projects the reality of Chinese life as, “Wang Lung was exceedingly angry and the more angry because he must bury it all in his heart and answer with smiles and welcome his relatives. This although when he saw the fat smooth face of his uncle’s wife he felt fit to burst with his anger” (189). Wang Lung feels happy in nature and forgets all the pain.

Buck shows the situation of Wang Lung as, “Wang Lung is seeking to pluck a flower somewhere and when O-Lan looked at her humbly, not understanding, she laughed and said again” (190). Chinese rural life is guided by naturalism which forces human being to search their existence in life. Buck allegorically presents the situation as, “Then abashed and as though he had never seen the girl before he went slowly out, hanging his head over his fine clothes, and his eyes looking here and there, but never ahead. But Cuckoo hailed him merrily” (196). Environment is source of life. Wang Lung is also highly influenced by environment and searches existence in his life. Buck describes, “Then did Wang Lung eat and drink of his love night and day. Day after he went into the room where Lotus lays indolent upon her bed and he sat beside her and watched her at all she did” (198). Lovely environment encourages Wang Lung to search existence. The narrator narrates, “Wang Lung saw that it was true the sun rose in the morning, and this women Lotus was there, and the moon rose in its season and she was there for his hand to grasp when it would, and his thirst of love was somewhat slaked and he saw things he had not seen before” (200). Wang Lung lives in desire so he searches existence in life. To fulfill the existence he desire to love with Lotus. Wang Lung himself justifies, “As far Wang Lung, he said to himself that at last his affairs were settled and his women at peace and he could enjoy his love. And it seemed to him freshly that he could never tire of Lotus and of the way she pouted at him with the lids drooped” (205).

Buck uses various symbol to show the situation as, “Then like a field of thorns springing up from one root and spreading here and there, there was at more to trouble Wang Lung” (207). The relationship between Wang Lung and O-Lan is guided by family need. Wang Lung wants to have romance with girl while O-Lan in bed. It shows the situation of women in China who are traditionally bonds by family legacy

rather than love of husband. Buck shows the situation as, “Then she went up to Wang Lung and took his hand and drew it to her face and she wooed him. But he, although he loved her again, loved her not so wholly as before, and never again as wholly as he had loved her” (210).

Wang Lung forgets everything and indulges in his intention which is guided by existential quest. In this regard, Buck says, “Wang Lung as though he had been for a long time away and there were suddenly a multitude of things and day after day he labored at it, and the paleness which the summer” (213).

Wang feels pride on patriarchy and love his son rather than wife. in this regard, he says, “Wang Lung would not pretend it was anything out of the common that he had a son like this, although when the lad side sharply as he read, “Here is a letter that has the wood radical when it should have the water radical” (215). When he was in tea shop he imagines the upcoming situation which is related to the marriage of his son. He speaks, “Wang Lung kept his own counsel, therefore, only listening here and there in the tea shop when minds were spoken of, or men prosperous in the town who had daughters for marriage” (216). Wang Lung is crazy on beauty and pride as, “Wang Lung distraught in her presence, and thinking of things other than beauty, pouted said” (220). Wang Lung is frightened because he can’t forget his desire though he has various obligation in household. The situation Wang Lung Buck projects, “Wang Lung was frightened and he called for O-Lan, and together they lifted the land up and O-Lan washed him and laid him upon the bed in her own room, and before she was finished with him the lad was asleep and heavy as one dead and could answer nothing to what his father asked” (223). Above lines show the household scenario of Wang Lung which leads through controversial situation. O-Lan Says, “Wang Lung heard this laughter he remembered in one crowded space of time all that he had

endured because of his uncle; how of old his uncle had tried to force him to the selling of his land” (228). Household situation of Wang Lung pushes him into critical situation as, “Now Wang Lung found himself in such a coil as he had never dreamed of.

His uncle came and went as before, grinning a little under the sparse and scattered hairs of his grey beard, his robes wrapped and girdled about his body as carelessly as ever” (229). Due to pressure of desire, Wang Lung forgets everything and indulged in his pride which is related to existential quest. In this regard, Buck analyzes the situation as, “Wang Lung forgot everything that troubled him. Women and sons and uncle, he forgets them all and he rushed among the frightened villagers, and he shouted at them” (232). Wang lung’s family members and villagers observes the situation of Wang Lung which is different from other. Wang himself also looks his son ,”Wang Lung looked at his son and he looked at himself, and his son stood there in a pale long robe of silver grey linen, thin and cool for the summer’s heat, and on his lip were the first black hairs of his manhood” (236). Household environment of Wang Lung is full of melancholy. Buck Describes the situations, “Now I am going to the piece by the moat of the town and I shall not be back early and he set his face to the town” (241).

When Wang Lung was in town, he imagines his village life. In the village, most of the people fall under the crisis. He is one of the representative characters whose life portrays the situation of rural life of China. Buck states, “Then Wang Lung paused and his breath whistled through his parted lips and the sweat poured down his body until he was drenched and he was weak as though with an illness. He threw down his bamboo and he whispered to the boy, panting” (243). Wang Lung feels odd in town and do not wish, “Wang Lung did not wish the town merchant to come to his

house because he feared he would have to prepare this and that, and so he washed himself and put on his silk coat and he set out across the fields” (246).

Wang Lung sees pain in face of the Chinese people. Buck describes the situation as, “When Wang Lung looked at her thus closely he saw the marks of tears on her cheeks, and her face was a shade too pale and grave for her years, and he drew her to him by her little hand and he said” (248). Wang Lung feels difficulties in his life though he searches existence in his life. The following lines justify, “Then Wang Lung looked at the doctor in silence and in sad understanding. He had not so many pieces of silver in the world unless he sold his land, but he knew that even though he sold his land it was no avail for it was simply that the doctor said, the women will die” (253). Wang Lung returns back to home and thinks about his family. It shows that Wang Lung is close to nature though he searches existence in his life. The lines show the situation, “Only the poor fool knew nothing, and only she smiled and twisted her bit of cloth as she smiled. Yet one had to think of her to bring her in to sleep at night and to feed her and to set her in the sun in the day and to lead her in if it rained” (255). Wang Lung could not feel pride on his situation and become angry, “Wang Lung was angry and cursed his son and daughter that they had forgotten the poor fool who was their sister” (255).

Wang Lung suffers and memorizes his past. In this regard, Buck says, “Wang Lung dispatched the man, therefore, and told him, “Tell your young lord that his mother is dying and her spirit cannot rest in ease until she sees him and see him wed, and if he values me and his mother and his home, he must come back” (260). When Wang Lung was young, he faced various problems. Wang Lung describes the situation as, “Then Wang Lung was scrupulous to do all that should be done for the one dead, so he caused mourning to be made for himself and for his children, and

their shoes were made of coarse white cloth, which is the color of mourning” (266).

Wang lung visits his village and searches the existence on his land.

Buck portrays “Then it all came to pass as Wang Lung had foreseen. The river to the north burst its dykes, its furthestmost dykes first and when men saw what had happened, they hurried from this place to that to collect money to mend it” (272). It shows that existence of Wang Lung. He found nothing in life. Buck analyzes, “Wang Lung allowed nothing to be bought and sold after the winter came except what he said, and he husbanded carefully all that they had” (274). Wang Lung secretly hearing the situation which shows, “Wang Lung standing there secretly and hearing this grew so angry that his skin was like to burst on him, but he was silent with great effort and he tried to plan what he could do with these three, but he could think of nothing to do” (275). Wang Lung does not feel happy in his life because he searches his existence in life. Buck says, “But Wang Lung did not see what the lad did, only that he walked there in silence behind his father. And when everything was planned Wang Lung went back to his house well content and he said to his heart” (284). The following lines further justify the situation, “Wang Lung had come in robustly from the fields and in high humor because the water was off the land and the air dry and warm and because he was pleased with his youngest son that he had gone with him, and he answered, angry at this fresh trouble in his house” (286). Above lines show the difficult situation that faced by Wang Lung by his family. Buck says, “Wang Lung heard this with astonishment; for he had not known that his daughter-in-law was thus, seeing only that she was a woman careful to be correct in her behavior and fair enough in her looks” (290).

Wang Lung memorizes his old days, “Now Wang Lung in the old days when the great family was there would have felt himself one of these common people and against



the great and half hating, half fearful of them” (291). It shows the situation of Wang Lung household. Wang Lung struggles to live and tries to be happy. She says, “Then Wang Lung laughed also and he rose and he slapped his hands together and laughed again and he said, “well, and I have been sitting here like a man with his own first son coming and not knowing what to do of this and that and afraid of everything” (301). Wang Lung loves his son more than other family members and take his son from old house, “Wang Lung took his youngest son and his fool with him and therefore he came scarcely at all for a long time to the house on his land” (305). The following lines show the condition of Wang, “Wang Lung it there was nothing left to be desired in his condition, and now he could sit in his chair in the sun beside his fool and he could smoke his water pipe and be at peace since his land was tended and the money it coming into his hand without care from him” (306). Above lines indicate the desire of Wang Lung. He tries to maintain his supremacy in his family. He is unable to handle the family before his son struggles with him. Wang memorizes the events and take rest, “And Wang Lung gave him the silver bit by bit, as he sat smoking and resting in his court, for the silver came in easily from the land at every harvest” (309).

Wang worships the earth her fertility is responsible for his upliftment after his wife and father death. He faces various problems as “As for Wang Lung’s sons, here was a continual unrest, the eldest son lest not enough be spent and they be belittled in the eyes of men and lest the villagers come walking through the great gate when a man from the town was there to call” (315). Wang Lung’s eldest son and his wife are not sincere to work. Other family members of his household also faces health problems. Buck describes the situation of Wang Lung uncle as, “Now Wang Lung’s uncle and his wife had long since smoked all the flesh off their bones and they lay day in and day out on their beds like two old dry sticks, and there was no warmth in them” (317).

Family situation of Wang Lung is going to worse that is similar to the city life of south china. When Wang was young he saw such situation in south, “Wang Lung had heard of war here and there but he had never seen the thing come near except the once that he wintered in the southern city when he was young” (319). Wang saw painful situation of people in south when he was young .all of them were searching their existence and struggle for their live. Buck describes as “Then Wang Lung went back to the gate with him to humor him, and there the men were filling the street, filling the town and Wang Lung felt as though air and sunlight had been suddenly cut off because of the numbers of grey men tramping” (320). Chinese revolution brings the sense of existence and parole learn to struggle in life. Wang Lung is one of them. Wang Lung portrays the situation of south which he saw, “There are soldiers everywhere in every house even in the house of the poor and I came running so say you must not protest, for today a clerk in my shop” (322).

At present, the situation is different people learn many things from such difficult situation. There is harmful habit like taking opium. In this regard, Wang Lung spraks, “I wish she were content with less, for it runs into a handful of silver a day for her opium, but at her age we do not dare to cross her and she wants it all.” And he sighed as he spoke, and he glanced secretly at his uncle’s son, but” (325). Wang memorizes all the events but he dies not regrets on his mother activities, “Wang Lung could not speak against their father’s wife, nor could their wives speak if they did not, nor could the youngest son, but he stood there staring at her, his hands clenched on his bosom” (327). At that time he, has two son who are not so responsible in farm work that memorizes Wang his painful time.

Buck describes the situation as, “Wang Lung and his two elder sons for once agreed and it was that all trace of what had just passed must be wiped away, and they

called in carpenters and masons again” (330). Wang lung observes the situation of old women whom contributes Wang Lung family to uplift economic as social status.

Wang himself sees her, “Wang Lung was just to her as to all, and he said to her that she might have the old women’s room for her own if she liked when the old one was dead, and she could have the bed also” (331).

Wang Lung analyzes all the past event and searches existence in his life and says, “Wang Lung came down off the dais and it seemed to him that now his life was rounded off and he had done all that he said he would in his life and more than he could ever have dreamed he could” (332). Wang Lung builds separate house for Lotus which remains secret in his life. Wang Lung does not like O-Lan after being rich. At the end of his life he could not feel pride on that. He breaks the secret and speaks, “Wang Lung had also his own secret trouble with Lotus since the day when he had protected her slave from the son of his uncle. Ever since that day the young maid had been in disfavor with Lotus, and although the girl waited on her silently” (334).

Lotus also searches existences in her life and marry with Wang Lung though Wang Lung is unable to fulfill the desire. Buck shows the Wang’s situation as “he pondered and he looked at this son of his and he saw the suffering young face, and he thought to himself” (337). Wang Lung takes rest in his room and thinks the situation of him he shows in this way, “Wang Lung sat there alone in his room by his table and he felt dreary and alone, and he muttered to himself. “Well, and I have to peace anywhere in my house” (338). The following lines further show the situation of Wang house as, “Wang Lung could not cease from his thought of what his youngest son had said of Pear Blossom and he watched the maid incessantly as she came and went and without his knowing it the thought of her filled his mind and he doted on her. But he said nothing to anyone” (339). Above lines show he situation of Wang lung household

which is similar to his childhood age.

After the death of his father and wife, his family is unable to maintain prosperous of house. Wang feels worry in his life and which Buck shows, “And Wang Lung could have wept for what she said because not one had ever requited him like this, and his heart clung to her and he said” (349). Wang Lung finds himself as poor fool and says, “Wang Lung had thought many times of what would come to his poor fool when he was dead and there was not another one except himself who cared whether she lived or starved, and so he had bought a little bundle of white poisonous stuff at the medicine shop” (348). Wang feels worry in his life and search his existence by asking question to himself what is life? Wang wants to come out from life and which Buck projects, “Then Wang Lung withdrew more and more into his age and he lived much alone except for these two in his courts, his poor fool and Pear Blossom” (350). Wang Lung spends his time by searching existence.

When he was young his family struggles for live now he meets the same fate years after. The narrator describes the situation in the novel as, “So Wang Lung sat, and so his age came on him day by day and year by year, and he slept fitfully in the sun as his father had done, and he said to himself that his life was done and he was satisfied with it” (351). Wang wants to weep because he is unable to describe the circumstance which he faces in his life as, “Wang Lung would have said he suddenly could not remember what it was, and the tears stood in his eyes because he had held the matter so painfully in his mind and now it slipped willfully away from him” (354). Wang Lung falls under the existential crisis because after his wife’s death, his sons are unable to maintain the devotion on farm work. The situation Buck describes, “And his two sons held him, one on either side, each holding his arm, and he held tight in his hand the warm loose earth. And they soothed him and they said over and over, the

elder son and the second son” (357). It shows that how Wang lung falls on existential crisis in his life. Wang struggles the whole life to fulfill his desire but he is unable to fulfill the desire and being existential hero like mythical hero Sisyphus.

The novel rejects the life of Chinese farmer who always faces the problems of existence. They repeat same work like Sisyphus and get nothing at the end similarly. Wang gets nothing at the end of his life. Chinese government and social system never teach people to exist in society and they exist still. So that they can struggle with land. All the attempts and activities show that Wang as an existential hero.

## Chapter 4

### Existential Crisis and the Hero Wang Lung

The novel projects life of rural China where people are in existential crisis. Wang Lung is the main character of the novel who faces the existential crisis in his life since his childhood to the old age. When he was young his family faced poverty. Due to hard work of his father and wife, his family gets success to achieve some wealth though Wang Lung struggles to get beautiful wife and searches the way to fulfill his desire. After the death of his father and wife, his sons are unable to continue the farm work. He falls into the crisis of living and becomes helpless man. He asks himself about what life is. The novel shows how Chinese farmers spend their life in China. Wang Lung's family reflects that fact.

Buck shows life style of Wang which is similar to an existential hero. He forgets everything and tries to fulfill his desire of marrying a beautiful girl and earning a lot of money. Wang buys a piece of land by selling the House of Hwang. Buying of this land boosts up Wang Lung's ego, and makes him more secure in his wealth.

Wang Lung's family, his wealth, and the House of Hwang's wealth affect Wang Lung's change in attitude. Changes in attitude are connected to the rise and fall of Lung's prosperity in life. Wang Lung, before he marries O-Lan, is impoverished. When O-Lan becomes his wife, his wealth begins to prosper as a result of her frugality and industry. Wang Lung approaches the pinnacle of his success and begins to feel financial stability. But later on his downfall starts.

Buck accounts the life of Wang Lung who lives in rural China and struggles for existence. By working in farm, Wang Lung's financial condition gets improved increases and the diminishing wealth of Hwang is the responsible for the changes. At

the beginning of the story Wang Lung is a poor, parsimonious peasant who always thinks thoroughly about how he spends his money. Even on the day of his marriage Wang Lung is still concerned about the amount of money he spends. And Wang Lung, to his horror, found there was nothing to do but to produce from his girdle yet another penny. Wang Lung's frugality determines his financial dealings, and he is not prone to indulge.

Wang Lung's desire of seeking existence plays main role in the House of Hwang. Even though they are experiencing financial decay, the members of the Hwang family continue spending money frivolously. O-Lan hears that the House of Hwang is selling a piece of land, due to their liberal spending. Seeing how the House of Hwang is selling their land, and that he has enough money to buy the land, Wang Lung confidently decides to buy the land. After selling the land, Wang's family faces various difficulties. It reflects traditional beliefs of Chinese people. Selling land is not good sign in Chinese society because they worship land and goddess. Wang Lung ignores such traditional belief and sells the land. He becomes poorer and poorer in his community. After his father's death, he again falls in the existential crisis.

The novel projects the existential quest of a Chinese farmer who struggles whole life and gets nothing except painful death. O-Lan works all over the life for the enhancement of Wang Lung's economic condition. She dies without getting anything except hatred till in her last day of life. In the same way Wang Lung recalls the past life before death because he loses everything from his life. He becomes poor fool man without getting anything.

Structure of Chinese society and political system is responsible for such situation. People struggle through their live getting nothing except exploitation. They are always in the crisis of existence like Wang Lung family. By challenging with time and natures disaster, Wang Lung keeps his repetition in the Chinese society. He sets up himself as an existential hero.

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