

Chapter I: Introduction

Nicholas Sparks as an Existential Writer

Nicholas Sparks (December 31, 1965), an internationally acclaimed American novelist and screen-writer of postmodern period, was born in Omaha, Nebraska, United States. He was raised Roman Catholic. He passed most of his childhood life in Watertown, Minnesota, Los Angeles and Grand Island, Nebraska and passed his high school life in Fair Oaks, California. He graduated in 1984 from Bella Vista High School. Then, enrolling at the University of Notre Dame, having received a full track and field scholarship Sparks majored in business finance and graduated with honours in 1988.

Nicholas Sparks has contributed a lot especially in the field of novels and films. Most of his novels are published in the *New York Times* and paperback bestseller lists equally. All Nicholas Sparks's novels have been translated into more than thirty languages. He has published altogether seventeen novels. Most of his novels include the theme of existence, where a person struggles for his or her individual choice. He tries to show the struggle of human being for their Christian faith, love and good fate.

Nicholas Sparks's *The Last Song* (2009) is a romantic American novel, which revolves around a seventeen year old rebellious and hostile teenage girl named, Ronnie Miller. Her life is turned upside down when her parents divorce and father moves from New York to Wilmington, North Carolina. Since then, she remains angry and alienates herself from her parents. In this novel Sparks shows the importance of struggle for individual choice that means desire of persons to live their life in their own way depending upon person's own individual desire and wish even if they have to face obstacles and problems on the way. By applying the same matter, Sparks tries

to show Ronnie Miller, the central character of the novel, as a violent and rebellious teenage girl who neglects the family relationship for her individual choice and addresses the difficulties and problems of a teenage girl for her existence. The novel tries to expose the rebellious mentality of Ronnie Miller who chooses struggle. She chooses to live her life by neglecting other's suggestions whoever they are, either her own parents or friends. In fact, Ronnie shows her anger, violence and rebellious activities for her individual choice. In spite of her immature age, she does not compromise with anyone but she goes ahead as she wants and does what she likes.

Most of Sparks's novels show characters struggling to understand their meaning of life and struggling for their individual freedom. And they struggle for the choice of themselves and in search of their individual identity within a family, among friends and in their society also. In this novel Sparks shows Ronnie as a rebellious and hostile clubber who refuses to talk with her father or to play their shared passion, piano.

John M. Formy Duval in *Contemporary Literature* says, "Sparks has planned a novel about a female protagonist and has more substances, explores the aspects of familial love and the storm and stress that come with having a teenager in the family" (78). He further says, "The angst generated by a 17 year old female is contrasted with the complete love a 10 year old son has for his father" (79). More emphasis is given on Ronnie's relationship with a new boy friend and the other permutations that create road blocks to happiness, great deal of life. And it is about the conflict between parents and children. Difficulties and complications are associated with love, especially first love in its permutations. Of course, there are complications and problems but all is well that end the way life ends. The novel shows that love brings both happiness and pain that when everything seems to be working out the way we

want, life can and often does, throw us a curve ball. So, despite all her strands of rebellion it is suitable for her saving grace may be the manner in which she treats children.

Likewise, another critic, Shippensburg in his interview with *New York Times* says, "Ronnie's character is driven by her emotions and each and every of these emotions emanating from the very beginning can be felt easily" (07). Here, he says:

When Ronnie Miller is being forced to spend a summer in Wilmington, North Carolina with her father that walked out on her family. She detests him and wants absolutely nothing to do with him, it's been three years since she has last spoken to him and she doesn't plan on doing so now. It is out of her hands through because her mother has made the decision to send both Ronnie and her younger brother, Jonah to visit him. So, Ronnie has to deal with it. (11)

Ronnie usually spends her time hanging out at the clubs of New York city and when she has forced to a town, where the only fun she has in fishing and surfing but does not fit in with the people around there and knows this will be the worst summer of her life. On the brighter side, she has met Blaze, a misfit just like her but their friendship lasts throughout a summer filled with drama and violence.

Elisa A. Walker in *Mpaa Rating*, praises Nicholas Sparks for the choice of character through whom he shows the importance of struggle. It is also praised by her for good ending of the novel which teaches us the way of life and importance of struggle for individual choice. So, she says:

Ronnie Miller, the central character has bad and rebellious attitude towards everyone at first but softens into a kind and caring young woman and takes care of her younger brother and becomes good to

him. Ronnie ends up being a great daughter to her father and really goes to extra-mild to fulfill her duty. Ronnie and Will have really innocent and sweet romance together but she tells Will to never touch her and walks away. (26)

Walker says it is good enough because it shows young girls and women to stand up for themselves and not let men take advantage of them. Finally, Walker concludes; "Her struggle and rebel gives the lesson of survival of existence and individual freedom" (31).

Similarly, Alina Silva in *The Common Sense Media*, focuses on the central character, Ronnie Miller and argues that "the novel has selected a rebellious yet, talented and compassionate teenage girl, who is good enough" (113). Alina adds; Nicholas Sparks has selected such a rebellious character in his novel, *The Last Song*, who goes out of her way to rebel against everything. She struggles within the family and among friends which makes her stronger to do so for her individual existence. And finally, she gets victory over family, love, personal choice and self pride as well. Alina particularly focuses on "the determinant and rebellious character of the novel because Ronnie struggles with her emotional turmoil and ultimately wins" (116).

The novel has drawn attention of many critics who have interpreted it focusing on different themes such as, quest for self identity, teenager's common behavioural activities, psychological depression, worldwide familial problems and devotion on religion. But it would be better to see the text from 'existential point of view'. The world of this novel is running towards individual choice and self pride, especially of the teenage girls who struggle for their individual identity and freedom. All the characters in the novel are trapped in the web of struggle and lack of mutual relation even within family drags characters toward suffering and pain. They try to lead life

forward easily by being familiar with 'naked reality' of the painful world. Especially the central character, Ronnie Miller is conscious about struggle for obtaining her individual choice, freedom and identity as well as in this alien world. The struggle for her choice helps her to create her own meaning of life. She is self confined and faces the terrible things that are happening to her. The pain of her struggle makes her aware of the fact that she can exist in the meaningless world. And she becomes strong enough to fight against miseries and pains of her life. So, she accepts that "suffering is the ultimate reality of life" ("Absurd Freedom" 856). Thematically, this novel raises the complex issue of individual choice oppressed by familial as well as outward forces. This novel insists on concrete individual choice, freedom and existence through struggle.

Ronnie as the main character of this novel rebels against the hindrance and absurdity in her life, who is in the hope of overcoming the pain and suffering. Her pitiable condition represents her hope of creating an individual choice and freedom. The frustration and alienation makes her more powerful and hopeful to overcome the problems and obstacles in coming days. In this novel Ronnie has been facing the crisis of good relation with her father, mother and with friends. But as she grows up, she herself decides to improve her relation with all them. And finally, she turns to choose to fulfill her father's desire by completing stained glass window in the church and by completing music composition that means the last song. She even takes care of her father while he is ill, depending upon her own choice and judgement but not by other's force which can be taken as the fine tune of the song and hope of existence. Whatever she thinks and does at first, tries to give meaning to meaningless life by engaging self in different activities either good or bad. She is enthusiastic to take risk of anything she does. Whatever it gives, the fruit or not which is her act of living.

Even her decision of not to talk to her father is her choice and her freedom to choose, in which she feels her pride. And finally, as she starts to talk to her father is also her choice, who always fights against meaninglessness and nothingness. Because she thinks that her individual choice is everything. So, she rejects other's hindrance in her life and wants to live her life as she likes.

Sparks through his novel, *The Last Song*, tries to digout the internal insight of the protagonist's mind. By applying the third person narration, he presents the violent and rebellious but not so harmful state of mind and external behaviours of the central character, Ronnie Miller with her parents and as well as with her friends. Nicholas Sparks shows all the characters bold in their existence. Her parents want Ronnie to be obedient and mature girl in her behaviours, who should they thought to be followed her father's shared passion, piano as a musical composer. Although, her mother suggests her to reunite with her father but at the beginning she physically and mentally rejects to be there in the same house with her father because she does not get her existence on it. But only after getting her existence she chooses to reunite with him. And she fulfills his desire. Here, the most important thing is that just before her father's death she performs the duties and responsibilities of a good daughter and of a mature woman. Most often she has faced the difficulties of existence. So, she struggles hard to be independent for her choice and freedom.

As in *The Last Song*, Nicholas Sparks in his 12th novel, *Dear John* has raised the issue of having the theme of existence of an individual and presented main characters John and Savannah struggling for their personal choice and freedom, in search of their existence in the selfish world. Though, whatever they do and think is for their freedom and choice. This novel revolves around the central character, John who chooses to leave the school to join in the army and equally chooses to engage in

love with Savannah. He feels himself free to choose whatever he likes. Savannah also chooses another person as her husband in spite of her love affair with John. So, in this novel also Sparks shows the importance of individual choice. Not less than in *The Last Song*, both John and Savannah struggle in this novel in search of their individual meaning and existence within meaningless world.

In Nicholas Sparks's novels, all the characters more or less struggle for their existence. As it is human nature, they all want to rob out the absurdity and boredom prevalent in their life to make it more fruitful and happy. They emphasize on their private problems to make life more meaningful. And all the characters are consciously choosing and creating themselves because it is not possible for all we human being to stay without choices. Although existentialists accept the premise that our choices are limited by external circumstances but reject the notion that our acts are determined. There are range of choices available to each of us and we are free to choose. Therefore, we ourselves are responsible for our own choices and actions. So, we must create and live with our own individual freedom and choice. It entails our capacity to take hand in our own development. Freedom is basic to existentialist understanding of human nature because it underlies our ability to choose. "People are free to choose among alternatives and therefore have a large role in shaping their destinies" (Engler 316). With freedom, we must also accept the responsibility for directing our lives. So, freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. The same issues Sparks applies in his novel, *The Last Song* and in his other novels also.

By applying the existentialist's concept Sparks shows Ronnie Miller as an authentic, honest, genuine and aware teenage girl, who takes courage to discover her centre of being. Ronnie derives strength through her experience of struggle, which teaches her to live from inside fully and responsibly. And finally, she gets the

meaning of life. "The basic goal of existential theory is enabling individuals to accept their personal freedom and choice" (Corey 138).

There are many existentialists, among them the most prominent and well known existentialist who believes in individual human choice and freedom is French novelist and exponent of existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre emphasizes on human freedom. For him, "man is condemned to be free" (*Existentialism* 322). One has to choose the route of life which is determined by choice of self. He argues that existence and freedom go together. For Sartre, "freedom is existence and in it existence precedes essence" (66). When he talks about freedom he also states individual freedom relies upon the freedom of others.

Like most of the existentialists, Sartre focuses on freedom of choice. Everything in the human condition remains problematic. If the external world offers no consolation, then the people must be able to make a decisive choice in order to make authentic existence. He thinks that there is no fixed human nature or essence. So, an individual has to choose his or her being. Sartre emphasizes upon the subjectivity of an individual. Man has to make his own universe with the meaning of his own. Realizing the fact that there is no priori meaning of anything in the world. That is why, for an authentic living one must choose and make commitment of the talents and capabilities. And the authenticity of life demands it to make a free choice regardless of pre-established social values. Regarding the very difficulty in choosing freedom, Sartre writes:

We will free for freedom's sake, in and through particular circumstances. And in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends upon our own. Obviously, freedom as the definition of

a man doesn't depend upon others, but as soon as there is commitment, I'm obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as my own. I can't make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my own. ("Authenticity" 842)

Existence and struggle are related with each other. To exist in this alien world, there must be continuous struggle in daily life of every living being. So in this sense, Ronnie's struggle is right for her existence. Self realization and choice come only after the struggle. Without choice, everyone tries to walk in the air but does not stand on the real ground.

From the existential perspective, Nicholas Sparks's all novels are bold and heavily raise the issue of existence and the characters have been selected are in continuous struggle for themselves. And through their struggle they create their own choice and meaning in their individual life. Individual human choice and freedom are emphasized in alien and fragmented world. Through characters's struggle Sparks shows creating their peaceful heaven like life within themselves. Such as Ronnie Miller, in *The Last Song* shows her violent and rebellious activities, which are finally valuable and contextual to fight against problems and obstacles, through which she establishes her right for choice. Ronnie Miller at first hates her father, she even denies to talk with him but as she changes her choice, she becomes a mature girl and a successful daughter which is the credit of her struggle. She herself makes her future life bright getting success over difficulties and problems. In spite of her immature age, yet shows intellectual and mature behaviours and follows right way to decide her life. Fortunately, she does not compromise with anyone for her choice and finally wins her existence. It is unimaginable that how hard she becomes at first, not yet bad and harmful. In fact, her decisions are right because she finally makes her relation with

them mutual and also chooses to be a musical composer, their own shared passion.

So, Ronnie is a winner of her situation. Thus, her individual practice and struggle are sufficient to maintain balance among many things through which she gains self pride and saves her choosing right.

Though the struggle of human being is a mean to reach towards meaningful world through which throwing pains, problems and obstacles one becomes successful. So, struggle is only one mean to get one's aim of life that is his or her existence. Without struggle one remains alienated, frustrated and fragmented from the self. That is why, Ronnie is right in her existence whereas Sparks has fully presented his existential ideas. From all these evidences we become clear that Nicholas Sparks is an existential writer.

Divided into four chapters, the first chapter of this thesis includes the general introduction to the area of this study. In order to provide the cause of struggle, Ronnie's tendency to be independent and quest of freedom for choice is responsible for producing her existence. The second chapter outlines in brief, the existential perspective from past to present applying existential ideas; prominent existence, aesthetic existence especially from Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. The study is based on the assumption that Ronnie Miller's struggle for choice to her existence which compels her to struggle against her family, friends as well as with her boyfriend, Will. The third chapter deals with 'the struggle of Ronnie Miller for her choice'. It is also the result of other's hindrance in her individual life. And the final chapter presents finding of this research in brief.

Chapter II: Historical Background of Existentialism

Meaning of Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophy that opposes the doctrine which talks about the absolute value of human being. As the two great world wars, especially the second world war of nuclear holocaust proves that human rationality works no more. Then the western people begin to think about the irrational activities of human beings for their existence. The certainties, coherence and scientific reasoning that ruled before nineteenth century smashed into fragments. Then after anxiety, absurdity and uncertainty start to prevail everywhere in the fragmented world. And the philosophers of that time come to know the world totally absurd, incoherent, disintegrated, chaotic and disordered. These feelings of existence without justification become the main proposition of twentieth century. That widespread feeling of despair leads to the idea that people have to create their own values in the world where traditional values no longer reign. Existentialism draws attention to the risk, the void of human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world in which pain, suffering, frustration, alienation, sickness, contempt, malaise and death dominate.

Existentialism deals with the interpretation of human existence. The term "'existence' is derived from the Latin root ex 'out' + sistere from stare to 'to stand'" (Cuddon 316). Thus, existence means 'to stand out in the universe that is against us' and existentialism means 'pertaining to existence'. Philosophically, "Existentialism applies to a vision of the condition, existence of man, his/her place and function in the world and his/her relation or lack of it with God" (Cuddon 316). "It is a very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest for selfhood" (Ellmann and Feidelson 803). Jostein Gaarder in *Sophie's World* defines "Existentialism is a collective term for several philosophical currents that take man's existential situation as their point of departure" (455). So, existentialism

focuses man's condition and position. This philosophy is not a single philosophy. It includes several philosophical currents. Again, Gaarder says the view of Sartre:

Sartre says that 'existentialism is humanism'. By that he meant that existentialism starts from nothing but humanity itself. He might add that by the humanism he was referring to look a far bleaker view of human situation than the humanism we met in the renaissance . . . Sartre said that man's existence takes priority over whatever he might otherwise be. (456)

According to Sartre, existence does not mean the same as being alive. Plants and animals are also alive, they exist but human beings exist in a different way. Man is the only living creature that he is conscious of his own existence. Sartre defines "Existentialism as an attempt to continue life by creating a system in which one realizes 'human loneliness' and 'human subjectivity'" (*Existentialism* 10). In this way, the focus of existentialism is on 'being' and 'subjectivity' as opposed to 'logical reasoning' and 'objectivity'. It is based on individual experience rather than a abstract thought and knowledge which is foregrounded in this philosophy.

In the context, *The World Book Encyclopedia* describes "Existentialism is a set of philosophical beliefs that stress the existence of human being, an anxiety and depression which pervade each human life" (322). Thus, existentialism is less of an 'ism' than an attitude that expresses itself in a variety of ways. Because of the diversity of position associated with existentialism, no single definition is possible. It stresses on concrete individual human existence. Regarding its subjectivity, individual freedom and choice, Nietzsche explains thus:

Hence, there is no single existentialist philosophy and no single definition of the word can be given. However, it may be said that with man's concrete existence, his/her contingent nature, his/her personal freedom and his/her

consequent responsibility for what he/she does and makes himself/herself to be. (205)

Really, existentialists concern to the problem of human being. They focus on human's concrete existence, human's personal freedom and their responsibility for choice. In such a situation, the existential belief holds that one has to make choices and create oneself.

Existentialism is a revolt against traditional European philosophy which takes philosophy as a science. Traditional philosophers produced knowledge that was thought to be objective, universally true and certain. But the existentialists do not go with the traditional attempts to get the ultimate nature of the world and in abstract system of thought. Instead, they search for what it is like to be an individual human being in the world. They find human life as being basically a series of decisions that should be made with no way of knowing conclusively what the correct choices are. The individual must continually decide; what is right and what is wrong, which belief should accept and which belief should not accept and what to do and what not to do. "Yet there are no objective standards or rules to which a person can turn for answers to problems of choice because different standards supply conflicting advice" (*The World Book Encyclopedia* 437). Therefore, an the individual must decide which standard to accept and which one to reject.

In this way, the existentialists conclude that human choice is 'subjective' and individuals must make their choices without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules or traditions. Individuals make their choices and choose freely. So, they are completely responsible for their choices. In this regard, Macintyre argues, "Even if I do not choose, I have chosen not to choose" (149). The existentialists emphasize that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility. Since individuals are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom and therefore their responsibility trust upon them.

Existentialism focuses on the lack of meaning, purpose in life and solitude of human existence. Existentialism maintains that existence precedes essence. This implies that the human being has no essence, no essential self and is no more than what he or she is. He or she is only the sum of life in so far that he or she has created and achieved for himself or herself. We may use the following extract to clarify Sartre's view:

We are like actors who suddenly find themselves on stage in the middle of a performance, but without having a script, without knowing what to do say yes, without even knowing whether the play has an author at all and whether it is serious or a farce. We must personally make a decision to be something or other a villain or a hero, ridiculous or tragic. Or we can simply exit, immediately. But that is also choosing a role and that choice too is made without our ever knowing what the performance was about.

(Existentialism 444)

This is how we are plunged into existence. We exist, we find ourselves free because there are no prescriptions and we must decide for ourselves, define ourselves as the kind of person we are going to be. The essence thus follows existence.

The study of being which is concerned with ontology is the fundamental problem of existentialism. The existence of human being is the basic fact and it has no essence, which comes before his existence. In this way, 'human being as a being is nothing'. This nothingness and non-existence of an essence is the central source of freedom that human being faces in each and every moment. He has liberty to view of his situation and in decisions that make him solve his problems and live in the world happily.

The human being thrown in the world is condemned to be free. Sartre co-relates the freedom of human being, the responsibility and guilt of his actions. The human

being must not slip away from his responsibility. He needs to take decisions and assume responsibilities. There is no significance in this world. The human being can not find any purpose in life. So, his existence is only a contingent fact. His being does not emerge from necessity. Therefore, human being's role in the world is not predetermined or fixed. Every person is compelled to make a choice. Choice is the thing that human being must make. But the problem is that most often human being refuses to choose.

Basically, existence is of two types: authentic and inauthentic form of existence. The authentic being is rarely attained by human beings but they must strive to gain it. Things are only what they are but human being is what can be. Things are determined, fixed and rigid whereas human being is free because he can add essence in the course of his life and he is in a constant state of flux and able to comprehend his situation. The human being does not live in a predetermined world. The human being is free to realize his aims and dreams. He has only the destiny he forges for himself because in this world nothing happens out of necessity.

According to Sartre, 'existentialism' has developed into two major trends; 'theistic' and 'atheistic'. The 'theistic' or 'Christian' group includes Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel and 'atheistic existentialists' include Martin Heidegger and the French existentialists including himself.

Both these groups try to speak of human existence in a subjective sense but the relationship with God differs. One of them negates the existence of God and his relation with people and the world. This group says that human kind is God. All human functions depend upon his choice. Man is nothing else but what he makes himself. But another group, which conceives God as the source of inspiration and as the guiding principle, gives God the higher position in the world.

Existentialist philosophers are of the opinion that the metaphysical explanation of existence as given by traditional school of philosophy failed to produce satisfactory result. Being contrasts not only with knowing, but also with abstract concepts which can not fully capture what is individual and specific. They also maintain that the problem of being ought to take precedence in all philosophical inquiry. Existence is always particular, unique and individual. It is essential and fundamental. Being can not be made a topic of objective study. Being is revealed and felt by the human being through his own experience and his situation. So, it is maintained that existence is the first and central problem.

History of Existentialism

Existentialism is a distinct philosophical and literary movement which belongs to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The elements of existentialism can be found in the thought of Socrates, in the Bible, somehow in Shakespeare's dramas and in the work of many pre-modern philosophers and writers. In fact, existentialism goes back to men's pre-philosophical attempts to attain self awareness and understanding of existence of the world around us. The connection of being and thinking was Greek insight and it is this very insight that the modern existentialists are trying to reestablish. The ancient Greek thought was revolutionized by Socrates who shifted the attention of the study of philosophy from nature to man as the centre of existence. The problem of what man is in himself can be perceived in the Socratic imperative "know thyself" (*New Encyclopedia* 612). The main idea of existential theories were already common to religious thought like the idea of man being responsible for his own actions when existentialism was first introduced. The subjectivism of theologian St. Augustine during the 4th and 5th century exhorted "man not to go outside himself in the quest for truth. It is within him that truth abides" (*Sophie's World* 14). Like Socrates, Augustine also declares that truth is within man. That is why his going out to search truth is vain.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophy began with the Danish Christian thinker Kierkegaard in the first half of the 19th century. He was critical of Hegel's philosophical system which analyzed being or existence in an abstract and impersonal way. Kierkegaard advocates that the irrational is the real against Hegelianism. Gaarder in *Sophie's World* acknowledges that "Gaarder thought that both the idealism of the Romanticists and Hegel's Historicism had obscured the individual's responsibility for his own life" (377). Therefore, it is obvious that existentialism is opposite of idealism, abstract thinking and objectivity.

The development of modern existentialism was preceded by the works of the German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, who was immediately followed by the modern existentialists. German existentialism was represented by Martin Heidegger (1889-1979) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and French existentialism by Jean Paul Sartre (1905-80). The most forceful voices of existentialist thought were the works of the French existentialists; Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. But no one has contributed more to popularize of existentialism than Sartre.

Existentialists impose an essence on human beings, telling them what they are. This violates their absolute autonomy and freedom and makes it sound like they actually have something important in common. If we live our lives just because of the completely free and autonomous decision we make, this creates nothing that is common with other. If we adopt something that comes from someone else, this could give us a common basis to make a connected existence. As we make new decisions, the probability of our connection with other is going to decline. As far as we know, there are two forms of existentialism: Theistic Existentialism and Atheistic Existentialism.

Prominent Theistic Existentialists

The word 'Theistic' means a group of people who believe upon God or upon Christianity. This group includes the philosophers such as, Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel. They believe in religious mysticism. According to them, the anxiety of modern man can be entertained when one submits oneself to the will of God without the intervention of Christian doctrine and celestial church. They believe on God and take him as authentic shelter but discard the superstitious beliefs of any religion. They believe on God and His existence. Though, they view that God exists first and then the man exists.

The 19th century Danish philosopher and religious thinker Soren Kierkegaard, the first writer to call himself existentialist who reacts against the tradition by insisting that the highest God for the individual is to find his or her own unique vocation. Kierkegaard focuses on the individuality, subjectivity and freedom. For him, "God is truth and infinite subjectivity and subjectivity is truth" ("Choice" 824). For him, the individual is unique in nature and cannot know in general term. Kierkegaard says, "By choosing inward and personal character, one makes a leap of faith in God which he regards as an 'ethic religious choice'" (828). Thus, there are two options for the individual to choose: either he has to choose God or he has to reject God. For Kierkegaard, It is the individual human, who has to fix criteria by making choice. The Christian doctrine and its quest for objective truth have nothing to do with.

Kierkegaard believes in subjective truth. Search for objective truth is meaningless for him. There can not be any truth that is universal, rather it is individual. Instead of one single truth, there are many truths which are personal. Jostein Gaarder comments on the point and says:

According to Kierkegaard, rather than searching the truth with a capital 'T', it is more important to find the kind of truths that are meaningful to the individual's life. It is important to find 'the truth for me'. He thus sets the individual or each and every man, up against the 'system'. (379)

Kierkegaard's concept of 'subjective truth' has influenced the 20th century existentialists who always emphasize on subjectivity. Real existence, for him is possible only when one becomes aware of the paradoxical presence of God, Christianity and man. Truth and existence are always prior to thinking. That is why, true knowledge is always subjective. It is direct and immediate experience. The main theme of Kierkegaard's writing is 'truth is subjective'.

Karl Jaspers is a prominent founder of modern existentialism. He knows his own self and takes will as creative, free and original. He emphasizes on truth and reality which can speak even in despair, in suicide, in the passion towards darkness and in every form of negative determination. For him, disgrace and anxiety are the essential consequences of free will. He rejects the declared religious dogma but takes the authority of Churches as philosophical faith. He says, "The self needs to be creative, free and original and that truth is infinitely more than scientific correctness" (869).

Jaspers creates a balance between rational and irrational movement of self. The truth is that which poses a perpetual question without which we turn back into the more or less dirty stereotype of self satisfaction which is inadequately thought. The possible truth and reality can sheath in despair, anxiety, suicide and dark passion. The existential root is not destructive will but a salvation from nihilism because it preserves confidence through its movement.

Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher and religious thinker who rejects the idea of separate existence of human being. He held that our existence is always attached with other

men, nature and God. He emphasizes on the importance of the relation between self and other.

Gabriel Marcel is a French philosopher, dramatist and critic. He tries to fill the gap between subject and object, between what is in use and what is before us. He emphasizes upon the faith of God which helps man to overcome from anxiety and despair. According to the theistic opinion of Marcel, in faith there is not only the existence of other selves but beyond that we can realize the highest kind of existence that is called God. God is not demonstrable but it is revealed by the direct participation.

To sum up, the religious existentialists recommend us to go to the shelter of God to transcendent and to ensure the faithful existence. Mysticism is their reliable route to be happy. Like atheistic existentialist, they accept that angst or dread is inevitable for modern man because of his absurd condition. The individual is always in dread when he has to choose and he must choose because the freedom that he carries with him demands it. But this dread can be enjoyed by making correct choice, God. Thus, the dread with faith can become the pathfinder for their true existence, according to religious existentialists.

Prominent Atheistic Existentialists

When the science developed fully and human being started to think themselves as supreme being, the concept of 'atheistic existentialism' came. People tried to search their existence without the help of God or Christianity. In the same period atheistic thinkers became superior along with the Nietzsche's advocacy as 'Death of God'.

Sartre has divided existentialist thinkers into two groups: theistic and atheistic. Martin Heidegger and the French existentialists including himself fall in atheistic group. Obviously, Nietzsche is the forerunner and chief source of inspiration for them, who does not believe in the existence of God but believes in the continuous struggle of anti

Christianity. The atheistic existentialists reject the concept of God as an authentic shelter. Atheistic existentialists continue to create a system in which the individual is paradoxically free and condemn to choose a rugged path in life. Heroes choose an authentic existence whereas cowards choose inauthentic existence. In Nicholas Sparks's *The Last Song*, Ronnie Miller also creates a system in which she individually chooses the path of her life.

According to Sartre, we do not have any essence at birth, rather we are free. Non-human things instead having essence, for example a mobile is to be made, has its essence before its existence. But in the case of human beings, we create our own essence choosing and freely acting on our choices.

Friedrich Nietzsche is a German philosopher and best known radical critic of the western tradition. He advocates against traditional Christian thinking and views that 'God is Dead'. Gaarder in *Sophie's World* remarks, "According to Nietzsche, both Christianity and traditional philosophy had turned away from the real world and pointed towards heaven or the world of ideas" (455). Bertrand Russell divides Nietzsche's ethics into two categories: The first about Nietzsche's contempt for women and the second about his sharp critique on religion, speckled Christianity as 'slave morality' and held that religion provides no truth because God is dead and Christianity has become the shelter of weak and disable people that he hated. In his famous essay, "The Death of God and Antichrist", he says:

The Christian concept of God-God as a good of the sick, God as a spider, God as spirit-is one of the most corrupt conception of the divine even attained on earth. It may even represent the law-water mark in the descending development of divine types. God is degenerated into the contradiction of being. It is transfiguration and eternal yes! God the declaration of war against life, against nature and against the will to live. (912)

Even to think of God is to go against life and against the will to power. As there is absence of God in the world, the supermen are the Gods. The supermen are higher men who declare war over the masses of inferior men and are free from any restrictions imposed by the society. "Napoleon is Nietzsche's model superman to whom he said was a great man defeated by the petty ones" (Russell 729). For Nietzsche, God is not here and there also, there means in heaven. Even if he was there, he is dead now. That is why, there is no authority or God to determine our existence. Individual freedom is another focal point to him. An individual for him, does not accept any imposition from any power, rather he is the master of himself to decide for him.

Nietzsche emphasizes upon subjective intentions and activities of individual and rejects the objective knowledge and thought. If a man troubles his mind on what other will think about him, he will be no more a man but an instrument or an object. To clarify this view Nietzsche writes:

The objective man is an instrument, a precious, easily injured, easily clouded instrument for taking measurements. As a mirror, it is a work of art to be handled carefully and honored. But it is neither an aim nor a way out nor a way up, not a complementary human being through whom the rest of existence is justified, not a conclusion or content, a self-less man.

("Subjective Will" 817)

Thus, Nietzsche's stress upon the irrational and upon the individual who confronts existence heroically, without hypocrisy. If we live our life as a part of the 'herd', we do not develop our own beliefs or create our own values but simply adopt the prevailing beliefs and values of society. So, we must make our own choice which leads us toward freedom and good action.

Another German thinker, Martin Heidegger who publicly praised Hitler and Nazism, is a leading figure of atheistic existentialism. "He himself rejected to be classified as an existentialist" (Perry et al. 756). He distinguishes between 'beings' and 'Being'. The oblivion of 'Being' (individual) into the 'beings' (group) has made us lost in unreal existence (*Recollection* 841). To get back the lost Being, Heidegger suggests us to return back into the ground of metaphysics and find the roots of our existence (Ellmann and Feidelson 808). According to him, to consider individual only the representation of mass is the recurrent mistake of metaphysics. Man has to determine his own existence. He creates his own possibilities and makes choices and commitment (Perry et al. 756). This shows that man is what he tries to make himself.

Simone de Beauvoir is a French writer, feminist and a member of the intellectual fellowship of philosophers. She gives a literary transcription to existentialism. She is close to Sartre. She has an original and independent interpretation of existentialism, though not radically different from Sartre's. Unlike Sartre, she chooses to concentrate on the personal and moral aspects of life. She attempts to apply existentialism to feminism. Beauvoir treats existentialism from feminist point of view in her book, *The Second Sex* (1949).

She takes the position that the historical attitude of women has determined her own views. In this regard Audi States:

Her feminist masterpiece, *The Second Sex* relies heavily on the distinction, part existentialist and part Hegelian in inspiration, between a life of immanence or passive acceptance of the role into which one has been socialized and one of transcendence actively and freely testing one's possibilities with a view to redefine one's future. Historically women have been consigned to the sphere of immanence, says de Beauvoir, but in fact a

woman in the traditional sense is not something that one is made, without appeal but rather something that one becomes. (256)

Beauvoir denies the existence of basic 'female nature' or 'male nature'. It has been generally claimed that man has a transcending nature. So, he will seek meaning and direction outside the home. Woman is immanent which means she wishes to be where she is. She will therefore nurture her family, care for the environment and more homely things. For that Beauvoir does not agree with the way we perceive the sexes.

Albert Camus is a French journalist, novelist and a philosopher for whom the absurdity of life is the first concept. He brings meaning of absurdity and revolts in existentialism. As Olafson remarks, "Camus believes in fraternity and humanism rather than in nihilism" (12). As an atheistic existentialist, he is basically known for his view on absurdity of life, choice and meaningless work without accomplishing goal. Camus sees the condition of modern man similar to that of Corinthian king, Sisyphus. Sisyphus is the martyr and a teacher to all modern men, who because of his disobedience to God and his passion for life suffers eternal torture heroically. The condition of modern man is absurd and his search for any purpose is meaningless and futile.

In his famous book, *Rebel* Camus has said that man must rebel but rebellion must respect the limits. Rebellion is the common ground on which every man bases his first value. We rebel therefore we exist. Camus believes that revolt is one of the essential dimensions of mankind. But the nature of revolt has changed radically with the change of time. It is no longer the revolt of the slave against the master, not even the revolt of the poor against the rich. Rather it is a metaphysical revolt, the revolt of man against the condition of life and against the creation itself.

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 that is the meaning of existence. 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 stone from the hill that makes him happy because he is fully aware of his absurd task. Camus makes this explicit thus:

Suicide is a repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and depletes 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. ("Absurd Freedom" 846)

While thinking on the common condition of men, Camus also considers about human rights. The revolt against the injustice done upon men is as relevant as the revolt against the absurd condition. Sisyphus maintains and at the same time he revolts. The injustice done upon him by God has made him conscious of his absurd task. Camus is careful about the unjust practices being carried out by the totalitarian political system, such as Fascism and Nazism. Political revolt is a 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.

Camus's concept of absurdity and the absurd has a lot to do with existentialism. Along with him, Sartre and other existentialists regard absurdity as a central feature of human life. Since the world does not have any meaning, value or truth, the condition of modern man is also absurd; yet one has to continue it without feeling any sense of defeat and surrender. The living absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this

absurdity. Thus, Camus's philosophy is optimistic and humanistic. He focuses on struggle against absurdity for humanism and optimism as well as for human freedom for choice.

Jean Paul Sartre is the leading advocate of existentialism and French thinker. He was granted the Nobel prize for literature in 1964, but he made the existentialist choice of refusing it. As mentioned earlier, the word 'existence' is the state or fact of being real or living. Sartre thinks that there is no fixed human nature or essence. Though an individual has to choose his or her being. This choice brings with it responsibility. Sartre puts himself in the group of anti-religious existentialists and describes, "Existentialism as a means of facing the consequence of the world that is devoid of any absolute power like God" (*Existentialism* 239). Disclosing atheistic existentialism, Sartre evaluates:

It states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man or as Heidegger says, human reality. What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that first of all man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards defines himself. (15)

Sartre makes a contrast to a divine viewpoint on the world and on human nature with human viewpoint where there is no divine element. When God thought about creating the world, he conceived it first. He had in mind that what the world was going to be and what human nature was going to be. These are the essences of the world and of humanity, the things that will make them what they are. Then God created everything and gave existence to the essences. Thus to God, essence precedes existence. Though Sartre does not believe in God. There is no place for the essence of humanity to be before human existence. The essence is whatever we decide it is going to be. So from his point of view, "things are just the opposite of what they would be for the people who believed in God" (*Existentialism* 43). As

God does not exist, there are no essences. By essence, Sartre is talking about the predefined human nature. By the phrase 'existence precedes essence', Sartre means if there is no cosmic designer, there is no design or essence of human nature. Human existence or being differs from the being of objects. Because human being is self-conscious. This self-consciousness gives human being the opportunity to define itself and creates his or her self by making self-directed choices.

Like most of the existentialists, Sartre emphasizes upon the subjectivity of the individual. But the individual is not free from other beings. Though, Sartre is conscious of Cartesian cogito, "I think therefore I am" ("Common" 797). He also becomes aware of others that constitutes his whole being. Man has to make his own universe with a meaning of his own. Realizing the fact that there is no priori meaning of anything in the world. This project, according to Sartre can be done only through commitment. There is no reality except in action Sartre claims. To act authentically we must take our responsibility for our future. So, for an authentic living one must choose and make a commitment of the talents and capabilities. To make this point more clear Sartre mentions:

The existentialists say that the coward makes himself cowardice, the hero makes himself heroic and that there is always a possibility for the coward to give up his cowardice and for the hero to stop being a hero. What counts is the total commitment and it is not by a particular case or particular action that you are committed altogether. ("Commitment" 855)

Human being lives totally not by any single action or commitment but by the whole actions that he chooses to carry out in his life. The authenticity of life demands it to make a free choice, regardless of pre-established social values. To think about the social or moral duties is to indulge in the 'self-deception' or 'bad faith'. But Sartre does not isolate the freedom of an individual from the total commitment of the society. Sartre's philosophy is mysterious

because on the one hand, he gives total freedom to an individual and insists that he or she should not choose his or her freedom in accordance with the values or dogmas of society but on the other hand, he leaves the individual's freedom in relation with the freedom of his or her society. So that, the society's freedom directs him or her to act in certain ways.

Sartre, in his famous essay, "Why Write?" says, "The author writes in order to address himself to the freedom of readers and he requires it in order to make his work exist" (987). Thus, a book 'exists' by its dark dead letters and it comes to life when a reader comes and leads towards essence that is existence of black letters as a book. He says that we write or writers want to exist in the form of book and the readers precede them toward the essence that is existence. For him, writing is an enactment of freedom and choice. So, being a atheistic existentialist, he ignores the absolute power of Gods and Goddesses.

Sartre defines his ontology in terms of the opposition of being in itself and being for itself. In the course of inquiring the meaning of being, he makes such distinction. It is consciousness that distinguishes these two realities. Sartre himself clarifies the distinction between 'for itself' and 'in itself' in his *Existentialism and Human Emotions*:

Whatever exists and is conscious not only conscious of other things but also of itself is for itself. Whatever is real but is not conscious in self. Basically, human beings are for itself but it is more complicated elements of our bodies that are in itself, even though we are for itself in so far as we are conscious. (83)

Sartre says that a material thing is simply 'in itself' but mankind is 'for itself'. Man is the only living creature that is conscious of its own existence. The being of man is therefore not same as the being of things.

Existence and freedom are very closely related for Sartre. He can not imagine the existence without freedom of thoughts and actions. It is the choice of one's action that makes who one is. Our freedom of action is the ability to choose our action and to act on our choice as we figure.

Sartre also associates freedom for choice and responsibility by saying that they go hand in hand in existentialist's theory. In this regard he writes, "Because we are free and create our own individual essence through our actions. And we are also responsible for us who actually become" (244).

In this way, Sartre like other existentialists, stresses upon freedom of choice, action, personal responsibility, subjectivity, anguish and so on, giving rise to the view of existence precedes essence.

Link of Existential Theory with the Novel

As of the existential philosopher's concept, Ronnie Miller in the novel, *The Last Song* struggles for her individual existence. Here in this novel, Ronnie wants to create her own individual value in the world where traditional values of her parents and society do not facilitate her. Ronnie Miller is thrown in her world that means in her family and society where pain, suffering, frustration, misery and alienation dominate her. And she faces the hindrance of others in her private life. But Ronnie seems conscious and tries to continue her life by creating her own system of life. When she feels her own existence, her essence also increases as viewed by the Sartre, 'existence precedes essence'. Ronnie, being a teenage girl chooses her life out of external law, order and ethical rule.

Nicholas Sparks in his novel, *The Last Song* shows Ronnie Miller as an alienated and a frustrated teenage girl, who is condemned to choose her desires and actions by her parents and friends. She is compelled to struggle for her individual choice and freedom. Ronnie

thinks that her desires and choices are not predetermined. So, Ronnie time and again changes her choices and desires and equally she takes the responsibility of her actions, as Sartre says, "We are free to create our own individual essence through our actions" (*Existentialism and Human Emotions* 44). Ronnie finds her meaning of life in her free choice. Though she denies her parent's and friend's obstacle in her private life. Society's predetermined laws and orders have nothing to do with Ronnie. So, she confronts to create her own individual laws and orders. Here, Ronnie's absurdity in her life drags her towards struggle. So, to establish her humanism and optimism, Ronnie's struggle is necessary here as the existentialists view.

In this novel Ronnie revolts against the injustice done upon her by her parents and society as well as, which is well matched with the existential view of these philosophers. Through her own individual experience of struggle, Ronnie creates her own values. It does not matter that whether her choices are correct or not. As existential philosophers view, each individual is completely free for his or her choice and they themselves are responsible for their actions, Ronnie here does the same. So, she must decide for herself as the kind of person she is going to be. Most often, Ronnie feels free to realize her own aims and dreams which is similar to the existentialist's view.

Here, Ronnie Miller is thought to be a Nietzsche's superman who declares her revolt against her parents and even dares to fight against them to establish her self and meaning in life. Though, Ronnie's revolt against the condition of her life and moral laws to establish her freedom and choice is meaningful. Through which she establishes her existence and she becomes the master of her own life. From all these evidences we become conform that Ronnie is an existential heroine and all of her actions and activities are closely similar to the view of existentialist philosophers.

Chapter III: Struggle for Choice in Nicholas Sparks's *The Last Song*

Ronnie's Choice: Struggle for Existence

Nicholas Sparks has tried his best to create a heroine Ronnie Miller, her real way of struggle and her obtained individual freedom and choice in *The Last Song*. The struggle of Ronnie with her parents, friends and with her boyfriend, Will Blakelee is not only for her survival because she can live her life as usual but also the question of existence. Struggle for choice is the struggle for individual existence. The story of this novel is smoothly folded and finally the conflict is resolved by Ronnie's achieving the goal that is freedom for her individual choice. Ronnie Miller, the central character of this novel is trapped in the web of struggle. Ronnie's struggle with her parents and friends is the struggle of teenage girl with the change of time and her choice because it is the 21st century, where teenage girls want to change their choice with the flow of time. Ronnie is conscious about her existence who realizes that there is nobody to determine her choice. So, here Ronnie says, "No Lecture, No orders, No laying down the law" (93). Here Ronnie chooses struggle to obtain her individual choice in this alien world, which finally helps her to create her own meaning of life.

It is natural of the teenage girls to show their rebellious and violent activities toward their families and friends. Because it is the age of rapid physical and mental change, and their desire and choice are also changing but family always neglects their choice and desire. So, they feel hard to adopt within their family and seek the right way of struggle, through which they want to establish their existence. So, Ronnie says, "Why I can't spend the summer with my friends" (8). In fact, along with their physical development they have to face many emotional upheavals. As Ronnie Miller, in *The Last Song* faces the terrible things that are happening to her. And the pain of struggle makes Ronnie aware of the fact that to exist in the meaningless world one should be strong enough to fight against the miseries in life. So, she accepts suffering as the ultimate reality of life.

Thematically clear, this novel raises the important issue of individual human choice of teenage girl oppressed by parents, friends and other social forces. The novel, *The Last Song* insists on concrete individual existence and freedom for choice through struggle. Here Steve says, "Ronnie knows right from wrong" (20). Ronnie as a heroine of this novel tries to lead her life forward easily by being familiar with the naked reality of the painful world. Whoever they are, Ronnie struggles with them for her individual choice or existence.

Nicholas Sparks's novel can be interpreted as his effort to produce a great work of art. There are different themes of existential struggle that means struggle for choice. Among these 'alienation', 'frustration' and 'hindrance of others in individual choice' are most important. The existentialists are in the opinion that human being's personal relationships are poisoned by facing alienation from any other. Ronnie Miller is also alienated and chooses to stay out of home separated from her parents, Steve and Kim. So, she says, "I just didn't want to talk to him, okay? And I don't want to have to spend my summer here, either" (40). She chooses not to be close with her parents at first but finally chooses to be good and mature daughter for them. Instead of being faithful and obedient daughter to her parents, she always revolts against them which is for her individual freedom and choice. It is because of her parents who always want her to obey their rule and permission but they do not understand her age and choice. So, here she is compelled to do so hard struggle for her freedom and choice. Her parent's behaviours with her brings a type of alienation and frustration in the life of Ronnie. So, Ronnie talks with herself:

She slouching in the front seat of the car, wonders why on earth her mom and dad hated her so much. She felt like a prisoner being transferred to a rural penitentiary. Why she was here visiting her dad she thought that, so enveloped in misery. She hates her father's piano and swore she would

never play again. She supposed she could live with a visit. But to stay until late August? Pretty much the entire summer? That was banishment. (05)

Alienation is the theme which Hegel started for the modern world on many levels and in many subtle forms. The alienation and frustration lie on those who do not identify with the institutions of their society. Here, Ronnie Miller is alienated even within her family because she finds her life in the family meaningless and gets nothing.

'Existence' is the another theme for existential struggle of Sartre, who is known as the leading figure of existentialism, believes that 'existence precedes essence'. Existence has the primacy over essence which is the basic existential stand point. Like Sartre, Campton's *Encyclopedia* defines existentialism:

Flora, animals and stones all exist. But people exist in different way.

Individuals are unique and able to think about themselves. And the whole world in which they find themselves and make choices. They can choose because they are free and the choices they make establish the future into which they project themselves. (371)

It shows that human being is conscious subject rather than a thing to be predicted or manipulated; they exist as conscious being and not in accordance with any definition, essence, generalization or system. Existentialists say we are nothing else but our own conscious existence.

We can measure Sparks's heroine in the same existential parameter. Ronnie is conscious individual, unique in her decision and totally committed in her choice. She shows her rebellious and violent yet, courageous activities to her parents and friends. She tries to create value of her life by being rebellious individual. But the lack of patience and disobedience to her parents sometimes give rise to her insanity and problem which is the

cause of her teenage mentality. She seems devoted in her choice and does not compromise with anyone but takes responsibility for her mistake herself. So, here Ronnie revolts against her mother:

RONNIE. Why again are you making us do this?

MOTHER. We've already been through this. You need to spend time with your dad. He misses you.

RONNIE. But why all summer? Couldn't it just be for a couple of weeks?

MOTHER. You need more than a couple of weeks together. You haven't seen him in three years.

RONNIE. That's not my fault. He is the one who left. I don't want to see or talk to him. (8)

Here, Ronnie tries her best to create her own values of life and thinks that individual existence is the main point for a person. So, she does not choose to devote herself to her parents. And she wants to establish her true subjectivity, freedom and choice. Ronnie denies to obey blindly by forgetting her own desire and choice. So, here she chooses to struggle to gain self awareness and meaning of her life. In such of her immaturity, she takes courage to discover her centre of being and learns how to live from inside. As Sartre says, "Through our self-awareness we choose our actions and therefore, we can partially create our own destinies" (*Existentialism* 16).

'Frustration' is the another theme of existential struggle. It is a sense of tiredness, fatigueness and a generalized uneasiness. Frustration is also a sense of defeated feeling of person, where a person feels himself or herself beaten by others. It is the underlying, all pervasive universal condition of human existence. When there the frustration comes in life,

then human being starts to search the existence. Frustration is common to all teenage girls.

The same theme can be found in Ronnie's dialogue with her father, Steve:

RONNIE. Would you just stop with that?

STEVE. (Stopped playing abruptly), what?

RONNIE. The music you're playing! You don't think I recognize those pieces? I

know what you're doing and I already told you I'm not going to play. Then,

why do you keep trying to get me to change my mind? It makes me feel sick.

Don't you get that? I hate the piano. I hate that I had to play every single

day! And, I hate that I even have to see the damn thing anymore! (94)

Ronnie focuses on her individual relationship with her family members. Alienation, frustration and hindrance of others in her private life rule her fragmented mind. She feels that she must create her own values of life in the family. As asserted by Nietzsche in *The Transvaluation of Values*, Ronnie too struggles against suffering. She elevates parent's weakness at the expense of her individual choice and freedom, along with her sanity. Slowly she eschews suffering and promotes honesty and loyalty towards parents and friends as well as. She is not weak, therefore struggles against the unfamiliar environment of family and society.

Sartre says, "Consciousness makes us aware of the possibility of choosing what we will be, which is the condition of human freedom" ("Being and Nothingness" 116). To perform an action a person must be able to stand back from participation in the world of existing things and should contemplate what does not exist. The choice of action is also the choice of oneself. In choosing oneself one does not choose to exist. Existence is given and one has to exist in order to choose. From this analysis Sartre derives a famous slogan of existentialism: existence precedes and commands essence. He maintains that there is no

reason for choosing as one does. The choice is unjustified and groundless, which is the perpetual human reality.

Existential philosophy emphasizes on the individual choice and freedom. This philosophy shades light on the miserable plight of human being in the alien world. It equally shades light on the freedom of choice and human freedom at large. It is a set of philosophical ideas that stresses the existence of human being. It suggests one major theme: The stress on concrete individual human existence and consequently on subjectivity, individual freedom and choice. Here, Ronnie Miller also applies the same view when she protests against her parents in the novel.

'Hindrance of others in one's private life' is also the theme of existential struggle. Hindrance is a mentality of human beings to hurt and ruin other's life. When human individual feels other's hindrance in his or her life, he or she takes it as a obstacle and wants to tackle it. As he or she confronts to get victory over it, he or she should struggle hard. Here in the novel, *The Last Song* Ronnie feels beaten by her own parents. So, she chooses to establish her individual existence or meaning of life. She never likes other's obstacle in her private life, whoever they are. Though, she says her father, "If you ever send the police to bring me home again I won't just refuse to play the piano. I won't just go home. I'll never ever speak to you again. And if you don't believe my, try me. I have already gone three years without talking to you and it was the easiest thing I've ever done" (64).

The existentialists search for what it is like to be an individual human being in the world and point out that every individual is only a limited being. We are consciously choosing and creating ourselves because it is not possible for us to stay without choice. In this context Macintyre says, "Even if I do not choose I have chosen not to choose" (149). Even when we do not choose, we still choose by not choosing. As we know from the text, the antagonist, Marcus always wants to romance with Ronnie but she vehemently denies to

choose him as her boyfriend, which is her good decision. When Blaze puts illegal CDs in Ronnie's bag, "Ronnie didn't try to run because she knew she's done nothing wrong; when the ponytailed man asked for her bag she saw no reason not to give it to him" (96). But "Ronnie wasn't sure what to do next: she didn't want to go to the beach but she didn't want to go home, either" (96). In fact, Ronnie almost and always seems determinant in her commitment.

'Identity' is the another theme of Ronnie's struggle. She wants to identify herself by her own values. She makes herself different from others and asks the question; Who am I? What is my relation with my parents and friends? According to Sartre, there seems something problematic in the relationship between individual and social forces. The question of identity is central: basically, Who am I? Sartre opinions that we are free to define ourselves. In this novel, Ronnie also does not like to follow her father's law and order but wants to identify self by her unique action.

Nicholas Sparks himself also struggles to identify as an existential writer of the 21st century. By his distinct subject matter of teenage girl's relationship with their family and friends, and their struggle for choice, he has become a unique existential writer. Like Sartre's view, his heroine or protagonist, Ronnie struggles with absurdities and meaninglessness of her life. She is just a teenage girl whereas she controls her emotion and struggles differently and uniquely rather than any other mature women. And finally, becomes a mature and successful teenage girl.

Really, it is so hard for teenage girls to struggle for their 'ownself' because they have their own inborn problems but here, Ronnie dares to struggle against all these problems. Teenage girls are just in the process of being mature. Though they have to fight or struggle against their own physical and mental development. There are so many problems in this age but most often, teenage girls seem weak to bearup it. All the girls of this age have their own

desires and choices, even though they do not dare to fulfill their choices and desires. But it is not in the case of Ronnie. Because she struggles hard for her desire and choice. Even if she has to face her emotional upheaval, she does not get fearful of it. And chooses to go ahead in her commitment.

Struggle is the most important theme in Nicholas Sparks's novels. For him, struggle is only one means to get success over everything. The scenes of struggle often occur in his novels. Ronnie thinks, "how could her dad her own flesh and blood, do something like this" (57). Ronnie sees her father as the obstacle on her way. Though she thinks and talks with herself, "I was almost an adult, I hadn't been doing anything wrong, and it wasn't even midnight. What was the problem? Why did he have to turn this into something far bigger than it was?" (57). Ronnie with her frustrated mind makes a commitment to fight against the miseries and pains that appear in her life. In fact, for her miserable plight her parents have great role. That is the reason she seems determinant in her action.

Individual freedom is absolute but one can not escape from responsibility and anguish, since human individual isn't determined by anything else, but the responsibility of his/her being and deeds rest on his/her shoulders. People's responsibility is very great because in making any kind of choice, they are choosing for the whole world (Sartre 16-17). Every possible choice is open to an individual but mere passive choice can't help his/her existence rather there should be deep involvement and commitment.

As Ronnie's father and mother can not understand her age, she also does not try to understand them. Even in her difficult situation, Ronnie does not lose her hope because she knows the fact that 'situation always goes against human's desire'. So, she does hard work to get it back. She thinks, if we perform our duty honestly and faithfully then the future will be automatically bright as we think it should be. Though, to get success over life we must swear or to make promise to get victory over problems and should be ready to face miseries and

pains. Then only the life will be meaningful. It is the real way of living. The life without purpose, value and meaning is literally senseless, hopeless, empty and meaningless.

Through the character Ronnie, Sparks focuses on the teenage girl's individual choice and freedom, who shares the assumption for struggle against frustration in the alien world. Here in this novel, *The Last Song* Ronnie seems immature yet, she shows mature decision in her life. The more she gets trouble, the more she becomes habitual to bear up it. And her experience of struggle makes her stronger to struggle more. Most often, she struggles with her pain and trouble caused by her own age and driven by others. And finally, she establishes her own world of her own desire.

The Struggle of Ronnie Miller with Self

In spite of her age, Ronnie is aware of the absurdity and meaninglessness of the world and she struggles against it because she knows the human predicament in this God given universe. She invests her knowledge to gain her freedom and choice, equally she increases her patience to struggle against the pain and suffering. After her long troubled experience, she knows to struggle hard through which finally she gets favour of all these. Her life becomes miserable and painful when her parents divorce. Then after she feels her life getting absurd. She gets nothing except pain, suffering and broken feeling but she does not lose her enduring hope to get success over all these.

Nicholas Sparks's *The Last Song* presents the struggle of protagonist, Ronnie Miller for her individual choice. In such of her small age, she has to struggle in different relations with difficult situation. The continuous struggle of Ronnie Miller with patience and courage, is not only for her survival rather it is for her individual choice and freedom. Even if she is small and immature in her age, she does not think herself less strong than any other mature woman. The continuous endeavor against pain and suffering makes her an independent teenage girl.

Being a teenage girl, she faces many mental and physical ups and downs. It is really hard for her because she has to struggle with self to become mature. Teenage is a critical age in itself. Most often, teenage girls should struggle with their own emotional upheaval. They feel so hard to control their emotions and if they became failure to control their physical and mental desires, they can not get success over their life. It is a turning phase of their life. Though if they choosed right path of their life, they become successful and mature individual human being but if they could not understand their life they become failure of their own life. Teenage being a critical period one should be conscious about it.

Ronnie time and again faces one after another problem. As she tries hard to control her emotion, she becomes sad and also promises to never commit such type of mistake again. But there appears one after another problem in her life unintentionally. Ronnie has to take the responsibility of other's crime also which is not acceptable for her. Though she feels others as obstacle in her private life, who intentionally commit mistake and put their crime on her shoulders. Here in this novel, *The Last Song* Ronnie takes responsibility of only the crime committed by herself but she vehemently rejects hindrance of others in her individual life. And she herself thinks capable to handle her problems. So, she seems determinant here in these lines:

I don't want you to be here. You're about to start a whole new chapter of your life, and I can't take that away from you. Because, it's not your problem. He's my dad, not yours, and that will never change. And I don't want to think about what you might be giving up, in addition to everything else that's going on my life. (325)

Here word has the ring of truth, even if Will thinks she was wrong. Ronnie never denies her effort to attempt. She wants to solve her problem herself. Ronnie whatever does and chooses to do is for her individual freedom. She equally becomes responsible for acts she

performs. Because she wants to be free throughout her life. Though she individually takes decision of what to do and what not to do. So, she says here:

I'm out of here, okay? I'm calling Mom and I'm going home. Please don't make me stay. I don't like it here. I don't like the people here. I don't fit in here. I don't belong here. I want to go home. I'm sorry. And it's not you, okay? If you call, I'll talk to you. And you can come and see me in New York and we'll spend time together, okay? (151)

As it is teenager's nature that they want to do whatever they like. They always seem inconstant in their choice and show almost dynamic behaviours and activities. The same thing happens in the life of Ronnie Miller. Individual always wants to seek his or her self within 'self'. Though individual is free to do what he or she wants to do. Almost and always she tries her best to create her meaning of life, for which she struggles hard and through which finally she gets her meaningful life or her own meaningful world.

For Ronnie Miller, what counts is the struggle itself. It does not have much to do with victory or defeat. Struggle itself gives meaning to life. Ronnie believes that meaning of life is life itself. No matter how truth turns out to be. She is always hopeful to establish her ownself, for which she struggles hard. So, she shows her decisive action of her past life:

He taught me to play from the time I was able to walk. I played for hours, seven days a week for years. We even did some composing together. It's what we shared, you know? It was something for just the two of us, and when he moved out of the apartment . . . I felt like he hadn't only betrayed the family. I feel like he'd betrayed me personally, and I was just so angry about all of it that I swore I'd never play or write another song again. (220)

Here, we know that for a person like Ronnie Miller, struggle is more important than his or her relationship with parents. Ronnie stands above the moral law and rejects the position of daughter in this alien world. So, she denies to accept her duty of being an obedient daughter to her parents. She even dares to go and speak against her parents. Her parents become failure to understand their daughter and her desire. Without caring her age and desire, they behave with her as of a child, which makes Ronnie more violent and rebellious toward them. Because of her parent's weakness to guide her in right way, she is compelled to struggle so hard with self. In this novel, Ronnie Miller seems ready to lose or break her relationship with her parents but does not hesitate to go against them. So, here Ronnie dares to scarify herself for her choice.

French novelist, playwright and exponent of existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre acclaims the freedom and responsibility of the individual human being. He is of the opinion that the 'forlorn' individual under the threat of 'anguish' and 'despair' learns to confront the existence in the world without God. He agrees existence precedes essence. Preferring existence rather than essence of an individual, Sartre writes; "first of all man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards defines himself" (*Existentialism* 115). According to Sartre, existence comes first. Each man circumscribed by his historical and environmental situation is the author of his own life.

Ronnie is a teenage girl who most often fights against the meaninglessness and nothingness in her own life. The struggle is the tension between living human life and living animal like life. For her, teenage girls like her must enable to endure the pain of their age. By seeing the struggle of Ronnie, Steve says, "couldn't tell whether she was angry or scared or sad. And he was certain that whatever was going on, she wanted to handle it alone" (212). This shows that Ronnie changes her desire and choice time and again. She seems determinant to bear up her all these pains and sufferings one by one there appear in her life.

Freedom is basic to existentialist understanding of human nature because it underlies our ability to choose. People are free to choose among alternatives and therefore have a large role in shaping their destinies. With freedom we must also accept the responsibility for directing our lives. In this context Engler says, "Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand" ("Human Freedom" 04). There are large range of choices available to each of us and we are free to choose and therefore, responsible for our choices and actions. We must create and live with our own individual freedom. So Ronnie does here, "Yet losing him she seemed unbearable. He was the one she loved, the one she would always love, and as he leaned to kiss her, she gave herself over to him. While he held her close, she ran her hands over his shoulders and back, feeling the strength in his arms. And now, she suddenly knew she had no other choice" (267).

Nicholas Sparks's characters are crushed by frustrating activities of other, nevertheless the fact remains that they flourish positive values which prevents them from nihilism. In the mortal universe only moral values the individual creates are left behind. Though Ronnie's action and struggle are purposeful because she is conscious about what she is choosing. In the essay, "Why Write?" Sartre says, "nothing can force the author to believe that his reader will use his freedom; nothing can force the reader to believe that the author has used his. Both of them make a free decision" (03). Here Sartre says, "The freedom of writing implies the freedom of citizen. Writing is though a certain way of wanting freedom" (03). Though for Sartre, "man exists in his unique sense means that he is open for the future which he determines by his choice and action" (02). There are both right and wrong ways of choosing, what to choose depends upon a person who chooses.

Nicholas Sparks's character, Ronnie Miller certainly has her own problems because she is a teenage girl and she wants to create her own individual universe with her own values. She faces many problems raised by her age. She is drown in her own physical and

mental emotion. Time and again her decisions and choices are changing. As we know from her behaviour that "I shouldn't have said those awful things to you" (382). Here, Ronnie feels a storm of conflicting emotions; desire regret, longing, fear, grief and love. But as she chooses to struggle against all these, she finally becomes a successful and mature teenage girl, who creates her own values of life.

The Struggle of Ronnie Miller with her Parents

The plot of this novel moves around the periphery of Ronnie's family. Ronnie as a heroine of the novel, *The Last Song* who rebels against her parents for their getting divorce and their hindrance on her private life. Being a teenage girl, she cannot bear their divorce and father's negligence of them, who goes to live in North Carolina leaving their shared apartment in New York. After then, she becomes a rebellious and violent clubber and chooses to live her life in her own desire. She has also her own private problems as other teenagers have. Almost and always she feels beaten by her father. So, she promises with herself to never talk to him again and even never play his piano again. Then after her real struggle starts here now. Her parents do not try to understand her feelings. Though Ronnie protests against her father's activities towards her:

RONNIE. You sent the cops after me?

STEVE. (Said nothing, but his silence was enough.)

RONNIE. Why would you do something like that? How could you do something like that?

STEVE. (Said nothing)

RONNIE: What is it? You didn't want me to have fun? You didn't trust me? You didn't get the fact that I don't want to be here?"

STEVE: I know you don't want to be here.

RONNIE: So you decide you want to ruin my life, too? (58-59)

Ronnie's father does not understand her pain and suffering. It is being a critical period, parents should be conscious about their son's or daughter's desire and choice. But here, Ronnie's father, Steve seems irresponsible for his daughter's career. Though he is failure in the role of a father, who neglects his daughter's choice and freedom. So, Ronnie struggles against him and denies his suggestions and guidelines.

Ronnie Miller is hopeful to create her own meaning of life. To solve the problems she has prayed with God. The prayer to God is her self determinant. "She prayed for the strength she needed and for the ability to stay positive in his presence. She knew he needed the daughter she'd recently become" (347). Camus like many other philosophers believes that the living in the absurd world depends upon the maximum struggle against the absurdity. Camus evaluates the condition of modern human individual as an insane crying inside a closed glass vassel. In the novel too, Ronnie struggles against her parents as Camus argues that transcendence of the absurd is achieved through an intense struggle but not through the passive acceptance of situation. Though Ronnie says here, "Who cares! She shouted. That's not the point! You're not going to monitor every single person I ever talk to, so don't even try" (59). Ronnie does not like to share her problems with her father, Steve. She even tries to remain away from him. So, she reveals her anger with Steve, "I hate being here! Don't you get that? And I hate you, too! (59).

Ronnie spends most of her time with her friends and does not care to her father and mother. Most often, she feels she has beaten by her own parents. Though she goes against her parent's desire and revolts against them. She shows her teenage behaviours with them, which is praiseworthy in the sense that she chooses right path of the struggle. Here in the story of this novel, she denies to share her last night's event with her father:

STEVE. Sweetheart? Can we talk about last night?

RONNIE. I really don't have time to talk right now.

STEVE. I just want to know where you were all day?

RONNIE. Nowhere. It's not important.

STEVE. It is important.

RONNIE. No, Dad. It isn't. And, I've got things to do, okay? It's none of your business. (93)

Ronnie talks about her individual existence. She admits that all the things depend upon a person who concerns with it. So, she thinks that there is no compulsion to share her last night's event with her father. Whatever a person does is his or her own choice. And every individual has his or her own right to choose. Whether he or she wants to share it with other or to keep it secret that depends upon a person's individual choice and freedom. We must choose our ethics, must define ourselves and create ourselves. Sartre thinks of man's freedom as a kind of condemnation. Though he writes, "he did not create himself yet, in other respect is free because once thrown in the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (*Existentialism* 23).

Ronnie wants to choose death rather than to lose her choice and freedom. Really, 'in our own choice we can find ourselves' which is 'one's pride'. Ronnie struggles against the chaotic environment of the family. So, most of the time there is verbal dispute and again silence pervades between them. Ronnie always wants to be independent. So, she says, "I needed something to do and besides I want to pay for the lawyer myself. It's not like my dad has a lot of money. And, I have to feed the otters" (255). Again Ronnie's younger brother, Jonah tells with their father, Steve about her recent activities in the family:

Ronnie doesn't go to the church as she used to go. She locks herself in her room and refuses to come out, but as soon as we leave, she goes over to starbucks to hangout with her friends. She even didn't read any of the letters you sent her, Dad. And, She won't play the piano anymore, either. Ronnie and mother fight like cats and dogs. (22-23)

Here Ronnie's mother does not understand her real cause of suffering and anger with them. So, she seems as an unsuccessful mother, who can not understand her own child's feelings and pains. But Ronnie is right in her behaviours because it is teenager's common problem, who always want to choose freely without other's obstacle. Whatever they think and desire is for their own self. Though to show such type of rebellious and violent activities is teenager's common nature which parents should bear up. And parents should guide them in rightway.

In Sartre's world, freedom plays central role. People are found to be characterized by an awesome degree of liberty. In the novel, *The Last Song* Ronnie also applies the same concept of individual freedom and choice. Though, here in this novel she chooses to reject her mother's proposal to return back to New York:

KIM. Have you finished packing yet?

RONNIE. I'm not going back to New York with you.

KIM. Don't be ridiculous. Of course, you're coming home.

RONNIE I'm not going back to New York (She had never been more serious in her life than that) I'm staying and I'm not going to discuss it. I'm eighteen now and you can't force me to go back with you. I'm an adult and I can do what I want. (339)

Struggle always brings meaning of life. The contrast between meaningful life and dead like living makes the sense of living. When a person's 'self' is liberated, he or she is free from the worldly affairs. He or she becomes the unique one since his or her self is elevated. He or she is at a higher state of life. Then, he or she is not an ordinary individual but a mature human individual. Here, Ronnie understands the importance of struggle and confronts heroically to face the problems and obstacles on her way. And she makes a commitment to fight against the absurdity and frustration:

Ronnie, time and again changes her choice because she is a girl of teenage. She does not seem constant and it is being a age of gradual change, she shows her rebellious activities. Sometimes she becomes sad and sometimes becomes happy. Ronnie also feels regret for her past mistake, "I was so mean to him. I quit the piano! I blamed him for everything, and I didn't say more than a few words to him for three years! Three years! And I can't get those years back" (321). Ronnie really shows her mature behaviour because she takes the responsibility of her committed mistake. So, she says, "Maybe if I hadn't been so angry, he might not have gotten sick. Maybe I caused that extra-stress that did all this. Maybe it was me! Let me go! I can handle this alone" (321). As Ronnie regularly engages in struggle, she learns the lesson of getting success.

In Nicholas Sparks's novel, *The Last Song* Ronnie always seems one step ahead to deal the problem that comes to her, even if she is small in her age. It is a universal truth that unless a person does not become rebellious towards other, he or she can not gain his or her 'self'. That can be cleared with the saying, 'No pain No gain'. To establish her 'selfness' Ronnie struggles here with her mother, Kim:

KIM. This isn't your responsibility.

RONNIE. Then whose is it? Who's going to take care of him? Just because you're still mad at him doesn't mean that I have to be mad at him, okay? I know what he did and I'm sorry he hurt you, but this is about my dad. He's

sick and he needs my help, and I'm going to be here for him. I don't care that he had an affair, I don't care that he left us. But I do care about him. It wasn't Dad who had the affair, was it? It was you. Was it with Brain? Were you cheating on Dad with Brain? I don't care what happened between the two of you, I don't care what happened in the past. But I'm not leaving my dad, and you can't make me. (339-40)

Ronnie is not defeated despite the fact that she has been beaten by her parents. Her mother shows her irresponsible behaviour and she becomes a failure in her wife's role also. Because she denies to help her own husband, Steve in spite of his difficult situation. Through her regret Ronnie realizes her insane activities. In this context Sartre opines that, "we have freedom to choose but there is commitment and responsibility (*Existentialism 673*). The same matter seems practically useful in the life of Ronnie Miller. Most often, she seems serious in her father's decreased health condition and she also tries her best to develop her bearing or enduring capacity. So, in such of her terrible situation, she becomes calm and finally becomes a mature daughter to her parents by fulfilling her duties and responsibilities.

The struggle of Ronnie Miller with her parents in the family is a crucial point in the novel. Ronnie what counts is the struggle itself. As she stands above the moral law, she wants to create her meaning of life by herself. Though time and again she faces the obstacle on the way but she does not hesitate to go ahead in her goal. In spite of her immaturity, she becomes successful to create her own world with her own values. In fact, all this credit goes to her struggle and her enduring capacity. Finally, Ronnie gets favour of all through her struggle.

The Struggle of Ronnie Miller with her Friends and Boyfriend

Nicholas Sparks's heroine of his novel, *The Last Song* spends most of her time with her friends and boyfriend, Will. But she gets trouble with them. Time and again her friends want to cheat her, even if Ronnie loves and respects to all them. She wants to share everything with her friends but most often they ignore and discourage her. As it is teenager's

common nature that they want to engage with their friend's activities. Here her friends do not understand her real suffering. Either it is her age or behaviour, she always gets problems with them. Wherever she goes and whoever she befriends with, give her trouble. Though it is her own compulsion to struggle against them, without which she can not gain her freedom and choice. Her friends always humiliate and avoid her presence. In North Carolina, she befriends with beach volleyball play group including; Marcus, Blaze, Ashley, Scott and Will but none of them help her as her close friend at first. But they continuously create problem for her.

Most often, Ronnie tries to avoid their obstacles in her private life. So, here Ronnie denies Marcus's proposal to drink a beer, who wants to romance with her in her intoxicated condition, "I don't drink, because it makes people act stupid. I'm not in the mood. And take your hand off me. I just don't want to, okay?" (90). As we know from the text, the antagonist, Marcus wants to ruin her life by acting himself as her boyfriend but Ronnie strongly denies to choose him even as her friend. Ronnie always gets trouble and pain with him. She struggles hard to win over him. The same matter can be found in her conversation with Marcus:

RONNIE. If what?

MARCUS. I was thinking we could be . . . friends.

He closed the gap between them. The streets were quiet. No one else around, no cars in the intersection.

RONNIE. She realized he was close enough to touch her, and she took a sudden step backward. And says, Just stay away from me. (120)

Ronnie seems to be strong enough to defend herself with Marcus. Marcus always tries to win her heart, for what he does everything. Whether it is right or wrong, it does not matter for Ronnie. Ronnie is already aware about him. She tries to remain away from him. Her struggle against him is a mean to get relief from him. Whatever she chooses and does it for her own individual life, which makes her able to get solace.

Ronnie Miller gets trouble from everyone. As a teenage girl, she engages or falls in love with Will but more or less she feels bitter in her relationship with Will also. When she gets the information from Ashley about Will, she chooses to break-up her relation with Will and she even chooses to leave the North Carolina for the New York as soon as possible, even if she does not leave. So, here she quarrels with Will:

WILL. C'mon, Ronnie! Wait! I just want to know what happened! Why'd you leave?

RONNIE. Go away! She shouted back.

WILL. What did I do?

RONNIE. I'm not going to play your game!

WILL. What game? What are you talking about?

RONNIE. I'm not stupid. And I don't have anything to say to you. (153)

Here, Ronnie's dialogue with her boyfriend, Will clearly hints her concentrated personal aspects of life and her emphasis on the self. She is in the effort at improving her understanding of 'self' and 'other' that means the world by the mean of careful description of experience. She supports her individual action and freedom of choice. Because she keeps herself at the centre of existence and does not fear to go against her relationship. She tries to choose herself by defining as 'one'. Though, she even becomes ready to break-up her relationship with her boyfriend, Will.

Even if her other friends like to drink, curse and gossip, she wants to remain away from all these things. The most important thing is that Ronnie always teaches the lesson of struggle to Will saying, "In the end, you should always do the right thing, even if it's hard. I know that might not help you and that the right thing isn't always so easy to figure out". (234) Nicholas Sparks shows the importance of struggle through the heroine of his novel, Ronnie.

She always confronts heroically to face the problems and obstacles on the way. She also makes a commitment to fight against the absurdity and frustration.

Ronnie falls in love with Will and they share their feelings to each other but in such of her relation with Will, she denies his closeness with her. She struggles hard to move away from him. So, she says, "No! I don't forgive you!" (216). Time and again she gets trouble with Marcus and Blaze but she seems strong enough to defend herself from them. Even if Ronnie agrees to kissing, she does not like to do romance with her boyfriend, Will. She represses her sexual passion and does not let men to take advantage of her. Here, the dominating voice of Ronnie against Blaze clarifies Ronnie's victory over her friends through her struggle. Ronnie orally dominates here:

RONNIE. I wasn't trying to pick up Marcus that night. He came on to me, and I don't know why he said what he did, other than because he wanted to make you jealous. I'm sure you don't believe me, but I want to let you know I never would have done something like that to you. I'm not that kind of person.

BLAZE. I know.

RONNIE. Then why did you put those things in my bag? (250)

Here, Ronnie has been arrested for her non-committed shoplifting case. It is a cheating of Blaze who wants to take revenge with Ronnie. Blaze thinks that Ronnie has been taking her boyfriend, Marcus away from her. In fact, Marcus is madly devoted in Ronnie's beauty and he wants to take advantage of her age but Ronnie always controls her emotion. As far as possible, Ronnie follows different ways of struggle.

Sartre frequently talks about freedom, he supposes freedom as a curse. For him, "man is condemned to be free" (56). Because one has to choose the route of life and he is responsible for his actions in life. So, life is determined by choice a person makes. He argues

that "existence and freedom go together" (66). Like most of the existentialists, Sartre focuses on the freedom of choice and personal responsibility, conveying that there is no absolute power to control a man. Everything in the human condition remains problematic, the existential hero in failure justifies his struggle if not compensates. If the external world offers no consolation, then the people must be able to make a decisive choice in order to make authentic existence.

Ronnie as a teenage girl, feels really difficult to adjust with her friends. As she starts her love affair with Will, there also appears obstacle on her way. Here in her love, she has to struggle with Ashley, Will's ex-girlfriend. So, here Ronnie revolts with Ashley saying, "Hey, Ashley, I'm going to tell you something, okay? And I want you to pay attention, so I'm going to be perfectly clear. I'm getting sick and tired of listening to your crap, so If you ever try to talk to me again, I'm going to punch those bleached teeth right out of your mouth. Got it?" (265). Ronnie is fedup with other's hindrance in her private life. It is really hard for her to control her emotion. Because she is just a teenage girl, who has her own desire and choice. But in her choice her friends want to burn fire, which is unacceptable for her. Though she sometimes threatens them to attack them physically. Here Blaze says the truth, "Marcus caused the fire at the church" (362).

Of course, Marcus is the real antagonist of Ronnie. Regularly he commits crime and wants to put it on Ronnie's head. He tries his best to ruin the life of Ronnie but his exercise finally goes to vain. Because his bad exercise makes Ronnie more stronger to endure the problems and teaches her the lesson of struggle. The more he tries to trouble Ronnie, the more Ronnie becomes careful about her problems. And goes ahead in her destination. A man should be involved in life, as a result he would be able to leave an impression on it and outside of that there is nothing. Man projects himself to the distant goals and values. His life is a movement to become something that he is not. So, here Sartre says, "The best way to conceive the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God" ("Desire to be God" 63).

Heidegger declares that the individual has to face the absolute problem of being, that is no one has to decide, one's own existence creates one's potentiality and makes premises. Sartre praises the freedom of an individual human being. He focuses on the freedom of choice, commitment and responsibility (*Existentialism* 673). Sartre claims that there is no absolute reality at all but an action.

Being a teenage girl, Ronnie is a rebellious and violent heroine of the Nicholas Sparks's novel, *The Last Song*. She does not devote herself with others. She always struggles for her own individual choice and freedom. Through her struggle, she establishes herself as a unique individual who creates her own meaning of life. So, Ronnie Miller is a representative of all teenage girls struggling against the absurdity of their own life.

Choice and Struggle

Choice and struggle are related terms with each other. To fulfill choice in this alien world, there must be continuous struggle in daily life of human beings. Ronnie Miller also does the hard struggle for herself. It does not have much to do with victory or defeat, struggle itself gives meaning to life.

Ronnie believes that the meaning of life is life itself. No matter, how appalling the truth turns out to be. She is always hopeful to create her meaning of life, for what she bears up all her miseries and pains. Most often, Ronnie is forced to show her violent and rebellious activities. As it is teenager's common problem that they change their choice and desire again and again. So does Ronnie here in this novel. That is the teenager's fact in the world today. Ronnie Miller seems little optimistic in the beginning but through struggle she understands her life. And she becomes fully optimistic in the late phase of her teenage life. So, "she always prays with God for her father's betterment while he is in his deathbed. And she also decides herself to read her father's Bible book to search the meaning of life her father has gained, equally she wants to collect the memories" (322). As she honours Steve's wishes, "She prayed for the strength she needed to help her dad; she prayed for the ability to stay

positive in his presence. She knew he needed her laughter and he needed the daughter she'd recently become. The first thing she wanted after bringing him home from the hospital was to take him to see the stained glass window" (347).

Ronnie Miller has done many great works that are really admirable. She is never tired and never fears to go ahead in her goal, even though she is immature in her age. Through struggle she does have succeed in every role of her life. She does not speak with her father due to her own choice. Then she promises to never play his piano, is also her own choice. Due to her age, Ronnie faces different critical situations such as, not supporting of parents to her, no help from her friends and her own emotional upheaval. Ronnie faces one after another problem and trouble in her such an immature and critical age, even though Ronnie is not defeated by anyone in her life. So, she thinks, "No matter what happened, she knew that her future lay in music and one way or another, she would find her way back to that passion" (387). And Ronnie says, "I think I'm going to audition at Juilliard" (381). Ronnie equally becomes responsible for her mistakes. So, she says, "I shouldn't have said those awful things to you" (382).

Ronnie does not try to escape from the pain and suffering that come to her life but struggles hard to get victory over it. So, she says, "Let me go! I can handle this alone" (321). She reveals her greatness in the continuous struggle. As an actual human being can not be destroyed by any trouble, Ronnie Miller also is not being defeated by any trouble.

Ronnie is fully hopeful that she will be able to establish her 'self' and will fulfill her desire and choice. Ronnie is always optimistic with her choice as Sisyphus, a famous hero of *Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus. However, Sisyphus carries the stone on the top of the mountain but it rolls down again and again. But he come to be success in one day. So, the philosophy of Camus is always optimistic and humanistic. In the same way, Ronnie Miller is also optimistic where she struggles hard to establish her own choice and freedom.

As Sisyphus challenges to God, Ronnie also challenges the moral laws and values, and she wants to create her own values of life. She does not choose to live her life as her parents desire and she does not surrender with them. Because she knows the fact that the struggle always brings fruitful life and when a person's 'self' is liberated, he or she is free from the worldly affairs. Here, Ronnie also becomes the noble one since her 'self' is elevated. So, she is at a higher state of life.

Finally, Sparks's heroine, Ronnie gets success in her choice and freedom. Because she realizes that struggle should be the continuous process, through which a teenage girl can establish her right for her own choice. Ronnie Miller, who bears her suffering as it comes is almost a hopeful symbol of the dignity of teenage girls. Though here Ronnie says, "In the end, you should always do the right thing, even if it's hard. I know that might not help you and that the right thing isn't always so easy to figure out" (234). It is the lesson of struggle for all teenage girls.

'Individual choice' can be established only after the struggle. Without 'individual choice' one cannot get the self-realization and one tries to walk in the air but does not stand on the real ground. Ronnie Miller accepts that pains and miseries are the core need of teenage girls. To get success over pains and miseries one should struggle hard. Other normal teenage girls frighten with troubles and problems but the protagonist of this novel is never defeated by troubles and problems. Ronnie views that choice leads towards struggle and the struggle takes forward choice. Thus, the essence of life to establish choice is the struggle.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

Ronnie Miller an Independent Teenage Girl

This thesis has attempted to trace out the struggle of teenage girl, Ronnie Miller for her individual choice and freedom. Through his novel, *The Last Song* Nicholas Sparks explores the painful and miserable condition of teenage girls, especially of the Ronnie Miller. Ronnie is a representative teenage girl, who struggles within the family with her parents and out of family with her friends violently and rebelliously. At first there in her life pain, suffering, meaninglessness, alienation and frustration prevail. But she always tries her best to get rid of all these things. As she increases her optimism, she gets victory over these things and she gets her 'self'. Ronnie does not compromise with anyone for her choice, whoever they are; either her parents or her friends.

In this novel, Ronnie places herself at the centre of being and makes a commitment to fulfill her choice and desire through the struggle. She always seems optimistic in her life. Like Sisyphus, who is happy even after his punishment, Ronnie Miller feels herself beaten by her parents. So, she goes against their desire and choice. Ronnie is an independent and mature teenage girl, despite her young age. Noone tries to understand her problems, though she struggles for her existence. All her attempt is struggle for choice.

Ronnie's parents want her to obey their laws and orders. Almost and always they want to see her as a faithful and obedient daughter to them. But Ronnie thinks just opposite of their hope that she feels their hindrance in her private life. So that, she goes against them and chooses her own way of life. Whatever she does and chooses to do is for her individuality. Ronnie becomes rebellious and violent towards her parents because her parents do not try to understand her choice and desire. Her parents become failure in their role, who do not understand her age and neglect her pain and suffering. Here, her parents

seem irresponsible towards their daughter. To create meaning in her meaningless life, she struggles hard and believes on it. And her struggle makes her more powerful and strong, through which she gets her maturity. Ronnie is a very courageous, rebellious and hopeful teenage girl, which are the true virtues of an existential human being.

Nicholas Sparks has depicted the theme of isolated rebellious and violent teenage girl, who must struggle hard to create meaning in the fragmented and indifferent family and society as well as. Ronnie Miller appears to be a strong teenage girl of action having extraordinary qualities like Nietzschean superman. The supermen are the people of restless energy, who enjoy living the life of adventure and struggle. Ronnie Miller stands as a rebel and protester of the hindrance and obstacle like Nietzsche who challenged the contemporary religious world by declaring that 'God is dead'.

This novel has emphasized on teenage girl's individual choice and self-realization. Human soul achieves truth only by self-realization. And through self-realization, she becomes aware of her choice and freedom. Ronnie feels she has been beaten by her parents. That is why, she does not like to share her problems with them rather she hates them. Ronnie herself is able to recognize and solve the problems and obstacles that come to her. This makes Ronnie aware about the struggle and she becomes determinant in her action. The struggle of Ronnie Miller with her parents and friends reveals her inner existential willpower to survive independently.

Alienation, frustration and hindrance of others in Ronnie's private life are the existential problem. The protagonist of this novel understands the connection between individual human choice and responsibility. Being a teenage girl, Ronnie has to face many mental and physical ups and downs, and emotional turmoil. Ronnie gets many mental as well as physical tortures, which are the problems in her existence.

In this way, the whole novel is basically about the struggle for choice of a teenage girl, Ronnie Miller amid frustration, alienation, meaninglessness, nothingness, absurdity and other's hindrance. In spite of all these absurdities, Ronnie is successful or winner of her problems. Ronnie Miller struggles hard to obtain her individual choice and freedom. She is self confined and faces the terrible things that are happening to her. Thematically, this novel raises the complex issue of teenage girl's choice and freedom hindered by familial as well as outward forces. The continuous endeavor against pain and suffering makes Ronnie an independent teenage girl. Ronnie Miller has to struggle hard with 'self' also to become mature and to establish her own meaning of life. In spite of her small age, she is able to control her emotion which is praiseworthy.

Being a girl of critical age or period, she has many choices and desires which are conditional and appropriate for her age. Ronnie feels a storm of conflicting emotions; desire, regret, longing, fear, grief and love are associated with her. But as she chooses to struggle against all these emotions, she finally becomes able to create her own values of life.

Because of their own problems teenage girls are violent and rebellious by their nature. And if they do not get support from their parents and friends, certainly they will be more violent and rebellious. The same thing happen in the life of Ronnie Miller. She does not compromise with anyone for her choice and freedom but goes ahead in her destination. Ronnie has a strong commitment to fulfill her choice and to establish her individual values of life.

Finally, Ronnie Miller fulfills her duties and responsibilities as of mature daughter to her parents. She chooses to be extra-mild to her father, Steve. And at the end of this novel, Ronnie devotes herself in her father's desire or choice. She fulfills her father's desire by reconstructing stained glass window in the church, completing his last song and finally by

admitting in the Juilliard she starts to compose her music. Here, Ronnie gets her own choice in her father's choice and desire.

Ronnie takes responsibility for her mistake too. For her, individual choice is more important than her relation. Though she seems ready even to breakup her relation with her parents and friends. Her individual choice is more important than the life itself. So, she goes against everything for her choice. Without hard struggle, it is really impossible for her to establish her choice and freedom. So, to create meaningful life her struggle is necessary here. The struggle is only one way of life to achieve one's destination or goal. Without struggle teenage girls cannot gain their choice and freedom.

Ronnie is right in her choice and desire. And her behaviours and activities are also meaningful and suitable to her situation. All the activities she shows here in this novel are acceptable for her age. Whereas Nicholas Sparks has presented Ronnie Miller through his novel, *The Last Song* as a role model of all teenage girls.

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