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Existential Problem in Saul Bellow's *The Victim*

– Tila Ram Sapkota

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Existential Problem in Saul Bellow's *The Victim*

by

Tila Ram Sapkota

University Campus

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Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

This thesis entitled "**Existential Problem in Saul Bellow's *The Victim***" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Tila Ram Sapkota has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head
Central Department of English

Date: _____

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Tila Ram Sapkota

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Abstract

In *The Victim* Saul Bellow attempts to trace out existential problem of the protagonist Asa Leventhal and other characters around him. Though he is alienated from family members and victimized in highly competitive and crowded bourgeoisie city, he is struggling for the dignity for mankind. Asa has sacrificed himself in many causes for the sake of humanity. He saves himself from nihilism and leads his path towards existentialism. This novel is a beautiful allegory in which human life is conceived an endless struggle. Bellow presents the situation of existential problem of present capitalistic form of society where humanity and morality no more work. The protagonist of the novel is engaged in constant struggle against meaninglessness, nothingness, emptiness, failure, frustration, alienation, absurdity and so on so as to create meaning and purpose of his existence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Saul Bellow and American Literary Tradition of Mid-twentieth Century

The entire political worldview is reflected in the art and literature after two great world wars. Existentialist theme is dominant in the writing of this era. We can see the representative character and their characteristics who suffer from the existential problem, in Saul Bellows writings.

When the Japanese attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, they did not simply precipitate America into its second world war of the century, they also transformed its economy, redirected its national purpose, and set it on its role as the great post-war superpower. The Depression era ended as military spending boosted the national economy, and the United States emerged from the war as a nation of growing material affluence. The war united Americans against the totalitarian cause, and the left wing and Marxist attitudes of the 1930s died along with the social causes that had produced them. The United States emerged in 1945 as the war's one outright victor: it was the nation that had initiated the nuclear age, when it dropped atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and it now had to assume a world role in the tense era to follow.

The age of affluence was also an age of materialism and conformity. And America's new world role implicated her in the deep disorders and conflicts of the modern world; this time the nation could not, as in 1918, withdraw within her own continent and mind her own business. When the hot war ended, a cold one began, and American's international role was in part ideological; she represented individualistic capitalist democracy against the other major twentieth century ideology, collective communism. With whatever misgivings, Americans were then in the historical

mainstream, and this sense of entering the bloodied arena of late modern history was soon to show itself in American fiction.

The American novel itself took on a new world role as the conflict ended and the age of American hegemony began. American writers were internationally read and increasingly studied as the great examples of the late modern literature. In all the western cultures there was an obvious sense of fracture, as writers adopted to a sense of profound historical change. American writers, asked to express the entry of America into the center of the new world history, were also asked to support an age of materialist conformity. American writing was now deprived of its energies, too bereft of moral, mythological, or artistic certainty to create a serious art. Many American writers who had very good reason to think of themselves as survivor of war and holocaust, and whose entire intellectual heritage had been transformed by the dark wartime events of 1941-5. Jewish intellectuals had often followed the radical path into and out of communism, had been preoccupied by European intellectual life and its modernist arts. It was they who could speak most reliably for the six million victims of the old world order, see the dangers of totalitarianism in politics and art, express the argument for a new humanism.

By the Fifties, a significant new group of Jewish- American novelists had appeared. Their work drew on the Yiddish tradition and on Russian and European modernism-especially that part of it concerned with the dismantling of the self by an intolerable modern history. In Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, and Philip Roth, one can see the transformation of the older tradition of Jewish-American writing. Now the theme was no longer the immigrant victim struggling for place and recognition in the New World, rather that of the Jew as modern victim forced by history into existential self-definition, a definition that was not solely religious,

political, or ethnic. The Jew now became the type of modern man, the metropolitan at home, though expert in the indignities, rather than the amenities, of urban life. Their writings became complex explorations of the individual's place as beneficiary or exile in the contemporary world, and are largely conducted as metaphysical enquiries, speculations on the predicament of disoriented modern man in a world of urban anonymity, behavioral indifference, and the totalitarian massing of social force. Humanism was the aim, but it was hard to forge in the face of disjunctive modern experience. The desire was to link the history of single individuals with the larger processes of society, but those individuals were also seen as alienated, victimized, dislocated, materially satisfied but spiritually damaged, conformist yet anomic, rational but anarchic. The mood of the characters of such writers went beyond the rural innocence and epicality of earlier American writing, exploring the dark modernity of post-industrial society in an attempt to face Bellow's question: How should a good man live, what ought he to do?

Universal experience is Saul Bellow's dominant emphasis in his writings. He has certainly reserved a place for himself in his literary world. His novels helped re-define American literature after World War II. He is a novelist who rejects the orthodox of modernism. Bellow's work is distinguished by his humanistic concern for characters and his clear-sighted analysis of contemporary society. His early novels are praised for breaking away from the harshness of naturalism and his later novels for their thought-provoking expansiveness.

Among post World War II American novels, his are the ones that best present the problems of the modern urban dweller in search for identity, desire of home and sense of belongingness. His heroes are rootless, or rooted to a past that no longer seems relevant to the present. Surrounded by friends and acquaintances who adjust

and who learn to conform, they seek to be individuals in a world that appears to have little room for individuality. Convinced of the need for freedom, they do not know where to seek it except on paths that lead often to loneliness and despair. Yet there is also an affirmation in their lives. Hemmed in all sides by society, they continue to assert the worth and dignity of the individual human spirit.

The first of the American Jewish writers to capture of large number of reader without departing from an American Jewish idiom, Bellow has been instrumental in preparing a way for other writers like Bernard Malamud, I.B. Singer and Philip Roth. But his achievement has been impressive enough in its own sight; he has developed a marvelously supple style of grotesque realism modulated by an ever-presented sense of irony. However, the very success of his fiction have drawn attention away from the intense moral seriousness of his concerns.

His central concerns were freedom and love: freedom as the interplay between what is given and what is made in the life of man, and love as the interplay between man's identity and his completion in others. Insistently, he asked what it meant to be human in the contemporary world; insistently, he sought the "axial lines of existence". His urban, Jewish characters recalled their heritage at the same time that they embodied the perplexities of the Jew in America; their comic and painful quests adduced dignity to all men.

Bellow's early novels offered an alternative to reductive naturalism by adopting a confessional style and reasserting the centrality of character. His anti-heroes are beset by all of the well known alienating forces of the modern world, but they nevertheless manage to maintain a life affirming dignity. Their courage derives, in part, from their refusal to abandon the idea that life's essential value is not

qualifiable. Their intuitive refusal to accept alienation complements their humanistic belief that men are responsible for one another.

Bellow recounts how he was convinced that the horrors of the twentieth century has sickened and killed humanistic beliefs with their deadly radiation. Bellow is an optimist, despite the prevailing climate of pessimism and despair. His novels are built on these dichotomies and paradoxes and written in a language that is almost always vibrant and resourceful. His Jewish heritage and his several divorces are shared by many of his characters . Bellow himself said that his Jewish heritage is a gift, a piece of good fortune with which one does not quarrel, but he also insisted that he is not a "Jewish" writer but an American writer who happens to be a Jew.

From 1960 to 1962 Bellow co-edited the literary magazine *The Nobel Savage*, and in 1962 he was appointed professor on the Committee of Social Thought at University of Chicago. In addition to his thirteen novels, he published many short stories, plays and essays. He edited many books and translated many from Yiddish into English written by his fellow Nobel Prize winner I.B. Singer.

The son of Russian Jews who had settled in Canada in 1913, Bellow was born in Lachine, Quebec on June 10, 1915. After the family moved to Chicago in 1924, he was educated in the public schools and attended the University of Chicago before graduating from Northwestern University in 1937 with a degree in Anthropology and Sociology. Later he supported himself by writing biographical sketches for the Work Projects Administration and teaching at Pestalozzi-Froebel Teacher's college.

During World War II, Bellow, served in the merchant marine and then worked for Encyclopedia Britannica. After the war he settled in New York and worked in publishing until a Guggenheim Fellowship allowed him to spend two years travelling in Europe. On his return, he accepted a series of teaching appointments at

New York University, Princeton University, Bard College and the University of Minnesota.

Bellow left Chicago in 1993 tired of passing the houses of his dead friends, as he said, and settled in Boston, where he began teaching at Boston University. Bellow had three sons from his first four marriages. Since all of his earlier wives were divorced in 1989, he married Janis Freedman. They had one daughter born in 1999. Bellow died on April 5, 2005 at his home in Brookline, Mass at the age of ninety.

Bellow's achievement is to have imposed upon the contending-forces in his fiction-life and death, optimism and despair, reason and feeling, self and brotherhood-an idea of order. He has always known that the novelist begins at a great death of distraction and disorder. Out of chaos of experience and the tensions of conflicting claims, he has sought to create a coherent and compelling vision of experience. But it has been a tentative endeavor marked by a sad, sane, comic skepticism about the power of the artist or intellectual to affect the world in any way. The emphasis upon the self, optimism, and feeling must be understood in relation to Bellow's attitude toward death. He believes that one can not understand life until one comes to terms with death. Such kind of themes in his writing help him to win the Noble Prize for literature in 1976. He has also won "The Pulitzer prize" (1976), "National Book Awards for three times" (1954, 1965, 1971), "Jewish Heritage Award" (1968), "Friends of Literature Award" (1960), "James L. Don Award" (1964) and dozens of national and international awards and prizes. Bellow's *The Victim* portrays manners of the American taste in which there lies war, holocaust and decline of the west as the very thematic heart of the book where we can see the existential problem of the protagonist and other characters.

Literature Review on Bellow's *The Victim*

Views differ from person to person regarding a work of literature as different people have different ideas within themselves. That's why numerous critics have diversely commented upon Saul Bellow's *The Victim* since its publication in 1947. Much has been said and written about the manifestation of humanism and existential problems in his novel. Bellow, through his protagonist asks the meaning of being human being in the contemporary world. He deals with human existence through the urban Jewish characters, who recalled their place for their dignities that is concerned with humanity of every individual. Earl Rovit affirms the human existence in Bellow's novel *The Victim*. He locates human being as bad to be less than human and more than human:

. . . But to isolate the problem is not the same as discovering solutions. The research for the 'exactly human' is a direct plunge into the dark heart of our contemporary mysteries. After all it may be that only the desire and the need to know are themselves human. (145)

Here, Rovit has attempted to define the habitable limits for contemporary men who are always in research of their place as modern men.

Catherine Copper finds the feeling of oppression within the protagonist as the nature of modern people. She does not deny the necessity of struggle within him/herself and to the society. She says: "In *The Victim* the ailments come mainly from within the protagonist [. . .]. The society is generally unhelpful in helping people to overcome their ailments and that the will to recover must come from within" (5). It is an instance in modern literature of characters who display some kinds of nervous ailment. Paranoia or a feeling of oppression is also common in the very novel. Cooper, in different context, has commented that the character's afflictions are not

perceived as being entirely their own fault but to a certain extent caused by events in their lives or the society around them. She has described the novel *The Victim* as the novel which has something to do with psychological treatment. She takes paranoia as mental and psychological aspect of human life and writes:

In *The Victim*, Saul Bellow's character Asa Leventhal is a good example of someone suffering from paranoia. As a Jew in Post-War America he is in a minority and he constantly feels that people dislike him or are even persecuting him because of his Jewishness. The situation is exacerbated by the arrival of Kirby Albee, a figure from Leventhal's past who blames him for the loss of his job three years earlier. (2)

Though we can find some references of Jewishness, paranoid feelings and feelings of cultural marginality but one can not introduce Bellow's writing without noting his Judaism or better yet, his Jewishness and its influence on his collective writing. Unlike the ethnic fiction that dominates today's literary ground, Bellow always stressed his Americanness over his Jewishness; only as he grew older did it gain a more prominent position in his fiction. The universal experience is always his dominant emphasis.

Frederick J. Hoffman, a distinguished critic, does not agree with the view of that *The Victim* is the novel of anti-semitism. Rather, he takes it as a kind of moral decay:

The Victim is a superbly through examination of the complexities of moral guilt. That Asa Leventhal's accuser (and victim) happens to invoke anti-semites is a part of the complex but only a part; in other words, the novel is not about anti-semitism, but rather examines Jewish

insecurity and the Jewish attitude towards complicity in anti-semitic behaviour. (86)

Nevertheless, Hoffman in different context, accepts the hostile conflict between native and Jewish people. "In Leventhal's case, the sense of 'being a Jew' is a heightened by Albee's New England gentile nature; so that they are easily and naturally examine, each capable of saying or doing the incriminating thing" (86).

The Jewish writer's books are dominated by a sense of the absurd situation of the self, the individual's need to withdraw from a history which is silent and it makes invisible and it is beyond his or her capacity to control. Malcolm Bradbury commented *The Victim* as a story of modern man who lived in the metropolitan home who is expert in the indignities, rather the amenities, of urban life. He writes:

His novels have always been rich in political and philosophical ideas, and touched with the heritage of modernism. But above all his work displays a deep Jewish humanism—a concern to affirm mankind, to explore moral and metaphysical questions, to confront the characteristic Jewish themes of victimization and alienation, and of the need in a material world for transcendental perceptions. (169)

The Victim is little or more concerned with drinking. Here, indulging in drinking has come as the product of capitalistic form of society, where individualism, and materialism are the prime concerns. Thomas B Gilmore Writes:

The Victim is concerned at several levels with drinking. On the surface it presents an interesting clash of culturally stereotyped attitudes about alcohol and drunkenness. These, however, soon appear to be inadequate to account for either Albee's drinking or Leventhal's reactions to it. The problem or concept of alcoholism seems at most

only a starting point for a deeper exploration. Albee comes to be seen in his full humanity, and Leventhal to a great extent overcomes his stereotyped attitudes toward alcoholic drinking and his fears of the failure it emblemizes by entering the being of the fallen derelict.

(394)

The Jewish matter in Saul Bellow's fiction has always seemed more personal and immediate. In many respects Bellow's progress has been a matter of integrating such material with the fabric of American literature. Saul Bellow's compelling inspiration is existential struggle and crisis both as a personal and symbolic experience and as a continuing condition of mankind. Some critics have dealt Bellow's *The Victim* with alienation as existential problem. A large number of others found the protagonist as a representative of suffering humanity who finds no purpose in his plan and no prize for his efforts. Stanford Pinsker writes about *The Victim* with hopeful note, "Leventhal too feels this keen sense of loneliness. Thus, when Albee finally does make his presence known, Leventhal is so hungry for human contact that even trouble is preferable to tedium" (124).

Many critics comment the novel from different perspectives but a distinguished scholar and critic Malcolm Bradbury affirms the concept of alienation and existence of the protagonist as the product of capitalistic form of society. He says:

Leventhal is the lonely man in the crowded city, the man for whom the presence of so many other people is a permanent threat, as it must seem to anyone in the highly competitive petty bourgeois world to which he belongs. He has 'got away with it', found a niche, but it is an unsafe one and he is aware that he can easily fall again. This feeling of

insecurity creates the mood of high tension in which the book is conducted. (120)

In this way, Bradbury finds Below's alienated character struggling for the adjustment in the present capitalistic society. Thus Saul Bellow's *The Victim* gives a kind of outline of fragmented life in the bourgeois society. In capitalistic society, people are dominated by the motive of money making attitude by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of their life. Human life under the capitalism has nothing to do with creative power and only potential quality is harmonized, so capitalistic society has created disharmony. Capitalists always try to create illusion and false truths from which the modern characters are suffering.

Bellow's early existentialist novel *The Victim* depicts the fragmented relations of Jewish Americans who are consumed by feelings of inadequacy that they become totally inadequate- a failure where they lose everything. *The Victim* is a model example which presents a character Asa Laventhal, to whom unlucky things inevitably happen. Embracing the view that the suffering in which an individual must create meaning in an unknowable, chaotic and seemingly empty universe. Here, the researcher has attempted to apply the theory of existentialism as a tool in following chapter.

II. EXISTENTIALISM

Background

Existentialism is the modern system of belief that started from the latest movement of European thought opposing the doctrine that viewed human beings as manifestation of an absolute value. As the two great world wars, especially the Second World War of nuclear holocaust, proved that human rationality no more worked, the terrified people of the western world began to think over the role and activities of individual irrational in the existence of human beings. Thrown into an incoherent, disordered and chaotic universe in which individual's destinies were obstructed and turned apart by the Second World War, they could not believe in old concept like unity, rationality, morality, value and even in Christianity. The artists and writers saw the world totally absurd, incoherent, disintegrated, chaotic and disordered; not governed by the laws of providence, but by pure change and pure chance and contingency. This feeling of an existence without justification became the main proposition of twentieth-century. Man is free of routines and conventions, who is laid bare and face to face to his own destiny.

The widespread feeling of despair and separation from the established order led to the idea that people have to create their own values in a 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 dominates. The dark portrait of such a sickness could be found even in the optimistic and confident nineteenth century in the works of Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard and Fredric Nietzsche.

Meaning of Existentialism

Twentieth century existentialist thinking was long before conceived by thinkers like Soren Kierkegaard, Fedor Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century, though the term "existentialism" itself was coined by Jean-Paul Sartre (Solomon 141-45). The term "existence" comes from the Latin root ex "out" + sistere from Sartre "to stand" (Cuddon 316). Thus, existence means to stand out in the universe that is against us and existentialism means "pertaining to existence". Now the term existentialism is used to describe "a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world", and his relationship 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). Jean Paul Sartre defines existentialism as an attempt to make life persist by creating a system in which one realizes human loneliness and "human subjectivity" (Existentialism 10). Thus, the focus of existentialism is an "being" and "subjectivity" as opposed to logical reasoning and "objectivity". This is based on individual experience rather than abstract thought and knowledge that is foregrounded in this philosophy. In this context Lavine defines: "Existentialism is a set of philosophical ideals that stress the existence of the human being, the anxiety and depression which pervade each human life" (322). Existentialism is less of an "ism" than an attitude that expresses itself in a variety of ways. Because of the diversity of positions associated with existentialism, no single strict definition is possible. However, it suggests a major theme that is the stress on concrete individual human existence. Regarding its subjectivity, individual freedom and choice, Rayan explains existentialism:

Hence there is no single existentialist philosophy, and no single definition of the word can be given. However, it may be said that with

the existentialist the problem of man is central and that they stress man's concrete existence, his contingent nature, his personal freedom, and his consequent responsibility for what he does and makes himself to be. (639)

In this way, Rayan focuses on freedom to choose and responsible that is for himself only. Moreover, he finds man as a finite being and shows the human limitations.

Existentialists really concern to the problem of man. They focus on man's concrete existence, his personal freedom and his responsibility for his choice.

Existentialism is a revolt against traditional European Philosophy which takes philosophy as a science. Traditional philosophers procured knowledge that would be implies that the human being has no essence, no essential self, and is no more than what he is. He is only the sum of life in so far that he has created and achieved for himself. 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 the name of the play or what role they are playing, without knowing what to do or say-yes, without even knowing whether the play has an author at all-whether it is serious or a force. 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. (Skirbek and Gilje, 444)

This is how we are plunged into existence. We exist, we find ourselves here free, because there are not 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 the non-existence of an essence is the central source of the freedom that the human being faces in each and every moment. He has liberty in view of his situation and in decision that make him solve his problems and live in the world happily.

The human being thrown in the world is concerned to be free. He must take this freedom of being, the responsibility and guilt of his actions. Each action negates the other possible course of action and their consequence; so the objective, universally true, and certain. The existentialist do not go with the traditional attempts to get the ultimate nature of the world in abstract system of thought. Instead, they reach for what it is like to be an individual human being in the world. They point out the fact that every individual even the philosopher seeking absolute knowledge is only a human being. So, every individual has to confront important and difficult decisions with only limited knowledge and time to make his decisions. This human condition resides at the core of the existentialists. They find human life as being basically a series of decision that should be made with no way of knowing conclusively what the correct choices are. The individual must continually decide what is true from false, what is right from wrong; which belief signify to accept and which to reject, what to do and what not to do.

The existentialists conclude that human choice is 'subjective', because the individuals must make their own choices finally without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are free because they choose freely; 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. Further more, since individuals are forced to further more, since individuals are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom- and therefore their responsibility-thrust upon them. Sartre says that they are condemned to be free.

Existentialism focuses on the lack of meaning and purpose in life, and solitude of human existence. Existentialism maintains that existence precedes essence. This human being must be accountable without excuse. The human being must not miss a way from his responsibilities. He needs to take decisions and assume responsibilities. There is no significance in this world and universe. The human being cannot find any purpose in life, his existence is only a contingent fact. His being does not emerge from necessity. If a human being rejects the false pretensions like the illusion of his existence having a meaning, he encounters the absurdity and the futility of life. Therefore man'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. The trouble is that most often the human being refers to choose. Hence he cannot realize his freedom and the futility of his existence. Rayan thus summarizes this concept:

Man is free and responsible, but he is responsible only to himself. As with Nietzsche, man creates moral values. Besides being free, man is a finite and contingent being; existing in a world that is devoid of purpose. The pessimism resulting from this position is likewise expressed by Camus' doctrine of "the absurd". Absurdity or contradiction arises from the clash between human hopes and desires and the meaningless universe into which man has been thrown. (639)

An existentialist is always stranger than others and certainly going to have no patience with conventions. The isolation produced by Existentialist value decision also explains why few existentialists are self-identified as such calling someone an "Existentialist" imposes an essence on them, telling them what they are. This violates their absolute autonomy and freedom and makes it sound like they actually have something important in common. This is intolerable for them. We live our lives just because of the completely free and autonomous decision we make, this creates nothing that is common with others. If we adopt something that comes from someone else, which could give us a common basis to make a connection with them, that is inauthentic existence. As we make new decisions, the probability of our connection with other is going to decline. We are isolated by our own autonomy. The values and decision of other, whether authentic or inauthentic, will be foreign or irritating.

Basically, existence is of two types-authentic and inauthentic forms of existence. The authentic being is rarely attained by human still it is what humans must strive to gain. The inauthentic (being-in-itself) is characteristically distinctive of things; it is what the human being is diseased with for failure to act as a free agent and this importancy to reject bad faith. Things are only what they are, but human being is what he 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 his dreams. Hence, he has only the destiny he forges for himself because in this world nothing happens out of necessity.

Anxiety arises from the human being's realization that destiny is not fixed but is open to an undetermined future of infinite possibilities and limitless scope. The

void of future destiny must be filled by making choices for which he alone will assume responsibility and blame. Anxiety is present at every moment of the existence of human being and it is a part and parcel of authentic existence. Anxiety leads the human being to take decisions and commitment. The human being tries to avoid this anguish through bad faith. But the free authentic human being must be involved in his own actions, responsibility and his being which is his own. Thus, the human being must be committed.

Existentialist philosophers are of the opinion that metaphysical explanation of existence as given by traditional school of philosophy failed to produce satisfactory result. Being contrast 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 and it 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 as a distinct philosophical and literary movement or trend belongs to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The elements of existentialism can also be found in the thought of Socrates, in the Bible, and in the work of many premodern 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 existentialist are trying to establish. The ancient Greek thought was revolutionalized by Socrates who shifted the attention of the study of

philosophy from nature man, man as the center of existence. The problem of what man is in himself can be perceived in the Socratic imperative "Know thyself", and "insight come from within", as well as in the work of Montaigne and Pascal, a religious philosopher and mathematician (New Encyclopedia 612). The main idea of existentialist they were already common to religious thought when existentialism was first introduced like the idea of man being responsible for his own actions. Most religious thoughts can be perceived as the existentialist by their definition. Existentialist root has been traced back to Pascal and St. Augustine. The subjectivism of theologian St. Anguistine during 4th –5th century exhorted man not to go outside himself in the quest for truth, for it is within him that truth abides (612). Like Socrates, he too declared that truth is within man that is why his going out to search truth is vain.

Existentialism is often seen as a revolt against traditional philosophy. It contradicts Descartes' view that man is open to the world and its objects without intermediary stratum of ideas or sensations. There is not also distinct realm of consciousness on which one might infer, project, or doubt the existence of external objects. Existentialists are more concerned with being rather than with knowing which is a rejection of cartesian dualism.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophy began with the Danish Christian thinker Kierkegaard in the first half of the 19th century. He was critical to Hegel's philosophical system which analyzed being or existence in an abstract and impersonal way. He served the study of philosophy to the subjective, emotional and living aspect of human existence as against Hegel's objective and abstract academization of reality. Kierkegaard advocated that the irrational is the real against Hegelianism. He

discussed man's essence with the existential predicaments and limitations; hope, despair, anxiety and so on.

Gaarder in *Sophie's World* acknowledge that "he thought that both the idealism of the Romantics 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 Frenz Bernto (1838-1917), and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). They were immediately followed by the modern existentialists. German existentialism was represented by Martin Heidegaard (1889-1979) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), French existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Spanish existentialism by Jose Ortego Y Gasset (1883-1955), and Italian by Nicola Abbagnano (b.1910). The most forceful voices of existentialist thought were the works of the French existentialist: Sartre, Simone de Behaviour, and Albert Camus. No one has contributed more to the popularization of existentialism of this philosophical trend than Satre. In literary influence, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyvesky (1821-81) and Austrian Jewish writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924) contributed significantly. Dostoyevsky in his novels presented the defeat of man in the face of choices and the result of their consequences and finally in the enigmas of himself. Kafka in his novels like *The Castle* (1926) and *The Trial* (1925) presented isolated men confronting vast, elusive and menacing bureaucracies. In the art, the analogues of Existentialism may be considered to be surrealism, Expressionism and in general those schools that view the role of art not as reflection of objective and external reality to man but as the free projection of the human being (New Encyclopedia 613).

An important aspect of the existentialist movement was its popularization due to the ramification of existentialist philosophy in literature, psychology, religion, politics and culture. Existentialism made its entrance into psychopathology through Karl Jaspers' *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913), which was inspired by the need to understand the world in which the mental patient lived by means of a sympathetic participation in his experience (613). Christian Existentialism, inspired by Kierkegaard, is a creed of its own kind. Similarly, Camus's semi-philosophical essays won sympathizers in this area.

Although the classic forms of Existentialism are characteristics of post World War II philosophy, literature and art, we have already seen with Dostoyevsky, reflect that existentialist-like ideas were anticipated long before. The most important was certainly Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). There are at least three ways in which Nietzsche qualifies as a classic existentialist, all of which we can see in what may have been his magnum opus, *The Spake Zarathustra* (1885). Nietzsche focused precisely on the non existence of God as implying the non existence of all value in one of the most famous sayings in the history of philosophy, "God is dead". Nietzsche's replacement of God is the *Urbmensch*. This was originally translated "Superman". It is the Latin interpretation of a word where "super" means "over" as does German 'Uber'. When Nietzsche says man (*Mensch*), he means someone egotistical, brawling, aggressive, arrogant, and insensitive. The *superman* is not vulnerable to taming domestically. The second most important thing is that the *superman* is free because all his own values flow from his own will. Value is a matter of decision and a matter of will. Because the *superman*, whom we find the triumphant "will to power" is free, he takes what he wants and does what he likes. He is authentic. The third point, which is advanced as the greatest teaching of Zarathustra, does the same job as Sartre's

redefinition of "responsibility". This is the "Eternal Recurrence". Since every point where a time like the present has happened, or will happen, itself also is an eternity of time before it, than what is happening now has already happened an infinite number of times and will happen an infinite number of times again. Though actions to Nietzsche are no longer good or evil they still do not mean that they are right or wrong after all. It simply means that before you do something, you must determine that you really want to do it.

Phenomenology and ontology have had remarkable influences on existentialism. Sartre and Heidegger were disciples of the founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl and Sartre, somewhat younger, was then influenced by Heidegger. Regarding their existential interest Skirbekk and Nils Gilje define the term phenomenology as:

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

Further Shaping and elaborating of this movement was made by Martin Heidegger, one of the main exponents of 20th century Existentialism and a leading German Ontologist who notably tried to disclose the ways of Being in his most famous and controversial book *Sein Und Zeit* (1927). In this book, Heidegger discusses what it means for a man to be or how it is to be. It leads to a fundamental question like. What is the meaning of Being? And through speculation and interpretation, he has tried to

reach the final truth of Existence, the situation of Being. His another book was *Ist Metaphysik?* (1929), Heidegger has elaborated das Nichts (nothing) which means the no-thing and given a phenomenological approach to the situation of human existence.

Mainly, Existentialism is a movement of 40's and 50's literary and artistic as well as philosophical, Sartre himself is the most famous representative. Sartre is also a convenient representative because for a time he actually acknowledged being an existentialist and offered a definition for the word. It was unusual for existentialists to identify themselves as it was less defined to give the sense all about, so Sartre is a convenient place to begin.

Sartre finds valuable philosophical materials in Descartes' subjectivism, Husserl's analysis of consciousness, Heidegger's existentialist concepts and themes and also in the two major forerunner of existentialism, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Lavin 341). From Kierkegaard, Sartre takes the emphasis upon individual conscious existence and from Nietzsche he takes the concept of the death of God (341). Sartre's originality lies in his reinterpreting, revision, and reworking of these materials into a bold new integration which became the center of French Existentialism (341).

Sartre divides existentialist thinkers into two groups: Theistic and atheistic. The theistic group includes Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel who are supposed to believe in Christian faith. In the second, atheistic group Sartre puts himself with Heidegger, Nietzsche and other French existentialist who do not believe in the existence of God. The atheistic existentialists discard the concept of the God as an authentic shelter. They regard human being as optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creature. The absence of God implies the loss of value.

Kierkegaard is an existentialist because he accepts the absurdity of the world as fully as Sartre or Camus. But he does not begin with the postulate of the non

existence of God with the principle that nothing in the world, nothing available to sense or reason, provides any knowledge or reason to believe in God. While traditional Christian theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas saw the world as providing evidence of God's existence, and also thought that rational arguments a priori could establish the existence of God. Kierkegaard does not think that this is the case. But Kierkegaard's conclusion about this is derived from Sartre's premises. He thought that if the world is absurd, and everything we do is absurd, why not do most absurd thing imaginable. They also thought that what could be more absurd than to believe in God. The atheists do not have any reason to believe in anything else, or really even to disbelieve in that, so we may as well go for it. Without reasons of heart or mind, Kierkegaard can only get to God by a leap of faith.

Kierkegaard's moral and religious seriousness offered a more promising basis for the development of existentialist theme than the basically nihilistic, egocentric, and hopeless approach of Niazism, Sartre, Camus and the others. Philosophers who make their own leap of faith to Marxism of Sartre or Niazism of Heidegger have really discredited their own source of inspiration. Thus, while Sartre achieved for a time a higher profile in the fashionable literary world, theistic Existentialists continued. Kierkegaard's work was also went on with updated approaches to traditional religious. Atheistic existentialism exhausted itself. The effort of will required for Sisyphus to maintain his enthusiasm is really beyond most human capacity, and better the solace of traditional religion than the vicious pseudo-religions of communism or fascism.

Standing very close to the philosophical outlook of Sartre is his life-long companion and intellectual associate Simone de Beauvoir (1980-86). She was close to Sartre, and it would be a mistake to say her thoughts are a mere duplication of Sartre.

She gives an original and independent interpretation of existentialism, though not radically different from Sartre's. Unlike him, she chooses to concentrate on the personal and moral aspect of life. She attempted 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 history of attitude of women has determined her own views. In this regard, Audi states:

Her feminist master piece, *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 redefinition 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 denied the existence of a basic "female nature" or "male nature". It has been generally claimed that man has a transcending (achieving) nature so he will seek meaning and direction outside the home. Women 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 did not agree with the way we perceive the sexes.

Another proponent French existentialist was Albert Camus (1913-60). He himself laid no claims to be an existentialist. Existentialism in the 20th century reflects the loss of certainties in the post-modern world. If there are no clear philosophical answers to the question of existence, then each individual has to design their own life

as a project. The choice and responsibility of that project falls entirely on them. Camus was concerned with the freedom and responsibility of the individual, the alienation of the individual from society, and difficulty of facing life without the comfort of believing in God or in absolute moral standards. The work of Camus is usually associated with existentialism because of the prominent themes in it as the apparent absurdity and futility of life. It also includes the indifference of the universe, and the necessity of engagement in a just cause.

Camus has the opinion that human existence is absurd. The modern world is full of injustice and millions work in repetitive exploitation jobs. He thought that we should rebel against these absurdities by refusing to participate in them. In the *Myth of Sisyphus* (1943), Camus asserts that by refusing to surrender, Sisyphus, the representative of modern man, can create meaning through a free act of affirmation in which he gives meaning to a situation which until then had none. In the *Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus says:

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

In order to get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, one may go to the rules of God or he may submit himself to the hand of death. But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The living of the absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this absurdity. The world is full of

absurdity, but Sisyphus teaches revolt through action that offers freedom and justification for continuing life.

Existentialists begin to think from the human situation in the world, the modes of existence, the condition of despair, the human being's tendency to avoid authentic existence, his relation to things or his own body or to other beings with whom he can not come into genuine communication, and the suffering of life. Starting from the study on being, Existentialist thinkers originate their own doctrines with their own emphasis of particular aspects. Very often their view points are conflicting and sometimes contradictory, yet this philosophical attitude of being, as a whole, can be described as the existentialist movement, which stresses upon the "being" of human being.

Prominent Existentialists

Theistic Existentialists

The theistic or "Christian" group includes 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 in God and his existence and say that God exists first, and then the man exists.

For Kierkegaard, "God is truth". To him, God is infinitive subjectivity and subjectivity is truth. For him, the individual is quite unique in nature and cannot properly be known or understood in general term. The individual is never a finished product, but he is always becoming or making himself. Marcel tries to make a distinction between a mystery and a problem and he says that both hope and love can

exist only on the basis of faith (existentialism 437). He distinguishes between having and being, linking greater consequence to being than to having. Having signifies ownership, which is a burden and an obstacle. Being means freedom from obstacle.

Jaspers speaks of the exposition or revelation of existence. He takes self and freedom as mere illusion. He knows his own self and will as creative, free and original. The existential self is thus associated with consciousness in which it twinkles or emerges. So existence constitutes the depth of consciousness. Jaspers considers that the individual can not become human by himself. Self being is only real in communication with another self being. Buber also emphasizes the importance of the relation between self and other.

Kierkegaard: Existing before God

A Danish philosopher and religious thinker, Soren Kierkegaard denounced Hegelian dialectical system and Danish Lutheranism (Macintyre, "Kierkegaard"). Hegel maintained the philosophy of reconciliation and synthesis, which Kierkegaard called "both/and" system as opposed to his existential dialectic, "either/or", which emphasizes upon personal choices and responsibilities rather than overall rationality (Kierkegaard" 224).

By choosing inward and personal character, one makes a leap of faith in God which he regards as an "ethico-religious" choice ("Individual" 809). Thus, there are two options for the individual to choose: either he has to choose God and get redemption from the angst, an "ethico-religious" choice, or he has to reject God and go the perdition, an "aesthetic" choice ("Choice" 828-34). But paradoxically enough, the choice is, according to Kierkegaard, criterionless and it is the individual himself how has to fix criteria by making choice. The Christian doctrine and its quest for objective truth have nothing to do with Kierkegaardian concept of Christianity. He

believes only in the existence of God, and not in any doctrine, and insists that "Christianity is therefore not a doctrine, but the fact that God has existed" ("Faith" 857). Kierkegaardian faith, as Macintyre describes, is also in a paradoxical form ("Kierkegaard"). When we believe in God, we believe both in his finite and infinite existence. The finite is related to the outward form and existence of God, whereas the infinite is concerned with the inward faith and non-existence. This is, of course, not a strange contemplation of Kierkegaard when we understand that he sees the whole world as a conglomeration of ambiguities and paradoxes. On the difficulty of existing in such paradoxical condition Kierkegaard writes:

Existing is ordinarily regarded as no very complex matter, much less an art, since we all exist; but abstract thinking takes rank as an accomplishment. But really to exist, so as to interpenetrate one's existence with consciousness, at one and the same time eternal and as if far removed from existence, and yet also present in existence and in the process of becoming: that is truly difficult. ("Concrete Existence" 814)

Real Existence, for Kierkegaard, therefore, is possible only when one becomes aware of the paradoxical presence of God, Christianity and man. Suffering, observes Kierkegaard, must be born peacefully and happily because only the elect and select of God suffers (Faith"859). Abraham suffered because he was the beloved of God.

Jaspers: Transcendence

Karl Jaspers is one of the first thinkers (the another being Sartre) to use the term "existentialist" (Koestenbaum). Like other existential thinkers, he discarded the self sufficiency of science and empirical observation, and the speculation of individual from the communication with other beings ("The Will" 864-67). One

cannot live fully if there is not another being to communicate with, and men are, held Jaspers, very much attached with all things around him. Jaspers writes:

We can not have objective possession of a truth that is the eternal truth, and because being-there is possible only with other being-there, and existence can come into its own only with other existence, communication is the form in which truth revealed in time. ("The will" 866)

Similar to Nietzsche's venture to balance Apollonian and Dionysian forces, Jaspers thought to create a balance between reason (*Vernunft*) and passion (*Existenz*), ("Encompassing" 877). There are two opposite modes of thinking based on this division of mind, according to Jaspers: the Hegelian rationality (reason) and the irrationality (passion) of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Both of these modes, asserts Jaspers, could not explain truth. The truth is the accurate combination of these two. Jaspers was not Christian in a traditional sense, but he believed in Transcendence. He uses the term "transcendence" to designate man's personal devoted and committed attempt to reach the encompassing (Koestenbaum). By "encompassing" (das umgreifende), he means the ultimate and indefinite limits of being as we realize it in all its fullness and richness; boundaries which surround, envelop and suffuse all there is (Koestenbaum). About the contradictory nature of encompassing Jaspers tells:

The Encompassing never appears as an object in experience, or as an explicit theme of thinking, and therefore might seem to be empty. But precisely here is where the possibility for our deepest insight into Being arises, whereas all other knowledge about Being is merely knowledge of particular, individual being ("Encompassing" 877).

In deity or transcendence only, claims Jaspers, can we find truth and reality but this does not imply the seclusion of the individual but in communication with others.

"Transcendence alone", says Jaspers, "is the real being" (878). This belief of Jaspers in the eternally indestructible power, transcendence (not God), is known as "philosophical faith" (*Philosophische Glaube*), which is against revealed religion, dogma and authority of Churches.

Buber: "I-Thou"

Not very much unlike Jaspers, Buber repudiates the idea of separate existence of human being (wyschogrod). He held that our existence is always attached with other men, with nature and with God. According to him, the relation should be concrete and immediate, an "I" to "Thou" and not an abstract and objective, an "I" to an "It" one ("The Primary Words" 870-76). "The primary word I-Thou", Buber writes, "can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word I-It can never be spoken with whole being" (870). Making Buber's point clear, Ellmann and Feidelson write, "Every 'Thou' tends to collapse into an 'It', an inert thing, but every 'It' is destined to be regenerated as a 'Thou' in the eyes of art and love" (870). The "I-It" relationship is not a genuine relationship because while I regard others as "It", I happen to be perfectly alone. Buber writes:

He who is overcome by the world of *It* is bound to see, in the dogma immutable process; ... in every truth this dogma enslaves him only the more deeply to the world of *It*. But the world of *Thou* is not closed. He who goes out to it with concentrated being and rises power to enter into relation becomes aware of freedom. (875)

The "I-It" relationship has to do with past because all objective knowledge is about one's past, whereas the "I-Thou" relationship has to do with present because "we are

prepared for any and every response to our address" (Wyschogrod). Thus, we should assume our relationship with God as "I-Thou". Our "I-Thou" relationship with the worldly objectives might turn into "I-It", when tiredness overtakes, but our "I-Thou" relationship with God never changes into "I-It" because God is Absolute and always present with us.

Marcel: Mystery

Cabriel Marcel, French philosopher, dramatist and critic, tries to fill the abyss between subject and object, between what is in us and what is before us (Keen). This effort can be fulfilled with a sterling awareness of mystery. He makes a distinction between primary reflection and secondary reflection (Keen). The primary reflection is abstract, analytical, objective, universal and verifiable, whereas the secondary reflection is concrete, individual, heuristic and open. Thus, primary reflection is concerned with empirical problems but secondary reflection begins with wonder and astonishment, with mystery. According to Marcel, as Keen remarks, there are two face of mystery: the mystery of existence and the mystery of being. The mystery of existence is related to "Concrete" Philosophy, and the mystery of being is related to "concrete" ontology. The concrete philosophy deals with the individual who is always related to the world in the same way, as he is related to his body. *We are* is, according to Marcel, much more important than *I am* in this philosophy. Ontology tells us that only with the participation in being, as Keen observes, can we overcome isolation, despair, and tragedy. The "ontological existence", which is an impulse to transcendence, is always present in all authentic human life, according to Marcel. We can feel the presence of Absolute (God) if we confront the world with love, joy, hope and faith within us. In this way, Marcel is connected with existential thinkers in his opposition to anti-religious system of atheistic existentialists like Sartre and Camus

(Macintyre, "Existentialism"), Unlike them, he stressed upon faith in God, which he considers, can help man overcome anxiety and despair that characterize modern predicament (Perry et al. 759).

In short, the religious existentialists recommend us to go to the shelter of God of Transcendence to ensure the faithful existence. Mysticism is their reliable route to be happy. Like atheistic existentialists, they accept that angst or dread is inevitable for modern man because of his absurd condition. "Dread is" writes Kierkegaard, "an adventure which every man has to affront if he would not go to perdition" ("Dread" 839). Even Christ was in dread. The individual is always in a 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. "Only this dread", declares Kierkegaard, "is by the aid of faith absolutely educative, lying bare as it does all finite aims and discovering all their deceptions" (839). Thus, the dread with faith can become the path-finder for there existence, according to religious existentialists.

Atheistic Existentialists

Martin Heidegger and the French existentialists including Sartre 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 repudiate 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 authentic existence whereas cowards choose inauthentic existence.

Heidegger declares that the individual has to face the absolute problem of being, that is, one has to decide one's own existence, create one's potentiality and make cliché and premises. Sartre praises the freedom of the individual human being.

He describes existentialism as a means of confronting the result of world war and issue of world that wants an absolute power like God. He focuses on freedom of choice, commitment and responsibility. Sartre claims that there is no absolute reality at all but in action.

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

Nietzsche: The Death of God

Bertrand Russell divides Nietzsche's ethic into two categories: the first about Nietzsche's contempt for women, and the second about his sharp critique of religion, especially of Christianity (Russell, 731). He took women just for a good machine to produce warrior and not more than that Walter Kaufmann observes Nietzsche's hatred for women as the result of his upbringing in the environment of women and because of a disease, syphilis, that he caught from a prostitute which inflicted him until he died in 1900. His critique of Christianity is even sharper and clearer than that of women. He called Christianity a "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 (Russell 732). In his famous essay, "The Death of God and Antichrist", he writes:

The Christian conception of God-God as a good of the sick, God as a spider, God as spirit-is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth. It may even represent the low-water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into

the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal yes! God as the declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live! (912)

Even to think of God is to go against life, against the will to power. As there is no 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. "The superman," explain Varvin Perry and his cowriters, "are people of restless energy who enjoy living dangerously, have contempt for meekness and humility, and dismiss humanitarian sentiments" (635). Napoleon is Nietzsche's model superman who, he said, was a great man defeated by the petty ones (Russell 729). But, as a Kaufman comments, Nietzsche's idea of "will to power" is not profascist. Instead, it is the natural and deeper psychological motive of human psyche.

Nietzsche emphasized upon the subjective intentions and activities of individual, and repudiated objective knowledge and truth. If a man troubles his mind on what others will think about him, he will be no more a man but an instrument-an object. This view of Nietzsche becomes clearer when we observe the following excerpt:

The objective man is an instrument, a precious, easily injured, easily clouded instrument for taking measurements. As a mirror he is a work of art, to be handled carefully and honored. But he is not an aim, not 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)

In this way, Nietzsche's insistence upon the irrational and upon the individual who confronts existence heroically, without hypocrisy, and give meaning to it his own meaning-was crucial to the shaping of the doctrine of twentieth century existentialists. But one must be careful, as Kaufmann puts it, to classify Nietzsche in any particular group of atheistic. He is neither an evolutionist nor an irrationalist. His genius appears in his emphasis upon the necessity and difficulty of balancing the Apollonian intellect and Dionysian passion, the two opposite sides of human impulse. Russell has made a very safe comment upon the surging influence of Nietzsche that deserves to be quoted: "If he is a mere symptom of disease (lunacy), the disease must be very widespread in the modern world" (734).

Heidegger: Being

Another German thinker, Heidegger, who publicly praised Hitler and Nazism, is another leading figure of atheistic existentialism, though he himself rejected to be classified as an existentialist (Perry et al. 756). He made a distinction between being and Being. The oblivion of Being (individual) into the beings (group) has made us lost in unreal existence ("Recollection" 879). 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). To consider individual only the representation of mass is the recurrent mistake of metaphysics, according to Heidegger. He held the belief that man should face explicitly the problem of Being; he has to determine his own existence, create his own possibilities and make choices and commitment (Perry et al., 756). The feeling of dread due to the awareness of death, may incite us to flee away from the problems of Being, accepting a way of life set by others instead of coming face to face with it. But if we take the dread of death as an opportunity, we may construct our life unique, and our own. On the necessity of being responsible to

the true experience of life, Heidegger writes, "The thinking which is posited by beings as such, and therefore representational and illuminating in that way, must be supplanted by a different kind of thinking which is brought to pass by Being itself and, therefore, responsive to Being ("Recollection" 880).

Heidegger accepts that one cannot escape the historical context because he is always bounded by conditions and outlooks inherited from the past. He considers human existence as tied by temporal dimension, which is the existential time (Grene). The Heideggerian concept of time moves not from past through present to future but from future through past to present. We experienced past in guilt and we anticipate future in dread. The time is my own time because I myself experience it and it is finite because my death is certain (Grene). Thus, my destiny is surrounded by a temporal context from which I cannot run away, but can confront it with a full conscience.

Sartre: Existence Precedes Essence

One of the eminent French existentialist, Sartre is considered as the proponent of twentieth century atheistic existentialist. Along with Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett, he developed the existential philosophy to its farthest point. As already stated, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger are the chief influences upon these three great philosophers and writers. Sartre put himself in the group of anti-religious existentialists and describes existentialism as a means of facing the consequences of a world that is devoid of any absolute power like God (Existentialism 13-15).

Disclosing atheistic existentialism, Sartre writes:

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 his 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)

As most of the existentialists claim, Sartre also stresses upon the subjectivity of the individual. But the individual is not free from other beings. When he becomes conscious of Cartesian cogito, I think therefore I am, he also becomes aware of others that constitute his whole being. "The other is", writes Sartre, 'indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself' ("Common Condition" 868). In this way, if the consciousness of myself also embodies the consciousness of other being in front of me, then my existence is in the world of "inter-subjectivity." But man has to make his own universe with a meaning of his own, realizing the fact that there is no prior meaning of anything in the world. This project, according to Sartre, can be done only through commitment. There is no reality, claims Sartre, except in action. The unused knowledge and potentialities do not count for the existentialists. For an authentic living, one must choose and make a commitment of the talent and capabilities. The talent of Proust is the sum of his total works. Making this point more clear, Sartre writes:

. . . the existentialist says that the coward makes himself cowardly, the hero makes himself heroic; and that there is always a possibility for the coward to give up 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)

Man 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 include in the self-deception, or 'bad faith.' But to be careful, Sartre does not isolate the freedom of the individual from the total commitment of the community. The contradictory nature of Sartre's philosophy lies in that he, on the one hand, gives a total freedom to the individual and insists that he should not choose his 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 community so that the community's freedom directs him to act in a certain way. This contradiction might be the outcome of his gradual attraction toward Marxism. The moderate change in Sartre's later thinking shows that he has turned more and more toward a kind of dialectical sociology that seems very remote from the individualism which was the characteristic of his earlier moral theory (Olafson, "Sartre") Olafson makes this argument more explicit as he says that out of Sartre's whole trust, there arise two options to choose and either of them seem difficult to maintain in isolation. The options are: either one has to choose his own liberty by suppressing others; which frames the good faith, or he should accept the liberty of others' repressing his own and adopt a bad faith. But both options are impossible because one is not immune from the intervention of another. About the same difficulty in choosing freedom, Sartre mentions:

We will freedom 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 does not depend upon others, but as soon as there is a commitment, I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time

as my own. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my own. ("Authenticity" 842)

Ultimately, it shows that Satre is being conscious of a system that seems more powerful than the total freedom of an individual. He is creating another system of human existence by negating the common social system, as people understand it.

Camus: Revolt Against Absurdity

As Olafson genuinely remarks, Camus believes in fraternity and humanism rather than in nihilism ("Camus" 79). Camus sees the condition of modern man similar to that of Corinthian king Sisyphus. Sisyphus is the martyr and teacher to all modern men who, because of his disobedience to God and his passion for life, suffer eternal torture heroically. "This Universe", states Camus, "henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile" ("Absurd Freedom" 852). Camus reached to the conclusion to declare the condition of man absurd when he realized that the speculative systems of past provided no reliable guidance of life or guaranteed any foundation of human values. According to Camus, when the absurd man becomes aware of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and hopelessness but he does not surrender himself in the mouth of death. Instead, he acknowledges the consciousness of absurdity as a reliable guidance to revolt against this absurdity. The cocksureness of science for absolute reality and clarity has made the world more complex and inexplicable, terminating itself to a mere hypothesis. The only predictable truth is that the world is absurd and unintelligible. But suicide cannot be the solution to the discomfort of absurd man if he is conscious of human pride which always negates the nihilistic attitude of life. Sisyphus continuously tools the boulder up the hill that makes him happy because he is fully aware of his absurd task. Camus makes this explicit while he writes:

Suicide is a repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance. ("Absurd Freedom" 846)

Camus was also considering about human rights while thinking on the common condition of men. The revolt against the injustice done upon man was relevant as the revolt against the absurd condition. Sisyphus maintained at one and the same time these revolts. The injustice done upon him by God has made him conscious of his absurd task. Camus was careful about the unjust practices being carried out by the totalitarian political systems such as Fascism and Nazism. He held the view that no one has the right to take life of another being. Political revolt is violent revolt, as much unwanted as the metaphysical revolt of Nietzsche and others. The metaphysical revolt, according to Camus, anticipates either a suicide or demonic desire to destroy the world ("Camus"80). Camus hated the destruction of the world and mankind as carried out in World War I and II. To get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, one may go to the rules of God or he may submit himself to the hand of death. But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The living of absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this absurdity. Thus, Camus' philosophy is not pessimistic and anti-humanistic but optimistic and humanistic. As Ellmann and Feidelson note, he sees man "arriving, through admission of absurdity, at an affirmation of his own worth" (806).

Our observation so far shows that existentialists differed widely from one another. Kierkegaard was a staunch believer where as Nietzsche was an atheist, so were Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. Heidegger supported Nazism where Sartre was a

Marxist. Camus hated both systems, calling them totalitarian terrorism. Nietzsche denied the freedom of will whereas Kierkegaard and Sartre advocated for it; Heidegger rarely talked about it. But the common attitude of all of them was their concern for the individual and personal responsibility. They despised larger public groups or forces for the sake of individual freedom. Kierkegaard preferred the words "the individual" for his own epitaph. But, although Kierkegaard's influence has been vital upon an important school of twentieth century religious existentialists, the existential attitude is generally attached to the atheistic thinkers who think religious relief as an act of cowardice, or "philosophical suicide." In contrast to the weak and mediocre ideology of religion, Nietzsche holds up various examples of "master morality" and "higher men," who reject and despise weakness and live as exemplars of what he calls the "will to power", which is best illustrated in artists and other creative geniuses (Solomon 142). The apprehension of the world as godless bears forth the faithless struggle of the individual, as opposed to the interpretation of religious existentialists.

In *The Victim*, the protagonist Asa Leventhal and some other characters are suffering from the existential problem such as alienation, meaninglessness, nothingness, emptiness, failure, frustration, absurdity and so on. The succeeding chapter will analyze the text in relation to existentialism.

III. EXISTENTIAL PROBLEM IN *THE VICTIM*

In *The Victim*, Saul Bellow tries to show the existential problem of the protagonist and his struggle for survive with dignity. The novel is about man's developing sense of obligation to his fellows for the sake of humanity. The meaning of novel is, in fact, greater than the experience of the hero; it is presented by the author as a third person narrative, and it concerns a few days in the life of Asa Leventhal, a young Jewish professional man moving gradually from failure to success in his career, magazine publishing. Asa Leventhal has accidentally caused an acquaintance, a gentile named Allbee to lose his job. Bounded by the sense of a limiting society, and of the intensity by which Leventhal's dilemma is seen as a social as well as a psychological problem for it the book is important.

Asa Leventhal is a lonely and isolated man in the crowded city and for him the presence of so many other people is a permanent threat in the competitive, industrial and bourgeois world that is unsafe for him. It is a world where there are very few opportunities for choices, and most of one's life is conducted accidentally. As Sartre suggests we wish to be free for freedom's sake and if we escape to choose it, even it is our choice. In *The Victim* Bellow has mentioned the same thing in different way:

We don't choose much. We don't choose to be born, for example, and unless we commit suicide we don't choose the time to die, either. But having a few choices in between makes you seem less of an accident to yourself. It makes you feel your life is necessary. The world is a crowded place, damned if it isn't. It's an overcrowded place. There's room enough for the dead. Even they get buried in layers, I hear. There is room enough for them because they don't want anything. But the living ... who wants all these people to be here, especially forever?

Where're you going to put them all? Who has any use for them all?

(173)

Saul Bellow's novel begins by examining life within a relatively narrow range of possibilities. In a few details as well it resembles Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea*: both Bellow's heroes seek to cut themselves off from the past and to find an area in which self-choice may become effective.

The protagonist of the novel Asa Leventhal is very much a product of capitalistic society in uncertain world. His security is of the utmost importance to him. One of the things that he learns in the book is that there is an element of chance and also of historical necessity in success and failure. He acquires a new understanding, an understanding about the nature of a general responsibility, and this involves a radical change in his view of what constitutes humanity, and what way the social system works. His sense of honor and humanity, we can see in the following lines of the novel:

. . . but may be I don't have a real sense of honor or I wouldn't put myself in such a position. I mean real honor. There is no getting away from it, I suppose, honor is honor. Either you have got it up to here, he drew a line across his throat, or you haven't got it. It doesn't make you any happier to tell yourself you ought to have it. It's like anything else that counts. You have to make sacrifices to it. (125-26)

Saul Bellow's *The Victim* has lots of things having existential problems and its main cause is the product of capitalistic form of society. Bellow's novel *The Victim* affords much dealing on drinking and immoral sexual relationship, attitudes toward it, and reasons for it. Of the two main characters, Asa Leventhal furnishes many of the attitudes and reactions; but Kirby Allbee, a supposed problem drinker, has a good deal to say on the subject himself. The richness comes in apart from the fact that Asa

Leventhal has not one but several attitudes, which collectively undergo a real though not total change. The most salient evidence that Asa Leventhal has overcome the central fear of his life-fear of being plunged to unregenerate degradation and failure symbolized by skid row-comes in the following passage:

Both of them, Allbee and the woman [whom Leventhal has also expelled from his apartment], moved or swam toward him out of a depth of life in which he himself would be lost, choked, ended. There lay horror, evil, all that he kept himself from. In the days when he was clerking in the hotel on the East side, he had been as near to it as he could ever bear to be. He had seen it face on them. And since, he had learned more about it out of the corner of his eye. why not say heart, rather than eye? His heart was what caught it, with awful pain and dread, in heavy blows. Then, since the fear and pain were so great, what drew him on? (249)

In particular, Leventhal notices a "decay" (262) in Allbee's appearance; and his resumption of drinking seems to be one sign of this decay.

The Victim is concerned at several levels with drinking. On the surface it presents an interesting clash of culturally stereotyped attitudes about alcohol and drunkenness. These, however, soon appear to be inadequate to account for either Allbee's drinking or Leventhal's reactions to it. The problem or concept of alcoholism seems at most only a starting point for a deeper exploration. Allbee comes to be seen in his full humanity, and Leventhal to a great extent overcomes his stereotyped attitudes toward alcoholic drinking and his fears of the failure it emblemizes by entering the being of the fallen derelict.

Asa Leventhal understands almost nothing of these reasons behind Allbee's drinking. Indeed, at a conscious level, he understands very little about the sources of his own fears, hostilities, and feeling of alienation, and therefore does very little at a conscious level to combat or overcome them. Nevertheless, gradually and unconsciously he makes headway against them. This entails more than tolerance or sympathy; it requires entering into a feared role or even a feared identity.

Leventhal is a frightened and lovely man in a crowded city. As his story begins, he holds a modest position in a publishing house, but he is always troubled with thoughts of the past from where he has come and with fears that he may be thrown back into it. His father had been a shopkeeper, his mother had died insane, and he had spent his early years working in second-hand stores and cheap hotels for miserable wages. He is happily married, but his wife has been called away by an emergency, and there is no one to share his troubles, to lend him support. The following lines show the alienated mood of Leventhal:

No, nothing ... I've been having a lot of trouble. My family-you heard about that. And Mary's away, that's been hard on me, too. My nerves aren't in very good shape. I feel I've been trying to throw something off. You aren't being very helpful. Just let me alone to handle this in my own way. This was a great deal for him to say; it was exorbitant, like a plea. (236)

The chronic depression shared by Asa Leventhal reflects a repressed rage toward history that has no means of venting itself. Leventhal's hidden rage is known through this projection clearly.

These lines show the bewildered and bad tempered mental condition of Leventhal:

He tried to seize the opportunity. He put out all his strength to collect himself, beginning with the primary certainty that the world pressed on him and passed through him. Beyond this he could not go, hard though he drove himself. He was bewilderingly moved. He sat in the same posture, massively, his murky face trained on the ferns standing softly against the gray glass. His nostrils twitched. (232)

In this way, guilt and insecurity are, in fact, composite emotions, and they become inseparable as Leventhal and Allbee gradually become confused as one person: victimizer and victimized in one. Their relationship of enemy to enemy and of accusation to guilt, is confused, and in the confusion Allbee acts to upset all of Leventhal's hopes and promise. In Leventhal's loneliness and fright he is confronted with several problems, the major one being to find some means of escaping from the persecution of Kirby Allbee. Allbee is presented as a mysterious figure, half drunk, half mad, who seeks restitution from Leventhal for an ancient falsity.

The world of the characters is after all vicious, do man did unexplainable harm to one another. There, many hideous things are done, cannibalistic things, good things as well are done. In the novel, Leventhal, with a heavy heart, offers Allbee shelter. Allbee's personal habits turn out to be squalid. He also pries into Leventhal's private papers. He comes in Leventhal's life unwillingly, disturbs him and presents as a problem to him. Allbee, arriving home one evening, Leventhal finds the door locked against him and Allbee in his, Leventhal's, bed with a prostitute. Leventhal's outrage amuses Allbee:

Where else if not in bed? ... may be you have some other way, more refined, different? Don't you people claim that you are the sane as everybody else? I know I have a fallen nature I never pretended to be

anything I wasn't. Why all the excitement? . . . oh, you don't see ! It gave you a bang to put your whore where I sleep. (244)

In this way, Saul Bellow has presented the human life in the frame of capitalistic society where morality no more works and people are indulged in the activities like drinking and prostitution and humanity is in shadow.

Every personal order that a man makes out of the confusion, is constantly challenged or threatened. In this sense, the novel is like a melting pot, covering several different moral and emotional system – Jewish, Anglo-Saxon, Italian – American. And the races are constantly set against each other; each has its own suspicion of persecution. Leventhal feels that there is a 'black list' against Jews, and Albee that there is a Jewish set-up, the marriage of Asa's brother is disturbed by its mixed strains. Nobody knows his place for there is no class system; no promises are made in advance. All feel isolated, alienated and detached from the common cultural ground. The contracts that take place between people are largely casual often abrasive.

Most of Leventhal's encounters are in fact with crowds-crowds on the ferry, on the subway on the streets, in the parks and the cafeterias and the office-blocks – or with his own family, a broken unit, on with the disintegrating Jewish community. His brother has gone off, neglecting his family; his relationship with his wife is flawed by his memory of her previous lover; and during the substantial action of the novel she is away from home and Leventhal, alone in his apartment, is made at once aware of the thinness of the strands of love and of its importance in a world where so much works are against it. The barriers between people are more evident than any ties; each man is thrown back upon himself alone.

Leventhal is very much a product of such an uncertain world. His character is a mixture of sensibility and an aggressiveness that he feels is necessary in the city if someone is not to put something over him. Security is the most important support to him, since he is terrified of falling; and because he has been successful he is inclined to interpret the world as rewarding those who deserve it and pushing down those who do not. One of the things that he must learn in the book is that there is an element of chance and also of historical necessity in terms of success and failure.

Leventhal's insistence on responsibility is shown to us as just his problem is simply to discern the true nature of his responsibility. Indeed, throughout the book, Bellow puts him into the position of having responsibilities of different kinds—to his work, and his brother's family; to Allbee, and to his wife; to his general humanity, and his Jewishness. And indeed, the reason why the true and accurate discerning of responsibilities is of such importance is that it is precisely in this urban competitive and morally confused situation that they are not recognizable. Thus the important happening in the book is that in the course of its action Leventhal acquires a new understanding, an understanding about the nature of a general responsibility, and this involves a radical change in his view of what constitutes humanity, and of what way the social system works.

The confrontation with Allbee is the means by which this change in understanding is produced; and this confrontation is a great imaginative invention, the one event that makes the novel seem to be terrifyingly modern. Allbee is a face out of the crowd, comes to claim from Leventhal a new attitude toward the world. He is a double-Allbee the Ostensial victim, Leventhal the real one.

The importance of humanity and the existence of individualism is always emphasized throughout the novel depicting model characters like Asa Leventhal.

Bellow's measure of complexity and his characteristic interest that is his idea contests in Leventhal's mind with another interpretation of human condition is expressed by Mr. Schlossberg. He says:

I am as sure about greatness and beauty as you are about a black and white. If a human life is a great thing to me, it is a great thing. Do you know better? I'm entitled as much as you. And why be measly? Do you have to be? Is somebody holding you by the neck? Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down. (120)

The same idea is captured to the end of the book, when Asa Leventhal is moving toward his crisis, recognizing an essential human sympathy with Albee, doubting the accuracy of his observations with respect to his brother's family. In a discussion about the way in which Americans seek to evade the thought of death, Scholossberg speaks of the fact that there is a limit to every mass:

There is a limit to me. But I have to be myself in full. Which is somebody who dies, isn't it? That's what I was from the beginning. I'm not three people, four people. I was born once and I will die once. You want to be two people? More than human? May be it's because you don't know how to be one. (229)

These lines suggest as to be one is to be human and existentialism is always individual existence as well as it is problematic.

Bellow's overall purpose in the novel is to evaluate how twentieth-century man copes with his victimization; the ending of the work alludes to show that Asa Leventhal is too weak-willed to move beyond his role as passive victim.

Though the novel's narrative voice is technically in the third person, it has the effect of being told by Asa Leventhal, making it difficult for the reader to judge the protagonist, whose perception of reality is distorted by his paranoia until chapter 24, the last chapter of the novel which leaps several years ahead. From the first page of the story until the climax at the end of chapter 23, when Asa Leventhal finally exercises his persecutor Allbee, he appears to be relentlessly moving toward disaster because of his emotional paralysis. But he does fumble through and save himself in the climatic scene and Bellow next shows him a few years later so that the reader can see Asa Leventhal free of his paranoic fear of Allbee and assess Leventhal's character.

In chapter 24, it is clear that Asa Leventhal has been improved physically, psychologically, and financially. With improved health and new job, he realizes that things have gone well for him, yet he still feels some deep-rooted sense of inadequacy. To him, the world and man's place in it seem completely "haphazard" (285). There is "no true work" at a specific company that an individual is "made for." The false belief that there is such true work, "instead of a delaying maze to be gone through daily in a misery so habitual that one became absent minded about it" results from the "mysterious" conviction of a preternatural promise granting one particular social status:

But the error rose out of something very mysterious, namely a conviction or illusion that at the start of life, and perhaps even before, a promise had been made. In thinking of this promise, Leventhal compared it to a ticket, a theatre ticket There were more important things to be promised. Possibly there was a promise, since so many felt it. He himself was almost ready to affirm that there was. But it was misunderstood. (285-86)

Love of humanity is the crucial idea in *The Victim*. In a long choral speech by the Yiddish journalist Schlossberg in the novel might be considered the central speech of Bellow where he stresses his humanist rejection of the supernaturalism. "This is my whole idea. More than human, can you have any use of life? Less than human, you don't either" (133). That's why he suggests people to be exactly human. Anything beyond the human allows man to detach himself from humanity and ignore, camouflage, or minimize man's suffering.

Even though Bellow is critical to his protagonist's "more-than-human" impulse, Asa's religious inclination can be considered a remarkable development for a man who is nearly solipsistically obsessed with his material security. The final scene of *The Victim* reveals that Asa Leventhal has not been reborn despite his momentary Leventhal of some kind of transcendent promise. At a Broadway theatre he accidentally meets a moderately successful Allbee, who correctly observes that Asa Leventhal has not "changed much" (292). Feeling remorseful for having tormented Asa Leventhal in the past, Allbee presses Asa's hand and confesses: "I know I owe you something" (294). The confession has no impact upon Asa Leventhal, who still maintains his role as victim even though Allbee has abandoned his role as persecutor years ago. As Allbee departs from his seat in the balcony, Asa Leventhal reluctantly calls after him, "wait a minute, what's your idea of who runs things?" (294). The book symbolically ends with the image of Asa Leventhal and his wife being led by an usher to their seats in the dark theatre. Bellow suggests that his protagonist is still a passive character who has no understanding of the cause at his own victimization.

Asa Leventhal is victimized by his own inability to define himself and create a suitable orientation to understand the environment for adaptation. Bellow's novel can be considered as his criticism of twentieth-century men—a weak-willed victim who is

unable to confront the most fundamental questions of existence and engaged himself with reality. The character's afflictions of the novel are not perceived as being entirely their own fault but to a certain extent caused by events in their lives or the society around them.

Asa Leventhal is struggling against chaos. His influence is based on reality, there is no question that Saul Bellow's greatness and affirmation is in the struggle against chaos and clutter of too muchness of everything, toward life and the freedom to live. Bellow's hero moves into society, with a desperate hope that the human dilemma will be solved in community recognition and action.

It is not the 'absurd' of Camus' but the absurdity of Bellow's world that is more likely to consist of a profusion of things, a clutter and surplusage of experience, the city world of Chicago and New York, where 'things' and gestures and manners and knowledges are heaped upon one another because there isn't enough space to contain them or time to consider them separately. Bellow's hero, here, is therefore something less than ideally heroic, he is agonizingly at grips with his own personal and moral identity and security; with surviving the flux and contrarities of experience finally, with the overwhelming noumenal question of his relation to an unknown. We can not expect from him either the large qualities of conventional heroism or the agonizing moral toothaches of the "alienated hero". The alienation is morally reprehensible to be separated from the rest of society which is a condition wholly deplorable.

Leventhal, physically, is alienated from his family members: "His father, who had owned a small dry good store, was a turbulent man, harsh and selfish toward his sons. Their mother had died in an insane asylum when Leventhal was eight and his brother six" (10). His wife too is far away since long leaving him alone and he is

isolated from his relatives. He, psychologically, is also alienated for not getting good job and disturbed by Allbee:

He began in a spirit of utter hopelessness. The smaller trade papers simply turned him away. The larger gave him applications to fill out; occasionally he spent a few minutes with a personal manager and had the opportunity to shake someone's hand He was met with astonishment, with coldness, and with anger. He often grew angry himself. (15)

His alienation in capitalistic and industrial world can be seen sharply in the following lines: "Leventhal said to himself, impatiently; there are two billion people or so in the world and he's miserable. What's he so special" (134)?

In this way, Bellow's novel *The Victim* scans the human world for its types of separation, conformity, rebellion and adoption. His essential task is to fight against loss of identity, to make a 'show' of virtue and a satisfactory life in this world, since the next world has been only nebulously indicated and surely does not inspire confidence. Bellow's great contribution lies in his ability to socialize the effort to survive in the modern world.

The novel is multifaceted in its suggestiveness and rich immoral meaning. *The Victim* is the only one of Bellow's novels to have a tight and neat structure. It comes before moral picaresque which is to characterize the complexities of moral guilt. It is an enclosed book but of moral vision, illuminated by one of Bellow's most important powers: a vividness of prose that brings alive suffering human characters and the moral life of humanity: for, as Schlossberg says, it is our task to seek and observe in life an understanding not of what is more or less than human, but what is human exactly.

So far as the novel is concerned with morality, it is not working in the present capitalistic society. We can see the Commodification of women in post-modern society. A film script of a journalist Schlossberg shows the same thing in the book:

You have a professional attitude in this, seeing so many beauties. I'm still unspoiled. I suppose you can do a lot with paint and cameras, but there has to be something to start with. You can't fake those gorgeous sex machines, can you? Or is it the gullible public again? They look genuine to me. (111)

In the novel, many events of immorality like alcoholism, sexuality and prostitution take place. But the protagonist of the novel always avoids these things and keeps himself having sense of duty. He works for humanity: "Leventhal visualized his brother's strongly excited face and imagined his incoherencies. He sends them money and that makes him a father. That's the end of his responsibilities. That's fatherhood,' he repeated to himself. That's his idea of duty" (122). Through these lines Saul Bellow not only tries to show the sense of duty of Asa Leventhal's family members but also to all human kind.

Here, in this book, we can identify the voice of new American generation, Haroured with a new kind of conscience. We also can see the representation of postmodern peoples' behaviour and life style, their bitter experience, morally troubled years, era of existentialism, angst and alienation. In some places, we can see even suicidal mood of the characters because of the frustration due to evil tasks of the co-worker human beings.

To Leventhal, Albee becomes an unwanted threatening and eventually even dangerous double, his grossness and intrusive insistence unforgivable. When Leventhal gives ground, Allbee takes advantage, and nearly ends up killing both of

them. Yet by the end, aided by the sense of a Jewish friend, Leventhal does come to a wider notion of responsibility, the common duty, the nature of what it means to be human. His determinism is not nihilism, and his duty towards Allbee goes at least as far as commonly sharing the obscure intricacy of life, the universality of death, and a need to nourish the human in the world of machinal competition.

In the novel, Asa Leventhal must fight his own battle, must lay the ghosts of his own insecurity and his imagined complicity of evil. That battle culminates in his discovering Allbee in the act of attempting suicide.

He collided with someone who crouched there, and a cry came out of him. The air was foul and hard to breathe. Gas was pouring from the oven. 'I have to kill him now', he thought as they grappled. He caught the cloth of his coat in his teeth while he swiftly changed his grip, clutching at Allbee's face. He tore away convulsively, but Leventhal crushed him with his weight in the corner. Allbee's fist came down heavily on his neck, beside the shoulder. 'You want to murder me? Murder?' Leventhal gasped. The sibilance of the pouring gas was almost deafening. (254)

Here, in two persons, accuser and victim come so close to being the same person that the twin acts of suicide and murder become almost indistinguishable. In this way, the novel has lots of characteristics of present post-modern existential world where the characters are suffering from angst and alienation, morally troubled experience, individuality, industrial and capitalistic form of society. Thus, we can say that Saul Bellow is an existentialist though he never put himself in the group of existentialist writers.

Bellow is not Marxist like Sartre but a democrat, fought against all sort of tyranny injustice and brutalities. He was humanist like Sartre and Camus but not like Heidegger and Nietzsche. He loves heroism and superman concept but rejects the idea totally cruel and tyrannical. He is not religious but remembers the God in the midst of crisis and never expects much from God. He believes in action but does not deny the complexities of situation. His writing is somehow complex in style. Existentialist says man is what man makes of himself but he shows human limitation what a man can do and endures.

Bellow is totally disillusioned by the experience of great world wars. He believes that man is judged in the crisis because of his action at the moment of crisis. Amid the anxiety, pain, suffering, victimization and alienation there is humanistic strain in his writing. He focuses on freedom and love and always keeps humanism in his mind. His expression about human being-to be even an enemy is better than nobody at all – shows his humanity and love towards man and mankind.

IV. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to trace out existential problem of the protagonist Asa Leventhal and the other characters around him. A piece of literary composition requires no explanation, it stands on its own worth as it reveals the human condition. In this novel we find the same thing, characters struggling in the crowded and competitive society with patience and courage where pain, suffering, meaninglessness and nothingness prevail. The angst of existence can lead to nihilism. But Asa Leventhal escapes from it and takes shelter in optimism where he gets himself in improved condition, gets reunited with his family members and tries to get rid of his difficulties.

Humanism was Bellow's aim, but it was hard to forge in the face of disjunctive modern experience. Bellow's desire in the novel is to link the history of individual with the larger process of society, but those individuals are also seen as alienated, victimized, dislocated, materially satisfied but spiritually damaged, conformist yet anomic rational but anarchic. The mood of this book goes beyond the rural innocence and epicality of earlier American writing, exploring the dark modernity of post-industrial society in an attempt to face Bellow's question: How should a good man live, what ought he to do?

In *The Victim* Asa Leventhal, the protagonist has a bitter sense of society, as an endless rising and falling, a scene of victimization. Whatever he wants, a number of people are after too. No one knows his power place; no promises have been made in advance. Luck and chance, too, play a great role to determine human destiny.

The idea of victim is the key to the hero in the novel. The 'Victim' here is he who can blame his suffering or failure on somebody outside of himself. This is, for the most part, the stance set up by Bellow's hero against the world. Asa Leventhal has

a wider range of lament and blame which is based on man's potential absurdity. Here, the universe rather than the Bellow's hero is in need of an existential demonstration. It is a new heroic concept of Bellow that the world needs the hero more than the hero needs the world.

Saul Bellow places himself in dangerous circumstances, and makes an effort to be alert to his optimistic life. He hates self destruction and hopelessness and becomes the heir of Sisyphus, who is happy even after punishment. Asa Leventhal is beaten by the problems of capitalistic forms of society, his moral sense of duty and his belief in humanity, he is still hopeful for meaning, for order, for his profession and for his future. So Asa Leventhal is not nihilist but existentialist. Nihilism can not overcome the reality of nothingness, void and absurdity of human existence.

Saul Bellow has depicted the theme of isolated individual who must struggle until he is dead to create meaning in a hostile and indifferent universe. Asa Leventhal appears to be an strong willed man of action having extra-ordinary quality like Nietzschean superman. The supermen are people of restless energy who enjoy living the life of adventure and have contempt for meekness and humility. Asa Leventhal stands as a rebel, a protester of the mechanized and indifferent world like Neitzsche who challenged the contemporary religious world by declaring that God is dead. Bellow's hero, in the novel, struggles within himself in the mental and psychological level and with people and crowded society around him.

Bellow's emphasis on the individual as rebel against conventions, against nada, against absurdity and presenting the hero as distinct, a lonely man is his existential root in the novel. His loneliness represents Heidegger's doctrine of alienation and loneliness. Heidegger finds his life meaningless and gets no ways to happiness as Bellow's protagonist Leventhal does. He is surrounded by difficult

situation, from which he cannot run away but confronts it with a full conscience, patience and courage. He is in quest for personal freedom or autonomy which can best be seen as attempts on his part to maintain his integrity in the face of pressures toward compromise and self-betrayal.

Bellow's *The Victim* represents a culmination in American literature of over forty years of modernist ideological debate about the philosophical premises of European existentialism versus traditional, Judeo-Christian humanism, and the 'wasteland' mentality of the Anglo-American cultural tradition. Both reflect Bellow's profound engagement with such writers as Kierkegaard, Dostoevski, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Hobbes and Sartre. Both, finally, portray nostalgia over the failure of the romantic quest and affirm the necessity for social responsibility, the moral exhaustion of a generation of young men who came of age in the 1940's and the moral bankruptcy of a metaphysically-derived humanism. Bellow portrays freedom, goodness, absurdity, death, monastic solitude and existential anxiety which are all explored throughout the novel.

The characters in *The Victim* struggle time and again for the salvation of their soul, but they have a problem of identity. The relationship between identity and existence is similar to Buber's existential concept of "I- It" and "I-Thou" relationship between God and man.

Loneliness, alienation, hopelessness and betrayal are some of the instances of the protagonists' existential problem. He, in the novel, understands the connection between individual responsibility and human dignity. He moves from self effacement to moral strength which adds a new dimension to his existence.

According to Sartre, only man exists, other things do not. This humanitarian concept is manifested when Leventhal says- even an enemy is better than nobody at

all. The instance of human existence which we can find in the novel also lies in the perception of all the senses of the individual. Vision at once is the dominant sensory system for a human being which Leventhal uses at his best in his life-style. The setting of the novel, hot mid-summer night of New York, itself signifies the mental torture and tension of Asa Leventhal in the crowded city where he is alienated and struggling for survival with dignity among the people. Humanity is always Saul Bellow's prime concern and morality he keeps in his mind.

In this way, we can say that the whole novel is basically about struggle for existence amid all meaninglessness, nothingness, emptiness, failure, frustrations, alienation and absurdity.

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