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An Introductory Idea of Existentialism in the Fictions of R.K. Narayan

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Abstract

The world of Nagaraj (1990), and Grandmother's Tale (1992). S. Krishnan says 'R.K. R.k. Narayan is one of the leading novelists of the first generation of Indian novelist in English. He lived a long life ninety for years: born in 1906 and died in May 2001. His first novel, Swami and Friends (1935), was set in the enchanting fictional territory of Malgudi. Narayan's other novels are The English Teacher (1945), A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), Talkative Man (1986). Narayan's writerly life spanned seven long and his essays written at various times indicate his growth as well as concerns as a writer. "In his growth as a writer, existentialism stands as a main concern of the artist thinker. His protagonists are surrounded by those elements

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Introduction-

R.k. Narayan : The writerly life ed. S. Krishnan New Delhi: Penguin Books India: Vrking, 2001, p. ix. Which show the undercurrent of loneliness helplessness, and failure. Every one of them is physically emotionally intellectually pauper: there is no field of human life which is not negative in essence. The hope of fulfilment and success comes to the point of negative at its end. The man remains in need of that which can make his life worth living.

Existential thinking has undergone two very clear developments after world war II : Christian existentialism and communistic existentialism. The former points to the idea that man may find freedom only in God : tension will be overtaken by peace in devotion to God. The latter hints at the idea that man is alone in a godless universe. Both shades of existentialism have some elements in common: "the concern with man's being ; the feeling that reason is insufficient to understand the mysteries of the universe. " The consciousness that pain in a universal object and the idea that morality has validity only when there is affirmative cooperation are offshoots of existentialism. God and morality hold the reins of human thought and action: the former makes man lonely and the latter leads man to be negative in thought, Karl peckson and Arthur genz, A reader's guide to literary terms dictionary (chandigarh: vishal, 1982), p.6

And action. The result of man's good and bad actions is attributed to the power of God; and the event of life and death is also beyond human reach and control. So to leave every thing on the mercy and will of God is an existential idea. Possibility and desirability too are existential terms, and their negative and positive aspects too are existential. The closing part of Swami and Friends is full of despair and disappointment; as such, the novel embodies existentialism. Swami does not get what he desires at the end, therefore, he attributes his failure to the will of God, and he consoles himself accordingly.

Existentialism, to a very great extent, is a style of philosophising: it is wrong to say that it is a body of philosophical principles. The basic themes found in the writings of existentialist thinkers are freedom, decision, responsibility, quest anxiety, boredom, nausea, and the emotional life of man. It is said that the problems of existentialism, in a narrower sense, are “expressive of the present crisis of man, and in a broader sense of the enduring human condition. “ other themes, such as, time 1F.H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (London : adam & black,1953) , p. 178.

In the world the man is compelled to ask : who am I? what is my relation to physical and social world ? How do I achieve true belief? “Answers to these questions end in a muddling state, for man thinks himself to be representatively Homosapiens (an object) subject to natural and social laws, and an objective Investigator

Discussion-

1 G. Marcel , the philosophy of Existence (new York: philosophical library, 1949), p.52 who hold reason above feeling put that mathematical certainty and experimental predicti Employing public methods for the discovery of truth. “ but many a time he thinks himself to be uniquely an individual, an subjective agent transacting his environment and a subjective creator committed to the private realisation of truth. Any two extremes of thought contain both rational and non-rational components. Neither group would deny that life as man experiences it is filled with regularities as well as contingencies, with necessary and accidental occurrences. And thought has both certainty and probability , both reasoning and rationalisation. Moreover, philosophers hold that the features that they emphasise are primary. Those –bility can justify his curiosity and put forward an adequate basis for dealing with the world. The thinking of this nature verges on aloneness and alienation. The two sides of the same coin have contradictory phenomena: there is, however, similarity in transitoriness and unreliability. What seems on the one side cannot appear on the other: but both sides make the value.

Some thinkers have faith in personal life of existence. For instance, Socrates recommended of knowledge of the self: Man’s efforts to meet his own recommendation are characterised by a strange tension. He appears to know himself by living a life in which he achieves thereby a higher and in which he achieves a higher level of personal existence. “His self-knowledge was attained by disciplined reflection in which characterising himself he characterised all men. History bears testimony to the existence of two Socrates : the participant in life and the spectator of life. The question arises: which bears the message of Socrates truth? Is it the inner directed, self determining orator, a personage who stands unique among men? Or is the dispassionate, passive character of that which unifies all men? In socratic dialogues in which plato’s concern is predominantly conceptual the courageous and audacious figure of Socrates as a man with a moral mission fed by his own energies and faithful to his own convictions emerges. Plato explicitly represents Socrates as turning 1B. Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944) , p. 835

To an inner voice – a voice that is a product neither of social conditioning nor of reason – crucial moments of decision. For instance, the dialogues concerning his trial. Socrates expressed loyalty to the voice of conscience without regard for his own life : I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy. “So Socrates the man and philosopher amounts to a cardinal philosophical error.

What the platonists have done is to assume that all of an individual's problems can and must be formulated in such a way that they are resolvable rationally. Plato talked about the highest form, that Good, which stands as the ultimate ground of knowledge and value, he had to switch from the careful language of reason to that of metaphor. It is through the devices of myth and literary analogy that he could communicate at all about this ultimate reality, it may be accepted that the existentialist grants his approval to those nuances of human life and activity which are within the halo of aloneness and alienation.

Accepting the analysis of the limitations of demonstrable knowledge, they feel that his efforts to1 B. Jowett (trans), The Dialogues of Plato (New York: oxford university press, 1932), p.96.who hold reason above feeling put that mathematical certainty and experimental predicti Employing public methods for the discovery of truth. " but many a time he thinks himself to be uniquely an individual, an subjective agent transacting his environment and a subjective creater committed to the private realisation of truth. Any two extremes of thought contain both rational and non-rational components. Neither group would deny that life as man experiences it is filled with regularities as well as contingencies, with necessary and accidental occurrences. And thought has both certainty and probability , both reasoning and rationalisation. Moreover, philosophers hold that the features that they emphasise are primary.

Those –bility can justify his curiosity and put forward an adequate basis for dealing with the world. The thinking of this nature verges on aloneness and alienation. The two sides of the same coin have contradictory phenomena: there is, however, similarity in transitoriness and unreliability. What seems on the one side cannot appear on the other: but both sides make the value of the coin.Man is partly successful in his efforts: he claims either that he has insufficient evidence of1K. jespers, Existentialism and Humanism (New York:Moore, 1952), p. 106. "the facts help sustain the existentialist in his attitude. Many a philosopher who turn to reason exclusively admit that it is limited, and even rationalists succeed in understanding nature to grasp the human situation . the existentialist sees those who acknowledge the limit of reason and fail to seek alternatives as consigned to a debilitating sceptic- ism. He seen those who militantly demand rational accounts of man's behaviour as having submitted to a dehumanised view. The contemporary existentialist insists on man's coming to the painful realisation that reason cannot cope with the particular, the contingent, and the transcendent thus,1E. Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Scribner's 1935), p.142.2J. Maritain, The Education of Man (New York: parthenn,1949), p. 27.Here and now. It is what is only enveloped but never consumed by rational from. So it is an actual empirical existence which is just as it is and no otherwise.Some thinkers have faith in personal life of existence. For instance, Socrates recommended of knowledge of the self: Man's efforts to meet his own recommendation are characterised by a strange tension. He appears to know himself by living a life in which he achieves thereby a higher and in which he achieves a higher level of personal existence. "His self-knowledge was attained by disciplined reflection in which characterising himself he characterised all men. History beare testimony to the existence of two Socrates : the participant in life and the spectator of life. The question arises: which bears the message of Socrates truth? Is it the inner directed, self deter- mining orator, a personage who stands unique among men? Or is the dispassionate, passive character of that which unifies all men? In socratic dialogues in which plato's concern is predominantly conceptual the courageous and audacious figure of Socrates as a man with a moral mission fed by his own energies and faithful to his own convictions emerges. Plato explicitly represents Socrates as turning1 B. Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Siman

& Schuster, 1944) , p. 835.

Incomprehensible despite his effort to grasp it through reason , and beyond this, as a creature with an absolute desire to establish a measure of report with an otherwise hostile or indifferent. It this desire is left unsatisfied, any man is condemned to a solitary life of terror.^{1B}. Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. W.F. Trotter (New York: Dutton, 1958), P. 31.^{2W}. D. Rose, *Foundations of Ethics* (New York: University Press, 1939), P. 82. The first type might be termed platonic, that is the datum and pure thought, the particular extent and the essence, the table and the ideas of the table are so totally divorced from one another that on the principle there can be connection of mediation between them. Hegel declared, “consciousness knows and comprehends nothing but what falls within its experience. i.e.’ abstract whether it be in the form of sense or of a bare thought externalises itself from the stage of estrangement.^{1S}. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 106.^{2J}. Loewenberg (ed.), *Hegel Selections* (New Selections) (New York: Scribner’s, 1929), p. 32.

Conclusion-

Impenetrable darkness of fate; and the novelist portrays this shade of necessity. The anxiety of death and fate in the permanent horizon within which the anxiety of both is at work. For the threat against man’s ontic (being) self-affirmation is not only the absolute threat of death but also the relative threat of fate. ness. They have, however, a certain independence and, ordinarily a more immediate impact than the anxiety of death.” “The heroines as well as the heroes are haunted by the visions of dancing the thousand eyes upon their shimmering feathers gazing steadfastly, unwinkingly upon the final truth-death. Both death and fate loom large in the novels which are primarily concerned with the problems of existence and the dilemmas of life. Nonbeing threatens man as a whole, and therefore threatens his spiritual as well as his ontic self-affirmation spiritual self- affirmation occurs in every moment in which man lives creatively in the various spheres of meaning.^{1j}. Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, p. 86.

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