Jean-Paul Sartre Versus Friedrich Nietzsche

Jean-Paul Sartre belongs to the Atheist group of Existentialists. His writings examine man as a responsible but lonely being, burdened with a terrifying freedom to choose and set adrift in a meaningless universe. The main purpose of atheist existentialism is ‘God is nowhere’. Sartre is an atheist existentialist and he believes that ‘Existence precedes Essence’. Since ‘Existence precedes Essence’, one exists and fashions our image. The image we create is valid for everybody and for the whole age. Thus, responsibility is much greater because it involves all mankind. If Existence precedes Essence, then there is no determinism, man is free.

Man is condemned to be free, carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders. He is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being. Responsibility of the ‘for-itself ‘is overwhelming since he is the one who makes himself to be. ‘for-itself implies whatever situation it must be, he must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it. Absolute responsibility is the logical requirement of the consciousness of our freedom. Hence, every event in the world is revealed only as an opportunity or better which happens to be considered as a chance. The responsibility of the ‘for-itself ‘extends to the entire world as a peopled- world.

The book taken for analysis is Existentialism and Human Emotions. The main concept in this book is ‘Existence precedes Essence’. Here, Sartre explains that the individual comes first, defines himself and then examines the world. Man invents himself. Man not only conceives what he is to be, but also determines what he himself to be after the thrust towards existence. Man is nothing else, but what he makes of himself. Existentialism’s first move is to make every man aware of what he is and make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him. Therefore, Man is responsible for his circumstances and that of others. The first principle of existentialism is also called subjectivity. It has two meanings: An individual chooses and makes himself; it is impossible for man to transcend subjectivity. This is the essential meaning of existentialism.

Man chooses his own self implies that everyone in the world does the same and also means that he/ she chooses all men. To choose to be this or that is to affirm the value of what one chooses because the man never chooses evil. Man chooses good always and nothing can be good for an individual without being good for all. Since ‘Existence precedes Essence’, man exists and fashions his/ her own image. The image man creates is valid for everyone and for the whole age. Sartre, when he talks of freedom and responsibility, says that man is responsible not only for his own individuality, but he is responsible for all men.

Freedom and Responsibility explain the implications of the freedom of the ‘for- itself’. It means consciousness without God. Absolute freedom implies that the individual is responsible. Whatever happens to the individual or others is something of the individual’s creation. Sometimes certain facts are outside the individual’s control. The human decides to adopt these facts into his choices. Anguish arises when the individual recognizes that her choices touch the world. When this happens most individuals flee anguish in bad faith.

Every individual is the unique project of creating himself. This project is a kind of motivation to ‘self-define. It involves himself, the physical world, the ‘Other’ and striving towards the

unification of these aspects. The person is self-contained, creating herself/himself for herself/himself alone. Sartre considers man as an isolated being and explains his condition in Existentialism and Human Emotions.

Existential psychoanalysis sees the approach to the meaning of the individual. Individuals become individuals not at birth, but later when they make the primal choices. This initial choice precedes the consciousness and constitutes the individual. This Existential Psychoanalysis shows the individual his self-generated existence. Some of the themes of Sartre's Existentialism are Anguish, Forlornness, Facticity and Despair. According to Sartre, anguish means the feeling that arises when one recognizes that her choices legislate for all mankind and she is responsible. Man is faced with the lack of any external source of value and determination. He is faced with the responsibility of choosing nature and values. In doing so, he must face the awesome responsibility of choosing nature and values for all men in our free choice.

By Forlornness, Sartre asserts that God does not exist and one must face up to the many implications of this fact. Theme Forlornness is explained by the case of one of Sartre's students. The student undergoes two cases of ethics in this concept and decides to choose any one of the two. Sartre then explains that in the two cases, the values are vague and broad and so the only thing left for the student is "Trust our Instincts'.

By Despair, Sartre explains that an individual should reckon with possibilities and so man can comfort action with the ensemble of possibilities. A man should restrict himself to what is under his own control. In Facticity, Sartre explains about throws. Sartre says that man is thrown into the world and so he begins life with nothingness. Hence he must create his own existence. By doing so, he creates not only his own being rather than others too. Human meaning is chosen by humans. Existentialism is nothing more than consistent atheism. The main concept of atheistic existentialism is 'If God exists, it would not matter'. Every man has his own essence and it changes persistently according to his own choices and possibilities.

Nietzsche is famous for his notions on power and morality. They are also highly controversial ideas besides his 'God is Dead' declaration. His views on power, politics, and morality are interconnected with each other. Each is informed by the other, and cannot exist in isolation. While Machiavellian thought is concerned with providing a practical basis for the management of a State, Nietzsche elevates it and gives it a metaphysical lift.

Nietzsche reiterates what part morality plays within the power-politics relationship. He advocates controversial ideas that share an anti-Platonist and anti-Christian slant while preferring a naturalistic morality. Nietzsche's attack on the worthlessness of morality in the practical development of the human race earned him ubiquitous hatred from all sides. To him, it is the animal in man, rather than his cultured 'self' that is important.

Nietzsche's ideas have always been treated as condemnable because he toes the line of the 'Immoralist'. Sadly, Nietzsche's teachings were misused by the Nazis, especially that of the Ubermensch, which unfortunately strengthened their ideology. This led him to be vilified by the West until Walter Kaufman released a newly translated version of all his works along with a new Introduction. This has allowed Nietzsche's writings to be re-examined and his ideas would eventually go on to help in developing a new manner of perception. They have helped in bringing about a 'rupturing' of thought and brought in a great shift in thinking. In fact,

Nietzschean ideology is credited with being the basis of many critical phenomena such as Deconstruction, Modernism and Postmodernism, to name a few.

Nietzschean scholars believe that much of his philosophical work is concerned with Man and the creation of the Self, which he terms as ‘becoming what one is’. His philosophy has a conviction that the universe is in a constant state of change. He identifies ‘Will’ as the agent of changing universe. He examines and studies man and his environment, his needs, desires and his relationships, especially those with his fellowmen and his religion. Nietzsche hates Nihilistic tendencies, and critics suggest that his entire corpus aims at trying to reaffirm life by radically rethinking the nature of human existence, behaviour, knowledge, and morality. Ethics and Morality the two areas, which he believes, are responsible for feeding nihilism. He calls for a re-assessment of their ideas while rooting out the negativity in them. He even goes so far as to advocate a plan for ‘becoming what one is’ by cultivating one’s instincts and cognitive faculties, rather than following forced and hypocritical norms.

Nietzsche supports the idea of a virtuous man, but then also builds it up into a more worthy premise. Rather than just making it an ‘ends justifies the means’ premise, Nietzsche endows this philosophy with a more metaphysical endgame. His concern is not only with man being a good leader, but someone who is actively trying to fight a nihilistic system that prevents worldly endeavour.

In connection with these ideas, Nietzsche created a new form of leader, which he terms as the Ubermensch or the Superman. ‘Man’ is characterised by a feeling of being unafraid to use his natural gifts of physical strength, intelligence and instinct in order to gain the best. In so doing, he achieves full potential and considers himself fit to assert dominance over others, who lack his skills. The Ubermensch is also a prophet who heralds the coming of the end, and who tries to offer a way out of the ennui that is beginning to set in with the impending Nihilistic spirit being fostered by the morality of the times. The search for meaning and redemption, in Nietzsche’s view, has caused man to abandon the earth and exhaust his potential. Instead, he wants to reawaken man’s instincts and inspire him to strive for greatness, which he believes is a natural need.

The Ubermensch is a superior individual who eschews the behaviour of the common man, and who is rather more intelligent, confident and result-oriented. He is also a man who pays little attention to the vagaries of morality, as he understands that his job as a leader is for the good of the multitude. He knows that it is sometimes necessary to resort to immoral means if it is for the good of the community at large.

This Ubermensch, therefore, is an ‘immoralist’ and a ‘criminal’ who abhors passivity and complacency and creates his own identity through self-realisation. He defiantly develops and hones his abilities, all the while believing in the importance of the ‘present’ rather than just denying their deeper natures, all for the sake of a heavenly reward. He is an exception among human beings, ‘whose inexhaustible fertility and power keep up the faith in man’.

However, Nietzsche has realised later that the realization of such a being is impossible. Nevertheless, man has an obligation to attempt to strive to this condition, irrespective of whether he achieves it or not. As a result of this, he has preferred the term ‘higher men’, a much more plausible ideal. ‘Higher men’ are ‘human, all-too-human, and are exceptional, who express a strong ‘Will to Power’, but are also seriously flawed. These Higher Men are also concrete

examples of non-conformity and strength, who can inspire towards something better and stronger.

In Nietzschean philosophy, Ubermensch uses his Will to Power to get things done. The use of words such as ‘instinct’ and ‘striving’ and ‘feeling’ introduces a psychological dimension that attaches importance on human nature, its needs and desires. Micael Tanner believes that this theory is a realistic competitor to the theory of psychological hedonism. The usual notion of power is that it is concerned with domination and influence that only evil or immoral people possess. In Nietzschean philosophy, however, they are basic to every being, human or animal, as they are naturally programmed.

The Will to Power, Nietzsche’s famous teaching, equates the search for power with the search for pleasure and for survival. He calls it as the struggle for independence, power to overcome obstacles and dominance over others’ Will. He calls people as things/ selves but as complex of Will struggling with one another for domination. It is also the theory that brings in the concept of survival into the fore. Survival is an important part in the Nietzschean power play, as it connects the idea to the controversial statement of the importance of the animal instinct in man. While Western philosophy generally believes that the suppression of the animal instinct is the cornerstone of a successful and fully realized individual, Nietzsche refutes it. In his mind, truth comes not from society or civilization but rather from the raw need of the animal within man’s self. Power is the best example of his argument. ‘Man’ may be the central component of his thinking, but not his cultured self; rather, it is his animal self. This animal self in man is characterised by wildness, need, superiority, and above all survival. An animal lives a day-to-day existence, with every moment being a fight for food, territory, and safety. The power it wields and the choices it makes are uninhibited by outside forces telling it how to behave. Killing is acceptable as natural because its survival depends upon it. Furthermore, there is no morality in the animal world.

Within this context then it becomes understandable, that Darwinian Theory is one of his greatest influences. Nietzsche has borrowed Darwin’s theory of Evolution and his subsequent adage - ‘the survival of the fittest’ as vital points in his theories of power and morality. The whole notion that the origin of man is from animals is crucial to a man for whom animal nature is the centre of his thought. He refers to Man as part human and part animal. It is only by civilization, with its multiplicity of morals and values that tempers his behaviour and streamlines it in a particular course. Yet, these instincts are never truly lost. They lie dormant and emerge in moments of great importance.

Using this concept of Evolution, he shows that in every species, there are both dominant and subordinate creatures. There are those that win, and those that do not, including Humans. He does not believe that all men are equally fit and thinking otherwise is erroneous. Some are naturally more gifted, stronger, and more intelligent, while there are others who are extremely lacking in these areas. The stronger, ‘superior’ man is the only one capable of asserting the Will to Power. Though this sounds entirely immoral, it is not so in reality; it is a necessity, and sugar-coating it is only delaying the inevitable.

Nietzsche believes that while it is necessary for a good leader to embody the virtues of an Ubermensch, he also needs to be in touch with the instinctual and animalistic side of himself. He needs to be animalistic in the manner in which he goes after what he wants. Power is not guaranteed, and neither is it permanent. As a way to combat this is the ability to fight constantly

in order to survive. He needs to fight for his survival and should be allowed the freedom to do it in any manner possible. Nevertheless, there is one restriction that states that a leader is justified in behaving in such a manner as long as he is doing it for the good of all. If it is only for the personal benefit then he is toeing the line of immorality and therefore ought to be censured. His ideal is the person who has the strength and courage for the universal affirmation. Nietzsche's ideal person creates meaning and values, and does not simply deal with empty facts. An understanding of his work as a whole concentrates on truth and language, metaphysics and conception of the will to power.

Nietzsche divides humans into two groups: a natural aristocratic group and a naturally dependent and inferior one. By principle, these groups find it impossible to get along. The superior one is naturally inclined to exploit the lesser one. Socialist thinkers like Marx and Engels believe that this exploitation will cease as years advance, but Nietzsche feels different. He also refuses to believe that 'Exploitation' is attributable only to the powerful, or the corrupt. Rather, he has supported the idea that it is the essence of every living organism. This exploitation, in his view, exists not because of this 'will to power', but rather as a consequence of the 'will to live'.

Schopenhauer's philosophy of "Will to Live" sets up the notion of 'survival' in the midst of a world that is dominated in uncertainty and ennui. But, Schopenhauer takes this to a morbid end, saying that death is the only solution to stem this continuing cycle of happiness - suffering. Nietzsche, meanwhile, refused to believe that 'survival' is a complete struggle without the promise of anything in return. He has taken this theory as the starting point and has created the idea of Will to Power, through which he has stated that the essence of every individual is the Will to dominate and to exert power. He believes that the natural instinct of every human being is to impose his will upon others as a sign of his determination, spirit and strength of character. The need to demonstrate his power and influence is his driving motivation. He even goes so far as to allege that there are not truly altruistic deeds because humans are essentially egocentric and self-serving. Yet Nietzsche does not take this as a negative thing. Instead, he esteems them as a man's ability to put himself first.