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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'OTHER' IN DEFINING 'SELF': A STUDY OF JEAN PAUL SARTRE'S *NO EXIT*

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Abstract:

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was born in Paris in 1905. He was one of the key figures in the philosophy of existentialism, and one of the leading figures in twentieth century French philosophy and Marxism. The play No Exit (1944) reveals the fact about human beings, who are in search of their existence and find nothing. Through this play Sartre presents his idea that, everything pleasant or unpleasant in life comes from others. The other plays much important role in an individual's life. The human beings are called as social animals, because they are attached with each other. They feel happiness, misery, identity, and loneliness in such atmosphere. The individual or self cannot exist alone in this world. He/she needs the 'look' of others or society to confirm his/her existence. The characters; Garcin, Inez, and Estelle in No Exit, beautifully specify the importance of others in an individual's life.

The present paper will focus on the struggle for identity of human beings living in post World War period. It will also explore the problems of identity, individuality, absurdity, and despair an individual faces in the society. And how the 'Gaze' of the Other person effects on the Self. The play No Exit is taken into consideration to highlight the struggle for identity and importance of the Other person in confirming Self's position.

Keywords: Existentialism, Self, Other, Identity, Individuality, Absurdity, Existence.

The concept of *other* examined by many philosophers and anthropologists as another individual who is different from the inner self. By the societal perspective, the *other* may be someone who is of a different race, religion, gender, culture, social class, or nationality. But from the point of view of existentialism, each and every individual person plays role of *other* whether in race, religion, gender or society. Basically, the philosophy of existentialism focuses on individuality and the position of other person in an individual's life.

To deal with the concept of *other*, it is necessary to focus on the philosophy of existentialism, because the philosophy specifically talks about human existence and it also highlight the importance, actions and contribution of other person in an individual's life. The term existentialism emerged in the nineteenth century in the writings of two great philosophers Soren Kierkegaard and Fredrick Nietzsche. However, it was popularized in twentieth century, because in twentieth century First and Second World Wars brought drastic changes all over the World. The period after Second World War was much depressive for humanity that an individual felt the meaninglessness of life and darkness of his/her existence. This situation was very conducive for spreading existential thought in philosophy and literature. Later on, the writers and philosophers of twentieth century, who contributed to this philosophy were; Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, and Jean Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka, and Albert Camus.

It is observed that existentialism is a philosophical thought that deals with the existence of individual human beings and their emotions, actions, responsibilities, and thoughts. Jean Paul Sartre was one of the key figures in the philosophy of existentialism, and one of the leading figures in twentieth century French philosophy and Marxism. He, in the play *No Exit*, beautifully specifies the importance of other person in an individual's life. For instance, if an individual person is locked in a room, it is not possible for him/her to exist in such place. That is the reason Sartre presents three characters in hell, who fight for their existence with the help of each other.

If the relation between self and other observed physically, Ralph Ruddock describes some phrases in identification with self's body:

'Don't push me.'
'It doesn't fit me.'
'I'm getting too fat' (Ruddock, 98).

These are the common speeches, a general talk that an individual speaks every day. If philosophically observed, it is found that the other person's actions and interest is involved in all sentences. For example the sentence 'Don't push me' conveys the meaning that the self is not pushing himself/herself but the other is pushing or intends to push. Hence the self is incomplete in the world. It always needs other's involvement or judgement.

According to Joseph H. McMahon, "Most frequently, the other has been considered as part of the category "man" and thus as a being who shares certain essential characteristics and potentialities with other members of his species" (McMahon, 85). In the same way, three characters, Garcin, Inez, and Estelle in the play share their characteristics and potentialities with each other in order to exist even in Hell.

Sartrean characters are not connected with the God, but with each other. In order to specify this, Jaspers Hopkins aptly comments, "Sartrean man becomes fallen through the presence of *other*, not through the project-to-be-God" (Hopkins, 116). Hence, Estelle rejects the notion that they are dead, instead of she says, "Please, please don't use that word. I suggest we call ourselves- wait! – absentees" (Sartre, 12).

Sartre keeps Garcin at the centre. He is the man who continuously wants to exist. When Estelle and Inez hear Garcin's crimes, they necessarily pass judgment on him as an object. If he feels shame and guilt, it's not because he treated his wife badly, it's because Estelle and Inez are looking at him and viewing him as an object. Here the big question is; who gets to be the subject and who has to be the object? In the sense, Garcin thinks the others as object for himself, but at the same time, he becomes the object for others too.

Since ancient times, the human beings have been living in groups. They are connected with each other. They divided themselves in groups by accepting Caste, Class, Race, Religion, etc. but to tell the truth, an individual feels life as absurd and meaningless if he/she is parted from human society. In an individual's life both good things and bad things or happiness and misery comes from the *others*. The others have main role to play in an individual's life. In fact, Estelle too without the others, is not sure that she exists. When she finds no mirror in her bag, she moves herself toward Inez to find whether she exists or not. Estelle asks for a glass to Inez, in reply Inez says, "Come closer, closer...now ask me questions. I'll be as candid as any looking glass" (Sartre, 20). Estelle must now rely on other's eyes to reflect herself. Moreover, she chooses Inez as the other to complete her desire.

Ingenuously, Sartre includes three persons in the play, no more, no less. Two is company while three is crowd. The third person serves as a threat to the relationship between the other two people and to one's subjectivity. The reason the third person becomes a threat is because of his/her gaze. As for Garcin, he declares that he was a brave person on earth but not coward. He wins

Estelle's approval. However, never succeeds in convincing Inez. Here he needs Inez to judge him and tell him whether he is brave or not. But Inez rejects his bravery by saying, "Oh, you coward, you weakling, running to women to console you" (Sartre, 44).

Garcin at the end of the play cannot leave the room where the three characters are together because he needs the other to judge him. When the door opens Inez says, "Well, Garcin? You are free to go...what are you waiting for? Hurry up and go" (Sartre, 42). However, Garcin changes his idea by saying, "... so it's you whom I have to convince, that's one and only thing I wish for now... If you will have faith in me I am saved" (Sartre, 42,43). Richard Vedebeck makes prediction regarding the impact of other on self. As he specifies, " If a significant *other* reacts approvingly toward some attribute of the subject, then the subject's concept of that attribute will increase; conversely, if a significant *other* reacts disapprovingly toward the subject, subject's concept of that attribute will decrease" (Vedebeck, 351-359).

Sartre, beautifully states the concept of *Being- in- itself* and *being- for- itself* in his essay *Being and nothingness*. In order to understand this, for example, a teacher is a teacher- that is being- in- itself, but primarily he/she is a human being- that is being- for- itself. In the same way, Garcin is coward- that is being- in- itself, but primarily he is a human being- that is being- for- itself. Therefore, it is the Gaze of Inez, which turns Garcin from being- in- itself into being- for- itself. It is the gaze according to Sartre, that first makes the three people feel that they are in Hell. Gaze turns love, and particularly sexual love, into a personal tension and eventually into warfare. As Garcin discovers, there is no need for physical torture in Hell; the gaze of the other reduces and devours his individuality.

Genuinely, the human beings are the social animals. Somehow, they are attached with each other. If a person is silent in the crowd, the crowd makes him/her to say something. The same thing happens in the play, when all of the three characters realizing that they are brought together to torture themselves, decide to sit silently without speaking a word. Garcin buries his head in his hands. After a while Estelle and Inez begins their discussion, but they do not feel openness, because the third person Garcin is not involved in their discussion. They try to get Garcin's attention toward them, through their amusing speech and actions:

Estelle: Are you Really- attracted by me?

Inez: Very much Indeed.

Estelle: (indicating Garcin by a slight movement of her head;):But I wish he'd notice me, too (Sartre,21).

Finally, Garcin interacts and they, by their discussion harm each other and get involve in difficulties. All of them are representative of bad faith. Sartre skillfully places Garcin with the two women in a closed place. Garcin could never think of any qualities of being a man. He needs Inez to judge him and tell him whether he is a man or not. Estelle too represents another form of bad faith. She desperately needs a mirror to be sure of her existence. She thinks that she does not really exist unless she can see herself. While Inez, demonstrates the third kind of bad faith. She refuses to let other people define her existence. She refuses any help and sympathy. She has said several times that she does not regret anything. Subconsciously, she identifies herself as a forlorn woman and sets herself at a distance

Shao-Fang Wu explains his views about Sartre as he "recognized man's essential engagement with the world. Man is a social animal. Therefore, more than one through the wretched Garcin, Sartre suggests that people need to help each other; otherwise, every place is Hell" (Fang Wu, 24). After experiencing loneliness in childhood and cruelty in Wars, Sartre proposed a new kind of humanism. He realized that an individual must consciously choose for himself/herself. No

one can choose him/her; no essence can define him/her. A human being is cast into the world and heads towards death.

To sum up, the problem of an individual person cannot be solved without a clear statement of the relationship between an individual and society. An individual by specific features tries to exist in the family, society, country, or in the World. The family members and all human beings living in the World become the *others* for an individual, but at the same time an individual becomes *other* for them. The analysis of Sartre's characters brings the fact that an alone person cannot exist at all, unless he/she gets the support of other human beings. Because it is the *other*, who makes the *self* realizes his/her quality, weakness, bravery, essence, behavior, action, so on and so forth.

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