

**DEATH, TEMPORALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY:  
AN EXISTENTIAL OUTLOOK**  
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Professor Raghunath Ghosh has been an epitome of scholarship and humility. I still remember his gesture of love and fatherly attitude towards his students when he addressed us for the first time in our M.A. class; he encouraged us to study being far away from our home, enjoy the beautiful atmosphere of the NBU campus, and also told that it would be very hard for us to leave the campus after the post graduation. We have seen him acting like a pillar of strength for further development of the department, be it either by successfully running the UGC-SAP programme as coordinator under the aegis of UGC. In addition, he was quite successful as Dean of Arts, Commerce and Law faculty of the University of North Bengal. As a person he is jovial and his sense of humour and warmth certainly make him a centre of attraction among others. He is widely regarded as a brilliant scholar of Navya Nyāya and Vedānta; he has extensively travelled various parts of the world to lecture as visiting fellow. I am deeply grateful to him for being so kind and supportive every time I looked for some advice. It is a privilege for me to write an article here in his tribute and I am thankful to Dr. Koushik Joardar for giving me this opportunity. I pray for the good health of Professor Ghosh and hope he remains as youthful as he is now and continues to produce his creativity through his writings and talks in future.

Human beings are the most powerful and rational ones, they try to capture every moment of happiness and excitement. In doing so, man essentially drives himself towards creation as well as destruction. The superiority of man plays in him, he eventually turns out to be a victim of his own deeds. Man is driven by his motivations to achieve more success in future; often it leads towards another level of realization which may not be related with happiness. This is the realization of a kind of individuality; a sort of aloofness plays a role in this realization of his self. It is the temporal existence of human being that marks his existenz but he cannot avoid it. We are always in a hurry to go further; our temporality becomes our obsession as well as a source of angst. I would try to explore a view of this temporality along with the concept of death down the lines of existentialism. Heidegger's notion of Dasein is a great way to understand the idea of individuality along with the concepts of death and temporality. Death is the most obvious possibility through which a man realizes his individuality and aloneness, death is such that leaves a long-lasting impression on the others who exist. When someone loses the life of his near and dear ones, a sort of loneliness continues to bother him. I would say it is also a kind of death of a part of his life which may well be found in literatures. A very interesting outlook of death could be taken into account if we consider it an experience through the death of others that could relate a self to the self of one who has extinguished from the lived

world. We may find that an individual self is being merged with the 'other' through the death of other and his conception of 'I' is reopened through this experience. This paper offers some fragments of thoughts on the issue of death, temporality and individuality; neither it is very conclusive in nature nor does it claim to give a substantial outlook of existentialism on this issue. What it suggests is to have a reflection on it, taking death as a mirror of human finitude.

The human experience, to a large extent is bothered by the agony as well as triumph of others. Yet it is occupied by the loneliness, conceived as a life of the individual who realizes his being-with-himself with such profound intensity that becomes his way of finding a new meaning of life. Man is individually driven by his motives and desires, at the same time he is associated with other beings. His association or dissociation is either driven by his own will or by the will of others. Existentialists hold that existence precedes essence; my being is dependent on my existence. Life is a continuous effort of moving ahead through activities and achievements, there is a constant motivation for further development. According to the existentialists, life cannot be fully understood by reason. Every individual is unique in his own right and there is inconsistency in life that goes beyond the parameter of reason and still is very much the pinnacle of human being. Rationalistic trend overlooks this factor and creates an obstacle to understand the meaning of human life. I do not claim that existentialism is the best way to understand this, but one must appreciate that its endeavour has been a boon for realizing the inconsistent aspect of human beings. In diverse ways existentialists understand the problem of being, its individuality and the anxiety associated with the individual. The individual's passion, sadness, solitude and anxiety are integral to his personality which cannot be dissociated. Existence of the individual is the highest truth according to existentialism. Essence fails to find out the individuality, its uniqueness. There is a totality of experience and it is expressed through action. There is always a danger of being indecisive before a human being; he has many paths to approach his goal but he suffers which one to choose.

The individual therefore turns out to be bound to some rules; he is free but never beyond a limitation. He is situated in his choices but his thought, imagination and effort drive him to another situation. In comes the conflict in his being and his

life takes another shape. Heidegger thinks that it is not possible for man to realize his existence in the everyday life; he has to live a separate life detached from everyday activity and should take responsibility of all his actions.<sup>1</sup> Thus he moves forward towards a life of realization. One good effect it has that the individual is always on his toes and any sort of trouble he faces poses a question to his tryst with the realization. But he is framed and bound in temporality, in a helpless manner. The projection of possibilities makes man attracted toward a goal with lots of passion, since he thinks that whatever he has to accomplish is limited within a time-frame. So, he is never really associated with his essence, rather his essence is split to a great extent in achieving his goal. It is the Being-in-the-world that bothers him; the Dasein is all about his existence in the midst of the world. We may be tempted to think that it is one sort of becoming of his essence, though here our understanding of Being takes an existential conjecture, as Heidegger puts it that “the ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence.” Because man is essentially driven toward a life of individuality, it becomes more important for him to understand his being, to question his own existence, to realize the anxiety in his being in spite of living an everyday life with others. There is an unwritten threat to man to be attached with the demand of others, to be merged with the crowd and thus to become anonymous they. Despite the invitation from the mass, he has to be detached to give himself an opportunity of realizing his existenz; otherwise he would be falling into prey of becoming a das Mann. Even then, Dasein’s everydayness is an integral aspect, though not merely an ‘aspect’ according to Heidegger. He says, “Dasein’s average everydayness, however, is not to be taken as a mere ‘aspect’. Here too, and even in the mode of inauthenticity, the structure of existentiality lies a priori. And here too Dasein’s Being is an issue for it in a definite way; and Dasein comports itself towards it in the mode of average everydayness, even if this is only the mode of fleeing in the face of it and forgetfulness thereof...”<sup>2</sup>

Our contention on Dasein can never be exhausted unless we can relate the ‘individuality’ factor with ‘death’ and ‘temporality’. The interesting factor with

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<sup>1</sup> M.K. Bhadra, *A Critical Survey of Phenomenology and Existentialism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New Delhi: ICPR, 2004), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, “The Question of Being”, in R.C. Solomon (ed.) *Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1972, 1980), pp. 308 – 309.

individuality is the angst towards finitude that a man faces along with the temporality. The existential question to a man could be thus, “What future does a man have in such a small life?” Temporality is itself the being of Dasein, Dasein is temporality according to Heidegger. While space is the existential mode of Dasein, time is Dasein itself.<sup>3</sup> Existenz, facticity and fallenness all the three existential structures refer to temporality in the form of future, past and present respectively. Time is finite in Heideggerian Dasein as the projection of possibilities looks for the end which is death. It is the structure of Being-towards-Death where no one can take the other person’s dying away from him, it is the individual that has to face it no matter how close others are to him, and none of them will die on behalf of the individual who is dying.<sup>4</sup> We can extend this factor to Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow*<sup>5</sup> where the journalist Ka’s death moves his journalist friend to the extent to lead him visit Kars where Ka had an eventful life. Although Ka dies in Frankfurt, the significance of his life rests in Kars, a Turkey city where he faced a fundamentalist and a lady named İpek with whom he fell in love. The misunderstanding between the two related to the fundamentalist leader’s death led Ka leaving the city of Kars where he could never return. He left a solitary life in Frankfurt remembering the lady and died after four years. He had the desire to return to Kars to marry İpek that he never could fulfil and his projection comes to an end with his death. So there are dreams and projections a man has, yet it is not always possible to accomplish them, in fact there is the void factor he can never get away. Unfulfilled dreams, plans and projects talk about the temporality of the individual who is ultimately helpless to his death, and this understanding makes Dasein anticipating his individuality. Death is the ownmost possibility of Dasein. What is important to understand here that one encounters death in many instances, be it death of a friend, death of a very near one, death of mass; this brings an individual to realize his being-with-others. Man is essentially a relational self since he cannot detach himself totally from the relation with the ‘other’ in any existential form. We need to contemplate that in many ways the death of other human beings affect man. As man lives in temporality, he tends to take deaths coming in the way of his future

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<sup>3</sup> M.K. Bhadra, p. 317.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 318.

<sup>5</sup> Orhan Pamuk, *Snow*, Tr. Maureen Freely (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).

projects which he wants to fulfil. In another way death of near ones bring in a sense of anxiety in him as he feels his life closer to perishing, he starts to believe that part of his life is already perished when he loses a nearest one. Being-with-others makes a man habituated to live in a comfort zone that he never wants to leave. Although he is then vulnerable to lead an inauthentic life, since he does not bother to ask questions about his potential abilities, it becomes intolerable for man to find himself in the world of deep sorrow. A kind of angst is involved when he perceives death of his close one, a sense of hollow disturbs him, unsettles his Being-in-the-world. Eminent Bengali poet Sankha Ghosh wrote a poem named 'Aayu'; the term 'aayu' means lifetime, it defines the period of life one has spent. Then one can also say that it demarcates the duration of life, the ultimatum is just after the living period is over. Joy Goswami, another famous contemporary Bengali poet, analyses the poem of Sankha Ghosh in his book Roudrachhayar Sankalan in a deeply philosophical manner which I consider is worth noting here. I find the following lines of the poem very significant:

*Sroter bhitore ghurni, ghurnir bhitore stabdha Aayu*

*Lekho aayu, lekho aayu Chup karo, shabdaheen hao. ('Aayu', Sankha Ghosh)*

The wave is always in motion, whirlwind is there, beneath is the clogged lifetime. Joy Goswami views that the term 'aayu' or lifetime is both static and moving. The existence is integrally related with this, time is moving forth and at the same time it is eternal. 'Aayu' means the existence, yet it defines the limit of existence, reminds us about death. Therefore, the poet thinks that it is not only the lived existence is what to be written; the death is to be written as well. Either it is the death of mass due to terrorism or due to the mistake of state policy and society, or the death of near or dear ones, we are struck by these. Joy Goswami observes that these could be taken as the extension of our death in the sense of the pain or anguish or persistent poignancy. This is annihilation of the person from our life, but on the other side of the coin part of them is still existent in our memory, in whatever form – vibrant or gloomy. So, the nothingness and existence both reside in the term 'aayu' or

lifetime as I call it.<sup>6</sup> When the existence comes to an end, then there is eternal silence; a sense of void fills the heart of man as there is nothing known beyond death. It defines the human finitude in the physical world as the achievement of the person comes to an end, he has nothing more to do or nothing that he can do to revive the possibility of coming into existence.

In conclusion I consider the existential issue in question regarding death as a point of demarcation between the lived experience and its disappearance. Dasein's existence lie in its realization of being an authentic individual, but this insight takes its comprehensive form in the sense of temporality. Everyday existence of us is struck immensely when we see the other dying in front of us. It makes us vulnerable to the extent of being in the fear of annihilating at any point of time, thus arouses the feeling of being individual – being-alone-in-the-world and takes human beings to another level of understanding, which demands a meaning of life. The individuality cannot be understood in isolation of the discourse with others, and death poses a kind of discourse which I think is critical in the understanding of individuality. This automatically brings in the question of Dasein being temporal as its existence is not infinite. The totality of existence is not the proposition here; rather our contention could be limited to the fragments of lived experience which are encountered with the death of others. Therefore, I think that death is the meeting point of individuality and temporality of Dasein from the existential point of view.

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<sup>6</sup> Joy Goswami, *Roudrachhayar Sankalan* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1998), pp. 14 – 16.