Chapter - 6
CONCLUDING REMARKS

When man first began to interpret the nature of things - and this he did when he began to be man - life was to him everywhere, and being was as being alive. Animism was the widespread expression of this stage, 'hylozoism', one of its later conceptual forms. Soul flooded the whole of existence and encountered itself in all things. Against this world-view of the first man, death confronted him as a riddle. It is the contradiction to the one intelligible, self-explaining 'natural' condition which is life. To the extent that life is accepted as the primary state of things, death looms as the disturbing mystery. Hence the problem of death emerged as an express problem signified the awakening of the questioning mind long before a conceptual level of theory is attained. Primeval reflection thus grapples with the riddle of death, and in myth, cult, and religious belief endeavours to find a solution to it.

Accordingly, the introductory chapter of our thesis traces an historical understanding of the problem of death developed throughout the ages, from the primitive to the most modern. This chapter also made references to some of the philosophical problems taken up by the philosophers in their quest for understanding the problem of death such as in Plato "the ideal conditions" of philosophizing a 'state' in which the philosopher's quest for true knowledge
is fulfilled. We have also explored death as the 'muse' of philosophy, the impetus behind philosophizing which aims primarily at mastering the fear of death and coming to terms with the inevitability of death as we find in Epicurus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and Schopenhauer etc. Further, death can be the 'instrument of philosophy' suitable to understanding 'Being' and revealing its true nature as penetrated by 'non-Being', as for instance, in Heidegger and Sartre. In brief, the first chapter is purported to inquire the fact and problem of death which brings the individual to the existential recognition that the familiar everydayness of our understanding on this fact is the result of the practicality and power of the complex apparatus of man's consciousness of it. That death, not life, calls for an explanation in the first place, reflects a themetical situation which lasted long in the history of the race. Before there was wonder at the miracle of life, there was wonder about death and what it might mean. If life is the natural and comprehensible thing, death - its apparent negation - is a thing unnatural and cannot be truly real. The explanation it called for had to be in terms of life as the only understandable thing: death had somehow to be assimilated to life. The question it inspired faces backward and forward: How, and why did death come into the world? Whose essence it contradicts? And where does it lead to?

Resultantly, the existential recognition of death has been fully explored in the second chapter of the thesis wherein the transitoriness of human life is vividly exemplified by the various negations which are implied
in death. Since pre-historic times, the problems of suffering, evil, sin, fear, ‘avidya’ and bondage have been regarded as human conditions which nihilates man’s quest for life-hereafter. As a form of nililation, sin has been the focal-point in Judaeo-Christian tradition. ‘Avidya’ and bondage are regarded as forms of finitude in the Indian tradition. In the philosophical scene, from ancient Greek philosophers to contemporary Existentialists, suffering and evil have been understood as forms of human finitude which culminates in death. Eventually man wanted to transcend his finitude by postulating a sense of meaning and value in the temporal dimension of human mundanity. Thus the second chapter of the thesis was an attempt to explicate the various forms of human conditions as directed towards human finitude which is a constant nililation of existence.

These disvalues are those aspects of life which are characterized by a deprival of desirable positive counterparts and by undesirable experience which nililates life relatively or absolutely. Suffering, fear, evil, sin etc. do it relatively. Death does it absolutely. It is only in the Indian philosophical tradition that the hope of ending of suffering is contemplated, when the individual self can transcend occurrences of suffering by finding its identity (in Brahman) or as contemplated by Christian tradition by having faith in Jesus Christ.

Understanding the problem of death and immortality has been a central theme in man’s life. Thus a detailed study of Phaedo and Kathopanisad
as representatives of Greek and Indian traditions were taken up in the third chapter of our thesis. The question whether the conscious personality survives after death has been answered by almost all races of man in the affirmative. Two traditions—Phaedo in the Occident and Kathopanisad in the Orient provide a clear understanding of this problem. When the Upanisads and Plato affirm the reality of the divinity in man, they have in mind the possibility of releasing the divine quality through the apparatus of mind and body. Plato like the Rsis of the Upanisads emphasize the fate of the soul after death with authority. To them, universal spirit is both immanent and transcendent. In both the traditions, the most important problem that affects the human mind, was as to what happens to the soul after the falling away of the physical body? This question is such that, man from time immemorial and all ages has asked time and again. Every human being who leaves this world undoubtedly is the forerunner of many who have to follow them.

Modern thought which began with the Renaissance is placed in exactly the opposite theoretic situation. Death is the natural thing, life the problem. This means that the lifeless has become the ‘Knowable’ par excellence and is for that reason also considered the true and only foundation of reality. It is the ‘natural’ as well as the original state of things. Not only in terms of relative quantity, but also in terms of ontological genuineness, non-life is the rule; and life the puzzling exception in physical existence.
Accordingly, it is the existence of life within a mechanical universe which now calls for an explanation and this explanation has to be in terms of the lifeless i.e., death. The very fact that we have now-a-days to deal with the theoretical problem of life, instead of the problem of the ‘problem of death’ testifies to the status of death as the natural and intelligible condition.

The body seems to fall down. What vestige remains behind the Soul which so long inspired it is an awe to the homo-sapiens. Are they right who say that along with the body, the soul too ceases or does it continue to live in a future state of existence? These questions trouble every human being which he has cherished almost as dearly as his own life. It may be said that Nachiketa’s questions to Yama i.e. from Death itself is out of the experiences of eschatological thoughts of mankind in general. And the queries raised in Phaedo also pertains to the same problem.

The problem of death and transcendence gets it new orientation in the context of existentialism. Today man has the feeling of estrangement from the world, in the larger sense, from the other, and we can no longer approach anything beyond ourselves. This loneliness can be terrible, even if it arises not from our own incapacity of receiving but of the others’ inability to give? It can be terrible also for the man who does not harden himself, but is ready to give from the fullness of his soul, even though others may not be capable of sharing it.
But at the same time struggle with death in the nature of eternal life is said to be man's main task. May be that is why it was death that first gave man the idea of supernatural. Enemies of religion such as Epicurus thought that he disproved it by showing that in the fear of death, man comes into touch with the deepest mystery of being and that death contains a revelation. The moral paradox of life and death, as Nikolai Berdyaev suggests, can be expressed by a moral imperative: 'treat the living as though they were dying and the dead as though they were alive, i.e., always remember death as the mystery of life and always affirm eternal life both in life and in death'.

In despair our insight into the complete nullity and worthlessness of all that is, separates us from any meaning that might give us support. Despair is deliberately 'chosen' a view most radically professed by Sartre. The idea of despair is present already in Kierkegaard, but attenuated by its theological setting. According to him, the more deeply a man is seized by anxiety, the greater he is. It is true that negation, taken in despair may make us ready to accept death. But it does not give meaning to life. In this background this chapter titled 'Death and Temporality' has been an attempt to elucidate the concept of temporality for a clear understanding of death. Temporality from a strictly phenomenological perspective is the 'a priori' condition for there being any consciousness at all. Thus, for the existentialists, and for Sartre especially, consciousness cannot but be temporal. Consciousness
is the source of time and time, in turn, transforms consciousness to a temporal consciousness. That is to say that temporality of consciousness is inseparable from consciousness. As chronometric time is peculiar to the world of physical entities, lived-time is the temporality of the lived-world; and if death is bound with temporality, then transcendence constitutes and discovers meaning by way of Being-towards-death. Death exists only on this side of things in temporal being. The affirmation of the eternal in life and participation in a different order of being mean transcendence of death and victory over it. Inwardly, from the point of view of eternity unfolded in the depths of the moment and not projected into time, death does not exist: it is only an element in the eternal life. To transcend death is to accept it within one's spirit so that it ceases to be a natural temporal fact and becomes a manifestation of meaning which proceeds from eternity.

The philosophical idea of the natural immortality of the soul deduced from its substantiality leads nowhere. It ignores the fact of death and denies the tragedy in it. From the point of view of such a doctrine, there is no need to struggle against death for the sake of eternal life. Scholastic spiritualism does not carry any currency for the solution of problem of death and immortality. It has become an abstract theory. In the same way idealism does not solve the problem. The idealism of the German metaphysics has no place for personality. It regards this problem merely as a function of the world - spirit or Idea.
Idealism affirms the immortality of the impersonal or the superpersonal spirit, of the idea and the value, but not of the person. Fichte and Hegel have nothing to say about personal human immortality. Human personality and its eternal destiny are sacrificed to the 'Idea, the world-spirit'. The idealists however, fail to recognize that this ideal and valuable element forms an eternal personality and transmutes man's powers for eternity. They are wrong in separating it and abstracting it into an ideal heaven as an impersonal and non-human spirit.

Materialists, Positivists and followers of similar theories accept death, legitimize it and at the same time try to forget about it, building up life on the graves. They have taken up the theory of progress with the future of the race. Progress, like evolution, is absolutely impersonal. For the progressing species, death is an unpleasant fact, but one that has nothing tragic about it. We may say here that it is only for the person and from the personal point of view that death is tragic and significant.

The religious - mythological consciousness of Greece recognized that although the divine principle was immortal and the human mortal, man's thought brought him into communion with the divine and enabled him to rise up to it and acquire it. This was the teaching of the Mysteries, of the Orphic and of Plato's philosophy. The human soul contains a divine element but should be freed from the power of matter; only then man will become immortal. Immortality for them is ideal and spiritual. That myth had a great
influence upon Plato as can be seen particularly from Phaedo. It is connected with the ancient doctrine of reincarnation. Accordingly, an attempt has been made in the fifth chapter of our thesis to understand an Existentialist-Phenomenological analysis of the problem of death and transcendence. Human existence turns out to be meaningless not because of the ‘fact of death’ but because it has no goals to achieve, no future to realize. From a phenomenological and existentialist point of view, human reality is constantly engaged in the process of discovering the most personal and subjective meanings. Death cannot be a phenomenon which encapsulates all possible meanings of human existence. Thus there is transcendence because man constitutes meaning. This being so, the meaningfulness of human existence cannot be found exclusively in its orientation towards death, as Heidegger holds.

Death is a fundamental dimension of life because it envelops or descends the individual. The subjective interpretation of the meaning on the problem of death should be understood as a ‘subjective’ experience, and not to any idiosyncratic translation of experience. Thus death as a phenomenon offers the possibility of comprehending the notion of transcendence in a life-hereafter.

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We have pursued in this thesis, to some measure, an existentialist-phenomenological understanding of death and transcendence. It may be
contended that the question of death and transcendence is fundamental to a Personalistic ethics and confronts us in every act and every expression of life. Insensitiveness to death and forgetfulness of it mean insensitiveness to existence and to the destiny of the world as a whole. If death is understood as a negation, then we may speak of negation in two ways: (i) as the 'not' of formal denial, in the sense of my acknowledging a 'no' to my existence. (ii) as the nihilation of experiential positing. In this sense, death nullifies my existence for the sake of its transcendence. Every human being confronts with the problem that he has to die. But none of us confronts death in our everyday life as an immanent possibility. In other words, the question is of a 'perhaps'. But when it comes to a question of 'when', there comes a radical change. Therefore, this study, we contend, brings the individual to the existential recognition that the fact of death and possible transcendence is the result of the practicality and power of the complex apparatus of man's consciousness of it.

In discussing these notions from an existentialist-phenomenological perspective, hopefully, we have made some contribution to the understanding of the queries under consideration. Any degree of success attained in this task may be taken as a vindication of the approach adopted in this thesis.