Chapter - 1

THE STRUGGLE WITH THE PROBLEM OF DEATH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter of the thesis is purported to examine and elucidate the problems of death and transcendence as appeared in the philosophical literature from its very beginning. Among other things, this chapter is concerned with explaining death and determining its nature towards transcendence. Yet, there are some philosophers who deny that death is man's absolute enemy. Does this mean that on this subject, philosophy finally turns sentimental or unrealistic? Quite the contrary. A scanning of the philosophical literature - oriental and occidental - represents a life beyond the grave, understood as a continuation of this life in a heaven freed from all unpleasantness or in a hell stripped of all happiness. What we do find, then, is a placing of the question of death in relationship to the weaknesses and terrors that afflict unintegrated man. It is also contended in this chapter that awareness of death is precisely what could bring all men to a deeper experience of their own life.

Many of religious thinkers and philosophers have attempted to explore and articulate the possibility of a meaningful relation between life 'before death' and life 'after death'. But all of them stumble when they come to pronounce the real meaning of death. Consequently many religious thinkers have declared that body is not a fit robe for the spirit or the soul. They have asked their adherents to prepare themselves for the life after death, for some paradise
or ‘Vaikuntha’. None of them explains adequately as to how the soul, originating from the divine source, could first fall (by some mistake) and then possibly able to transcend this fall.

The above reflections suggest that the fact of death is both inviting and forbidding. There is nothing more commonplace than ‘death’ and nothing rarer than ‘death’. Something of the same paradox exists in the study of the subject, for it is apparent that, if a choice between the ‘concreteness of death’ and the seeming abstraction of analysis is avoidable, there still remains a distance between the reality of death as an experience and its discussion in the philosophical literature on death. It amounts to saying that there is nothing that brings to men such a sense of total helplessness as death.

From the earlier dawn of human history, man has been battling against mortality to delay and if possibly to completely escape from the clutches of death. Thus, he performed sacrifices and indulged in incantations to propitiate the angry gods. When this failed, he went after the miracle-men with the hope that they would be able to help him to overcome death. To him, death was such an inscrutable mystery that he carried the dead body from place to place or kept it embalmed, hoping that the dead would rise again from the deep slumber. The modern man have changed his method of propitiating nature, but he stands exactly where his so called primitive strange counterpart stood with reference to the question of death.
In view of the above, it may be said that the problems of death and transcendence have been always an enigma for the homo-sapiens. It is only man who is aware of his death among the animate kingdom of nature. Since man has been conscious of his existence and extinction at the same time, he has contemplated in transcending them. Thus in the oriental and occidental philosophies, we find the common urge in man to transcend his finitude. The difference lies in the expression of modes of transcendence. From the primitive period to contemporary times, response to the problem has been a serious endeavour. Even when philosophers have been disregarding this problem, they have in consequence, justified their stand. This aspect of justification is itself an expression to the enigma of death and man’s quest for transcendence. A little differently “Landsberg maintains that knowledge of death comes to man through a particular experience of death,” the death of someone close to us which reveals to us our mortality.

1.2 INEVITABILITY OF DEATH

Regarding man’s original discovery of the inevitability of death is concerned, the obvious problem is to determine how such a knowledge, later passed on and accepted on faith, was acquired. In a historical perspective, knowledge of the inevitability of death gradually became the common property of mankind and therefore must not be thought of as a ‘discovery’, in the sense of a sudden event. Nevertheless, there came a time when the idea became universal. This idea of the inevitability of death, measured against man’s total presence on earth is relatively a recent one.
It appears that two stages may be distinguished in the inception of the notion of the imperishability of the soul. First, the collective group soul (among primitive people) becomes atomized into individual souls which still feel themselves immortal and imperishable. Secondly, the breakdown of the original duality (thymos - the mortal spirit and psyche-immortal spirit) which led to the idea of a more complex psyche in which the two are fused and have become localized in the body, opened up the possibility that the psyche may survive the body to which it is intimately attached.

1.3 DEATH AS TOTAL ANNIHILATION

What must have contributed to the discovery of death as total annihilation leading to the realization of the inevitability of death, is the emergence of lineal concept of time. Primitive man, as Plessner points out, lives in circles, in “an eternal present”, and “the world which is conceived cyclically knows death as an organic phenomenon. Where the chain does not break, or more precisely, where the past is ruled by the ‘law of return’, the importance of individual death remains obscured. But with the transformation of time consciousness from its cyclic into its eschatological form, there was a sense of ‘never more’ and separation of time into the past, present and future.”

Not until lineal time replaced cyclic time did every event receive the character of uniqueness and of unrepeatability. Along with the individualization of the the members of the group in civilized world made death
appears as a real threat. It is possible that the first hint that death may be complete annihilation comes from the spectacle of human death.

With the realization that death is total annihilation, man’s discovery of death is complete. Along with such a discovery, the sense of futility of life overwhelms man with unprecedented force. “This mode of despair and frustration seized not only the people of the old civilizations of the VALLEY OF THE NILE, of MESOPOTAMIA and of PALESTINE, and also those inhabiting the GREEK COLONIES of ASIA MINOR. The IONIANS, as evident from their literature, were deeply impressed by the transitoriness of things.”

The problem of death in philosophical thought is, on the one hand, an attempt to ascertain that death is not the absolute end, and on the other that survival after death is not an illusion. There is also growing skepticism to these assertions and beliefs. Sometimes the problem shifts more and more from demonstrating the unreality of death to that of a reconciliation which is characterized to be emotional and intellectual. In a word, the question of the human existence in the totality of Being gains its true and practical importance through man’s total discovery of death.

1.4 DEATH AND IMMORTALITY : PRIMITIVE BELIEFS

“In all primitive races, death was explained by other than natural causes.” For the primitive people, death is the result of the action or malign influence of an enemy in either human or spiritual form. The various myths
about the origin of death found among the primitives bear out the conclusion that during the long pre-history of the homo sapiens, death was not considered as a necessary attribute to the human condition. "If the primitive man pays no attention to the cause of death, it is because that he knows already as to how death is brought about, and since he knows why it happens and how it occurs, it matters very little to him. It amounts to saying that they had a kind of 'a priori' reasoning upon which experience had no hold" regarding the problem of death. Consequently, the explanation of belief in immortality in the past or present as wishful thinking and as the product of the fear of annihilation in death requires qualification. For, in order to desire immortality, one must at least doubt its reality, and primitive man had no such doubt at all.

1.5 DEATH AS MOTIF AND MOTIVE OF PHILOSOPHY

The problem of the fear of death and of its nature is traditionally recognized as the province of religion. Religion, as a rule, denies the finality of death; it affirms the continuation of the human beings, either in its psycho-physical totality or as a disembodied soul. Therefore, philosophy has not begun to concern itself with the notion of death except when the assurance of religion becomes doubtful or suspet, as when the assurance appears in contradiction to the incontrovertible evidence of our senses. Accordingly, in the absence of a definite religious conviction as in fifth and fourth centuries B.C. in Greece or in the second and first centuries B.C. in Rome, we find death not only as a motif, but as a motive of philosophy.
Consequently, they discarded the mythological explanation of the origin of things in favour of natural causes keeping in view of their world-view which was modeled on natural elements. Thales considered water as the first cause, for Heraclitus, it was fire. The world was animated in their conception of reality as they observed the facts available in nature and their surroundings. The statement of Thales that 'water is the cause of all things', has a deeper insight and significance: that water is deathless and ageless, thereby implying that if all things are one, then change (and death being the most shocking change) becomes less radical through the essential oneness of all that exists.

The basis of philosophical speculation of Anaximander was based on the ideas of transitoriness of things and spectacles of impermanence. According to him, “things perish into those out of which they have taken birth”, contains the nucleus of philosophical answers that was subsequently favoured by all those who were unable to side whole-heartedly with the view that death was not final annihilation.

According to Heraclitus, the idea of change is the basic characteristic of reality. “We step and do not step in the same river, we are and we are not”, thereby Heraclitus implies that opposite forms a unity. He stressed the identity of life and death in the statements like ‘Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals; the one living the other’s death and dying the other’s life” . Thus, in a sense, it is the doctrine of ‘eternal return of the same’ that
was reviewed after twenty five hundred years by Nietzsche. For Heraclitus not only affirms life, but that death generates life.

Even Parmenides, who argued that change is an illusion, denied the total and final destruction of death. According to him change is an illusion, so is death - perhaps the most flagrant change.

As opposed to other Ionians/Milesians philosophers, it was Democritus who did not seek solutions of death in the precepts that all things are one or opposites form a unity. He accepted the fact of mortality with the realization of its naturalness and necessity.

For Ionians/Milesians philosophers, philosophy was an intensely practical matter as they were men of action. They were concerned primarily with the question of what all things are made of? They attempted to explain the problem of death from a scientific/philosophical point of view which was otherwise part of their world-view. Their answers (the first philosophical attempts to the question) fall short of the promises of personal immortality.

It may be possible to accept the fact of mortality with the realization of its naturalness and necessity. But it is difficult to think that it is considered a happy solution to the problem of death. It may turn out to be a little more satisfactory and stable than other solutions which consists of keeping the scientific evidence and the answers offered by religion separated in watertight compartment. Consequently, an attempt of reconciliation between the scientific
evidence and religious answers was made with the teaching and death of Socrates
and subsequently in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.

Regarding the notion of immortality, Socrates is far too dogmatic
in his interpretation of the nature of death. In what is called ‘Socratic Spirit’,
he points out that it would be a ‘pretense of wisdom’ to make claim of knowing
it. He leaves the choice between the two possibilities: death is either a
dreamless sleep or migration of the soul to another world.

Plato taught the immortality of soul and asserted that death was
merely a door to another better life. The soul is held to be of heavenly origin
and it dwells in the body as if imprisoned. It can escape at death and regains its
divinity. As Cornford points out there is no gulf between the divine and human
and “immortality in this sense is to be sharply distinguished from mere
continuance.”

Two different answers to the problem of death that Plato and
Xenophon gave us as those of Socrates have been developed by subsequent
philosophers. Accordingly some see him as the prophet of immortality and others
as the ideal of the stoic wise man. It was Plato, who by presenting apparently
conclusive arguments for the immortality of soul, gave a new but consoling
answer to the query of death. Plato elaborated and developed the arguments for
the immortality of the soul in ‘Phaedo’ and ‘Phaedrus’.

In the platonic philosophy we find that there is a change of
emphasis from the problem of death to the notion of immortality. The assertion
of the immortality of the soul means that 'when attacked by death it cannot perish'.

Plato was concerned more about the aspect of immortality than the problem of death as a 'problematic'. Accordingly, Plato advanced certain arguments for the immortality of the soul in Phaedo which can be summarized in the following way.

1. The soul existed before death. This pre-existence of the soul is based on the contention that knowledge is recollection (real knowledge is considered here not to be empirical, but a priori). This, however established only the existence of the soul before birth. Does it exists after death?¹⁰

2. There are eternal and immutable 'forms' or 'ideas' and since the soul is capable of apprehending them, it must be eternal by itself and divine¹¹ ('nothing mortal knows what is immortal').

3. The soul rules the body, and therein resembles the immortal gods.

4. The soul is simple, it is uncompounded, and therefore incapable of dissolution.¹²

5. The soul, whose essence is life, and thus the very opposite of death, cannot be conceived of as dying, any more than fire can be conceived of as becoming cold.¹³
Additional proof is given in Phaedrus. The soul, being self-moved and the source of life and motion, can never cease to live and move.

What Plato has demonstrated is that death is a process that effects only the bodily organism, and that the soul is undying. But this does not prove that the soul continues to live after the body has died. “It is a hope of immortality and not a certainty, that we are given in Plato - but a reasonable, plausible hope.”

Plato’s greatest pupil Aristotle in many respects, opposed his teacher in this query. In ‘De Anima’, Aristotle dismissed migration of soul from one body to another. What distinguishes man from the animal, according to him, is his reason (NOUS). Reason comes to man ‘from the outside’; it is the divine element in man which does not perish in death.

Epicureanism together with Stoicism, represents a subtle reaction to the dualism of Plato. It was clearly a reaction to the unavoidable effect of every religious doctrine that denies the finality of death and the fear of the life hereafter. How great and widespread this fear must have been can be judged from the success of Epicurus’s argument that soul dissolves after death (like that of Democritus). For Epicurus, it was not death but the fear of death, that concerned the problematic; “death does not concern either the living or the dead, for the former it is not, and for the latter it is no more.”

Perhaps no ancient philosopher is as painfully conscious of the perishability and transitoriness of human life as the emperor-philosopher Marcus-
Aurelius. For him, philosophy is not a quest for knowledge but the ability to look at life and death. Marcus Aurelius reiterates the necessity of accepting man’s fate as a mortal being. Before we turn to the Christian answer to death and immortality, we must mention the revival and clarification of Platonism by the last great thinker of antiquity - Plotinus. He was able to surmount the inconsistencies of Plato’s doctrine of immortality of soul. It was based on ‘mystical’ experience of ‘ecstasy’ in which Plotinus is aware of soul’s independence from the bodily frame it inhabits. His great influence on Christian thought is visible in Christian response to the problem of death and immortality.

1.6 DEATH AS MOTIF: MODERN EUROPEAN APPROACH

The unbearable tensions that developed in connection with the Christian answer to death led to the undermining of the Christian response. It also led to the decline of absolute domination of Christianity over western thought. In the 14th and 15th centuries, not only the Christian answer to death but also the doctrine of immortality of soul became questionable. The new consciousness emerged out of the Renaissance period urged to escape from all pervasive thought of death. Throughout the modern period, philosophy has clearly reflected scientific revolutions. From an intellectual standpoint, the decline of Scholasticism was the most significant change. Renaissance which was truly progressive and forward looking, stressed the importance of this world. It emphasized the dignity of man. It championed the possibilities of reason. It pointed to a new scientific age and laid foundations for the present century.
The denial of personal survival after death appeared to have the distinct advantage of freeing men from the oppression of the fear of Hell and eternal perdition. Looked at in this way, it may be argued that 'the manifesto of the Renaissance is a far cry from the passive attitude of the Christian and of the Stoic; it replaces an attitude with active resistance to fate, and with a drive towards self-fulfillment and self-realization.

The Renaissance period was prompted by moral considerations also. The empirical evidence and natural reason made immortality (either as eternal life or as the immortality of the soul) appear improbable. Further, the belief in 'everlasting life' seemed to an emancipated mind to corrupt rather than promote virtue. As for the Humanists and the philosophers of Renaissance, the accent was rather on life; and death was merely the unavoidable and unpleasant natural accident; the thought of which had better be kept in the background.

With Montaigne, an answer to the problem of death that appeared in the Western world was regarded as an alternative to Christian answer. He reiterated the arguments of later Stoics in order to prove that death is not to be feared. According to him it is but an instant and hence is natural.

Metaphysical - Rationalist constructions of Leibnitz and Descartes were based on the supposed nature of the soul. As for instance its simplicity follows in principle the road opened up by Plato. This approach is often tied in with the particular philosopher's religious views no matter what he may proclaim or imagine. But it must be clearly distinguished from the assertion of the
immortality of soul derived from religious doctrines, which in turn, are based on revelation or mystical experience which is the case with Pascal. Descartes stated that our souls outlast our bodies. According to him the difference between a living and a dead body consists in that “death never comes through the failure of soul, but solely because, some principal parts of the body disintegrate”\(^1\). Leibnitz represents a reaction to the mechanistic conception of nature which dominates the system of Descartes and Spinoza with the teleological views of nature. He holds that “not only souls but also animals are ingenerable and imperishable; they are only developed, enveloped, clothed, and transformed. There is metamorphosis and not metempsychosis.”\(^1\)

The philosophers of 17th and 18th centuries, generally, disregarded the fact that with the passing away of the body, everything ends. Among the philosophers who took this approach, we can think of Spinoza and Immanuel Kant. They attached great importance to the notion of Immortality than death.

Kant was well aware of the weakness of the immortalist position after Hume's devastating critique of the doctrine of immortality. In his 'Critique of Pure Reason', he has given his doctrine of immortality as a 'postulate of practical reason' and based it on moral ground.

A number of philosophers in the post-enlightened period showed indifference to the problem of immortality of soul and denied it (David Hume).\(^1\) There were some among Romantics who glorified death (Novalis, Schelling). And there were still other viz; Hegel\(^1\), Schopenhauer\(^2\) and Feuerbach who has reconciled with death. This trend persists till Nietzsche.
Independent philosophical thought in Renaissance period, gave ample opportunities to philosophers, toward the denial of personal immortality. Thus we notice that the denial of immortality of soul has become gradually the philosophical position par excellence in 18th century with French materialists.

No other period shows a more intense pre-occupation with death than what follows 18th century. It was a time of denial of immortality. Denying the immortality of soul began to assert itself in the 17th century. With the French Materialists of the 18th Century, the denial of immortality of soul became the philosophical position par-excellence. Immortality was considered 'a priestly lie.' The doctrine of the immortality of soul has been subjected to a scathing attack from David Hume. Whereas a number of philosophers in the post enlightened period, showed indifference or denied immortality; the French Materialist, in addition, urged the Stoic attitude to death which they held to be total annihilation.

**Schopenhauer** is the first modern philosopher who investigated the problem of death in a systematic and comprehensive manner. 'Death, for him, is the true inspiring genius, or the 'muse' of philosophy. Indeed without the problem of death man could scarcely philosophize. According to him, the brute lives without a proper knowledge of death; in the case of man, the terrifying certainty of death necessarily entered with reason.

From genuine philosophical consideration of world and nature Schopenhauer inferred that our existence in time is merely an image of our
essential being. Death is merely the end in time of a time enclosed phenomenon. Man, a thing-in-itself is outside time, timeless and eternal.

The conclusion which Feuerbach arrives at is that neither death nor immortality, as they are usually understood, are real. Death is merely a 'negation of a negation'. Hence, immortality, as opposite to nothingness, is an unreal and indeterminate affirmation of the individual, of life and of existence. According to him, the idea of immortality stems from the instinct of self-preservation and from the unconscious transformation of man's idea of the future into objective existence.

'Doctrine of eternal recurrence' expounded by Neitzsche was a defense against death and a consolation in the face of ceaseless change and ever destroying death. The doctrine of eternal recurrence is totally alien to western mind, for it requires the abandonment of the concept of lineal time. In many respect Neitzsche belongs to that group of thinkers who fit into the loose designation of 'philosophies of life' which attempted to explain all reality in terms of life and whose common bond is their revolt against Cartesian rationalism. Hence their answer to death too varied greatly. Thus we find Henri Bergson as the most influential representative. He is against the consideration that man is a minute speck on the face of earth." If our body as the matter to which our consciousness applied itself is co-extensive with our consciousness, then it comprises all we perceive, it reaches to the stars."21
Ludwig Klages on the other hand takes up Schopenhauer's theme that individual existence is a mistake. According to him the desire for personal immortality appears to be the "extreme outrage and criminal encroachment on the right of nature"\textsuperscript{22}. Klages considers the conscious and reflecting ego as the arch enemy of life. The emergence of original sin is the reflecting ego. The expulsion from 'Eden' of 'Adam and Eve' is identical with the emergence of the conscious ego. The philosophy of life becomes a philosophy of death with Klages.

Simmel\textsuperscript{23} in his 'Metaphysics of Death' occupies a middle position between the aforesaid views. He suggests that in order to understand what death is, we have to discard the idea of it as something threatening life from the outside, as a power independent of life and opposed to it. Actually death is bound up with life from the very beginning. According to him, the hour of death is merely the last phase of a continuous process that began with birth.

1.7 DEATH AS MOTIF : CONTEMPORARY SCENE

In the 20th Century an in-depth study on the problem of death and immortality was made by Max Scheler. Scheler answering to Kant's attempt to justify the belief in immortality on moral ground points out that there is no reason to believe that reality will yield to the moral demand and it may at best be termed as an empty wish. Scheler does not seek as to how immortality can be proved, for, it cannot be proved. 'To be immortal' is a negative 'fact' and as such is incapable of proof. Therefore he speaks of the 'survival of the person'\textsuperscript{24}. 17
If we have empirical evidences of survival then we could with some justification infer the possibility what is usually called immortality.

1.8 EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH

Existentialism is a philosophy not of things, but of the human situation. Existentialism dwells with 'subjective awareness' and rejects universal and abstract problems. Existentialism has been a reaction in favour of individualism, subjectivity, introspection and feeling. Existence thus precedes essence in Existentialism.

The existentialist position varies with its proponents. Their major and differentiating thesis from the classical philosophical tradition, is the metaphysical pronouncement that 'existence is prior to essence'. For existentialist, it means that human nature is determined by the course of life rather than life by human nature.

In its theistic form, existentialism has been an important factor in the neo-orthodox awakening that has marked theology since the first war. Its emphasis on the negative qualities of man, on human estrangement, and the tragedy of human existence, have supported the dogma of original sin and the entire structure of eschatological theology. Secular, or what is often called atheistic existentialism has been popularized especially since the second world war by numerous expression in fiction, drama, and poetry, particularly under the leadership of Jean Paul Sartre. In its technical formulations, recent existentialism
is largely elaborated by Heidegger and Jaspers. Its religious implications were explained by Marcel and Unamuno. But in its modern technical form, it is grounded in the psychology and theology of Soren Kierkegaard, the philosophy of Nietzsche and the method and ontology of Husserl.

The universe of the existentialists lacks the traditional support of religion, so to say, there is no Supreme Being, and hence no immortality. It does not tolerate any type of dogmatism which it regards as unworthy of human beings.

Existentialism opposes all attempts to explain life according to the mechanistic hypothesis. Man is not determined by hereditary and environment, and he is free to choose and free to realize his destiny. This concept is elaborated especially in Sartre’ trilogy ‘Les Chemins de la liberté’.

Existentialism as a philosophy distrust all intellectual analysis, and like Bergson and Nietzsche rely on ‘intuition. To them reason is an inadequate avenue to life, which must be explained subjectively according to a new ‘existential analysis of human subject and his situations’.

Existentialism has a rigid view regarding human responsibilities. Man is responsible, not merely for his own acts but for those of others. If he takes part in a war, he supports it morally. What is the alternative? What can he do to check violence? The existentialist would say, that in case of war, he can either commit suicide or desert.
With its emphasis on individualism, subjectivity, introspection and feeling existentialism has been a reaction to sensory empiricism, objectivity, behaviourism, logic and science. To some extent existentialism is a restatement of Humanism. According to this school of philosophy, man is the source and creator of all values and he can realize his mission in life only by concentrating on his own inner development.

Existence is understood by the existentialist philosophers in a wider sense than the classical meaning of the term, that a thing exists. It refers to the peculiarly human way of being, and it goes under different names - 'Dasein' in Heidegger, 'Existenz' in Jaspers, the pour-soi in Sartre.

The particular experience underlying the thinking of the existentialist philosophers, regardless of the considerable differences, is described by Jaspers as the 'awareness of fragility of Being' or as the experiencing of the 'limit situation'. In Heidegger it is 'the experience of progressing towards death' and as the experience of 'not being at home in the world'. And in Sartre it is the all-pervading disgust with existence, manifesting itself as nausea."

In the first two instances, there are two experiences: the terrifying possibility of non-being and the horror of being. The latter is either the feeling of an unbearable burden of one's own existence 'suffocating under the weight of tons of existence' as Sartre has it, or the feeling of being lost in a hostile world. One could distinguish existentialist philosophers according to whether the dread of being or the dread of non-being as their dominant emotion.
It is in existentialist thinkers that we find the fact of death occupies a central place. Existentialism restates the traditional problem of philosophy. Consequently, instead of the problem of death, we have the problem 'I Must Die'. Instead of the problem of evil, it speaks about personal concern, or care (Sorge), which Heidegger regards as the basis of all beings.

Heidegger refers to Simmel's conception of death, but reproaches him for seeing the problem only from a biological angle and not from an existential perspective. "The existential view of death, on the other hand, involves the specific significance that death takes on for man, who alone among all creatures knows that he has to die." Heidegger's answer to death appears to be incidental and his main philosophical concern was the question of the meaning of Being. Thus, the meaning of 'Dasein' for Heidegger is its freedom unto death. Death, then is the clue to authentic existence. 

1.8.1 Heidegger

What is important in the existential interpretation of death is that it precedes all biology and ontology of life. According to Heidegger, it alone gives a basis to historio-biographical, and ethnologic - psychological interpretation of death. "Heidegger's answer to death appears to be incidental and his main philosophical concern was the question of the meaning of Being. Thus, the meaning of 'Dasein' for Heidegger is its freedom unto death. Death, then is the clue to authentic existence."
For Heidegger, man is the being that knows he is going to die. He dies not only at the end of life, but everyday of it. Death is certain, yet indefinite. Because it is inevitable, it marks the contingency of life. Life is cast up between nothing and nothing. Death is its boundary and its supreme possibility.

According to Heidegger, just as 'Dasein' is specifically mine, so is dying. One can die for someone, but no one can relieve another from his dying. Death is more than negation of Dasein, because it permeates it. 'Dasein dies in fact in so far as it exists'. Death is impending -'media in vita in morte sumus'. Dasein is neither completed in death nor does it simply vanish with death. It also does not finish in death and it cannot become completely available. So Dasein, as long as it is, is already its not-yet, so it is also always its end. The end meant here is not a 'coming to an end of Dasein' but 'being toward the end'.

Death is a mode of being which Dasein takes upon itself as soon as it is. "As soon as a human being is alive, he is old enough to die." In a wider sense, death is a phenomenon of life. The death of animals can be considered simply as ending. But dying is, for Heidegger, 'a mode' of being in which Dasein is 'towards' its death. Between the two alternatives Heidegger places the demise. Dasein can end without really dying but on the other hand, as Dasein, it does not simply end.

22
Death distinguishes itself from other kinds of what awaits Dasein by three characteristics:

(1) It is a most private possibility in so far as it is mine.

(2) It is an unrelated possibility, in-so-far as in death the relations of all other Daseins are dissolved.

(3) It is an unsurpassable possibility, in so far as it represents the most extreme, 'the possibility of absolute impossibility of Dasein.'

Thus Heidegger regarded death as the ultimate and unsurpassable possibility; the most authentic, unrelated, certain, and as such, indefinite possibility. Dread of death, far from being objective, makes man free to seize his true possibility, to be quite himself.

1.8.2 Sartre, Kierkegaard and Jaspers

In Sartre too we find a similar view. According to him far from being my own possibility, death is a contingent fact. I cannot discover, nor wait for it, nor take an attitude toward it, for it is that which reveals itself as indiscernible and that which disarms all expectations.

In short ‘death is not my possibility but always the possible nullification of what is possible for me, which is outside my possibilities’. The day and hour of my death are not fixed by me, but are decided by the ‘sequences of the universe’, it cannot be said that “death confers a meaning, a sense to life, for meaning comes only from subjectivity itself.”
In summing up, Sartre says “Death is pure fact, like birth.” Basically it is indistinguishable from birth and it is this identity of birth and death that we call facticity. I am not ‘free in order to die (Heidegger), but a free being who dies’. Death is not annihilation, but lapses of my subjectivity out of the world. According to Sartre, ‘I am not free for dying, but I am a free mortal’. Thus death is for Sartre a means of asserting one’s liberty. Man, as Sartre sees it, is ‘condemned to be free. Death reveals our freedom and this is its main function. Death is accidental in its occurrence and therefore absurd, far from giving a life its meaning it may leave that meaning in doubt and suspense.

Kierkegaard too in his ‘Sickness unto Death’ amply elaborates on the finiteness of life which in turn reveals dread, anxiety, anguish and despair. According to him dread is an experience of ‘awakening’ one’s ‘possibility of freedom’. He pointed out that the man who knows that ‘all men are mortal’ knows an abstract, theoretical truth about man in general; what is really important philosophically is that he realizes the relevance of this truth for himself that ‘I too, must die’.

As a theologian, Kierkegaard accepted the Christian answer to death. “What concerned him was not the fact of death but the salvation of his immortal soul and this depends on the life one leads as well as the purity of one’s faith.”

A Right-wing existentialist like Jaspers advances the concept of ‘Ultimate Situation’ in order to exemplify the meaningfulness of life in death.
Thus he emphasizes death as the ‘ultimate situation’ par excellence. For him, death reminds one to keep one’s awareness of ultimate situation.

But to become “aware of it as an ultimate situation, one must experience it as absolute failure.” Jaspers demands that the awareness of the ultimate situation should not be evaded or obscured. It is through it that man become Existentz. It is from this point of view that Jaspers considers the traditional answers to death to a critical review.

Jaspers “deprecates the Stoic ideal of apathy with regard to death. He finds the Stoic reliance on the ascendancy of reason over the passion unfounded since it underestimate the radical character of absolute failure and over-estimate the independence of reasoning.” According to Jaspers it is of little help to argue that fear of death is based on an error. None is capable of overcoming the horror at the thought of non-being. Stoics, according to Jaspers, overlook not only ‘the anxiety of trembling before non-being, but also the anxiety of existential of non-being’.

Similarly, world negating position taken by theology and some philosophies also ‘deceives and consoles’ through the fantasies of another life which is a “retreat from the awareness of death as the ultimate situation.” As far as Jaspers is concerned, since the ultimate situation should not be obscured or evaded, there is no point in seeking refuge in any kind of religious or philosophical system.
1.8.3 *Gabriel Marcel and Paul Tillich*

The disquietude of death (caused by parting with one’s loved one) has a greater impact on the Christian existential thinker, Gabriel Marcel than other philosophers of existentialism. For him, “death presents itself as a permanent invitation to despair.” Through metaphysical reflection together with metapsychological experience, Marcel reaches to a certain conclusion that ‘I am of the world, and, at the same time, transcend the world and that death is not annihilation’.

Marcel’s position is that ‘death is the springboard of an absolute hope. A world where death is absent would be a world where hope would exist only in an embryonic state’. When death is envisaged on its true plane, that of mystery, it loses its terrifying aspects and ceases to be seen as an evil. It becomes the threshold to another dimension, so to say, another birth. This existential moment coincides with the eternal instant, and death appears itself as an accomplishment. Marcel emphasizes that there is mystery in the thinking process itself where ‘it thinks in me’ is much closer to what really happens when the simple ‘I think’. Accordingly, there is a tendency to convert mystery into a problem, and a symbol or expression becomes the ontological mystery.

The recognition of mystery is said to be one of contraries and points essentially to a positive act of the spirit. Thus the problem of being would then be nothing but a translation of a mystery into an inadequate language which can be ascribed only to a being whose central characteristic is perhaps that of not coinciding purely and simply with its life.

26
“This recognition of mystery is similar to ‘Cusanus docta ignorantia’ - learned ignorance - and not a hasty ‘non-liquet’. One can recognize the problem, and be able to solve some of them, but still remain aware of the basic mysteriousness of being as an existent - This concrete individual who knows himself to be in the world as well as outside the world.”37. Therefore, according to Marcel, the awareness of this mystery may in itself be sufficient to resist total despair arising from the encounter with death.

A great modern theologian Paul Tillich who has attempted to look into the problem of death from an existentialist point of view argues that the enemy of a valid human life is not death but anxiety in the face of the unknown. This anxiety clouds man’s understanding of his own possibilities despite the threat against the individual self. For Tillich man comes into real relationship to God only if he has the courage to be in the face of the possible loss of everything that men ordinarily take as a support for their sense of self. Death is precisely this loss and therefore precisely the fact that man must face with help from nowhere. Only then does help from God appear.

1.9 DEATH AND IMMORTALITY : CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION

With the advent of Christianity and its promise of resurrection “and” an eternal life in the here-after, the problem of death appeared seemingly solved. In the Old Testament, it may be noted that death occupied an important place in the minds of the ancient Hebrews.

27
The Book of Job in Old Testament states that "for the years of my life are numbered, and I shall soon take the road of no return and he never comes home again, and his house knows him no more." Such statements make it clear that Jews believed in the lineal conception of time in which death was the complete annihilation of human existence on earth.

It is significant that in the very beginning of Old Testament, we find a theory of the origin of death. In the Book of ‘Genesis’, there was a conception of death as the result of ‘Original Sin’ (of Adam and Eve). The Israelites had believed that a good life is rewarded with longevity and better living conditions.

The New Testament proclaims victory over death. Again, The book of 1 Corianthian states that "when this perishable nature has put on imperishability, and when this mortal nature has put on immortality then the words of scripture will come true. Death is sweloped up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin, and sin gets its power from the law. So let us thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. An answer to the problem of death in the New Testament is that death is the last and greatest enemy but this enemy is already conquered because of the resurrection of Christ. Consequently the Christian doctrine teaches the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day of Judgement and thus shifted the emphasis on the immortality of soul. The eternal life spoken of in the New Testament is a free gift bestowed by Christ.
Accordingly, the Christian conception is that eternal life is a gift which Christ is empowered to confer on his people. A cursory review of the New Testament underlines the idea that death is the consequential effect of sin. But Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament, conquered death and won over the causes and effects of death and sin through the laws of ‘Spirit’ (Holy). Eventually, the Christian theology advocates that a Christian dies along with Christ while receiving baptism and resurrects with Christ on the last day of Judgement.

The contrast between the Greek idea of the immortality of soul and Christian conception in resurrection is still deeper. The belief in the resurrection presupposed the Jewish connection between death and sin. Death is not something natural and willed by God, as in Greek thought, it is rather something unnatural and thus opposed to God. Accordingly death can be conquered only to the extent that sin is removed. For ‘Death is the Wages of Sin’. Christian faith proclaims that Jesus has expiated sins and that he arose with body and soul undergirds the immortality of the soul.

Where, however, such a belief is present, death appears merely as a necessary and preparatory event for another existence - an existence towards man’s true being. It is this view of death that made possible for St.Paul to regard death and proclaims: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. Death where is your victory? Death where is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin, and sin gets its power from the Law’. A gradual emergence of a definite answer to the problem of after-life is developed by Christian theology in due course of
time and emphasized the difficulties of salvation from eternal death, culminated in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The above explanations obviate the necessity to consider that, according to the Christian conception of death, only when one dies in his body, one can have eternal life and immortality is made possible if one believes in the eternal redemption offered through Christ's resurrection. To sum up, it may be noted that a healthy Christian attitude toward the problem of death acknowledges and accepts the human condition of fragility which is overcome in death and experience the fullness of life in the life here-after.

1.10 DEATH AND TRANSCENDENCE: INDIAN APPROACH

Indian philosophy has been occupied with the problem of death from its very beginning. Even the jubilant optimism of Vedas is not without its shadow of death. The ancient seers keenly conceptualized and cognized the fact of death as the inevitable stage of one's life. The Vedic sages fumbled to find a solution of death. It was only the Upanisadic sages who discovered the spiritual secret of life and thus a spiritual solution of death in the form of spiritual way to attain Immortality. Indian mythology also devised several means of overcoming death: viz; transmigration, birth in other worlds of immortal existence. One notable among them, transmigration, is a series of lives of the same soul. Accordingly, the body is perishable by death but the soul is cognized as the enduring identity of a person. Looked at from this perspective, transmigration is regarded as a partial conquest of death in so far as death
destroys only the body and not the soul which eventually survives and is reborn. Consequently transmigration and rebirth are partial consolation against the destructive tyranny of death.

The Upanisads in general recognize transmigration as an implicit principle of life in several statements which deal with action and their fruit. The Kathopanisad regards man as a crop which grows and ripens. Yama offers paradise to Nachiketas in the Kathopanisad and describes it as a region in which man is not afflicted by disease, decay, old age and death.

The Upanisads take the fact of death so seriously that the modes of life appears to them as only a provisional evasion of death. Transmigration is a cycle of death, rebirths and death. It may be noted that the Upanisads are not pessimistic and consider death as a serious and serene fact of life and seeks a satisfactory metaphysical solution to it. The transitoriness of life and the fact of death is recognized in several statements in the Upanisads. The seer in Brihadaranyaha Upanisad pray to God that he may be lead from death to Immortality. They see that the existence is enveloped by death. Thus Sankara explains in his commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanisad that life is bondage and bondage is death. Accordingly the Upanisdic seers depicted Immortality as the freedom of being. Bound personality can undergo transmigration and transmigration involves death. Immortality is attainable to an integral spiritual being which is non-dualistic. That is why in Brihadaranyaha Upanisad, the sage warns that death prevails so far as it sees duality. One who sees duality in life goes from death to death.
The Upanisads not only cognise and confirm the fact of death as an inevitable destiny of man, but explore also the cause and character of it and thus seek a way of attaining a state of being which transcends the causes and conditions of mortality. Statements which confirm and confer immortality upon man abound in Upanisads. They are numerous and confirm that the greater interest of Upanisads is in immortality rather than death. Death is referred to only as a reason on account of which quest for transcendence and attainment of immortality is necessary. They seek immortal existence which will never be touched by death.

The notions of death and transcendence in the Upanisads may be understood in terms of time and duality which are the main causes of death. According to them life is a limited cause in time. Time in itself is a cosmic order, cause and process goes on endlessly and devours everything in the universe. Time is a greater destroyer. It is the cardinal cause of death; the course of time moves towards death and every moment of time indicated it. The temporal cause of death assumes several forms in life. The Brihadaranyaka Upanisad has defined them as hunger, labour, bondage, evil and unreality. Death eventually is an unreality.

Time and negation of being are the two organizing principles of death for the Upanisadic genius. Time signifies transitoriness. Death is termination of being in which transitoriness culminates. In a way, time indicates the being in its momentariness. The Upanisads discover the secret of immortality...
not in the temporal existence but in the vision of spiritual reality which transcends it. As mentioned in Isavasyopanisad time is undoubtedly a dimension of reality which has a dynamic aspect. But it is not the whole of reality. Reality transcends time. Reality is not bound with time & space. Hence it is immutable, eternal and immortal. Thus it is blissful being and bliss is everlasting, happiness and joy.

It is for this blissful being as the supreme reality of existence and life which is transcendent of time and mutation that the Upanisads discover the secret of immortality. It is the core of human existence for the Upanisads. When one realizes his deeper blissful being and identifies his existence with it, he attains immortality. It is a blissful existential experience unaffected by laws of time, decay and death. It is devoid of sensory pleasures and bodily attachments. It is the inner core of man’s being and is realizable through penance, contemplation, meditation etc. It may be difficult due to the physical limitation of existence. Such a possibility is the deepest secret in one’s life and the greatest truth according to the Upanisads.

The Upanisadic seers confirm the truth of this possible immortality in numerous statements in the principal Upanisads. The Upanisadic *risis* were more interested in affirming the truth of immortality than in dilating upon the lamentable fact of death. Almost every Upanisad affirms the truth of immortality. Isavasyopanisad declares that man conquers death by ‘Karma’ and attains immortality by spiritual knowledge.
Thus the Upanisads find the secret of immortality in the realization of a non-dualistic consciousness. Such realization alone is the way to conquer death. It cannot be reflectively cognized as cognition implies the duality of subject and object. This spiritual experience is above the categories of time and space and thus of decay and the idea of which is the greatest contribution of Upanisads to human aspiration.

Such a non-dualistic integral blissful state of being is said to be the most positive content of life. It alone overcomes negation which constantly corrodes life in the course of time and ends in death. If death is negation then immortality is affirmation, and positive in character. When the ignorance of non-duality is overcome by a deeper and greater consciousness and realization, then existence becomes integrated with infinitude and bliss. Time is conquered in transcendence and negation of death is conquered in the absolute affirmation of blissful experience.

1.11 CONCLUSION

The literature which we scanned on the problem of death and transcendence and its relation with the human subject appeared mainly under three aspects:

1. It can be, as in Plato, “The Ideal Condition” of philosophizing a ‘state’ in which alone the philosopher’s quest for true knowledge can be fulfilled.
2. “Death can be the 'Muse' of philosophy, the impetus behind philosophizing which arms primarily at mastering the fear of death and coming to terms with the inevitability of death.” Thus we find philosophers such as, Epicurus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and Schopenhauer.

3. Death can be said to be the 'Instrument of Philosophy' suitable in understanding 'Being' and revealing its true nature as penetrated by 'Non-Being', as for instance Heidegger.

If this sketch of our approach is an answer to the fact of death, it should be evident that the familiarity and coziness of the taken-for-granted attitude guards us against the intrusion of a sharp reflection. What has always been considered as 'ours' in the common sense world must be made thematic and what we have always relied on as the indubitable truth must be invaded and searched. If there are no assurances about results, there is at least something that can be said about the prize of the venture. The point of our approach to the existential recognition that the familiar everydayness of our 'understanding' on death is the result of the practicality and power of the complex apparatus of man's consciousness of it. Thus we turn to our second chapter - Death and Human Condition - as a necessary corollary to man's consciousness of it because death holds hope and horror for man, though he does not always recognize this or call it by an appropriate name.
REFERENCES


8. ______. Fragment 67 (Quoted by Burnet John “Early Greek Philosophy” op.cit. 1930. p.138.)


11. Ibid, 70c-77a.
12. Ibid, 78a-84b.
13. Ibid, 91c-107b.


26. Ibid. p.222.

27. Ibid. P.231

28. Ibid. p. 234.

29. Ibid. p. 235.

30. Ibid. p.244.

31. Ibid. p.247.

32. Ibid. p. 226.
33. Ibid. p. 226.
34. Ibid. p. 226.
35. Ibid. p. 227.
36. Ibid. p. 254.
37. Ibid. p. 261.
39. 1 Corinthians, 15:54-56.
41. Ibid. 267.