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Pursuit of *Moksha* through Existential Anxiety and *Karma* in Ghanashyam Khadka's *Nirvana*

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Abstract

The idea of struggle for existence is always the turning point for the search for ultimate reality. Reality leads to realization. *Moksha* is the point of ultimate realization. Based on the theme of *Moksha*, the novel *Nirvana* by Ghanashyam Khadka proposes a new mode of defining and exemplifying the process of *Moksha*. This study explores how the transitoriness in life and the realization of meaninglessness in life have conditioned us to accept every dimension of *Dukha*, which ultimately leads us to enlightenment and *Nirvana*. Grounded on the principles of existential anxiety and the search for *Moksha* through Gita philosophy, this study examines how the queries on the truth of life and death lead to the realization of the value of death in life. These queries are meant for existence and they properly lead to the level of *Moksha*. Before knowing the truth of human limitation to the knowledge of worldly existence and life, human beings are disturbed by the destined events of life, but these events become the sources of the perfect knowledge to enable one to be free from all worldly sorrows and pains. The experience of sadness and loneliness in life makes people think that they should give up anger and malice on the journey of life to understanding the truth, the *Moksha*. The novel, *Nirvana*, shows the central characters, Monika and the narrator, undergoing long troubles of life individually, have realized ultimate peace when they have followed Buddhist meditation in search of *Nirvana*, but throughout their life, they are guided by the Gita theory of *Karma* and essence.

Keywords: *Moksha*, existential anxiety, existential subjectivity, *Karma*, the absurd

Introduction

The search for *Moksha* is the ultimate goal in religious practices in Buddhism and Hinduism. The contradiction in the search for *Moksha* and physical existence is always a turmoil practice among these practitioners, which results in the real success to achieve *Moksha* or failure to achieve it. This research work focuses on the mode of *Moksha*

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Ghanashyam Khadka has suggested through the *karmic* and destined experiences of life in his novel *Nirvana*. It aims to examine how life is determined by destiny; how human beings are destined to survive even in the extreme condition of suffering; and how this suffering may lead one to the mode of realization of the truth of life. Very often, the suffering and the anxiety in life lead to a sense of meaninglessness, but the characters in the novel realize the truth of life the more they have undergone suffering and are filled with the anxiety of life and existence. For the same, the research work has observed the life events of the central characters through the lens of existentialism and *Gita* philosophy of *Karma*.

Nirvana's central plot revolves around the quest for Nirvana with full respect to *karmic* beliefs. The narrator's visit to a young lady, Monika, at the beginning of the novel, is mysterious. They do not have familiar relations with each other. They have a mysterious birthday celebration just between the two. They have come close by the sense of existential quest for some days. But, Monika disappears just after a few days. Where she goes, nobody knows. She appears mysteriously at the end of the plot as the life-giving agent to the narrator. This time it becomes clear that she has spent four years in the search for mental peace, and the peace for spirituality. Both of them have experienced extreme suffering in life. At last, Monika takes him to Sage Govinda (Govinda Guruji). It becomes the only place where the narrator feels enlightened. The research objective, in this sense, is to examine the novel, *Nirvana* through existential and *karmic* principles to address the problem of how anxiety in life can be the means to find the gateway to *Moksha*.

Regarding this problem, this research work tries to find the answers to these research questions:

- How has Khadka presented the concept of existential quest in the novel? How this quest has led to the mode of *Moksha*?
- How has he shown the characters' devotion to Buddhist meditation that has the association with the *Gita* philosophy of *karma* as the means of salvation?

Existential Anxiety, 'Being on their Own' and Truth beyond Life in *Nirvana*

Anxiety to exist has always been the guiding principle for human beings. Everything else becomes possible only when there is existence, and Sartre states, "I am the creator and user of the objects with which I surround myself and by which I live" (Blackham 140). The theory to define individual existence and the meaning of life is existentialism. It shows an important difference between distinctively human existence and anything else. Human existence, in this sense, does not refer to the existence of things alone. It is the existence of life and knowledge together. Knowledge is the consciousness of being. The question always is the search for a factor for one's existence. Sartre supposes every individual as the cause of his existence; "I make myself to be in coming into existence as consciousness is itself individual and concrete" (141). Then, is existence an essence? Surely not. The difference lies between 'I' and 'being'. 'I'ness of 'I' is being. 'I' is the essence and 'being' is existence. The search for 'being' in 'I' is the real quest for existence.

One major idea is that human existence is in some way 'on its own', or a sense of anxiety. Anxiety here has two important inferences. First is the anxiety about the significance of emotions or feelings on an individual and separate existence. Second, anxiety also stands for a form of existence that is recognition of 'being on its own'. What does 'being on its own' mean? It means, "becoming an individual" and it "is a task to be undertaken and sustained but perhaps never permanently achieved" (Flynn 24). It differs from person to person. It refers to the point of departure from rational thought, moral

values, or empirical evidence at the time of making essential decisions. It makes someone different from others and provides the space for existence. This mode of 'being on his/ her own' signifies the uniqueness of human existence. It sets the difference out of the sameness. This difference leads to differences in understanding, and therefore, everyone differs from others one and finds to 'being his/her own'.

With a sagacity of fundamentally 'being her own', Monika, the central character in the novel, appears, disappears, and again appears mysteriously. Not much is known at the beginning about her background, the story mysteriously unfolds the sad situation in her life, but by then she has already been out of contact with society, friends, and the narrator. Her attitudes and expressions have shown her as a lady with anxiety about her life, more precisely about life in general. She has lost her whole family- father, mother, and brother, in a plane crash, and she has even left her profession as a doctor. She has real anxiety in her life, the anguish of her feelings and emotions, as she reveals, "Not known, why I feel this life full of pleasure and want to live and sometimes I don't see any reason of the life and intend to die" (Khadka 8)¹. The life experience just of eating, drinking, giving birth to babies, and becoming old and dying becomes even more meaningless to her, and finds high monotony in all this customary process, "I can't say life is just this much or something more" (8). Her anxiety about her emotion in life brings her in dilemma on whether to live or not to live or anything between these two points. She has questions about why men are living this type of life that is no life at all and grows her reluctance in her own life, "I don't find this world worth living" (9). The cause of her anxiety is her alienation that leads to feelings of unease about meaning, choice, and freedom in life.

Alienation is the melody of her life and reflects the experience of fear or being threatened in the context of a physical or situational threat. Her feelings, as "every act of a person may be considered as contributing to some kind of success or failure" (Thorne 36) leading to anxiety, are always driven by a kind of threat to her life, or desire to death or inquiry to the existence of life and death. In all the conditions, "it is postulated that the level of anxiety stimulated by any fancied or actual failure is a function of the status of a person's success-failure ratio in life" (37), she makes the question of the existence and meaning of life and death, "what do you think, does the life end after the death?" (Khadka 26). She suffers through mental anguish on what is life and what is death and what is in-between if there is any. She realizes that everything in life is just the coexistence, "Every event in life is just fortuities. All these things may happen or may not, but death certainly happens. It is a mystery that, even knowing this a truth, our mind always tries to avoid death from it, and supposes the coincidence as the truth" (30). Monika develops this sense of awareness. She is perturbed about the truth beyond this life. For her, this life is no more than the combined events of coincidences.

A similar point of anxiety exists in another female character, Sweta, especially after the death of her mother, "what is the certainty of life at all?" (Khadka 179), and "where does the life go after death, to heaven or hell or to somewhere else?" (178). She asks the same question as Monika had previously "but does life end after death?" (180). Her existential despair has made her think that life is inherently useless, "ultimately, what remains permanent, nothing" (188). She has earned a lot of property by selling her art. She has a comfortable house, car, and everything as such a material property. She has understood the essence of the uncertainty of life and the emptiness of wealth and property. So, she sold all her property go on a journey, "I have earned that much as I need for my life, and

¹ *The citations from the novel, Nirvana are my translations.*

I don't want to play with brushes anymore" (191). It is seen that she knows she has not many years to live, "let us go round the earth before dying" (191). She seems to know that her existence has no meaning because there are limits or boundaries to it. She exists just to exist. She has lived her life in her way. She enjoys the freedom of her choice. She has made major decisions in her way. She has chosen to go to the sea herself in the way she knows it. Her decisions are her personal but she is merely a part of the unknown truth of life.

Sweta is just a representative character. She embodies the nature of human angst in life. Her fretfulness has grown bit by bit towards her loneliness caused by the death of her father, her responsibility to her mother, and the death of her mother. All these events have played a role to search a meaning in life as Sartre focuses, "I am alone in my responsibility; my existence, relative to everything external that might give it meaning, is absurd. Face to face with such responsibility, I feel 'anxiety'" (Blackham 135). Sweta's feeling of responsibility, therefore, has resulted in anxiety, and angst has led to absurdity. And, absurdity has led to the point of self-decision in her.

Likewise, with all her hopelessness, and despair at her young age, Monika has also chosen a different way of her life. She has realized no meaning in just living a material life. She has searched her existence. It is the existence of her soul even after death. In her opinion, life is just meaningful in death because "man dies because he has a life" (Khadka 153). She has negated all her social responsibilities. She lives just in search of truth. It is the search for Nirvana – the search for no life form after death. She has recognized 'being on her own' for the search for spirituality. Her realization, "we understand and suppose our life as much as we experience it, but life is not just that much" (221). This experience of life is one level of existence. It is the existence and the state of 'being'. One truth is the worldly truth though it is supposed to be transient or deceptive. Becoming part of this worldly truth, either the identical or the different is the way of taking part in worldly *karma*. Also, Monika has the realization of the truth beyond the worldly, "There is another truth of life afar from what we experience from our senses as the truth" (Khadka 221). She is in search of the truth afar from physical life which can only be achieved after death. But, it is even clear death alone is not the mode of finding the truth. It is achieved through *karma* in life. Therefore, our life is for the existence of both types of 'being' - 'being of here' and 'being of beyond'.

Hence, two major characters, Monika and Sweta have undergone the feeling of anxiety, and questions about the meaning of life. They have been in search of the difference between death and life. Ultimately, they have felt the freedom from the sense of anxiety to the mode of their realization of meaning in their lives and beyond. Monika's existential anxiety has led her to the *Bhagavadgita* sense of illusion in physical life, "the world is full of illusion, the illusion of love, life itself is illusioned with love and mysterious" (Khadka 266). Monika comes to the point of ultimate freedom in her life beyond all the physical boundaries, desires, and needs almost similar to Sartre who feels, "I begin to exist in a new dimension of being" (Blackham 134), and she feels freedom is absolute and it makes her life meaningful. Anxiety, in Monika and Sweta, therefore, is not a problem as it appears at its surface level, but it is an inevitable part of life. Everyone, like Sweta and Monika, experiences. Though the term anxiety gives the impression of having a negative outcome, it is positive, and it has taught important lessons about life.

Existential Subjectivity, Absolute Freedom and Nirvana

One principle of existentialism is the notion of subjectivity. Subjectivity is the recognition of the self. A human owns himself/herself and has the responsibility for

his/her existence. Human, therefore, is the master of/her life and must feel free. It is the subjective priority of an individual in existentialism. A man/woman is not of social existence, neither he/she can hold the social responsibility. Still, individual's responsibility is conditioned socially. Existence begins from the self. Kierkegaard thinks, "Individuals are infinitely interested in existing and constantly in the process of becoming" (Cooper 34). This becoming is subjectivity and individuality.

An individual has the freedom of his/her life. He/she chooses to have life as he/she wishes. It is subjectivity. Sartre supposes this subjectivity leads to not being free as the wish or will, but it is that humanity is condemned to be free with the principle that "existence precedes essence" (35). Sartre's talk of a human being as someone "who makes himself" (40) shows the focus on the subjective self and the existence as purely individual existence. The conditions of human birth and upbringing are beyond human control. We can make choices only when we become self-aware. The choice after self-awareness can best define our essence. This is the freedom of subjective choice, as Sartre examines, "Liberty, indeed, is strictly assimilable to the cancellation of being: the only being which can be called free is the being which cancels (separates itself from) its being (Blackham 139). He claims that a person "chooses" his or her "original relation ... with the world" sits badly with the insistence that we experience a world "always already" interpreted in virtue of a communal engagement with it" (40). Freedom is an implicit trait of consciousness or artlessness. But there is more to freedom. It is responsible for making choices, or not being able to avoid making choices.

Monika has faced the most unfortunate situation of the permanent separation from her dearest ones, and she has a sense of alienation as if "anxiety is necessary, even if not always obvious" (Buben 983). She has felt no value in her life, but she has chosen herself in the way she likes. She does not care about her society, friends, and no one else. She has made her choice to spend the rest of her life in search of the essence of her life. Her previous search for existence is replaced with her search for essence. She has recognized her existence is different from her essence. This understanding enables her to set her choice, her individuality, and her freedom. It is her freedom to obtain what she has wished. She asks many questions within herself, "Why am I sad? Am I sad because I have lost my family? Am I sad because I am alone? Am I sad because I can't enjoy loneliness? I am sad because I have not understood what is life. I am sad because I don't know why there is sadness in life" (Khadka 232). These self-centering questions make her feel different from what she has got (her existence) and what she wishes to get (her essence). She has a wish to find the cause of sadness in life, so she goes to Govinda Guruji. Also, freedom can be seen as the freedom to choose- it is the fundamental project that she sets for herself with no compulsion at all. She confers on the situation in which she finds herself- "she has chosen to search inner world within herself, a young lady being disconnected with all the society with no phone, no Facebook, no email and no socialization at all" (235). Her condition shows that she has never thought of that situation in her life previously. With a good happy family, and a profession as a doctor, she must have a distinct mode of life she could have undergone. But everything comes not as she has thought, but as the predetermined consequences. Life, therefore, is not exactly as what one thinks but as it just happens – life is predetermined.

An almost similar situation of individuality and freedom takes place in the life of the narrator. He has chosen the freedom of his life leaving the home alone, "I left home without any information to anyone, I had no plan. I would take a bus on the highway and go to the place wherever it takes" (53). His journey is aimless. He has shown his subjectivity by starting an unplanned, obscure, and free journey in his life. He wants to go out of the social, familial, and other systems, "I had left the village of Sweta suddenly

in the way I had gone there. I intended to be out of the system, but I was trapped within it even strongly” (63). But ultimately, he becomes part of a system that he reaches to a village and becomes a teacher. The rhythm of his life starts from the very point when he meets Sweta as his student, and later she becomes his girlfriend. He shares his happiness with her. He lives with her in the ways he had married her but he has not married her.

The narrator again begins the journey to nowhere. It is his second choice of a plan-less journey with Sweta. All these events take place as if he wishes to obtain. He has tried to preserve his subjectivity trying to show his existence. But as ‘existence versus essence’, his reality threatens his existence. His reality of life takes a separate mode than he expects, especially when he loses Sweta in a ship accident and when mysteriously Monika saves his life. As Sartre defines the uncertainty of life, “Here is a dimension of me which I cannot get rid of and cannot live” (Blackham 134), the narrator has come to realize the existential question, and “the pace of life is so strange. Life is very different than what we expect it would be and we don’t think what exactly happens” (Khadka 202). He has understood that neither life nor death is on his hands. He does not know how Monika came in contact, and how her behavior made him think about his mode of life differently. The disappearance of Monika has changed drastically in the regularity of a psychiatrist, the narrator.

The freedom of choice, from an existential point of view, can best be understood by reference to an individual’s original choice. Sartre views the whole life of an individual as expressing an original project that unfolds throughout time. This is not a project that the individual has proper knowledge of, “I see that there is a liberty beyond my liberty, a situation beyond my situation” (Blackham 135). Specific choices are therefore always components in time of this time-spanning original choice of project. And so has happened to the narrator, Monika, and Sweta. They have the liberty of life, but the liberty of the situation becomes greater than their liberty and choice. And then, is there any possibility of absolute freedom? It is not possible in life. Life is free, subjective, individual, and still destined with the liberty of the situation or time. Absolute freedom is only possible in the point of nirvana- the point of being free from all the restraints of life, desire, needs, physicality, and worldliness. Then, how much is it possible is a question the existential theory discusses?

Karma, Destiny, the Absurd, and Nirvana

Destiny and the concept of already determined life are other major ideas of existential thought. The existentialists do not exactly believe in the role of destiny in a direct manner, but they believe in the individuality and power of freedom or liberty in humans. The subjectivity, as we call it freedom appears as the confusion in freedom of choice in life. Human beings are always in the dilemma of choice. There is not always certain that the choice has become the right choice. If the choice becomes wrong, the whole life is enslaved within the destiny, “how short is the life. it is now but, it may not be this evening” (Khadka 178). Or, destiny makes one take action in life too. So, a human being’s role is always predetermined and everyone is compelled to decide as destiny makes him/her do so.

Camus and Sartre have talked about nothingness. Likewise, Khadka writes, “all problems of life are imaginative. They are problems because we have supposed them as problems. All solutions are also imagined. Imagined problems can’t have a real solution” (257). It means what we call as important is not important at all. Camus has notified us we are destined to perform the act- the act of Sisyphus and the stone. What about human life and regularity? We believe in an important life, but life is nothing more than doing meaningless activities. The meaning of life is nothingness. We work for nothing, but still,

we have to work as part of *Karma*. Fact or essence does not control who or what we are, but *karma* controls it. We are all pushed, fated to choose how to live our lives. Not deciding to choose is also a choice.

The freedom Sweta, Monika, and the narrator have possessed does not appear to be the freedom anymore by the end of the novel. Monika, Sweta, the narrator, Dipti, and all the characters in the novel exist in the way they have been destined to. They are under the bound rules of destiny, “the only way of making existential commitments is by using bound variables. To be is to be a value of a bound variable” (Hintikka 128). They wish to be free, but they are not free to choose their life in another way. They all are under the control of *karma* and their destiny. Landslide kills Sweta’s father, but not her mother, not Sweta herself. And another coincidence is that the narrator is safe because he leaves that house secretly the night before. Sweta is saved because she goes to find the narrator and her mother is saved because she goes to find Sweta. All these coincidences are the best instances of the destiny of life and death. Why does the narrator decide to leave the job and run away secretly? Why does Sweta need to search for the narrator but not her father? Why the mother leaves her husband alone in the house that night? Why the landslide runs away from the village that night? - are all the parts of destiny with no proper explanations. The narrator has chosen freedom to leave the village, which has given the way to all these consequences.

Sweta has a real sense of existence, a valuable life with art. She has got name, fame, and money from art and excellence. She has a real desire for prosperity and has found it too. She has the feeling of the real meaning of struggle, life, and existence, but she is killed in an accident. Was it her choice or her destiny? It was her choice, no doubt because she has made a plan to make the journey of the world. She has come to feel that “human existence and the world are not logically independent of one another” (Cooper 35-6). But, her choice has become the wrong choice of freedom that has led her to her destined death in the sea. The narrator has lost Sweta in the same accident, but he has survived. He has been floating in the sea for three days but he is not killed. Monika, who had discarded life for four years, and had left the narrator without notice, has appeared at the time when Sweta has been killed in an accident. All these events show that “there is always the existential foundation for someone or something to be there” (Khadka 130). All these events appear to be the results of the choice of freedom as existential philosophers argue, but they happen as if everything has happened as part of coincidence and destiny. Although “we may anticipate that we must die, we never know when we shall die; but it is the timing of one’s death that makes all the difference when it comes to the meaning of one’s life” (Kaufmann 86), the narrator’s father knows that his son will be under the suffering, “You have the tragic destiny with Sweta, probably you will come back alone” (Khadka 244), and also he knows that “we will not meet again in this life” (242), but he chooses not to tell his son all about it. What would have happened if he had told it before the narrator leaves for the journey? Everything happens because it has to happen, and does it happen to the narrator and his father. It is part of destiny.

Srimadbhagavadgita depicts this concept of destiny as *Karma*. A person has to perform his or her duty, sacred duty; also known as *dharma*, कार्यमित्येव यत्कर्म नियतं क्रियतेऽर्जुन । १८-९॥¹ “when one performs his/her prescribed duty only because it ought to be done” (Prabhupada trans. 710). The narrator’s father knows the truth about his son, his relation with his son, and the tragedy in Sweta’s life, but cannot tell it to him because everyone is forced to act according to his/her *Karma* and *Dharma*: न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्य कर्म कृत् । ३-९॥¹ “everyone is forced to act helplessly according to the qualities he has

acquired from the nature; and therefore no one can refrain from doing something, not even for a moment” (Prabhupada trans. 151). Hence, people act according to their *Karma*, the nature they have acquired as the *dharma*, but it appears to be absurd for them.

The absurd denotes the conflict between the human tendency to seek meaning in life and an inability to find any meaning. Life itself is meaningless. Activities in life are also insignificant. Seeing life with no value is absurd. On the one hand, existential search is the search for the value of life and the result of the search is nothingness, just the relation between stone and Sisyphus. It is also the conflict between being and oblivion. Human existence cannot have a relationship with being unless it remains amid nothingness. This emptiness is understood as the mystery- life before birth and life after death. Heidegger observes this concept as “at the very core of existence nothingness dissolves being into nothingness” (Roubiczek 125). Gita consciousness depicts this mystery as the theory of *Karma* beautifully - it is human *karma* to perform a duty whether it has value or not-

सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत ।

कुर्याद्विद्वांस्तथासक्तश्चिकीर्षुर्लोकसङ्ग्रहम् ॥ ३-२५॥ⁱⁱⁱ

As the ignorant perform their duties with attachment, the learned may similarly act, but without attachment (Prabhupada trans. 172).

One who knows about *karma* performs the action without the attachment of the result and who does not know about it performs the duty with the expectation of the result. It means a person either knows or does not know about *karma* he/she is guided by, “the pace of life is very strange. What we think does not happen. And, we don’t think what happens” (Khadka 203). We are guided by something else. That particular ‘something else’ is *karma*. The expectation is a different aspect. The narrator of Nirvana, in this sense, is the product of his *karma*. His actions are the actions of his *Karma* and determined by his destiny, but not known to him and the people around him as absurdist actions. He does not know how he has come to meet Sweta at her childhood age, how she has come again in his young life and why he has to lose her amid the sea. Neither does he know why Manika has come into his life mysteriously, why she has taken the position in his mind and how she has come to save his life.

It is absurd why Monika happens to think she has to save someone in the sea, and how she feels someone saying, “go save the life of this man, he is the one you want to save” (Khadka 219). It is where the mystery lies. Some strangeness dwells in her action. Is not it absurd why Monika reaches that place? Why has she got the idea to be involved in saving the life of ship-wrecked accidents? Why is not she satisfied with one day’s search? What makes her think that there must be someone waiting to be saved? All these questions have remained unanswered and are mysterious. The life of the characters revolves around these mysteries. This absurdity guides the principle of life.

Another aspect of the absurd theory is that the significance of life is understood at the point of death. The absurdity of human life is “certain sort of nihilism – that is, the rejection of all metaphysical, religious, evaluative, and moral absolute principles transcending this life in this world in their status and reality” (Schacht 118). It poses a challenge to the meaning of the world. Absurdity and meaningfulness do not go together. It does not mean that if life is not absurd, it necessarily becomes meaningful. Krishna gives the lesson to Arjuna about the meaninglessness of bodily existence in the absence of the entity:

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।

निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥ १४-५॥^{iv}

Material nature consists of three qualities- goodness, passion, and ignorance, but all these qualities are only meaningful with the contact of eternal entity when the eternal living entity comes in contact with nature, he becomes conditioned by these modes. (Prabhupada, trans. 607)

Human beings consist of all these qualities, but these qualities are no more meaningful in isolation. The narrator in Nirvana feels passionate about seeing half-naked Monika at the beginning of the novel. But he has no sense of passion for her in the same condition when he has undergone meditation and knowledge about the importance of the soul in life, "I could understand Monika only after going away from the sense of bodily attraction" (Khadka 276). Ultimately, he has realized the meaninglessness of just bodily existence of the man if he/she has not had the sense of beyond the body, beyond the material world. It is the sense of looking at everything with goodness consciousness. Monika has already undergone the same feeling.

The realization of nothingness in bodily existence has led to the concept of the absurd in both of the characters- Monika and the narrator. It is a state of alienation from the world. They are not in the search of the meaning of this material world; however, they have come back to their regular life and business. Having fifteen days of lessons and meditation within the *Ashrama* of Govinda Guruji, the narrator has learned, that "there is no difference between the city and jungle. Neither there is a difference between Ashrama and the home. The main thing is the realization of the truth. Wherever you stay, have the inner consciousness for the truth" (275). Monika has been practicing the same for four years regularly. Now, the narrator has also started the practice to search for the truth- something beyond the worldly existence of this life. This level of awareness enables them to transcend superficial thoughts and they have discovered the inner reality through the outer. And then there is nothing that remains to make the difference between meaningful or meaningless life and the world.

Nirvana's Pursuit: Moksha through Existence

The *Bhagavadgita* identifies *Moksha* as the supreme state of the human condition that only a few can achieve. It is the position of an individual's natural state with complete renouncement from imposed physical desire. It is beyond the experience of good and evil. It brings someone to the eternal and indestructible status and free from all troubles of birth and death:

जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ।

त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोऽर्जुन ॥ ४-९॥^v

One who gets *Moksha* (transcends the divine within) does not take his birth in this material world again but attains eternal abode. (Prabhupada, trans. 205)

This is the extreme point of ecstasy from the knowledge. One who has the existence of life can only attain the mode of *Moksha* through practice. The sense of good and bad is the point of existence. When reached to the mode of *Moksha*, one does not feel good or bad, happiness or sadness, anxiety or reassurance. So, in the complete absence of existence, *Moksha* is not possible. Hence, *Moksha* is possible only through existence.

Moksha is the state with no pain and no pleasure of the physical as such. It is the transcendental perfection of the individual self, the attainment of God, and an inseparable union with him. God, in this context, is the ultimate truth. *Moksha* is a delight in the self, contentment with the self, self-realization, and self-fulfillment. A perfect bliss! It is free from all types of moral obligations.

Then, is it possible to achieve *Moksha* ignoring all the physicality as such? Has anyone achieved this state without taking part in this material world? *Moksha* is only

possible after achieving the physical state. First comes the physical state of emotions such as attachment, fear, and anger. No *Moksha*, no freedom from physical attachment without being involved in it is the real essence of *Moksha*, वीतरागभयक्रोधा मन्मया मामुपाश्रिताः । ४-१० ॥^{vi} “people are purified with knowledge being freed from attachment, fear, and anger and fully absorbed in me” (Prabhupada trans. 206). This *Moksha* can be attained following three-fold paths- *Jnana* (knowledge) *Bhakti* (devotion), and *Karma* (duty). One can adopt these three paths, or one of them to achieve *Moksha* or liberation. Once liberated, he/she finds no difference between good and evil, pain and happiness, but feels ecstasy out of the knowledge. A person attains the stage of equanimity and equilibrium. Among the three-fold paths of *Moksha*, Monika and the narrator have devoted themselves to the search for *jnana* or knowledge. Their search is to know the truth, which, they suppose, is beyond the life they are living and have practiced for a different mode of life.

Monika and the narrator have not followed any particular religion or any group as such a faith. They have visited Govinda Guruji, who has been practicing long in the quest of truth, and even has got the power of gender transformation, as he practiced becoming a woman for six months with the real bodily and behavior change in him with the realization of “we become what we think. We become sad if we think us sad, free is we think ourselves free” (Khadka 255). Being untouched from the outside but perceiving the world with inner knowledge is the point of *Moksha* because “truth does not have any fixed form, but we want to see the truth in the form” (255). They are always in the pursuit of the knowledge of the real, but always affected by the principle that “the manner in which we and ourselves situated in a world that *matters* to us in a range” (Ratcliffe and Broome 361). It is the formless truth. They have felt the pain or sadness that has led them to the mode of searching for the reason for sadness, the way they followed as the Buddha did, and ultimately they have come to the point that pain is no pain at all. At the beginning stage, their queries about the sorrow of their life stand as the anxiety for their survival, for their happiness in the physical world and their search for existence as Sartre supposes, “man is a useless passion” (Sartre 636) and *Gita* says शरीरं केवलं कर्म ॥ ४-२१ ॥^{vii} ‘the body is just for the *Karma*’ (Prabhupada trans. 220). It happens as if the narrator is a perfectionist, “man fundamentally is the desire to be God” (Sartre 587). God in this reference does not refer to the God idol, but someone who knows everything as a symbol. The use of the name ‘God’ to refer to such “an impossible being alludes to the traditional idea of philosophical theism that God, while personal and conscious, is perfect and timeless and hence immutable or unchangeable” (Webber 106). It does not mean that every man becomes the God in ultimate existence, but man’s ‘desire to become God’ means, “we want to possess the solidity of a fixed nature while also being conscious” (Webber 107). The desire to become a god is the desire to ‘being’, desire to exist, desire to be free, and desire to be conscious and consciousness is the point of knowledge.

Refined with the knowledge of the quest for the truth, the narrator has started to think; “humans are moving around the anger towards the enemies, affection towards the loved ones and desire towards the wealth” (Khadka 276), and he has come to realize *Gita* consciousness त्यक्तसर्वपरिग्रहः । ४-२१ ॥^{viii} “give up all sense of proprietorship over the possessions” (Prabhupada trans. 220), and has achieved the level, “the enemy does not become an enemy when there is no anger, the friend is a real friend when there is no

affection and the attachment to the wealth becomes free when there is no desire” (Khadka 276). The state of being free from desire is the condition of *Moksha*, liberation from all the worldly limitations because “our body is hanged in the consciousness” (Khadka 259), and यस्य सर्वे समारम्भाः कामसङ्कल्पवर्जिताः ॥४-१९॥^{ix} “one is understood to be full in knowledge whose every endeavor is devoid of desire for sense gratification” (Prabhupada trans. 218). With this principle, the narrator has decided to follow the principle of Govinda Guruji, “go home and search the truth until you come to the point of Nirvana” (Khadka 265), and also the novel ends with his conclusion that Nirvana (*Moksha*) is not the thing to say, it is not the knowledge to impart or to share, but it is the knowledge of the truth to be experienced and realized with long and extreme patience and practice.

Conclusion

The novel, *Nirvana*, as the title suggests from its etymology, presents modes of central characters undergoing steps of practice for the real *Moksha* or Nirvana. It does not only present the lessons on how to achieve Nirvana and neither does it show or justify someone achieving *Moksha* as Buddha did. But it is the story of how the central characters, especially the narrator and Monika have realized the knowledge of the truth in life- they have not found Nirvana yet, but realizing it. They have not ignored the physical life, nor have they denied this physical existence. But they have accepted the notion of human existence; the reality and existential reality of life and death. The death of loving ones has heavily disturbed their lifestyle. It has fathomed into the sense of nothingness, and ultimately they have adopted a different mode of life that they suppose would be the way to Nirvana or *Moksha*.

The idea of anguish for the existence of the central characters is the turning point in their search for the ultimate reality. The narrator moves through the anxiety of the meaning in life, realizes meaninglessness, and is conditioned to accept every experience of his life one cannot escape. Similar is the condition of Monika, whose role begins with her question on life and death, the value of death, and whether there is meaning in life in death. All these queries are the queries for existence. Furthermore, the events like the death of Monika’s family in the plane crash, the death of Sweta’s father, the death of Sweta herself, narrator’s visit with Dipti, emerge one after another as unpredictable events. They are guided by some kind of other power as such a destiny. Before knowing the truth of human limitation to the knowledge of worldly existence and life, Monika and the narrator are disturbed by all these destined events. But, they have come to realize that perfect knowledge enables one to be free from all these worldly sorrows and pains. The experience of sadness and loneliness in life has turned away their mind from other objects of sense and has made them think they should give up anger and malice.

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Endnotes

- 1 "karyamityeva yatkarma niyatam kriyartearjuna" (Gita 18.9),
- 2 "Nahikaschitkshanamapi jatu tisthatyakarmakrit" (Gita 3.5),
- 3 "sakta karmanyavidwanso.... Kuryadwidwastathasakta" (Gita 3.25)
- 4 "satwa rajastama iti guna prakritisambhava, nibadhanti mahabaho dehede-hinamavyayam" (Gita 14. 5)
- 5 "janma karma cha me divyamewam yo vetti tattwata,tyaktwa deham punar- janma naiti mameti siarjuna" (Gita 4.9)
- 6 "Vitaragabhayakrodha manmaya mamupashrita" (Gita 4.10)
- 7 "sariram kebalam karma" (Gita 4.21)
- 8 "tyaktasarvaparigraha" (Gita 4.21)
- 9 "yasya sarve samarambha kaamasankalpavarjitah" (Gita 4.19)

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- ⁱ "karyamityeva yatkarma niyatam kriyartearjuna" (Gita 18.9),
- ⁱⁱ "Nahikaschitkshanamapi jatu tisthatyakarmakrit" (Gita 3.5),
- ⁱⁱⁱ "sakta karmanyavidwanso.... Kuryadwidwastathasakta" (Gita 3.25)
- ^{iv} "satwa rajastama iti guna prakritisambhava, nibadhanti mahabaho dehede-hinamavyayam" (Gita 14. 5)
- ^v "janma karma cha me divyamewam yo vetti tattwata, tyaktwa deham punarjanma naiti mameti siarjuna" (Gita 4.9)
- ^{vi} "Vitaragabhayakrodha manmaya mamupashrita" (Gita 4.10)
- ^{vii} "sariram kebalam karma" (Gita 4.21)
- ^{viii} "tyaktasarvaparigraha" (Gita 4.21)
- ^{ix} "yasya sarve samarambha kaamasankalpavarjitah" (Gita 4.19)