



## Gabriel Marcel and the Modern Man : A Reflection in to the Philosophical and Moral Approach

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**Abstract** - In Gabriel Marcel Philosophy, his central observation about modern-man and his experiences has been pointed out. In this paper, I have tried to elaborate philosophical and moral dimension of his philosophy and show that how it is relevant in present scenario of Pandemic, which directly or indirectly is the result of devaluation of human values. It is true that science & technology, Economics, GDP have changed human life at a larger scale and have contributed in reducing physical labour. But, did the same have helped in reducing existential and spiritual predicament? Can it help in solving the issues of humanity? If answer is no, then what can be the most expected answer? Can Gabriel Marcel's philosophy provide with us the right answer? In my opinion Marcel's philosophical and moral thought is related and fits in to the existential crisis that we are facing through in this Pandemic. I have attempted to defend his points by showing that adopting the moral approach of Gabriel Marcel can be like milestone in understanding core reason of crisis and could provide us with possible measures to overcome them. I believe that this paper will create a deeper and clear understanding of the topic among readers.

**Keywords:** Broken World, Modern Man, Problem, Mystery, Primary Reflection, Secondary Reflection.

Turning the pages of history, shows that mankind has suffered a number of crisis such as Technological crisis, financial crisis, Natural crisis, etc. The term 'Crisis' is generally defined as - any event or time of danger which leads to an unstable situation affecting an individual or community as a whole. Today, the scenario we are witnessing due to covid-19 all over the world is seen as 'Existential crisis'; it is the crisis of existence. At this juncture of pandemic, man is compelled to think what is the meaning of life? Are we condemned to live at home? How will be the life after corona war? Man today is concerned with such kinds of existential questions. This darkness of future has given birth to a number of mental health conditions i.e., Despair, Anxiety, Depression, feeling of isolation, etc which are common pictures of 'modern society'. The biggest question mark before us is how do we overcome these problems? In order to find the solution of any problem

one must first of all go to the root of the problem. The most recognized reason is materialistic and narrow attitude of man which obviously is the result of technological development and crafty as well as greedy attitude of man which has helped him to degrade his values and attach himself merely to materialistic pleasure ignoring spiritual dignity. Talking about ancient society, when we look back in history we find that earlier, 'Barter system' was the medium of exchange. Later, we shifted from gold & silver coins to modern day currency to ease the trade at a global level. The mode of convenience now shifted towards gaining power as a result our values started shifting towards materialism through money. That's how we slowly and gradually plunged in to a kind of society where market is a dominating force today. This attitude towards 'surplus profit' rather than 'surplus emotion' has brought to the loss of humanity. At this moment of Pandemic it is worth remembering that **"Money is lost, nothing is lost; Health is lost, something is lost; but if character is lost everything is lost."** Here, by 'Character', I mean our value system. Values are those principles of behaviour, which an individual regards as important for his development. The development of a society is based on its value system. An individual is the unit of the society. Therefore, values adopted by a person will affect his family and consequently will affect the society. In other words, values can order society in better or worse ways. Losing our values, we lose our way. Values can be both personal and social such as, freedom, responsibility, community, etc. Both personal and social values are correlated. But it seems that these values are rarely practiced today. Therefore, It is a time to re-educate ourselves and redefine our value system. It is a time to redefine and build our character. For this, looking within ourselves is required so that we can transform and redefine our value system.

In this direction, at a broad level, for instance, 'Nudge' an aspect of behavioural economics, Political theory & Behavioural science is considered as a promising tool to encourage people to bring required change in their behaviour and act in an environmentally benign way. Recently, 'The Deloitte 2020 Global Marketing Trends Report' has addressed to seven key trends on which every business will focus. These are: Purpose, Human experience, Fusion, Trust, Participation, Talent and Agility. This way emphasise is being made in every sector in rebuilding the policies which are authentic and keeps 'Humans' at front & centre.

This is not the first time we are going through existential crisis. The term has its root in 'Existentialism', a school of philosophy of nineteenth century. At this juncture of pandemic we have once again turned back towards the philosophy of existentialism as it has a long history of poignant response to crisis. Existentialism in general is a philosophy that conducts war against all kinds of scientific positivism, materialism & technological pragmatism. The central theme with which existentialism is concerned is the Philosophy of man for it recognizes man to be the gateway for understanding the world. Although existentialist examine topics such as ontology, epistemology, but their discussion gives prominence to value-laden concepts such as Individuality, choice, creativity, subjectivity, etc. All existentialist thinkers admit the definition that to live morally is to live as a man.

We are going through the era of transformation. Meanwhile, the philosophy of **Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)**, a French philosopher is worth remembering for his philosophy is concerned with transforming the old notions of philosophy in to a new one and hence aims at searching new man centred values. His philosophy is the outcome of what he went through his life. The incident of 'first world war' had a profound influence

on Marcel's value-learning and consequently turned him towards a new philosophical direction. He is known as 'Mysterious Empiricist'. His purpose was to repudiate the devaluation system so that authentic values could be established. For this he thought it to be essential to transform the traditional notion of empiricism, rationalism and metaphysics.

Marcel argued that due to dominance of scientific thought, traditional empiricist conceived sensation merely as a transmission of message from one object to other. 'Experiencing self' was considered only as a 'Datum' for sending and receiving data. Experience was reduced merely to sensation and reflection as a process of mind. Ordinary objects were reduced to 'sense-data', it was considered that only sense data or qualities of an object such as its colour, shape, size, etc only can be experienced through sensation (The awareness of sense-data) rather than the object itself. In other words it can be said that knowledge of sense data was the criteria of experience. For instance, on the question of self Hume says that soul is nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions. Hence, Empiricist adopted idealistic approach for experiencing beings or phenomenon.

Similarly, Marcel was reluctant to rationalistic conception of Metaphysics. Rationalist adopted an idealistic approach towards defining being. For example, Hegel's concept of being. Marcel was not satisfied with the traditional conception of 'man', 'self', 'experience', 'reason, etc. He held that traditional philosophy has fastened idealism & existence in a single frame. Such an approach he conceived does not raise the questions of existence (in existentialist sense). Rationalist gave priority to reason over existence. This abstraction of science and idealistic method of philosophy demolish human dignity. This thinking moved Marcel towards a new direction of philosophy.

On recalling Marcel's Philosophy, we get to know that he called the modern world as '**Broken world**' in which human dignity has been lost resulting in devaluation of human values. His main concern was '**Modern man**' and his main intension was to find the way to revive the lost dignity of broken man. In discussing this central question, Marcel focused his attention on a particular idea. This idea was the distinction between '**having**' & '**being**'. The term 'having' means 'to possess'; 'being' means 'to be'. In a society dominated by technology and scientific thought, we, man have become a tool of mechanization, exercising a specific task. We are no more free - agent and are reduced to statistical numbers. We are identified by a function we perform and not by the sacredness of our being. Marcel explains this by an example of a ticket-collector. A Ticket-collector is identified with the work he performs. On being asked 'who is he?', we reply, he is a ticket-collector. Today's man has lost his ontological sense. Possessed by 'having' man has lost the authenticity of being. Man has gratification for having (Possessing) a 'house', a 'job', 'money', etc which has dragged him in to the relation of 'I-IT', abstraction and objectification of being. This is the state of 'ontological deficiency', which Marcel would call as 'Absent' (non- availability). Ontological deficiency or absent means non-availability of an individual to another individual. This deliberate absence of man in need of his fellow-man creates a gap in authentic human relation. This dehumanization has led modern man to witness denial, betrayal, despair, etc. in modern society. But, Marcel aims at bringing back this lost 'ontological sense'. He calls for the stage of 'Ontological exigence' what in other words is called 'Presence'(availability) in Marcel terms. He calls for availability of man for his fellow-man. In more explicit

way, He is expecting a stage where man knows the sacredness of his being, he will be in immediate contact with other beings and a stage where absence(non-availability) would be replaced by presence(availability), betrayal by fidelity, denial by faith and despair by hope.

In this context he further differentiates between '**Mystery**' and '**Problem**'. In defining 'PROBLEM', he said problem is something in front of me i.e. the object about which I am asking is separable from myself. It does not include my subjective involvement e.g. about asking the question, is there life on the moon. Such kinds of questions include verifiable solution based on observation and appropriate testing. 'MYSTERY' on the other hand is something in which I myself is involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is me and what is before me loses its meaning and its initial validity e.g. The question 'Who am I?' is different from 'what is man?'. 'Who am I' includes the questions about meaning of life, subjective problem, on the existence of God, etc. which cannot be objectively solved. But, in regarding the second question, 'what is man' a number of various theories have been provided in history of philosophy. In dealing with the concrete philosophy of human existence Marcel adhered to concrete approach to solve the mystery of being.

Marcel believed that man is the inseparable part of this world. He first recognizes himself and then formulates questions about himself and the world. He deliberates on many points that are essential and requirement of present time to invoke an insight in to the mystery of being. They are: Fidelity, communion, availability, hope, etc. In order to grasp the reality of human being for the realization of existence, it is necessary that not the problem of human life but understanding of the mystery is required. In this context he distinguishes between two forms of Reflection i.e. **Primary and Secondary Reflection**. For understanding the mystery of life Marcel points out, one must focus on Secondary reflection rather than Primary reflection. Primary reflection, according to him is a kind of problem-solving thinking. It is predominant in science & technology whereas, Secondary reflection is the introspection in to the self. It is the means to deepening our participation in the mystery of being. This introspection in to the self is possible only through the mode of 'Inter-subjectivity' i.e. man to man relation in light of love. It is only in entering in to the communication with others that a concrete and complete knowledge of oneself is possible. This participation stands for a vital relation with other. This is the ground of 'I-THOU' relation i.e, relation of two concrete selves. I-THOU relation is the only authentic relation of love. Contrary to this, I-IT relation is not the relation between two selves but a relation where one soul understand other soul as an object for fulfilling ones purpose. This is the ground for lonely isolated existence. We have to replace 'I think' by 'we are', the authentic ground of our existence. But, the culmination of this kind of relation between two soul is not limited only to 'I-THOU' but it reaches from 'I' to 'Absolute thou'. 'Absolute thou' is the stage where a person starts giving other beings just like him. This is the vision of humanity. 'Freedom' is the key to reach this stage. According to Marcel 'freedom' means to express the latent powers in the person. It's something to be experienced and not just to be rationalised in idealistic sense. It is freedom through which man realizes ones existence and defines his self either by his possession or by his being. This realization only is the starting point of creativity. Freedom represents ones possibility of choosing values in limited circumstances. Freedom in terms of creativity,

according to Marcel is the biggest source of hope. At this creative level, an authentic person according to Marcel, creates authentic values and executed them in life with commitment.

Thus, Marcel begins with 'we' and not 'I'. He prioritizes love, friendship, sympathy, honesty, etc as social values through the assimilation of 'I' & 'THOU'. These are the values that connect person to the person and Marcel considers it necessary for authentic existence. These are the values which represent the sense of responsibility of a person and also of society. Although many steps are taken up to bring positive changes, they cannot be achieved unless we effectively implement them. Values do not exist until we commit to them. We can say that Marcel's philosophical and moral approach can help us to tackle numerous modern problems concerning man and society. In this forthcoming 'new-normal' era it becomes both appropriate and relevant to once again revive Marcel's philosophy and rebuilt our values in order to overcome existing and upcoming existential and related crisis. Understanding Marcel approach can help us to rediscover the new ways of living and reshaping our value system and bring desirable changes within ourselves and society as is the requirement of our time.

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