
ADDRESSING THE CONCEPT OF EXISTENTIALISM IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF ANITA DESAI

Ms. Shaju T.J.

Ph.D. Scholar

Department of English

Malwanchal University Indore (M.P.).

Dr. Ram Sharma

Supervisor

Department of English

Malwanchal University Indore (M.P.).

ABSTRACT

This appropriate concept began to take root in literature after Sartre established a link between literature and philosophy in his writings. Existentialism is a broad phrase that encompasses a wide range of psychological theories about human nature. Its complexity and breadth make it challenging to comprehend and manage. Many intellectuals have debated it, argued about it, and defined it. Existential characters are emotional and gloomy, with a wide range of temperaments. The emotional struggle of protagonists in Anita Desai's novels is the focus of this paper. Because of the unstable state of their lives, the feminine sex felt subjugated. To live a meaningful and tranquil life, a woman must look within herself to realise her full potential and live a life independent of others. Desai highlights women's suffering at the hands of males.

Keywords: Novels, Theme, Women, Fiction, Existential.

I. INTRODUCTION

The beginnings of existentialism are tough to trace. The roots of existentialism can be traced back to Socrates, Saint Augustine, Saint Paul, and Pascal in Western philosophy. The modern existentialist movement, on the other hand, is seen to have its roots in Soren Kierkegaard's thinking. In his feelings, Kierkegaard highlighted the importance of human subjectivity and depth. He maintained that subjectivity, rather than an objective and intellectual examination of the universe, contains the truth. Philosophical theories based on abstract systems and logical thinking were rejected by him. He emphasised the value of personal experience over intellectual abstractions. He was a theist who, as a result of his existentialist philosophy, rejected Christianity as an abstract religion removed from reality. He also emphasised the harsh reality that existential man suffers from 'Dread.' Dread, according to Kierkegaard, is a dichotomy in man's life that makes him a creature that wants to know his destiny while also being scared of it. As a Christian existentialist, Kierkegaard prefers the religious path over the aesthetic and ethical paths. Genuine existence, he says, is a possibility that man can turn into reality by taking a leap of faith. Martin Heidegger, another existentialist, is often credited for coining the phrase "existence precedes essence," which serves as the philosophical foundation of existentialism. He's also come up with his own definition of 'Dread.' According to him, the experience of dread or existential torment signifies the turning point in a human being's life when he pushes aside his inauthentic existences and becomes aware of authentic existence. He also emphasised that what distinguishes humans from other living beings is their awareness of their own mortality.

II. EXISTENTIALISM IN THE FICTION OF ANITA DESAI

Anita Desai is undeniably a serious novelist of the highest order in current Indo-Asian fiction. She deftly investigates the emotional ecology of her heroes in her works, who, despite fighting the pervasive forces of ludicrous realities, feel tormented by the burden of existing hopelessly in today's chaotic surroundings. She tries to assess the different daunting variables that make life difficult and unendurable by delving further into the subtleties

of human existence. Desai's unwavering existentialist concerns, along with her superb skill, have set her apart from other novels of both the older and younger generations. She pursues her trade with exceptional sincerity, talent, and seriousness, as she is devoted to the novel as an art form. Her multi-faceted art and never-fading themes necessitate a plethora of critical studies from various perspectives.

Existentialism is concerned with the unchangeable human condition as well as the various tactics used by people to deal with existential challenges. In Anita Desai's literature, the protagonists express their dissatisfaction with their spiritual circumstances in many ways. In existentialism, man is portrayed as a lonely and alienated individual who must choose between two opposing ways of life, one of which is authentic and the other is dishonest. Anita Desai's characters are forced to make similar decisions in comparable situations. In her novels, she frequently expresses her characters' existential concerns. She used to investigate and investigate the human predicament from an existential standpoint. Her characters' alienation, loneliness, and regularity are key themes in her work. Anita Desai has attempted to study the existential state of modern man in a modern context on several occasions. She expresses her dissatisfaction with man's current predicament. There has been a significant shift in emphasis from society to individuals, which has resulted in a change in the environment. The sad effect in her works is heightened, according to Harish Raizada, "since the external situations not only oppress the protagonists in her stories from the outside, but also fault their personality from within."

A well-known author Anita Desai was born in Mussorie, India, to a Bengali father and a German mother on June 24, 1937. Even as a child, a variety of influences nourished her lyrical and creative imagination. Her parents, sisters, and brother conversed in German. She began writing prose, mostly fiction, at the age of seven, and had some tiny pieces published in children's periodicals. Her family lived in Delhi, where she attended Queen Mary's School and subsequently Miranda House, Delhi University, where she received her bachelor's degree in English Literature in 1957. Calcutta, Bombay, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Poona are among the cities she is reported to have resided in, some of which are extensively detailed in her novels.

III. ANITA DESAI AS AN EXISTENTIALIST IN HER WORKS

Desai is essentially an existentialist novelist, focusing on what F.H. Heinemann refers to as "the enduring human condition." She has deftly explored existentialist themes such as maladjustment, alienation, the absurdity of human existence, the search for ultimate meaning in life, detachment, isolation, and time as a fourth dimension in her novels, focusing on how women in today's urban milieu are bravely fighting or helplessly submitting to the relentless forces of absurd life. "The horror of fighting, single-handed, the savage assaults of existence," she says in her interview with Yasodhara Dalmia, about her handling of the basic human condition, which remains largely same despite day-to-day changes.

Characters Take Center Stage

Anita Desai has focused her works solely on characters rather than the social context. She has never produced common characters; instead, she has written about particular men and women - solitary individuals – who are not normal but have withdrawn or been driven to despair, and thus turned against or made to stand against the general river of life.

Alienation between husband and wife

The alienation between husband and wife caused by their temperamental incompatibility is a major existentialist issue. The novel *Cry, the Peacock*, is built on it. As opposed archetypes, Gautama and Maya stand in stark opposition to one another, and as such, they continuously remind us of their counterparts, Raman and Sita, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* The communication gap between husband and wife is well-developed

throughout the narrative, with Maya and Gautama constantly arguing and tiffing about trivial matters. Despite the fact that their marriage was a complete disaster, they remain together and live an exciting life. "It was depressing to realise about how much in our marriage was founded on a nobility force upon us from outside, and hence neither true nor permanent," Maya says of her failed marriage. It was frequently broken, and the pieces were gathered up and reassembled as if it were a sacred image with which, "... we couldn't bear to park" (Cry, the Peacock 5).

The conflict between Maya's and Gautama's irreconcilably different temperaments is central to the narrative, which has numerous events depicting their lack of communication. Maya is surprised by Gautama's ability to distinguish the smell of lemons from that of petunias, indicating that they do not share any common sensibility or understanding: "...the blossoms of the lemon tree were different, quite different: of much stronger, crisper character they seemed cut out of hard moon shells, by a sharp knife of mother-of-pearl, into curving, scimitar petals that guarded the heart of fragrance by a sharp knife of mother-of-pearl. Their aroma was also stronger - a sour, astringent scent that was as refreshing as pulverised lemon peel or crushed lemon leaves. I stammered with worry as I tried to explain this to Gautama, for now, when his company was necessary, I needed his complete understanding" (CTP 21).

IV. THEME OF EXISTENTIALISM IN CRY, THE PEACOCK AND VOICES IN THE CITY

Anita Desai masterfully addresses a "enduring" existentialist predicament with her profound insight of human psychology in *Cry, the Peacock*. Though it appears to be a realistic story, *Voices in the City* methodically examines "the fierce assaults of existence" of Calcutta's "monster" mega-city on the novel's three main characters – Nirode, Monisha, and Amla. In *Voice in the City*, the novelist goes deep into the human psyche, attempting to navigate the murky realms of the conscious and subconscious minds of the main characters. Anita Desai is the undisputed queen of the inner emotional world, particularly that of women. She excels at externalising the internal and conveying the memorable movements of quiet pained reflections. She excels in capturing the angst-ridden characters in her fictional world's silent introspections and retrospections. "In Anita Desai's two novels, the inner climate, the climate of sensitivity that lours or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning, is more captivating than the outer weather, the physical geography, or the visible action," writes K.R.S. Iyengar. In other words, her specialty is the study of sensation -" (See page 464)

"Desai dives deep into the human psyche and tries to investigate quite adroitly the dim regions of the conscious and subconscious of the primary characters in *Voices in the City*," writes Madhusudan Prasad (P 22). "The issue of alienation is explored in terms of mother-children relationship, which is itself a consequence of dissonance in husband-wife relationship," writes R.S. Singh in *Voices in the City* (P 171). Nirode, Monisha, and Amla all look to be caught in the webs of Calcutta, "the monster metropolis." They are all gasping for air as they fight the monster for their lives - and this is the novel's fundamental theme. *Voices in the City* is, without exaggeration, a Calcutta epic. Desai's epic works on England, Dublin, and Alexandria, respectively, are reminiscent of those written by Charles Dickens, James Joyce, and Lawrence Durrell. In a word, Anita Desai's work *Voices in the City* is certainly powerful, and it is in no way inferior to her previous novel, *Cry, the Peacock*. Desai's successful existentialist approach, her successful attempt to bring to life a crowded metropolis like Calcutta in all its disgusting ugliness and sordidness, her deep probing into the inner dim domains of her major characters, her striking symbolism, her telling imagery, and the novel's resultant textual density – all reveal her genius. In a nutshell, *Voice in the City* is an excellent addition to the rapidly growing body of Indo-Anglian fiction.

V. CONCLUSION

Anita Desai has made a significant contribution to the modern Indian fiction in English. All of Anita Desai's protagonists face the same existential problem. Her writing style is inextricably linked to her interest in existential issues. She makes a statement about society's violence and aggression through her protagonists. She also makes

observations on the conflict between inner and exterior reality, but her main focus is on the absurdity of the human condition, the existential search for meaning in human life, and an examination of the obstacles and choices that humans encounter in life. Every work by Anita Desai is a search for meaning, values, and truth.

By investigating the unquestionable existentialism concern of her heroes, Anita Desai brings a fresh dimension to the genre of Indian fiction in English. Anita Desai has given the three most important human predicaments of agony, estrangement, and despair an existential dimension. By dramatising the "silent misery and helplessness of married women," she gives her female characters a voice and an audience. Her characters have a strong sense of self-awareness, fallibility, and a concentration on loneliness, alienation, and pessimism. Anita Desai takes a turn at being reflective, delves deep into the psyche, and visits the regions in the heart and mind where things accumulate. Desai stands out among her generation's novelists because of her unmistakable existentialist concerns. Anita Desai's novels are psychic extravaganzas with complex drama and existential aspects in their structure. Anita Desai's principal characters are forced to make similar decisions in comparable situations. Thus, Anita Desai's work is important in today's world, when man is confronted with several challenges and problems in order to live a successful life.

REFERENCES: -

- [1] Dr. C. Ramya (2019) "Anita Desai - Psychological Exploration of the Inner Psyche of Her Existential Characters" Language in India, ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 19:9 September 2019
- [2] Dr. C. Ramya (2018) "Anita Desai as an Existentialist Exploring the Emotional Turbulence and Chaotic Inner World" Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 18:9 September 2018
- [3] Potla, Rajendra. (2018). "Encountering The Adversary: A Study On 'Existential Assault On Female'" In Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock And Fire On The Mountain.
- [4] Manu Verma (2016) "Existentialism Predicament In Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock And Voices In The City" International Journal Of English Language, Literature And Translation Studies, Vol.3.Issue. 1.2016 (Jan-Mar)
- [5] Molugu, Vanisree. (2015). Existential Dimension In Anita Desai's Fire On The Mountain And Jhumpa Lahiri's Mrs.Sen. Journal of Higher Education and Research Society: A Refereed International ISSN 2349-0209. Volume-3. 473-478.
- [6] Sharma, Dr. (2015). From Feminism Sensibility to Existential Predicament: A Study of Anita Desai's In Custody and Cry, the Peacock. International Multidisciplinary Research Journal. 5. 22-30.
- [7] Tandon, Neeru. Anita Desai's In Custody: A Critical Appraisal. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2011.
- [8] Desai, Anita. Voices in the City. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1968. Print.
- [9] Desai, Anita. Cry, the Peacock. Calcutta: Rupa and Company, 1980. Print.