



Existentialism in Anita Desai's 'Cry, the Peacock' and 'Bye-Bye Blackbird': A Review of Literature

Simran Yadav,
M.Phil Research Scholar, Department of English
Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Barla, Raisen (M.P.)

Dr. Naveen Kumar Mehta,
Associate Professor, Department of English
Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Barla, Raisen (M.P.)

Abstract

Existentialism is regarded as philosophy that put emphasis on individual existence, freedom and choice. In existentialism, humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe; mostly it focuses on human existence. It is believed that individual is free to take their responsibility. Existentialism deals with experience, personal concern, commitment and uniqueness of the individual. The theme of existentialism appears to be very prominent in Anita Desai's 'Cry, the Peacock' and 'Bye-Bye Blackbird'. In 'Cry, the Peacock' the female character Maya she is victim of many social and psychological predicaments, and this novel depicts modern Indian culture and highlighting the female predicament of maintaining self-identity as an individual woman. In 'Bye-Bye Blackbird' Desai's portrays a realistic picture of men-women relationship. The protagonist Sarah becomes victim of psychic and social alienation. In this background, the present paper explores review of literature on existentialism in Anita Desai's: 'Cry, the Peacock' and Bye-Bye Blackbird".

Keywords: Alienation, Existentialism, Freedom, Fear, and Identity.

Introduction

In the world of existentialist, each person is born, lives, chooses, his or her course, or her own existence, thinkers believe that people search to find where they exist, and are in search of their identity and existence. There are certain themes in existentialism such as theme of alienation, fear, anxiety, freedom and commitment. These themes depicted by many writers in their works. The novelists who portray these themes are mainly R.K. Narayan, Arun Joshi, Kamala Mrakandaya, Jhumpa Lehari, and Anita Desai. Anita Desai is a leading

20th century women novelist and her novels are based on the inner levels of Indian men, and women, known for their compassion, and lucid prose.

Research Methodology and Objective

The present study is based on secondary data, secondary data is collected from various websites, journals, newspapers and reference books. Literature review has shown prior research work done in this area. This paper makes an attempt to discuss Existentialism in Anita Desai's 'Cry, the Peacock' and 'Bye-Bye Blackbird' through Literature Review.



Cry, the Peacock' and 'Bye-Bye Blackbird': An Introduction

In 'Cry, the Peacock' (1963) she presents a hypersensitive and cultured character known as Maya she is the victim of many social and psychological predicaments. There is no denying that Maya receives a comfortable upbringing but due to high intensity of pain she faces tragic end. 'Cry, the Peacock' engages the complexities of modern Indian culture from a feminine perspective while highlighting the female predicament of maintaining self-identity as an individual woman. Desai makes Maya her mouth piece to express her views about women. In 'Cry, the Peacock', covers themes of alienation, isolation, loneliness, marital discord, and family relationship.

Anita Desai's novel 'Bye-Bye Blackbird' (1971) is a study of man-woman relationship by cultural encounters. The heroine of the novel, Sarah stands for culture the Indian and England. She is weak but possesses steady voice; she becomes a victim of psychic and social alienation. The title of the novel refers to "England's bidding farewell to an Indian Black Bird". The novel is in three parts "Arrival", "Discovery" and "Recognition and Departure." The novel deals with the problem of marital maladjustment which is one of the most recurrent and dominant theme in Anita Desai's work. The novel discusses various themes such as racism, displacement, alienation and so on.

Literature Review

Chaudhary (2013) unfolded that the protagonist, Devan, In Custody suffers existential absurdity, dilemmas, loss of communications, and a complete sense of

isolation which brings in a state of mental crisis where the protagonist is in search of true self.

Sharma Asha (2013) highlighted that Anita Desai holds a significant place as modern Indian English novelist. Most of her critics have focused their attention on the psychological and existentialist approach in her novels. For them 'existentialism' seems to be a favourite subject of Anita Desai where the characters recognize the world as negative and meaningless and feel alienated.

Tyagi (2014) revealed the existence of a normal woman Maya shattered due to the feeling of frustration, lack of belongingness and sense of rootlessness. Existentialism, as a literary theory touched this very soft emotional issue of modern human beings and attracted a large number of authors, critics and philosophers. Anita Desai being a psychological novelist, tried to portray this psychological trauma in her novels at best; Maya the central character of Cry, The Peacock is the best figure representing the existential dilemma of everyday life.

Ghosh Shaswati (2014) remarked that Anita Desai depicts the inner psyche of the characters in her novels especially the life of the middle class women, who silently suffers with mental stress, and unsatisfied desires. The domestic and social situations cause and even aggravate a kind of neurosis. The study and analysis of the mental stress is seen in female characters created in her novels. Anita Desai portrays the inner conflicts of their characters and also they struggle for their individuality and quest for freedom. Man and her dominating



nature is responsible for all violent and disturbing things.

Huda (2015) explained Existentialism as a mode of philosophy as well as of literature may have various interpretations. Existentialism deals greatly with the alienated trepidation, preposterousness, prejudice, escapism etc.

Sheoran Bharatender (2015) discussed that Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock* signifies the inner spirit, the mood of sensibility that roars like thunder and instantly outbreaks forward like lightning. It is more crucial than the outer climate or the visible action. Since her consociation is with the inner climate of feelings rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to imitate the style to convey the intimate relationship of the protagonist with nature and environment.

Verma (2016) stated that Desai expressed the existential dilemmas of her characters repeatedly in her novels. She used to explore and inquire into the human situation from the existential perspective. He remarked that she focused on alienation, loneliness and routine of her characters and tried to explore the existential condition of modern man in modern scenario. All the protagonists of Anita Desai's novels face the same existential crisis. Her style of writing is entirely connected to her concern with existential problems.

Singh Kamna and Jagdish Singh Somvanshi (2017) remarked that women of Desai's novels become victims of the traditional modes of existence without a strong terra firma, which makes them intensely conscious of their lack of identity. Their protest mostly turns into

frustration, for as an Indian girl, a woman is brought up to be passive, meek and obedient. She tried to depict the oppressive and unfeeling conjugal bond. Hence, Desai presents the unhappy situation of women in Indian society.

Nasreen, and Glory (2017) revealed that Anita Desai protagonists are forced to involve completely in routine life regardless of their interest and tendencies and they are in thrust of justice, security and identity. Security and identity are essential for a woman to develop a better quality of life. It is well known that darkness prevails in the absence of light. In the same way insecurity and depression filled the hearts of women. In *Cry, the Peacock* the protagonist Maya suffered from Neurosis, the feeling of insecurity is one of the symptoms of psychic disorders.

Chelliah (2018) discussed that Desai is greatly obsessed by existentialist dimensions and she explored the existential dimension of adjustment, belonging and ultimate decision in the lives of three major characters Dev, Adit and Sarah in her novel *Bye- Bye Black Bird*. These characters faced their existential problems of loneliness and hollowness, adjustment and sense of belonging that torment them. The researcher concluded that Anita Desai portrays mysterious landscape of the mind whose characters are the terror of facing, single handed, the ferocious assaults of existence and the inward journey of existence.

Swain (2018) stated that man's autonomy, assertion of his subjective self, his flouting of the reason and rationality, his denial of traditional values, institution and philosophy, his exercise of



“will” and “freedom”, and his experience of the absurdity and the nothingness of the life are some of the existential themes which are reflected in the writing of the exponent’s of existentialism.”

Gajeswari. N and Subbulakshmi (2018) unfolded that Anita Desai attempts to underline the existential concerns that are so common to humanity. She chooses her characters that are under stress and tries to peep inside their psyche and come up with an explanation of their actions. All her characters have existential pangs and they are on a spree to find out the root cause and reach at some sort of realization to complete their cycle of search of life. But in her works this existential journey is spoiled by the advent of males into the lives of females and the shift mars the impact of her existential concerns.

Ramya (2019) disclosed that Anita Desai has created a picture of inner psyche of existential characters in Anita Desai fiction she examined the predicament of women in wilderness by placing these characters for removed from civilization, she has consciously examined the difficult situation and psyche of women in isolation.

Concluding Remarks

It can be summed up that Desai further examines women protagonists Maya in ‘Cry, the Peacock’ and Sarah in ‘Bye-Bye Blackbird’, as they both is in search of self-identity and existence. Desai’s works bring out dilemma, tension, agony, isolation, loneliness, and other threats of existentialism. Though in both the novels, the female protagonist are existentialist they crave to have their

independent individuality, the characters of Anita Desai creates frustration, depression, and other psychological problems, they burn from inside feelings, unable to express their anguish though they are in search of their existence. She uses various images from nature and contributed various themes in her novels, and in comparison of men, women’s are more attached to nature and environment. Nature has also exploited by male-dominated society, for fulfilled their needs. Existentialism contribute a lot in the development and growth of relationship between Men and Woman. Anita Desai as a classical novelist who boldly portrays her characters directly or indirectly influences the growth and development of character. It makes them to understand the real essence of life. In the Bye-Bye Blackbird Sarah attains maturity and a sense of responsibility to face the challenges of life. On the other hand, Maya in Cry, the Peacock compares herself to a peacock but does not like to be only a piece of beauty but makes all the efforts to maintain dignity of life.

References

1. Chaudary, Roy Anwasha, (2013), “Anita Desai’s ‘In Custody’ in a Maze of Existentialism”, International Journal of English and Literature, Vol. 49, pp. 435-439.
2. Sharma, Asha (2013), “Familial Relationship in Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock”, Indian Journal of Applied Research, Vol.3, Issue 3, pp.198-199.
3. Tyagi, Neetu (2014), “Existential Strains in Anita Desai’s Cry, The Peacock”, Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLILJ), Vol.4, pp.234-40.
4. Ghosh, Shaswati (2014) “Woman’s Search for Identity in Selected novels



- of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande", International Journal of Education and Science Research Review, Vol.1, Issue 6.pp.25-27.
5. Huda, Nazmul (2015), "The Philosophy of Existentialistic Meaninglessness in the Novel, Fire on the Mountain by Anita Desai", TIJOSS, Vol.30, pp.78-86.
 6. Sheoran, Bharatender (2015), "Eco-feminism; A Paradigm of Women-Nature Nexus: prospective Analysis of Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock", International Journal online of Humanities (IJOHMN), Vol.1, Issue 2.pp.1-7.
 7. Verma, Manu (2016), "Existentialism Predicaments in Anita Desai, s Cry, the Peacock and Voices in the City", IJELR, Vol.3, Issue1. pp.374-378.
 8. Singh, Kamna and Jagdish Singh Somvanshi (2017), "Existential Concern in the Novels of Anita Desai- A Review", International Journal of Research and Development in Applied science and Engineering (IJRDASE), Vol.14, Issue1.
 9. Begum, Nasreen and Glory K.B (2017), "Conflict and Insecurity in select novels of Anita Desai", International Journal of Current Advanced Research, Vol.6, Issue 12. pp.8104-8105.
 10. Chelliah, S. (2018), "Existential Dimensions as Projected in the Fictional World of Anita Desai: An Appraisal", International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review, Vol.1, Issue 37.pp.18-23.
 11. Swain, Dr. S. P., (2018) "Note of Existentialism in the Novels of Anita Desai", the Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study, Bhatnagar: Mittapalli Rajeshwar, (2000), pp.164-165.
 12. Gajeswari, N and Subbulaksmi, S (2018), "The Existential Pains of Women: A Study on Anita Desai's novels", International Journal of Current Research and Modern Education, Vol.3.Issue1.pp.612-615.
 13. Ramya (2019), 'Anita Desai - Psychological Exploration of the Inner Psyche of Her Existential Characters", Language in India, Vol.19:9, pp.27-36.