

Existential consciousness: The existential philosophy in J. M. Coetzee novel using Edward Said's orientalism

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Abstract

Elevation of existentialism happens in everyday life. Existentialist tries to dominate the society with his or her own social constraints. Breaking off the structures, codes, morality lead to existentialism. Violation of the structure in the society may cause many barriers and suppressions to the existentialist still the endurance is constant in them. The nature of the human being is shaken when there is the restriction on their freedom of choice and end up in a dilemma between the structure and the personal desire. Some human beings without any option they follow the structure, but in the corner of the heart a trace of violation are witnessed and the desire of the self- are killed. This is evolved with the help of the character in J.M. Coetzee's novel.

Keywords: occident, orient, self, other, existentialism

Introduction

J.M. Coetzee, a South African writer, in his writings, he deals with sensitive issues like depicting the colonial situation, history, and exploitation. Coetzee, who reaches to fame by receiving the Nobel Prize for literature by dealing with susceptible issues in his writing? In his novels, the characters are placed in a situation where they overcome a colonial politics and it is not only presented in the perspective of the self or the other but a mutual consideration of both parties is depicted. The characters in his novels are marginalized for some basis and it helps them to understand the nature of the subjugation eventually they try to exist themselves in the nature of living.

In the beginning, the human race separated into halves-called as the occident and the orient. Generally, the occident tries to set them in the upper hand by constructing the rules and regulation for the orient. The orient did not violate against the occident, as they believed them as inferior to the occident and this leads to the idea of imperialism in the minds of the people. People in the eastern countries got used for suppression, power, and violation. "Because of Orientalism, the Orient was not a free subject of thought or action" (3 Said). This paper is about the annexation of the land and the suppression. Here the colonizers are referred to as the self and the colonized as the other. The act of annexation ends up in the difference between the people. Even though there is a separation between the self and the other, the characters in the novel try their best to create meaning to the life. The character in the novel is placed in a varied situation just to make sense and to exist in the World.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement, which started in the 20th century. It aims at the concept of existence and of how human being tries to find out meaning in their life of existing in the world. It is up to the individual to decide the moral constraints in life. It lies in the hands of an individual to decide between the opposing dyads like good and bad or right and wrong and so on. Man will have to search for the meaning of life with the struggle and without a struggle, there can't be any living.

The novel, which is considered in this paper include *Life & Times of Michael k*, which is published in 1983. In *Life & Times of Michael k*, Michael k, a disfigured man who has neither proper education nor a job still his love for his mother is abundant. From birth, the society has isolated him because of the disfigurement in his appearance also his mind is slow in thinking. Anna k had been suffering from gross swelling in legs and arms and this is caused because of the hard work, which had infected her with a disease. Now she wants her son to take her to Prince Albert, where she spent her childhood days. Michael k, as a loving son, he wants to oblige to his mother's wish so he prepares for the journey to Prince Albert. In the beginning of the novel, it is clear, that the political situation of the South Africa has worn out by the civil war. Here Michael k is treated as the others in the society and the anarchy system and the itinerant armies shatter him.

The self of Michael k faces many difficulties in order oblige to his mother's will but the society in which he lives is not letting him do. "K should not expect to board a train without both a seat reservation and a permit to leave the proclaimed Cape Peninsula Police area. The earliest reservation he could give him would be for the eighteenth august, two months away." (9 Coetzee). He wishes to follow the rules of the country like a dutiful citizen, but as a son, he broke the regulation by hiring a cart to take his mother. He knows the risk of the journey as he is violating the rules of the country. On his way, he faces many barriers like physical, environmental and psychological problems. "You can't travel outside the peninsula without a permit. Go to the checkpoint and show them your papers. And listen to me: you want to stop on the expressway, you pull fifty metres off the roadside. That's the regulation: fifty metres either side. Anything nearer, you can get shot, no warning, no questions asked." (22 Coetzee). On the way to Prince Albert, Anna k had fallen sick and was admitted to the hospital where she dreams of the place and even she blabbers in her dream "Prince Albert is coming to fetch me" (24 Coetzee). However, the ailment fails as she passed away in the hospital, leaving him

in turmoil. "The suitcase was waiting for him and two brown paper parcels." "This parcel contains your mother's ashes. Your mother was cremated this morning." (32 Coetzee) Even though he is filled with sorrow, but he did not stop his journey to Prince Albert. On his way, to Prince Albert, he discovered many things in his life without his mother.

He reached Prince Albert, found the place more interesting than Cape Peninsula and he settles himself in a broken house that is isolated from the country. "The box of ashes waited in a corner of the living room. He hoped that his mother, who was in some sense in the box and in some sense not, being released, a spirit released into the air, was more at peace now that she was nearer her natal earth." (57 Coetzee). He is mentally sick and distresses because of the absence of his mother, but he tries to adjust himself in the place. From childhood, people abandoned him, but now he abandoned everyone by staying in an isolated place. He tries to find life in an isolated place by doing jobs, which gives him pleasure. In loneliness, he sang aloud and heard his echoed voice. He buried his mother's ashes on the ground. "He laid the packet of ash in the hole and dropped the first spadeful of earth on top of it. Then he had misgivings. He closed his eyes and concentrated, hoping that a voice would speak reassuring him that what he was doing right- his mother's voice if she still had a voice or a voice belonging to no one in particular, or even his own voice as it sometimes spoke telling him what to do. But no voice came. So he extracted the packet from the hole, taking the responsibility on himself, and the set about clearing a patch a few metres square in the middle of the field. There, bending low so that they would not be carried away by the wind, he distributed the fine grey flakes over the earth, afterwards turning the earth over spadeful by spadeful." (59 Coetzee)

This is how he tries to exist without his mother's presence and he starts his journey as a cultivator by sowing seeds on the ground and watering the plants. His daily routine is to water plants just for the sake of food. He feels like an owner of the land, as there is no one to question him about his work. He does things according to his wish. This place is where existentialism is applied.

He discovered the meaning of his life is to be a cultivator of crops so he starts growing crops and stayed happily in place without any companion. It is hard for anyone to stay in an isolated place without any facilities, i.e. for a city dweller like Michael K but he proved it wrong as he stayed there without many amenities. Unexpected to his feeling, grandson of the place came to stay in the house and he starts ordering Michael K to do his work. "He felt the old hopeless stupidity invading him, which he tried to beat back. Perhaps he will stay only a day or two, he thought, when he sees that there is nothing good enough for him here; perhaps he will be the one to go and I will be the one to stay." (60 Coetzee). When he ends up in the camp there he is not ready to do any work as he doesn't wish to still he does things just for the sake of existing.

This clearly shows that the Michael K wants to live a life of high spirit with freedom and he doesn't want anyone to interfere in his business. He is not ready to live a life of construction, but

when there is no option for him except the structure of the society, he relies on it.

References

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