



## "Confronting Existential Angst: Vikram Seth's Portrayal of Absurd in Contemporary Society"

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**ABSTRACT:** It delves into the existential themes pervasive in the literary works of Vikram Seth. This research paper examines Seth's novels, poetry, and essays through the lens of existential philosophy, focusing on his portrayal of the absurdity of existence in contemporary society. Drawing upon key existentialist concepts such as alienation, freedom, and the search for meaning, the study analyzes how Seth's characters confront existential angst amidst the complexities of modern life. Through an exploration of characters grappling with questions of identity, purpose, and the human condition, the paper illuminates Seth's nuanced depiction of the absurdity inherent in the human experience. Ultimately, the research aims to offer insights into Seth's engagement with existential philosophy and its relevance to contemporary societal challenges.

**Keywords:** Existential angst, Absurdity, Contemporary, Existentialism, Identity, Meaning.

### I. INTRODUCTION:

In Vikram Seth's literary corpus, the existential angst of contemporary society finds profound resonance, echoing through the intricacies of his characters' lives and the landscapes they inhabit. Through his novels, poetry, and essays, Seth meticulously crafts narratives that serve as mirrors reflecting the absurdity and complexity of the human condition in the modern world. At the heart of Seth's exploration lies a deep-seated understanding of existential philosophy, drawing upon the insights of thinkers such as Sartre, Camus, and Kierkegaard to illuminate the existential dilemmas faced by his characters. Through his nuanced portrayal of existential themes, Seth invites readers to confront the fundamental questions of existence: Who am I? What is the meaning of life? How do we navigate the absurdity and ambiguity of our existence? In

Seth's novels, characters grapple with these questions in myriad ways, navigating the labyrinth of contemporary society with varying degrees of resilience and introspection. Moreover, Seth's exploration of existential themes extends beyond the individual psyche to encompass broader societal dynamics and cultural tensions. Through his keen observations and empathetic storytelling, Seth unveils the existential struggles inherent in the fabric of contemporary society—whether it be the alienation of individuals in the pursuit of success and status, the fragmentation of human relationships amidst the pressures of globalization and technological advancement, or the existential crisis precipitated by political upheaval and social unrest. In Seth's literary universe, the absurdity of existence is not merely an intellectual abstraction but a lived reality, palpable in the everyday experiences of his characters and the world they inhabit. Yet, amidst the existential angst and despair, there are moments of transcendence and hope—moments of connection, love, and human solidarity that affirm the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

### II. Philosophy of Existentialism and its Features

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in Europe, and is characterized by a focus on individual existence, freedom, and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent or absurd world.

**Existence Precedes Essence:** Existentialism rejects the idea that individuals have a predetermined essence or nature. Instead, it asserts that existence comes first, and individuals define themselves through their choices, actions, and experiences. This emphasizes human freedom and responsibility in shaping one's own identity and destiny.



**Freedom and Responsibility:** Existentialism places a strong emphasis on human freedom and individual responsibility. It asserts that individuals are ultimately responsible for their own lives and choices, and that they must confront the consequences of their actions in an often unpredictable and chaotic world.

**Absurdity of Existence:** Existentialism contends that the universe is inherently meaningless and absurd, devoid of any inherent purpose or value. In the face of this absurdity, individuals must confront the existential anguish and anxiety that arises from the realization of their own mortality and the uncertainty of the future.

**Anguish and Anxiety:** Existentialism explores the existential anguish and anxiety that individuals experience in the face of freedom and uncertainty. This existential angst arises from the awareness of one's own mortality, the absence of inherent meaning in life, and the burden of individual responsibility.

**Authenticity and Individuality:** Existentialism values authenticity and individuality, emphasizing the importance of living in accordance with one's own values, beliefs, and desires. This entails embracing one's own uniqueness and resisting societal pressures to conform to external standards or expectations.

### III. Discussion of Vikram Seth as an Existentialist

Like existentialist writers, Vikram Seth delves into the depths of human existence, probing the fundamental questions of identity, meaning, and purpose. Through his characters and narratives, he confronts the existential angst and uncertainty inherent in the human condition, inviting readers to contemplate the complexities of life. It places a strong emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility in shaping one's own existence. In his works, Seth's characters often grapple with the consequences of their choices and actions, highlighting the existential dilemma of navigating personal autonomy within a world fraught with ambiguity and moral ambiguity. Existentialist writers frequently explore themes of alienation and isolation, depicting characters who feel disconnected from society and struggle to find meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. Similarly, Vikram Seth's characters often experience profound feelings of alienation and loneliness, navigating the complexities of interpersonal relationships and societal expectations in search of belonging and

authenticity. It posits that life is inherently absurd and devoid of inherent meaning, leaving individuals to grapple with the existential absurdity of existence. In his writing, Seth confronts the absurdity of life with honesty and introspection, portraying characters who confront the absurdity of their circumstances with varying degrees of courage and resilience. Central to existentialist philosophy is the search for authenticity and meaning in a world devoid of inherent meaning. Vikram Seth's characters often embark on quests for self-discovery and personal fulfillment, seeking to carve out meaningful lives amidst the existential uncertainties and challenges they face.

While Vikram Seth's writing encompasses existentialist themes, his approach is multifaceted, drawing from a diverse range of influences and perspectives. While his works resonate with existentialist sensibilities, they also incorporate elements of humanism, romanticism, and social commentary, reflecting the complexities of the human experience in all its richness and diversity. Ultimately, Seth's exploration of existential themes enriches his writing, offering meditation on the universal questions that have preoccupied humanity throughout the ages.

### IV. Conclusion

Seth's portrayal of existential themes reveals a deep understanding of the human condition, emphasizing the individual's struggle to find meaning and authenticity in a world that often seems indifferent and chaotic. His characters confront the existential abyss with courage and introspection, navigating the complexities of modern life with varying degrees of resilience and vulnerability. Throughout his oeuvre, Seth captures the existential dilemma of existence precedes essence, emphasizing the importance of individual freedom and responsibility in shaping one's own identity and destiny. His characters confront the absurdity of life with honesty and courage, embracing their autonomy and confronting the existential anguish and anxiety that arise from the realization of life's inherent meaninglessness. Moreover, Seth's exploration of existential themes extends beyond the individual psyche to encompass broader societal dynamics and cultural tensions. Through his keen observations and empathetic storytelling, Seth unveils the existential struggles inherent in contemporary society, including alienation, fragmentation, and the erosion of traditional values.



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