

Theme of Existentialism and Identity in Nayantara Sahgal's Plans for Departure

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Existentialism is a philosophical belief that we are each responsible for creating purpose and meaning in our own life. Existentialism is the movement which redefined individual freedom and self assertion. Existentialism and quest for identity are two aspects of same coin. Existentialism does not talk about collective freedom, rather it is more concerned about freedom of an individual. Existentialism is that philosophy which manifested itself in Germany a few years after World War I and later spread to France and Itali.

It may be generally characterized as a protest against views of the world and policies of action in which individual human beings are regarded as the helpless playthings of historical forces or as wholly determined by the regular operation of natural process. Existential philosophers agree that the explanation of existence given by traditional metaphysics is unsatisfactory. All existential writers seek to justify in some way the freedom and importance of human personality. They all emphasize the place of will in human nature. Soren Kierkegard a devout Christian and religious was the forerunner of existentialism, who conceived of himself as having to choose before God with no possibility of knowing whether the outcome would be his salvation or damnation. He was a Danish philosopher and inspired existentialist movement in Germany and France. He developed the existential position as an interpretation of Christian faith.

Existentialists maintain that every personal existence, as they themselves experience the situation in the world, is the only fruitful point of view for expressing and solving human problems. According to New Standard Encyclopedia "man possesses free will and therefore responsibility molds himself, his fate and character is not determined in advance by God or society" (259). So when an individual questions his existence, he questions his identity, his place and his freedom. The theme of modern woman's existential struggle to establish her identity in order to assert her individuality can be seen most often in the novels of the Indian women novelists of the post independent India. Nayantara is among such novelists.

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