

## Existential Crisis and Self-Identity in Anuradha Roy's The Folded Earth

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### Abstract

The primary goal of this term paper is to examine the existential crisis subject in the well-known book *The Folded Earth* by Anuradha Roy. "Existential crisis" is confronting one's own existential crisis. This focuses on how people see themselves, as well as their purpose and aspirations in life. Those who are undergoing an existential crisis are uncertain about their life's meaning, choices, or freedom. The belief that life has no purpose or significance is common among those who suffer from existential distress. Additionally, an existential crisis may lead to confused notions about one's identity. The greatest existential philosophers and authors include, but are not limited to, Hegel, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Marx, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Albert Camus, Simon de Beauvoir, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Roy, a recent recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, wrote the book *The Folded Earth*, which tells the tale of Maya, a young lady who starts over in the Himalaya hill country. It explores her feelings of loneliness and asks why she is here on Earth. When Maya is struggling with her sense of self, meaning, and purpose in life, she is going through a period of internal upheaval. She struggles with numerous traumatic events, such as identity crisis, anxiety, sadness, and estrangement. Then, having moved past her sorrow, she chooses to start over. Consequently, the "new woman identity" in contemporary culture is examined in this book.

Inequality, patriarchal suppression, identity crises, psychological inclinations, political and religious disputes in society, and the longing for a new, peaceful life are the main themes of this book. Even though the book covers a wide range of topics, the existential crisis's impact is evident throughout.

**Keywords:** existential crisis, identity crisis, loneliness, trauma, *The Folded Earth*, anxiety, self-identity, freedom, psychological exploration

**Abbreviation:** TFE – *The Folded Earth*

### Introduction

Anuradha Roy is born in Calcutta, India, in 1967, a well-known Indian journalist. In addition to being a successful writer, journalist, and editor, she deserves recognition in India for another achievement.

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All of her books are internationally renowned. Of the thirteen authors on the lengthy list for the Man Booker Prize, she is the only one from India. Currently, she and her husband, Rukun Advani, own an academic publishing called Permanent Black in Ranikhet, Uttarakhand. Her works, including *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008), *The Folded Earth* (2011), and *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015), are all well-known worldwide. Themes such as love, alienation, patriarchy, class conflict, political quandary, sexual assault, betrayal, men-women interactions, the pursuit of freedom, and the battle to define one's identity are the primary means by which she addresses the status of women in contemporary society.

There are ups and downs in life. In life, everyone encounters difficulties and situations that cause them to question themselves. The confrontation and experiencing of existential facts as a relationship transforms a crisis into an existential crisis. Emotional pain, a broken sense of self-worth, powerlessness, despair, anxiety, shame, fear, and isolation are some of the feelings that naturally accompany the conflicts. Developing new ideals and purpose for oneself is a positive result of an existential crisis. An existentialist, to put it simply, is someone who talks about people and their everyday lives, about their struggle for survival, or about anything else related to what they do or do not do.

The term "Existential Crisis" mostly refers to the existentialist concept found in psychology and psychotherapy. It is a school of philosophy as well. "Existentialism" is described as "a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the person as a free and responsible agent determining their development through acts of the will" by the Oxford Dictionary. Therefore, existentialists are a movement that is linked to the modern 20th century. The use of it expanded after World War II.

Existential philosophy is the study of human life's quandaries. It centers on the experiences of a man's life. By examining our origins and sources, it aims to provide an answer to the question, "Who are you?" Existentialism rejects any purely abstract idea as well as all forms of scientific and logical philosophy. Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher and theologian, is credited with being the first existentialist philosopher to use the terms "existence" and "existentialism." Consequently, he is also considered the founder of contemporary existentialism. Since "subjectivity is truth, subjectivity is reality," he said, he rejected Hegel's "Dialectical Method" and asserted that "objectivity is truth." He contends that as each person considers every aspect of himself, their knowledge and perception of reality are subjective. Thus, genuine faith is also a matter of opinion. He asserts that all fundamental knowledge relates to existence (Kierkegaard). He identifies as a Christian and theistic existentialist who believes that one can only truly understand oneself after going through "intensified awareness" of a supernatural experience.

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is considered one of the first existentialists, along with Soren Kierkegaard. In particular, he addresses the concept of Superman, God's death, and the desire for power via her actions. The term "exist" here refers to more than just "to be" or "to live." A person who freely projects himself into the universe learns about himself by the act of existing, according to

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existentialism. What man chooses to depict as his essence determines his capacity to project himself into the world. As a result, living is a process of transforming one's actuality and free becoming.

Another significant player in the philosophy of existentialism who popularized the term "existentialism" in the 1940s was Jean-Paul Sartre, a French philosopher and dramatist. In *Being and Nothingness*, he makes two well-known and timeless statements: "Man is on his own," and "Man is condemned to be free" (Sartre, *Existentialism From*). Existentialism may be argued to have an innate sense of freedom. Being is a choice, and ceasing to choose is ceasing to be, according to Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of human existence. Therefore, consciousness is responsible for our capacity to respond to daily demands and make decisions. He adds that while societal structures have an impact on an individual's freedom, they do not completely determine it. Though they may not be fully aware of it, people with their own objectives and preferences go beyond the parameters because they are a part of the original project.

In existentialist, our physical existence—as well as its shape and structure—is important, as is who we "are." The fact that existentialism is a philosophy of the subject rather than the object is evident from this. According to this theory, human actions and choices are not mechanical and unaffected by biological and physical processes, and there is no "general will" to which "individual will" is subject.

René Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum," which can be translated as "I think therefore I am," is the basis for both subjectivity and reason. Existentialism fervently opposes collective norms and values and honors the individual. The flourishing of the human individual, or the unrestricted realization of our most basic nature, is what Jean-Paul Sartre claims existentialism pursues in his book *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Sartre, *Existentialism Is*, 52-53). Therefore, in addition to aiming for existence, existentialist emphasizes the uniqueness of each individual as both a person and an object.

Karl Jaspers, another well-known theistic existentialist, is renowned for his writings. According to Jaspers, "A man is always more than what he knows, or can know, about himself." He believes that men relate to one or more of the various worldviews in order to define who they are. For many people, it can be challenging to discover their identity and comprehend who they are at various stages of their lives. They are currently going through an existential crisis. Existential crises happen during periods of confusion and intense anxiety, when a person is attempting to answer the difficult questions: Who am I? and What am I able to offer the world? Anxiety levels will be elevated in those going through an existential crisis (Bugental). The anxiety will persist until the crisis is recognized, dealt with, or resolved. Larger social problems that people have internalized can lead to an existential crisis (Jameson & Hardt). People must address each form of existential crisis when it arises in order to reduce negative impacts on both themselves and society.

In literature from antiquity to the present, a number of other notable thinkers and authors have helped to elucidate this concept. Existentialism is claimed to have originated in India. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan claims that Buddhism and the Indian Upanishads are its sources. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan remarks, "Existentialism is a new name for an ancient method," in light of this. Buddhism and the Upanishads both emphasize "atmanam viddhi," or "know thyself." It implies that man is a victim of

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selfishness due to ignorance. Buddhism holds that man must completely comprehend his duty in order to transcend this fleeting life. He can so be free from grief and suffering by awakening to the eternal. Many Indian authors, including R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arun Joshi, Manju Kapur, Amitabh Ghosh, and numerous others, have written on existentialism in the modern era. One of the best modern novelists, Anuradha Roy, uses her books to illustrate the problems associated with human life on Earth.

Anuradha Roy's best-selling and second-most popular novel is *The Folded Earth*. The book was shortlisted for the 2011 Man Asian Literary Prize and won the 2011 Hindu Literary Prize. The lovely little Indian village of Ranikhet and the foothills of the Himalayas serve as the backdrop for this book. Human relationships in society are well-portrayed in this book. Women's repressed feelings, unresolved problems, and numerous hidden aspects of human existence are all reflected in it. In addition, it tells about unmet expectations, affection and loss, the recollection of a troubled past, treachery, and the hope for a fresh start.

One of the main features of an existential crisis is the pursuit of freedom. Being an individual means having the autonomy to make one's own choices. This book tells the story of Maya, a young woman who serves as both the narrator and the female protagonist. She is constantly torn between her current life and her ideal self. She is the only daughter in her parents' family. Her father is a successful businessman who aspires to emulate him. Since she was a little child, she believes her father controls her:

I was my father's pet during my early years. I was his only kid, the girl who won all the school trophies, his bright-eyed, devoted devotee, and he had set aside his sadness at not having a son to start taking perverse joy in me (TFE 63).

In order for her to live with her family after marriage and carry out her duties as a successful woman in her father's business, he wants to marry her to the person of his choosing. She is a princess and will eventually control his pickle factory, he informs everyone:

"Get to know Begumpet Pickles' princess! She would eventually become this nation's first female industrial mogul (TFE 63).

He becomes upset when her mother protests that he is making her live up to his standards:

"I'll find her a husband who lives with us, and she'll live here and manage the business." Without my grandchild, why am I making so much money? (TFE 63).

However, her wants and choices are different. Since she was a little child, she has felt under her father's control. This demonstrates unequivocally how Maya is being suppressed patriarchally by her father. It causes her to reflect on why she is here on Earth. She is not entitled to live her life as she pleases. Women are frequently deprived of their sense of self, individuality, and identity in patriarchal societies. She experiences psychological strain and powerlessness as a result of this identical circumstance. Conflicts of this nature might cause people to worry not only about their decisions but

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also about how those decisions would impact their entire lives.

Another significant element in this book is the sense of loneliness. It concludes that Maya has an issue with loneliness. She longs for someone to be in her life at all times. When she marries a Christian lad who is not part of her caste or faith, her family legally disowns her. She wants to live a happy and contented life with her husband, Michael, but fate has other ideas. Maya's life is totally altered by this choice. Their marriage does not last very long since Michael is more passionate about mountaineering than he is about Maya, despite the fact that she has given up everything for him:

His desire for the mountains was just as strong as his need for me, which I was unaware of (TFE 7).

This indicates that despite Maya's shared love of trekking and mountaineering, Michael has not shown her any attention. She is merely seen as a product that was purchased for romantic and marital purposes. Her feelings are ignored and unacknowledged in her marriage. She desires Michael as her true love after marriage, but she also understands that her husband is an adventurous individual who is deeply passionate about his life's ambitions and accomplishments:

TFE 6 states, "He was with me, but not with me."

Her life abruptly takes a drastic turn when she loses her husband on his final mountain track excursion. He was injured and perished in the jungle. She is currently grieving alone in this planet. She acts irrationally after learning of Michael's passing:

"I had been out all day on hot streets, walking randomly, boarding buses without checking their destination, stopping at parks and stores, and then continuing until the stores closed and the traffic subsided" (TFE 10-11).

This is a representation of Maya's agitated state. Everyone leaves her alone, as she says:

"I was by myself. I had lost my friends throughout the years of being enmeshed in Michael, so I didn't communicate with them. Despite the fact that my parents did not reside in the same place, I effectively had no family (TFE 11).

She has to face the harsh truth of her isolation. She later makes the decision to leave her hometown and travel to the hill station of Ranikhet in order to get away from the memories of her previous existence. She works as an English teacher in a school here and spends the majority of her time in the natural environment. Meeting Veer, a little child who looks like her deceased husband and is also a mountain climber, changes her life once more. In her estranged life, she has a lot of expectations for Veer. She states:

"I had no one in town to hang out with until Veer came" (TFE 182).

She believes Veer is the one who can help her overcome her loneliness. She eventually learns, however, that Veer is the true reason behind her terrible life. She discovers that it was Veer who abandoned her husband in the wilderness, knowing that it would result in Michael's death. However, he left him hurt and did not assist him. In the same way that he betrays Maya on his uncle's behalf, he

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betrays his friend. She experiences alienation once more:

"I felt completely, completely alone." My body trembled with sobbing, and I held myself by putting my arms about my knees. I cried as though Michael had passed on the previous day (TFE 246).

Although Maya is a woman who constantly regrets her choices, she bravely faces challenges in her life. She always has a rather perplexing personality. She always deals with loss and misery in her life since she doesn't believe in the choices she makes. She says:

I could have made a different decision. There are other places where I could have obtained a higher-paying career. The alternative was to go back to my own family. My mother had been perplexed by my refusal to return to my previous life at home following Michael's passing. Now that Michael was no longer in my life, my father's rage had lessened. Telling him I was mistaken and confused and pleading with him to trust me again was all I needed to do (TFE 20).

One of the main components of existentialism is the loss of the relationship. Maya experiences the death of her mother, father, lover Michael, and Veer in this book. However, Michael's passing has a significant impact on her life:

"That name is no longer in my mental book, but my love is still imprisoned by it" (TFE 40).

It indicates that she seeks to move on from her past in order to have a self-sufficient existence. The fact that Maya has a prosperous pickle shop by the book's conclusion establishes her status as a self-sufficient woman.

### Conclusion

Anuradha Roy certainly crafts a profound, well-crafted view of human existence in her works, especially in *The Folded Earth*. Using existential crisis themes of loneliness, guilt, trauma and suffering, anxiety and the search for personal identity, Roy presents a hybrid image of the human condition. The novel explores the issues for today's society, politically and psychologically. Roy doubles the confusion to the emotional and mental torment wrought by personal loss, social pressure, and looking for intention, freedom.

The subject matter in *The Folded Earth*/, addresses of alienation, self-discovery, and resilience, is best described as Maya attempts to reconcile the past with the present and make sense of who she is. In addition to the battle between individual inner existence and existential crises, the novel also adds all the issues of patriarch proper control and the women's demand of fulfilment that complicate the search for personal fulfilment. Maya's journey from a precarious place of self-destructive, settling, and abusive relationships to an emotional and psychological healing path marked by self-reliance and clarity is a journey of abandonment, betrayal, grief, and loss.

Ultimately, however, Roy's novel expresses also a morally serious comment on the all too difficult and always changing reality of human life. This only further reminds us that if we're to move to the independence and self-awareness of one's life, then our fears and our past traumas have to be

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confronted. The novel through Maya's journey, reminds us of what to reflect on in our own experience in existential crisis, asking us to find meaning, to grow and to heal. It acts as a reminder that the road to self-understanding is a bumpy one but it is through this struggle that people come to understand how they are made, and how to use their freedom of choice to change it, as to be would greatly prefer.

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