



BETWEEN TRADITION AND SELF: EXISTENTIAL QUESTS IN ELIF SHAFAK'S 'HONOUR'

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Abstract:

Honour is a novel by Elif Shafak, that is a fascinating journey into the meeting points of culture, family, and the weight of hereditary traditions. It does not directly talk about existential philosophy in its strictest philosophical sense but it dwells on some ideas whose existence correspond with those in existential thought like the search for individual identity, opposition to predestined roles and quest for significance in an unfriendly reality. The characters are struggling mightily within "Honour" to carve out identities for themselves beyond those imposed upon them by their families and cultural backgrounds. In life they take divergent directions as each of them respond to their cultural confines and personal desires. At heart, this quest is existential because it emphasizes the conflict between defined roles and individual freedom. The experiences of these characters growing up Kurdish villagers from Jordan who migrated to London give us an opportunity to consider alienation which is one of key concepts within existentialism. This uprooting raises questions such as what does it mean to belong or how can human exist in an indifferent or even hostile environment? These are people who have had a difficult time navigating through different stages of life while still finding space to maintain their own culture. The novel also includes the absurd, another existential concept with which it deals—the relationship between humans' urge for inherent value and meaning in life, and universe's silence to them. The existential



struggle of this family regarding honour, a highly complex and devastatingly influential factor in their lives, mirrors this.

Keywords : Predestined roles, Individual identity, Unfriendly reality, Uprooting, Existential struggle

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Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Bharath School of Arts and Science "Honour" by Elif Shafak is a fascinating and sensitive novel that discovers subject matters of fondness, ring of relatives, integrity, and enlightening war. The story is about in antagonism to a background that extents from the Nineteen Forties rural Turkey to the 1970s London, characterizing the excursion and tribunals of a Kurdish-Turkish family that migrates to England. The novel revolves around the lives of the twin sisters Pembe and Jamila, who have been brought up in a small Kurdish village in Turkey. Pembe moves to London along with her husband, Adem Toprak, and their kids, in quest of a better life. Jamila stays back in Turkey, residing a life closely knit to her ancestors as a midwife and healer. In London, Pembe and her family face the problem of residence and the cultural conflict among their traditional values and the new Western normal.

The narrative directs us mainly towards Pembe's son, Iskender, who is interested in cultural distinction on male honor, makes a distressing choice that fluctuates the development of the circle of relatives' existence. The story unfolds by offering a glimpse into the past and present of the characters, which assists the reader and makes the audience understand the detail in the lives and the cultural problems they face. As the story moves on, secrets are exposed and the characters face their past and the outcomes in their actions. The novel explores the undesirable nature of honor-based violence. Ultimately, "Honour" is a disastrous story of out-of-place trustworthiness, profound love, and the battle for refurbishment. It challenges the reader to reflect the



deep-seated cultural values that could govern lives and shape verdicts, now and again with heartbreaking moments. In Elif Shafak's novel "Honour," the existentialist method can be observed through the intricate individual reviews of identification preference, and morality confronted through its characters.

Existentialism emphasizes on person freedom, desire, and the inherent isolation of the human situation within an indifferent or even hostile universe. In "Honour," the story revolves around a circle of relatives revolving their lives across one-of-a-kind cultures and the considerate impression of their preferences on their lives. The predominant man or woman, Pembe, and different participants of her own family warfare with their individualities and existence assortments within the milieu of a severely patriarchal Kurdish culture contrasted with a greater generous however nevertheless hard British society. Pembe's practices echoes on the existential issues such as the search for self-identity beyond socially imposed roles, and the burden of freedom on the subject of making lifestyles-altering choices. The tragic result of the novel, targeted on an honor killing. It raises questions on the quantity to which societal and cultural anticipations can restrict personal freedom and preference on core existential worries. The novel's discovery of honor as a social construct and its extreme implications at the person's self-determination to pick their calling also highlights existential isolation—the feeling of being alone in a single's conflict against the outside international's demands and expectations.

The quest for each individual's path can be assessed as stating that human beings around the world try hard to find themselves in a space that might have some conflicting values with their personal needs, thus implying that the existential perception can stretch out the fact that ones' life should depend on the meanings that one gives to his/her own life rather than the customs of the society around. Hence, the novel "Honour" perfectly portrayed by Elif Shafak uses the story of individuals who are struggling in different situations of families and cultural implications in order to bring out what existentialist thought is all about with the emphasis on the struggle and accountability which is related to personal freedom and being able to identity one's self in a complex world.



The most pivotal figure in the piece, Iskander is attributed to many of the existential problems that the main characters face in Elif Shafak's book "Honour," particularly in the context of their identity, the struggle to choose, responsibility as well as the load of freedom. During the quest, he finds himself facing the gnawing challenge of unresolvable crisis where he finds himself squeezed amid the individual aspirations and the pressure imposed by the cultural and family traditional expectations. Iskender as a person has a big self-look. This comes from his move and the split between his Kurdish roots and his life in London. This split self makes a good space to look at life's big questions. Iskender has a hard time fitting who he is with what people expect him to be. The battle is not just between two cultures but inside himself. It is between what he wants and what he thinks he should do. This shows the big life question of defining who you are by the choices you make. The philosophy of existentialism says people are free to make choices. But with that freedom comes the heavy weight of what happens.

Iskender's selection to dedicate an honor killing is a stark instance of this. His desire, although heavily encouraged with the aid of his cultural history and his mom's relationship, is in the long run his personal. This act highlights the existential perception that we're condemned to be free; Iskender is unfastened to choose, but he should live with the irreversible outcomes of his movements, leading to his imprisonment and lengthy-time period emotional and psychological repercussions. The novel is all about how Iskender feels really alone in both his culture and his life, like, this feeling of being all alone is a big deal in existentialism, and it is like, totally in Iskenders head because he is disconnected from everyone and everything. He is been locked up for a long time, and it's not just because of the prison walls. He is also lonely and sad because he can't relate to his Kurdish roots or his British life. After the crime, Iskender is constantly haunted by guilt, which is a common theme in stories. He is not just guilty for the crime he committed, but also for going against his own moral beliefs, which is a big deal. Iskenders journey in the course of the radical is likewise one in all in search of redemption, a route that existentialism frequently argues is completed through accepting one's freedom and obligation. He later thought about it and made up



with his family, which shows that he wanted to find meaning in life by forgiving and learning from his past and present. In "Honour," Iskender's story shows how we struggle to find our true selves in a world that expects us to fit into certain roles, and how our choices shape who we are and where we go. Shafak explores profound questions about freedom, the weight of cultural and family expectations, and the potential for redemption and change through his partner.

In Elif Shafak's novel *Honor*, Yunus serves as a crucial individual who symbolizes gentleness, mercy, and a possibility to embody masculinity in contrast to his brother Iskender. While Iskender becomes involved in the severe mechanics of cultural honor and force, Yunus represents a more mellow, thought-provoking approach, and he often exhibits practicality and compassion. The man's role in the family and story entirely contradicts that of Iskender, and such an opposition emphasizes dissimilarities in the male character's reaction to the same cultural force. However, if Iskender responds to the existential challenges of identity and cultural assimilation with rage and an inflexible adherence to the traditional values he associates with masculinity and honor, Yunus appears to be looking for a more personal identity that is closer to his own values and truths, which are more in tune with his nature and empathy. This distinction in their characters and choices can be regarded as an exploration of existential freedom as they all respond to their own existential reality in a unique way and, thus, to define their future by their own free choice. Yunus's character is seen as choosing a path that rejects the violent aspects of the traditional code of honor, instead embracing a lifestyle that embodies a broader, more humane understanding of what it means to be honourable.

Yunus's perspective and actions in the novel provide a thoughtful commentary on the ability of individuals to redefine their identity and values in the face of societal expectations, highlighting the existential theme of shaping one's essence through choices rather than strictly adhering to prescribed roles. In Elif Shafak's "Honour," Yunus can be viewed as undergoing an existential quest for meaning, identity, and authenticity amid the cultural and familial pressures that surround him, reflecting existential issues through his character. This individual reflects existential concerns as



he grapples with the tension between his personal values and the expectations imposed on him by his subculture and family. His existential search involves a quest to live authentically, defining himself based on his own convictions rather than conforming to external standards. This is evident in his interactions with his family, where he often questions or challenges traditional notions of honor and masculinity. Existentialism emphasizes individual freedom and the responsibility that accompanies it. Yunus is portrayed as someone who exercises his freedom by making choices that align with his conscience, rather than blindly following societal norms. His decision to pursue a path of empathy, expertise, and non-violence, even in the face of pressure to adhere to traditional codes of honor, demonstrates his dedication to personal autonomy and ethical agency.

Existentialism often grapples with the inherent absurdity of human life, the sense that life lacks inherent meaning or purpose. Yunus may also confront this absurdity as he navigates the contradictions and complexities of his cultural identity and familial relationships. His search for meaning amid these challenges reflects an existential struggle to find significance and coherence in a world that can seem chaotic and irrational. Yunus's existential quest may also involve a search for genuine connection amidst feelings of alienation. He might also feel alienated from his family or culture because of his different values and ideals. However, his search for meaning might also lead him to seek genuine connections with others who share his values or who can support him on his journey towards self-discovery. Yunus's existential quest may culminate in a journey of redemption and transformation, where he discovers a sense of purpose and fulfillment by staying true to himself and his values. Through his experiences and choices, he may come to realize that true honor lies not in conforming to external expectations, but in living authentically and with integrity. In "Honour," Yunus's character grapples with existential topics such as identity, freedom, meaning, and authenticity amid cultural and familial pressures. His journey reflects the universal human quest for knowledge and self-awareness in the face of life's uncertainties and complexities.



Pembe, a central character in Elif Shafak's "Honour," embodies various existential themes, including identity, freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning. Here's a closer look at how Pembe's character reflects these themes. Pembe navigates the complex terrain of identity, torn between her Kurdish roots and the challenges of assimilating into British society after moving to London. This novel explores existential themes related to the quest for self-identity in the midst of cultural conflict and the existential anxiety that arises from feeling torn between one's unique cultural world. Throughout the unconventional, Pembe struggles with the tension between fulfilling her familial and cultural obligations and following her personal dreams and ambitions. Her journey involves making difficult decisions that often have significant consequences, revealing existential themes of freedom and the responsibility that comes with making choices in the face of societal pressures.

Pembe experiences feelings of alienation and isolation, both within her family and in the broader society.

As a Kurdish woman living in London, she may also feel a lack of connection to her cultural heritage while also experiencing a sense of alienation from the Western society in which she resides. These feelings of isolation reflect existential themes of personal existential loneliness in the midst of a seemingly indifferent or hostile world. Pembe's character sets out on a journey of self-discovery and redemption, seeking to find meaning and purpose in her life amid the challenges she encounters. Her journey towards redemption may involve facing past errors, coming to terms with her personal identity and values, and finding fulfillment in her relationships and experiences. In the novel, Pembe aims to live genuinely and with honesty, remaining loyal to her own convictions and values despite outside influences. Her dedication to authenticity mirrors existential themes of the significance of staying true to oneself and living in alignment with one's own moral principles, even in the presence of societal expectations or cultural standards. In summary, the character of Pembe in "Honour" explores various existential themes as she wrestles with questions of identity, freedom, duty, and the pursuit of meaning amidst cultural and personal challenges. Her journey



exemplifies the universal human quest for self-discovery, authenticity, and fulfillment in the midst of life's uncertainties and complexities.

Adem Toprak, a significant figure in Elif Shafak's "Honour," plays a crucial role in the narrative's exploration of themes such as identity, cultural conflict, masculinity, and familial relationships. Let's take a closer look at how Adem's character embodies these themes: Adem represents the struggle of identity between his Kurdish heritage and his life in London. As an immigrant trying to adapt to a new culture while maintaining his background, Adem wrestles with questions of belonging and authenticity. He constructs his identity through navigating the tension between his traditional Kurdish upbringing and the realities of living in a Western society, reflecting the existential theme of the search for self-identification amid cultural conflict. Adem's character also delves into traditional ideas of masculinity and honor within Kurdish culture. He grapples with the expectations to uphold honor codes and provide for his family, which can sometimes clash with his own aspirations and beliefs. His journey includes dealing with those expectations while also struggling with his own concept of masculinity, reflecting existential themes of freedom and responsibility in shaping one's identity.

Adem's relationships within his family, particularly with his wife Pembe and their children, provide a perspective through which the complexities of family bonds are examined. His character is moulded by his interactions with his family members, emphasizing themes of love, loyalty, sacrifice, and the difficulties of communication and comprehension within familial relationships. In the novel, Adem embarks on a quest to find purpose and reason in his life. His journey involves wrestling with existential questions about the importance of his actions, the legacy he will leave behind, and the impact he has on those around him. His search for meaning reflects universal human desires for understanding and fulfillment in the face of life's uncertainties. Adem's character shows resilience and adaptability in the midst of adversity. As an immigrant adjusting to a new cultural setting, he must learn to adapt to new situations while also preserving elements of his cultural identity. His capacity to handle those challenging circumstances speaks to existential concerns of resilience,

agency, and the potential for personal growth and change. In summary, the character of Adem Toprak in "Honour" deals with a range of existential issues including identity, masculinity, family dynamics, and the search for meaning in the midst of cultural and personal challenges. His journey mirrors the universal human pursuit of self-discovery, authenticity, and fulfillment in the midst of life's complexities.

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