CHAPTER - 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The research thesis *Existentialism in the Novels of Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri: A comparative Study* was carried out to explore, understand and to identify the themes of existentialism by a critical and comparative study of the selected works of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri. The term existentialism has wide connotation, it embraces various psychological tenets of human nature. It’s complex and multifaceted nature is difficult to understand and deal with. It has been widely discussed, philosophies defined and augmented by prominent philosophers in Europe during the nineteen forties and fifties. Existential characters are very sensitive and moody with varied temperamental changes. They are overpowered by their own intense innate identity quest and they pursue their quest in a committed and persistent manner irrespective of the consequences. The extremely complicated nature of existentialist is difficult to understand as they do not conform to any religious, social or political school of thought. Lack of understanding of existential characters may result in unpleasant incidents such has alienation, frustration, insanity, murder or suicide. This research attempts to understand the existential characters in a given context and the causes and possible preventive measures that can be adopted against the probable unpleasant incidents.

The aim of the research was to initiate critical thinking and analysis of the interpretations of scholars about existential issues. The existential novels selected for analysis are *Cry the Peacock, Fire on the Mountain, The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, The Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. Other significant literary works: Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Albert Camus’s *The Stranger*, Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man* and Virginia Woolf’s stream of consciousness novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* which are some of the foremost and prominent existential novels were also
discussed briefly to get a global perspective and a better understanding of the existential philosophy and to draw a comparison with the novels researched.

The methodology adopted was an extensive research about Existential philosophy and its origin with reference to the proponents of the theory. A critical examination of prominent existential writers, the varied themes and techniques used to convey their ideas and thoughts in a convincing manner to the readers. The plot, narrative technique, use of imagery and symbolism, stream of consciousness narrative and characterization were analyzed. An examination of the trends in Indian English novel and a study of the prominent existential novelists were conducted to critically analysed the existential tenets projected in the writings of Indian English novelist. The thesis briefly outlined the changing trends in postmodern Indian English Literature. The novelists of the nineteen fifties Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, Nayantara Sahgal and others concentrated on projecting the political, social and the economical situation of India. The next generation of writers Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Sashi Tharoor, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, etc not only projected the contemporary issues but also the East-West encounter, immigrant issues, multiculturalism, post colonialism, and attempted to reveal, compare and contrast the existential issues portrayed. Since the advent of the great trinity of Indian English, literature passed through several trends. The issues and ideas were analyzed by drawing a comparative study with a variety of existential writers like Jean Paul Sartre (French), Albert Camus (French), Kafka (German), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (Russian), Ralph Ellison (Black American), Virginia Woolf (English) and existential philosophers and thinkers.

The themes and issues of existentialism are prominently portrayed in the fiction of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri. Anita Desai’s protagonists; Maya, Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ila Das and others revolt against the unfavorable situations and circumstances in their lives. Their existential struggle is like that Arun Joshi’s protagonists; Sindi Oberio and Billy Biswas. The existential struggle of Jhumpa Lahiri’s protagonists are however different. They also experience agony and
existential angst but mainly due to their immigrant issues, cultural identity crisis in their adopted countries. The existential themes and issues which gained prominence after Second World War spread expeditious to all spheres of literature. This thesis has explored the profound existential thoughts of the selected novelists and examined the issues which are extremely vital for human existence. The prominent problems dealt with by existentialist writers of the selected literary works are death, angst, identity crisis, feeling of foreignness, freedom and responsibility and primarily the search for meaning in life. The novelists identified the existential concepts and presented them before the readers in an insightful manner.

5.2. Review of Existentialism

The philosophy of existentialism which originated in the nineteen forties and fifties concerns with the circumstances and situation of existence of the individual and deals with his feelings, thoughts, actions and responsibilities. The nineteenth century notable writers and philosophers of existentialism were Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Several prominent thinkers, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger were also associated with existentialism in the nineteenth century. Jonathan Webber analyses the themes of existential philosophy discussed by the well known philosophers; existence, authenticity, freedom and choice, responsibility, alienation, sadness, bad faith, etc. Jean Paul Sartre in his Existentialism and Humanism states that, Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be but that which he wills himself to be.¹

Albert Camus a prominent French novelist and philosopher who vehemently and explicitly denied existential thoughts and who was completely opposed to existentialism is classified as a prominent existentialist. As all his renowned works, L Etranger/ The Stranger, La Peste/ The Plague, L HommeTevolte/ The Rebel deal with existential issues. Camus was preoccupied with issues such as meaningless of life, absurdity, irrationality, etc. He believed that in the circumstances of denial of basic rights human beings revolt and experience existential struggle. Camus’s existential aesthetics is prominently expressed in his Nobel Prize winner novel, The Stranger.
Meursault, the protagonist’s alienation and detachment, his feelings of complete unconcern about the trial and sentence, his determination to be true to his feelings reflect the existential credo of Camus. Meursault is an existential character he leads life in a meaningless manner. He falls in love with Maria but frankly admits to her that love is a vague emotion, it has no meaning for him. His character is like that of Sindi Oberio, who was very much in love with June but refused to marry her as he was afraid of attachment. However, Meusault is completely obsessed with his own theory of absurdity of existence. He shows neither sorrow for the death of his mother nor any sense of repentance for murdering an Arab. He does not show any emotion, neither sorrow nor regret when convicted to death. Camus was concerned with portrayal of absurdity of existence. His work The Rebel is about historical rebellion, revolt against slavery and suppression but Camus philosophy of absurdity is also prominently present throughout the book, he believes that there is no God or guiding principal it is difficult to find the true meaning of life or existence. Similarly in his The Fall, Clamence is guilty and evil, Camus tells his view point by the use of a long interior monologue. His character can be condemned but one can understand and sympathize with him as he is an existential character.

Postmodern Indian English novelists explored the existential situations and confusions faced by modern man in relation to the Indian contemporary socio-cultural situation with great intensity, creativity and sensitiveness. The conflict between the inner self and the materialistic society, the in-between situation of the migrant, confusion of cultural values, issues of identity crisis and existentialism are the recurring themes. The immigrant issues of rootlessness and problems of adjustments form the major crux of contemporary Indian English fiction. Equally significant are the problems faced by the second generation immigrants, they are pulled by the hopes and beliefs of their parents, by their ethnic identity and the identity of their adopted western culture. The existentialism characters of the selected novels are complicated and people in general do not understand their philosophy which leads to further agony and alienation. Their behaviour lacks rationale and they appear absurd and illogical and ridiculous. Aptly observed by the nineteenth century philosophers of existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard and Fredrich Nietzsche also considered to the
fathers of existential philosophy that we should expect life to be rational, a journey well planned and systematic. Many times one has to deviate from the smooth flow and take risks in order to be a true existentialist. It is better to be authentic and live life to the fullest rather than have ‘bad faith’. According to Jean Paul Sartre bad faith is claiming to be someone one is actually not, it is the conscious effort to assert a false identity. Existentialists do not put on that act, they exercise their free will and take up the responsibility and succeed in overcoming the suffering. An existential person thus appears to others as absurd as he willingly accepts the anguish of existentialism and does lead a well defined systematic life which according to him pretentious. According to Albert Camus’s views an existential man is absurd and once he understands absurdity of the universe he ceases to question and accepts his existential freedom.

The observations of the existentialists are all the more relevant in the postmodern period. For instant Desai’s characters like Maya, Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ila Das or Joshi’s Billy Biswas, Sindi Oberio or Lahiri’s Gogol, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Sen and others are often misunderstood by society, they are considered to be abnormal, irrational and outrageous. Their existential quest cannot be understood because they do not adopt the logical argument of society. However they cannot be condemned as irrational merely because they do follow the accepted logical, reasonable pattern of life. They are guided by their personal convictions are are simply being true to their own self.

5.3 **Summation of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri’s characters:**

The outcome of the study is an increased awareness of the all persuasive and omnipresent subjects of existential thoughts and philosophies, and how people encounter and tackle existential issues in their own individual manner. Thus the study presents various different reactions and responses to existential issues both positive and negative. The study presents an overall psychological image of the existential tribulations. Anita Desai’s novels similar to that of Virginia Woolf’s portray the agony and alienation of women shaped by the conservative social structure. Desai’s protagonist, Maya suffers from existential crisis because of her oversensitivity and
inability to handle stress. Unfortunately her stress and anguish leads to insanity, murder and suicide. Desai’s characterization of Maya portrays psychoanalytic realism. The prediction of the albino astrologer haunts her throughout and she suffers bouts of insanity. Her tragedy was lack of communication with her husband Gautama, his inability to understand her fears and anxiety. As observed by Vashisth, ‘Marital discord is the result of Maya’s strong streak of neurotic fantasy and Gautama’s phlegmatic and stolid attitude.’ Maya could have been spared from her predicament if Gautama was as sensitive and caring as her father was. Maya’s sense of loneliness and problems of alienation could not be understood by her husband or her in-laws. Her husband through-out the novel reveals a sense of concern and care but dismisses her fears and anxiety as childish. The husband’s attitude further increases her existential crisis and she losses her self confidence, the elements of angst, fear, loneliness, despair overpower her. Maya finds it increasingly difficult to cope with these overwhelming forces. The negative influences take precedence over her positive approach to a meaningful existence. Anita Desai’s philosophical concern similar to that of Soren Kierkegaard’s is concerned about the portrayal of individual’s reactions and preferences under stressful circumstances. Her protagonist, Nanda Kaul of Fire on the Mountain is a very strong and resilient character completely in contrast to Maya. She possesses the strength and patience to lead a life which she detested, only because of her commitment to social responsibility. Her husband never cared about her, her children were detached and no one ever cared to understand her inner cravings or true self. After her husband’s death and after her children left her, Nanda finally finds peace. She lives in isolation a peaceful life devoid of social responsibilities or obligation. Unfortunately she was entrusted with the responsibility of great grand-daughter, Raka. However the fact that Raka was also a recluse like her neutralizes the situation to a great extent. Anita Desai existential thoughts are aptly presented through all the characters of the novel. The climax of the novel, death of Ila who was raped and murdered, Nanda kaul’ death due to shock and Raka setting the forest on fire reveals the pathetic position of women in a male dominated Indian society. In spite of being strong overpowering characters, they succumb to their fate.

Arun Joshi projected Billy’s character as an existentialist, who was determined to lead a meaningful existence irrespective of the consequences. Maya’s anguish can be compared to that of Billy Biswas, whose wife failed to understand his primitive
cravings and psychological needs. However, Billy is a much stronger character than Maya. Billy is to a great extent like Antoine Roquentin of Sartre’s *Nausea*. Sartre’s existential approach is very positive in the sense that Antoine does not care for the sense of isolation which he experiences but intentionally isolates himself and attains complete freedom. He takes up the responsibility for his actions like Billy Biswas. Billy does not suffer endlessly, escapes into the jungles to fulfill his destiny, akin to that of Nanda. Nanda Kaul of *Fire on the Mountain* is very dutiful and responsible person. She leads a life of isolation and alienation only after completing all her worldly responsibilities. She waited for several years patiently to pursue her quest for a meaningful existence. Like Joshi’s protagonist, SindiOberio of *The Foreigner*, who is constantly in search for the true meaning of existence, he attempts to be always detached in spite of having several relationships with women and in spite of being in love with June. He exhibits the escapist’s tendency of the modern man, an outstanding characteristic of twentieth century writings. Sindi’s aimless travel from one country to another in search of meaning of life finally ends in India. The person who resolves his crisis is not a learned or renowned person but an ordinary worker of Kemka’s firm named Muthu. He is instrumental in changing Sindi’s perspective of life by explaining to him that detachment actually means getting involved. Escapism can never resolve any issue, only by performance of one’s duty one can attain peace and enlightenment.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s protagonists feel alienated and despair because of their dual identities. Ashima and Gogol from *The Namesake* are glaring examples of immigrant experiences. Ashima represents the existential issues of first generation immigrants while Gogol represents the second generation immigrants. Their perspectives, issues and concerns are different. Ashima finds it extremely difficult to adapt to the Western lifestyle while at the same time finds it impossible to retain his ethnic values inculcated to him by his parents. As a result both of them face adjustment problems loneliness and disappointment. They adopt different measures to tackle their existential concerns. Ashima steadfastly preserves her Indian cultural values and maintains association with a limited circle of Indians, consciously maintains a distance away from foreigners. On the contrary Gogol tries to keep himself away from
his ethnic culture by associating as much as possible with his western friends. Similarly the characters of the collection of stories *The Interpreter of Maladies* experience existential problems but most of them manage to resolve them positively and emerge successfully from their alienated and isolated state. The six stories of *The Interpreter of Maladies* are about the first and second generation American Indians and their existential issues. The concerns are primarily about individual problems not about cultural conflicts. The protagonists, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Sen, Shoba, Miranda, Lila and others manage to resolve their problem by adopting the alien culture and assimilating ethnic with the Western cultural tradition. All the stories deal with different issues so it is complicated and cannot be labeled but the main focus is on the individual’s identity issue. The various themes, of cultural clash or communication problems of married couples projected are only used to lead to the main theme of identity crisis and existentialism.

Anita Desai’s themes provide a deep insight into her character’s psychological state of mind with technical brilliance and ingenuity. The internal landscape is projected with clarity and lucidity. Each of her novels is a fictional marvel. The intensity of the thoughts and feelings of characters be it Maya, Nanda Kaul, Sita or others are presented in a very sensitive manner with feminine sensibility. The thoughts and feelings of the protagonists, the alienation, withdrawal, existentialism, loneliness, isolation, lack of communication experienced by her protagonist are issues relevant at all times, the contemporary woman can very well identify with them, the insensitive male figures, husband, father or brother are prototypes present in society. The uniqueness of Anita Desai in presenting her female protagonists as individuals in quest of their identity, in asserting their individuality and questioning the traditional roles of women is critically acclaimed and appreciated and recognized by literary critics. Her intellectual vigor, multicultural dimension of contemporary Indian society and meticulousness technique are greatly appreciated.

M. K. Naik in appreciation of Anita Desai’s style of narration, the stream of conscious technique compares her to Virginia Woolf. He further appreciates her sustained effort in fictional writing which very few women novelists have achieved. Naik⁴ states that,
Desai very efficiently and with immense skill untangles the intricate layers of the sensibility of her characters and matches them with her description of nature. Naik while appreciating Desai’s skill and control over English language points out her shortcomings also. With extensive use of symbolism and imagery her writings may at times appear to be repetitive and exaggerated. As a novelist Anita received critical acclaim both in India and abroad. The western audience appreciated Desai’s insights and attention to minute details. She expresses a unique feeling of Indian susceptibility and at the same time is very comfortable while expressing the Western point of view. In the perspective of the concerns and themes of the women writers, Anita Desai occupies a significant position. Unlike the other contemporary women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Jhabvala or Nayantara Sehgal who were observed in focusing the changing social scenario of Indian society, Desai took the lead in exploring the troubled sensibility of the modern women, in projecting the inner psyche of her protagonists by her simple narrative style with extensive use of imagery and symbolism. The intense feelings of her protagonists are portrayed using the stream of consciousness technique. Srinivasa Iyengar comments that-

The readers’ first impression on reading Anita Desai novels may very well be that the contortions are too many, and are often the result of excessive cerebration on the author’s part and not always determined by the movements in the consciousness of the characters.  

However, he appreciates the original talent and courage of the novelist for her innovative style and subject matter. However some critics have pointed out the tedious aspects of Desai’s fiction while others have examined the impact of western culture on the urban middle class protagonists of Desai which inhibits the growth of her characters. Devi and Kailash observe that Anita Desai’s style and technique of using flashback or stream of consciousness is appropriate. She cleverly blends two different opposite characters and in a very symbolic manner and by intellectual use of language creates the appropriate ambience and atmosphere to bring out the nuances of her characters.

Anita Desai’s writings have generated immense interest in literary scholars. They have appreciated her handling of simple everyday ordinary experiences in a manner
which signified their universal existential appeal. The portrayal of Maya’s character is so sensitive that readers sympathize with her helpless situation, in her struggle to lead a life of meaningful existence. Her pathetic and vulnerable condition, her cravings for understanding and love, her psychological sufferings are so well portrayed that readers are drawn sympathetically towards her situation. Similarly the situation of NandKaul, her self imposed exile is presented in an extremely sensitive manner. The character of Raka, her arrival at Carignano to recover from an attack of typhoid and her world of fantasy is very well portrayed by apt use of language. Her mastery over language and technique is commendable. Sindkhedkar comments that Anita Desai’s style and language are nervous, sensitive, highly responsive, tenuous, sensuous, rich, dynamic and suitable to all modes of thought and tension.\(^7\) Desai explores the inner multifaceted complicated inner world in her novels. She explores the modern woman’s conflicts and tensions in their simple attempt for meaning existence and uses a mixed technique of narrative, the protagonists’ voices in first person narrative and her own voice as the omniscient third person narrative. Chakranarayan observes that, Anita Desai’s greatest asset is the language and novelty of approach in her technique.\(^8\)

Critical reaction to the protagonists in Arun Joshi’s novels shows a wide variety, ranging from downright denunciation to enthusiastic eulogizing opining that their attitudes are jarringly out of place in the cultural milieu of India. Srinivasalyengar has found in Billy’s daring public censure to realize his deeply desired goal, an expression of every man’s inarticulate yearning to do something wild, to give in to some unusual passion. Human predicament happens to be the artistic premises for Arun Joshi’s novels, the spiritual isolation of his protagonists does seem symptomatic of a pathological condition, but the important point to remember is that they manage to come out of the morass of self pity and self doubt. By establishing a correspondence between the personality traits of his protagonists and universal human yearnings, as for instance in Billy’s quest for adventure, Arun Joshi has more than authenticated his right to be considered a novelist par excellence. Just because the vantage point from which he chose to view life happens to the little explored territory of emotional problems rather than the run of the mill track of economic pressures, it can not detract
from his remarkable achievement in his forte – lucid analysis of habits of thoughts and quirks of human behavior. Iyengar appropriately comments that, *Arun Joshi has carried his exploration of the consciousness of hapless rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery.*

Arun Joshi attained remarkable success in symbolic use of words resonant with nuances of meaning forged his own imaginative use of them. Arun Joshi’s use of narrative technique is also highly laudable because basis for this choice rests only on one consideration succinct expression of intended mood and its inherent import. Each of his novels offers interesting explorations of unavoidable conflicts between inner needs and external social or moral norms. A new dimension to the sovereignty of individuality is offered in his novels by linking it with a courageous rallying round of psychological reserves of endurance and hope. Joshi exhibits the loneliness of his protagonists by presenting their psychological conflicts in the quest for meaning in life. Meenakshi Mukherjee commends Joshi’s first novel, *The Foreigner* by giving it the credit of being the very first Indian English novel which deals extensively with existential philosophical thought. Trimbakrao rightly observes that Arun Joshi’s style of using the past and present circumstances in an orderly manner and the actual and imaginary episodes enable to bring out the excitement of the novel.

Jhumpa Lahiri akin to Anita Desai and Arun Joshi portrays the existential crisis of her protagonists by exploring their inner landscape. She is the first Indian immigrant to win the Pulitzer Prize. She is widely read and appreciated worldwide. Debarati in her critical study of Lahiri’s fiction observes her advantages position as a writer. She could easily present a variety of view-points due to her multi-cultural exposure. Bandyopadyay observes that Lahiri is the principal representative of a hoard of issues of contemporary society they may be very insignificant but major concerns of modern life. Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction deals majorly with Bengali Americans in Boston, she presents a diverse picture of the immigrants. Ashok, Ashima and Gogol of *The Namesake* are representative of the first and second generation immigrants. They face the numerous tribulations associated with the immigrant population. Mrs Sen, Twinkle, Shukumar, Eliot are some of the characters in her short stories that have to
encounter similar issues of assimilation to a foreign culture simultaneously attempting to retain their ethnic identity. However, she does not present herself as a representative of the ethnic Indian in United States. Ashima in *The Namesake* is lonely and is distressed in a foreign country as she cannot identify herself in an alien culture but like Nanda Kaul puts on a brave front. She fulfills her responsibilities of a wife and mother to two children uncomplainingly. Lahiri presents the existentialism of her characters in a very positive manner. Her protagonists successfully encounter the existential crisis and take charge of their lives. They do not languish in misery or self pity.

Literary scholars of Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction have greatly appreciated her characterization, her realistic representation of the problems of Bengali Americans. They have also lauded her selection of genre for her first and third literary works in which she is able to excellently bring out the innumerable nuances of her diverse characters. Her literary works not only present an interesting insight into the existential issues but are also presented in a very engrossing manner and fascinating manner. The universal global concerns projected by Lahiri can be easily identified by the immigrant population. The highlight of her work is the projection of problems as observed by Lavina and Floyd the compatibility and disharmony of marital relationships which are a recurring theme of Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* and also of *Unaccustomed Earth*.

Jhumpa Lahiri takes into her fold a great variety of characterization far more elaborate and far reaching in comparison to Desai and Joshi. She has shouldered the responsibility of representing two worlds, the post modern ethnic and the western world. She has very well connected them with excellent images and metaphors and brought out the experiences of cultural hybridity. In this present post modern period of global immigration, hybridization of identities, the concept of home as fixed does not exist. Fluid identities have replaced fixed identities and this has brought about an identity crisis especially among the second generation immigrants. The second generation immigrants are not comfortable and are incapable of adhering to their ethnic identity unlike the first generation immigrants. The first generation immigrants retained their ethnic identity by rigidly following the culture and traditions of their
homeland. Lahiri in her novel, *The Namesake* and in the stories of *Interpreter of Maladies* has managed to effectively portray these concepts. She draws a comparative picture of Ashima and Ashoke first generation immigrants with that of Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi. The intense feeling of loneliness and alienation, nostalgia and anguish of Ashima as against the confused attitude of her children Gogol and Sonia are brilliantly brought out. She generally leaves the endings of her stories for reader’s interpretation. As observed by Shea\textsuperscript{13}, Lahiri intentionally left the endings open for the interpretation of the readers as per their cultural views. She considers it her obligation to let readers bring out their own varies perspectives. In appreciation of Jhumpa Lahiri’s microscopic sense of observation and precision for characterization details Sciortino\textsuperscript{14} aptly comments that her sense of shrewd observation coupled with style and imagination simply haul the readers to an altogether unfamiliar imaginary world of experiences travelling through the shortcomings of human nature.

*The Namesake* also effectively deals with the same issues as dealt with in *Interpreter of Maladies*, though with a limited set of characters. The characterization of Gogol, who, by virtue of his birth is an American but by his ethnic upbringing, an Indian, has been critically analyzed by critics. He feels at ease with his American identity in a multi-cultural society like his sister Sonia and Moushumi. Lahiri has excellently portrayed the in-between situation of the second generation immigrants, Gogol’s adjustment and blending his inherited ethnicity with his western lifestyle. However, he had to constantly assert his identity which results in confusion and identity crisis. Lahiri has superbly presented a family portrait of two generation of immigrants and balanced their concerns and fears. She has also sensitively concentrated on the psychological landscape of her characters. Arun Joshi and Anita Desai had mainly chosen to probe the inner turmoil of their protagonists, the resulting impact of the psychological struggle and their existential crisis while Lahiri has widened her sphere. She has brought out the existential conflict in relation to the issues of immigrant crisis. All the three novelists present a wide canvas of characterization and handle issues of concern of the post-modern society.

The existential anguish and identity crisis in the selected works were portrayed by Desai, Joshi and Lahiri by using flashback narrative technique, the narrative moves
from present to past and stream of consciousness style with ample use of imagery. Anita Desai makes the protagonists narrate the story, thereby giving a clear perspective of their view points. Maya, the narrator of *Cry the Peacock*, expresses her anguish, loneliness and insane dreams so intensely and with such clarity that the readers can associate and relate to her suffering and sympathize with her condition. Though the fictional image of Maya is constricted it is enriched with great intensity and profundity. The intense feelings and thoughts of the protagonists are further enhanced by use of symbols and images.

A detailed analysis of the selected novels of the prominent Indian English novelists, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri in the context of existentialism presents an extensive depiction of all the recurring themes of existentialism in the post modern Indian English writings. As existential writers they have portrayed the theme of absurdity, meaninglessness, purposelessness of life. Human beings have to consciously attempt to make their lives meaningful as is seen in the characters of Nanda Kaul, Raka, Maya, SindhiOberio, Gogol and others. According to the existential belief man is free and there are no limits to his freedom, even if man refuses to accept his freedom and shoulder responsibility, he is free as he has consciously taken the decision. The existential characters like Maya, Sindhi, Billy and others take up their responsibilities and thus exert their freedom to be authentic to themselves irrespection of the subsequent anguish, loneliness and alienation. In order to present a wider perspective and perception of existential characters, the thesis has explored the theoretical philosophy of existentialism and examined them. The research attempted to dismiss the wide spread belief that existentialism is all about negativity, absurd and meaningless life. On the contrary individuals by their will power and determination come out of the crisis, despair and find meaning in life. They experience alienation, anxiety and helplessness, which are the other themes of existential philosophy. The writers have handled the themes with great intensity and adeptness. Maya’s helplessness and her anxiety to be authentic to herself results in her death while Sindi’s quest ends in a more positive note as he discovers the true meaning of life. Billy Biswas’s revolt against societal norms and his search for meaning in life results in his death like that of Maya in her identity quest. Golomb had remarked that the
writers attempt to portray authenticity in their works in order to arouse the sadness and tragedy of genuineness of feeling which they want the readers to experience. In order to make them understand and empathize with the pathos of the characters. The writer sole purpose was to develop a sense of identification and to reduce the superficiality of modern society. Existential writers were persistently concerned with the projection of authenticity of their characters feelings and thoughts to evoke the tragedy of being true to one’s feelings and thoughts.

All the three selected novelists dealt with existential issues but from various different perspectives. Arun Joshi perspective is presented through his prominent characters, Sindí Oberio and Billy Biswas. His point of view is completely contrary to that of Anita Desai or Jhumpa Lahiri. Joshi’s protagonists are foreign educated, intelligent affluent Indians with enviable positions in society. He is concerned with the decaying upper crust of the Indian society. His protagonist are privileged ones, they achieved all the material comforts, good education, career and love without actually striving for them. Things came easily to them and perhaps due to this lack of struggle in their lives they developed existential quest of identity crisis. The existential tenets of loneliness and alienation were strongly rooted in their lives. Sindí’s quest for a sense of belonging took him to different countries however he felt like a foreigner wherever he went. In the end he realizes that for a meaningful existence involvement is essential. Billy on the other hand finds civilized society unbearable, hollow and meaningless. He gives up his career, family and friends and run away to uncivilized society to be true to himself. Anita Desai’s existential perspective on the other hand is mainly from that of married women, discontented and depressed due to lack of understanding and love from their partners. Jhumpa Lahiri focuses largely on the existential angst of Indian immigrants. The characters portrayed in Interpreter of Maladies deal with the existential issues of diasporic people who experience identity loss in the immigrant country. Their daily struggle of living in between two adverse set of cultures and their alienation and aching for ‘home’ are intensely depicted by Lahiri. Even the children of migrant people suffer from existential identity as they are constantly haunted by their past culture, perpetually pestered by the cultural values of their parents and the culture of the adopted country where they are living, their sense
of alienation arises in their attempt to link the two very different cultures. The subject, content and themes of all the three novelists are identical but they presented from different perspectives. The study thus gives a wider perspective of existentialism which is useful as it takes into account the various factors responsible for individuals’ behavior in this stressful environment of postmodern situation. The novelists’ have very cleverly and with great intensity contributed to presenting a better understanding of human nature. Nayak\textsuperscript{17} has remarked on Arun Joshi’s assessments and examinations of the complexities of life projected through his characters. They offer varied patterns of survival approaches to life which an individual develops over a period of time and community at large.

The complexity of life, the stress and tension to survive in this competitive, materialistic society takes a great toll on individuals’ lives. People resort to all sorts of anti social elements simply to survive and excel. The sensitive and emotional people suffer the most. Human life in the postmodern period is full of conflicting situations and chaotic. The novelists have attempted to analyses these issues and have conveyed their messages in a very subtle manner. Desai, Joshi and Lahiri by their literary works have managed to project the causes and effects of the sense of loneliness, anguish, identity crisis of these sensitive individuals with great intensity by adopting their own individual styles and techniques.

The comparisons of the writers and their perspectives on existentialism provides insights into the contemporary issues and themes of alienation, agony, conflict, death, quest for self identity, etc. Their works highlights the perpetual conflict of modern man in his search for authenticity in life, to assert his own individuality in a society governed by cultural and social norms. Determined to lead a meaningful life in the postcolonial world, the protagonists of the selected novels; Maya, Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ila Das, Sindhi Oberio, Billy Biswas, Ashima, Gogol and others are constantly struggling with existential conflicts in a postcolonial globalized environment. Anita Desai’s protagonists are women, who encounter intense conflicts within themselves and with relationships which make them alienated, aggressive and at times neurotic. Arun Joshi’s protagonists are men who are rebels, isolated and alienated but determined to pursue their quest irrespective of consequences. Jhumpa Lahiri’s
protagonists are constantly faced with cultural conflicts, identity issues but the somehow come to term with their existential conflicts and lead meaningful lives. All the three novelists, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri address the existential issues in their own unique style. However it is obvious that they are connected and preoccupied in their concerns.

The study examined and analyzed in detail the selected literary works of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri from the perspective of existentialism. In the critical analyses of the works of women writers i.e. Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri’s exploration of the existentialist and psychological approach to feminism is discussed in detail. The novelists have portrayed the identity crisis, the true self of women and have presented the changed modern women in contrast to the traditional, stereotyped image. The study also deals with the limitations and constraints that Indian women are subjected to in the male dominated Indian society and their marginalized existence. Desai in *Fire on the Mountain* according to the critics Reddy and Rath is able to bring out the existential suffering, passivity and defeatism of Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das in the context of their marginalized existence. Her ‘*Cry the Peacock*’ voices the unheard cry of women trapped in inescapable emotional web. Her women characters of Anita Desai are unique in the sense that they are not representative of the common Indian women they are contemplative, over sensitive and eccentric. They live in their own world of imagination. Maya of *Cry the Peacock* had lived in her father’s house like a fairy tale princess. After her marriage she is unable to survive the realistic life and get rid of her past. The conflict brings intolerable psychological suffering she longs to assert her own identity but is unsuccessful. Moreover she is terribly disturbed by the prophecy of the albino astrologer who had forecasted the death of either the husband or wife in the fourth year of her marriage. All these factors are the causes of her eccentricity and delusion. The protagonist of *Fire on the Mountain* Nanda Kaul chooses to live by herself all alone as per her own terms and conditions. She took the decision because of the psychological disturbances of being a wife and a mother and living by the circumstantial terms and conditions. Desai in all her novels depicts the female sensibility, their inner furies and their revolt for the attainment of freedom from the depressing social structure. Desai in her treatment of female protagonists has
brought to the forefront a new dimension of Indian English fiction, that of presenting the sorrowful plight of the psychological depressed alienated housewives and the insensitive, unsympathetic husbands.

Arun Joshi’s male protagonists manage to find their own salvation from the existential issues. Joshi’s themes such as the psychological suffering, quest for identity are all typical universal themes. Billy simply abandons his family responsibilities and escapes into the forest to attend to his innate sense of being with nature. While Sindi moves from place to place until he finally realizes the true principle of detachment and attachment in life. Joshi firmly establishes his existential perspective of escapism from relationships in the characters of Sindi and Billy. As observed by Gadhavi, Arun Joshi could present a mocking assault on the superficiality of modern sophisticated society merely by taking an example of a single person, Sindi Oberio. This could be achieved because the modern society is strongly dominated by the escapist tendency of individuals and this has been more or less adapted as a way of life. He establishes the views of existential philosophers that one must be responsible for one’s actions and also responsible enough to respond to the inner voice of self.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s writings focus on the causes of emotional disturbances and psychological turmoil of women who are considered to be privileged living in a migrant country. People in general overlook their sufferings as trivial, thus leaving them all by themselves to cope with their personal existential problems. Jhumpa Lahiri’s protagonists fight their emotional battle and merge successful and stronger to face the trials and tribulations of modern society. At the outset Lahiri’s content appears to project the East - West encounter but a careful reading prominently displays her concern for the visible and invisible frontiers her characters have to cross to lead a meaning life. Like Anita Desai her intention is not to portray the stereotyped characters. Like the postmodern contemporary writers she attempts to bring out the existentialism of her protagonists and also inter cultural issues. Some other concerns are relating to the problems of lack of communication between couples and difficult relationships. The stories in Interpreter of Maladies deal with the individual’s identity conflict of either Indians in India, Indian Americans or American of Indian origin. Gayatri Spivak, the Indian American critic of postcolonial studies is of the view that literary texts provide an opportunity to bring forward the unheard voices of subaltern
women. Jhumpa Lahiri’s works have brought forward the voices of such women who negotiate their identities and live lives as they wish. The subaltern voices are heard in the fictional literary world. However the collection of the stories deal with such varied themes that they cannot be classified into a single group. The diasporic trauma of the Indian women immigrants and their attempt to negotiate their identity are dealt differently with different characters. Moreover their reactions are different individually. Some characters accept their new found identity while some resist. All the varied reactions and negotiable identities are woven intricably in the fictionally stories.

The research basically concentrated on the existential issues and problems encountered by modern men and women taking into its fold the psychological approach to feminism. The other approaches to feminism like Marxist and post-modernist are discussed only sketchily, thus the limitations of the research provides ample scope for a wide area of research, from the feminist’s point of view. The feminist’s perceptive of the novels can be studied and analyzed in detail. The psychological stress, suffering and misery of women in traditional Indian society and the socio-economic situations responsible for the suppression of women are the issues which have a wide scope of research. The study has incorporated the feminist perspective only to lead the readers to understand the much neglected and ignored aspect of existential trauma and suffering of women. However, the thesis does not attempt to randomly enforce the philosophy of existentialism on the selected works of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi or Jhumpa Lahiri. It only strives to comprehend the works in the context of existentialism. The novelists’ can be considered as existentialists as they have emphasized the ontological and practical aspects of existential freedom in their works. All the characters discussed are constantly struggling in their endeavor of freedom and responsibility as they according to the terminology of existentialism leading an inauthentic life and thus always suffer existential angst. They use different ways to encounter their existential state. The thesis has provided an outline of the concerns and influences of existentialism, however the views of existentialism as discussed vary from philosopher ton philosopher. The selected works were critically analyzed keeping in mind existential philosophy and the intensity with which the philosophy was portrayed by the Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri. The research is a well-defined approach to the study of existentialism, the most important
factor to be taken into consideration in the modern century is the fact that understanding and looking at existence requires a fresh new perspective which is not found in the gamut of philosophies ancient or modern, human beings cannot be understood or explained in terms of any specific physical elements of creation. Scientific, religious, moral or social theories are unable to describe the essential conditions of human nature. Authenticity of existence is considered to be a new philosophical norm in the twentieth and twentyfirst century to understanding the intricate byzantine nature of the human beings. Existentialism thus plays a significant part in the contemporary thought.
Works Cited


