Chapter 1

Introduction

i. The Shifting Paradigms in Indian English Literature

Indian English novel is the most amenable literary genre for projecting the pressing social, economic and political concerns of the times, it has played diverse roles. Its thematic pre-occupations have included the glorification of the Indian heritage, the mustering of support for the freedom movement, espousing the cause of Gandhian Non-violence, recounting of the colossal tragedy of the partition riots and presenting the impact of the changing social scene on the Indian sensibility with special emphasis on the interaction of the ingrained religious streak in the Indian character with the more mundane considerations of the West. The novelists’ concentration gradually shifted from the past to the present contemporary issues of social and political concern. Gandhian movement inspired the Indian English novelists to write about the struggle for freedom, communal violence and the social condition of India, such as the miserable condition of the landless farmers, the economically exploited and the oppressed. The earliest novels such as Murugan, The Tiller, written in 1927 and Kandan the Patriot written in 1932 by K.S.Venkataramani, KrishnaswamyNagarajan’s novels, Athavar House and Chronicles of Kedaram deals with the economic and social vicissitudes of Indian scenario.

Indian Novel became contemporary with the emergence of the great Indian English novelists; Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao in the 1930’s. The three great novelists dominated the entire literary scene and their contribution led to the growth of novel as a social portraiture. It was the most noteworthy outcome and greatly contributed to the glory of Indian English literature. Indian English novel moved in the right direction and attained an identity of its own in the writings of these three great novelists. Iyengar observes that the great trinity attained fame, appreciation and respect from the very beginning before the Second World War and sustained their creative writings skills and popularity even in the postmodern period. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao and other novelists of the postmodern
period as observed by Iyengar have between them succeeded in imparting to the contemporary literary scene both the stir of variegated activity and the aura of significant achievement.¹

Mulk Raj Anand projected the social disparity of India in his novels, Coolie, Untouchable, Two Leaves & A Bud and Big Heart. They are milestones in Anand's journey of social reform. The novels of Mulk Raj Anand produced during this period extensively deal with several aspects of social reform such as exploitation of the untouchable, the landless peasants, tea garden workers and the problems of industrial labourers. Anand’s novels, Untouchable and Coolie present scholarly and philosophical arguments about the illusion of work. As remarked by Verma² both the significant novels of Anand represent the condition of slavery, suppression and oppression prevalent in Indian nineteenth century society.

R.K.Narayan’s Malgudi Days depicts the realities of village life and Raja Rao’s Kanthapura is about Gandhian philosophy and modern India. Mulk Raj Anand & R.K. Narayan throughout remained preoccupied with the treatment of social & national issues in their novels, Raja Rao made a departure from the prevailing movement, he concentrated on the richness of Indian philosophy in his The Serpent & the Rope (1960), the novel is about spiritual search and truth. His next novel The Cat and Shakespeare (1965) is again about philosophy, it attempts to answer the philosophical queries questions posed in the earlier novels, he uses the cat as a symbol of Karma. K.R.Srinivasalayengar observes that, the big three remain undisturbed after four decades of pre-eminence.³

Depicting of contemporary life of India in a realistic manner was evidently the concern of the Indian English novelists. Issues and aspects of social, political and philosophical life of India such as the nationalistic movement, poverty, subjugation of women, casteism, feudal practices, the conflict of East and West were some of the themes handled adeptly by the three great novelists Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand. Some of the women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and others also made significant contribution to Indian English literature.

Postcolonial Indian English literature largely concerns with issues of de-colonization, the political and cultural independence of people formely subjugated to
colonialism. It critiques the contemporary postcolonial discourse and attempts to re-read the emergence of post colonialism and its literary expression. In the search for identity that constitutes the core of the recent Indo-English novel, we find an interesting exploration of the East-West encounter with special emphasis on the inevitable confusion of values cropping up in the wake of the conflicts between disparate cultures.

After 1950 Indian English novelists concentrated on the search for the self. To generalize, nationalistic orientation can be said to be the most distinctive feature of the Indo English novel in the pre-independence era while that of the post-independence novel seems to be the psychological probing of the individual destiny, shaped and molded by overweening historical and sociological changes. The Indian English writers have been greatly appreciated and they have achieved an identity of their own after the Independence of the country. M.K.Naik aptly states that after 1947 Indian English writers have gained a very strong foothold and pursued their venture with greater confidence and farsightedness.

One of the major themes of pre-independence Indian English Novel was freedom struggle and the theme continued to fascinate novelist even after Independence. K.A. Abbas’ *Inquilab* (1958) treats this theme in an objective manner. He gives a detailed account of Indian political scene and focuses on political leaders like Bhagat Singh, Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Patel and others. Kushw;ant Singh’s novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) gives an imaginative account of partition and his second novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, portrayed the theme of freedom struggle with the fusion of satire and religion. The story set in the backdrop of 1942 is about a family caught up in the changing times and the turmoil they endure. The Partition left an ineradicable mark on the consciousness of a few writers and in their writings the ill effects of partition are noticeable. Manohar Malgonkar’s novel, *A Bend in the Ganges*, deals with the explicit violence of partition and *Distance Drum* presents a vibrant and flawless picture of Indian army. Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* is about the struggle during the partition of India, the following communal violence and influx of refugees. Chaman Nahal in *The Crown and the Loincloth* portrays freedom struggle by combining historical and fictional incidents with tragic and comic elements. Kamala Markandaya’s *Some Inner Fury*
also portrays this theme although its main focus is on the romanticizing of the historical events. R.K.Narayan deals with is an unconventional love story of Sriram and Bharati in the backdrop of the political struggle in his novel, *Waiting for the Mahatama*(1955).

The period after the great trio of the Indian English novel, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao the Indian English novel saw the ingress of a large number of novelists. Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie and many others. The novelists dealt with themes of varied nature. History was one of the themes that drew the attention of some of the novelists. Iyengar observes that,

*History as the theme of creative fiction seems indeed to exercise a special fascination for many an Indian novelist of yesterday and today.*

There is a remarking difference in the attitudes and approaches of novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K.Narayan on the one hand and Kamala Markandaya, Kushwant Singh, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi (to mention a few) on the other. The reformistic concern of Mulk Raj Anand, the philosophic tone of Raja Rao and the affirmative creed of Narayan connot the strength of a basically constructive and optimistic outlook on life while the more recent writers offer a picture of tensions and conflicts that deny neat pat solutions. The angst in some of the novels is seen as a literary affectation and criticism is also leveled against them on the ground that, in as much as cynical despair is out of tune with the basically religious Indian temperament, the lonely protagonists of these novels are not authentic embodiments of Indian experience but are at best stupid copies of their counterparts in western literature. We find in this sort of criticism a mixing up of issues namely the difference in reality as perceived by different writers and the altered perspective from which each novelist wants to study life. When a writer’s concern is with man as a social being, his focus is bound to be on action and achievement, whereas a writer interested in the inner climate of the human psyche, tends to give more importance to passing fancies, fleeting moods and fluctuating thoughts than to concretized incidents and events. Interaction of cultures may be chosen as the backdrop for their novels by many writers but depending on what they want to make out of this study a different colouring is imparted to the novels.
A. Raja Rao’s interest in underscoring the East’s spiritual supremacy over the West need not be shared by an Anita Desai to whom the humanness beneath the peripheral barriers of divergent cultures is of utmost significance. Apart from portray of contemporary Indian socio-economic and political scenario the novelists’s sphere widened to other subjects such as identity quest, existentialism and other complicated issues which projected psychological tensions and conflicts that defy neat, pat solutions.

The diasporic writers very cleverly interwove the Indian cultural values and philosophies with its global counter parts and brought out a cultural conflict in their writings. The literary works of Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Kavita Dasvani, M.G Vassanji, V.S. Naipaul and others effectively bring out the problems and issues of the displaced people in their adopted countries. The Indian English novelist of post-Independence India became more imaginative and innovative, as observed by Naik Indian English novelists provided ample evidence of increased creative vigor and capacity for experimentation. Some of the novels which reflect the brilliance and newness of Indian English literature in the period are The Serpent and the Rope, Guide, etc.

In the 1980’s and 90’s Indian novelists gained prominence and India emerged as a major literary nation. A number of Indian English novelist won critical acclaim. Salman Rushdie was greatly appreciated for his noteworthy novel, Midnight Children it was awarded the Booker Prize while his other novel, The Satanic Verses generated the most controversy. Vikram Seth attained worldwide success as a novelist for his The Golden Gate he was greatly appreciated and acknowledged in the global literary scene. The brilliant outstanding books he later published, A Suitable Boy (1993), An Equal Music (1999), and Two Lives (2005) were also globally appreciated. Another novelist who gained prominence was Allan Sealy, whose first novel, The Trotter Nama (1998) is an exuberant chronicle of seven generations and the declining fortunes of an eccentric Anglo-Indian family. Shashi Tharoor established his mark in the Indian English literary scenario with the publication of his books, Show Business and The Great Indian Novel, Amitav Ghosh is another contemporary Indian writer, his works, The Circle of Reason (1986), The Shadow Lines (1988), The Calcutta Chromosome (1995), The Glass Palace (2000)
and others won excellent reviews and admiration. He was honoured with SahityaAkademi Award for *The Shadow Lines*.

Arundhati’s Roy won instant fame and recognition in the literary world with her very first novel, *The God of Small Things*, it was also awarded Booker prize and was in the New York Times best seller for a long time. Roy is the first Indian woman to win the Booker prize. The novel was appreciated for its rich similes, metaphors, lyrical languages. This drastically changed the world’s perception about Indian English novelists. *The God of Small Things* examines India’s contemporary global scenario by tracing the differences of attitudes and cultural conflicts from the colonial times to the present post modern period. She shows in her novel, the real issues in contemporary Indian society, postcolonial experiences are the effects of globalization and the ramifications of a destructive caste system.

Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, AnjanaAppachana, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, JhumpaLahiri, Kiran Desai are some of the other post modern novelists who deftly handled the theme of existentialism. They have brilliantly expressed the diasporic experiences and the multitude of emotions; anguish, isolation, discrimination, assimilation and dissimulation, and particularly identity crisis in the new circumstances. AnjanaAppachana’s *Listening Now* (1997) is the about the psychological pressures, emotional upheavals, existential predicaments of an unwed mother, Padma raising her daughter Mallika singlehandedly. The novel sensitively and powerfully unravels the various emotional stages Padma experiences. The only people who support Padma are her older sister, some concerned neighbours and friends. The tragic tale of Padma and the interwoven stories of six other women reveal the excruciating pain that women undergo, their existential agony remains unnoticed. Anjana as observed by Shibani7 is primarily dedicated to presenting the overall psychological state of Indian women who realizes her true identity and her oppression due to her own irrationality and meaninglessness. In Chitra Banerjee’s *Mistress of Spices* (1997), the protagonist Tilo suffers mental agony, undergoes pangs of oppression in her various roles until her innate powers were revealed. She resolves people’s problems and even heals them. As a result people flock to her store for remedies but she herself cannot reach out to anybody. She chose for herself; a life of
isolation and loneliness. *Psychosis is a malady of alienation and loneliness, an unmistakable strand of post colonial literature finds a place in this work.*

ManjuKapur is another contemporary woman novelist who attempts to portray the tremendous change in the image of women, from the traditional role of self-sacrificing to an assertive, ambitious role. In *Difficult Daughters* (1999) Manjukapur deals with complicated issues of generation gap of mothers and daughters. The complex relationships of three generation of characters are examined. ManjuKapur’s novel reveals the true spirit of Indian English fiction. She gives an excellent presentation of human desires and the urge to lead a self – designed life, though it results in pain and alienation. The existential problems of women are very well brought out. Her other novels, *The Immigrant* and *A married Woman* presents the inner conflict and diasporic sensibility of her characters.

Over a period of time Indian English fiction witnessed a new awareness in the concept of diasporic sensibility which evolved as a result of globalisation. The second and third generation immigrants realised that co-existence of two cultures can lead to a progressive future. JhumpaLahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) is a powerful expression of the issues and problem of the Indian immigrants and about the cultural differences, problems of adjustments and assimilation. Most of the stories in the collection deal with various different views and observation of Indian American immigrant population, their daily struggle with identity issues and cultural amalgation problems. Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* (2003) is extraordinarily subtle in its existential concerns. It echoes the existential angst of disillusionment and despair, loneliness and alienation of Ashima, AshokeGanguli and Gogol. JhumpaLahiri continues to explore the theme of cultural identity of immigrants in another collection of stories, titled *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008).

Kiran Desai’s won critical acclaim with her very first book, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. She also won Man Booker prize for her second novel, *Inheritance of Loss*, it was also awarded the National Book Critics Circle fiction award. Desai deals with conflicts, loneliness and alienation in the lives of her characters. The identity crisis of all the characters, the protagonist Jenubhai, a retired judge, his granddaughter, Sai, their cook and Biju the son of the cook is deftly portrayed by Kiran
Desai. Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008) winner of Man Booker Prize is about the class struggle, the existing reality of India. The protagonist Balram Halwai is an immoral person he dons several roles at different stages of his life, of a servant, chauffer, philosopher, murderer and entrepreneur to become a successful man in the materialistic sense. Chetan Bhagat another contemporary Indian English novelist has published several brilliant books. His *One Night @ the Call Center* was greatly appreciated. His other books, *2 States, 3 Mistakes of my Life, Five Point Someone, etc.* are also greatly appreciated in the literary circles.

Contemporary Indian English fiction thus, reflects the changing perspectives, changing paradigms and changing thematic concerns of society. Most of the post modern Indian English writers can be termed as existentialists as they deal with the existential concerns of modern man, his psychological freedom of choice and his authenticity. The themes of Existentialism are reflected in the writings of earlier writers also but there are differences in concerns, attitudes and approaches of earlier novelists like Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan on the one hand and Kamala Markandaya, Kushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and others.

**ii. Existentialism**

Existentialism as a philosophical and cultural movement began in the mid-19th century. The prominent intellectual thinkers like Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus and Sartre associated with the beginning of the philosophy of Existentialism have never admitted that they were responsible for the movement. Soren Kierkegaard is universally considered to be the first existentialist philosopher but the movement became prominent due to the efforts of two French writers Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), a French existential philosopher, a prominent novelist and playwright is considered to be the father of Existentialist philosophy. His trilogy, *Huis-clos (No Exit), Nausea, The Roads to Freedom* contribute greatly to the philosophy of existentialism. The central theme of existentialism is freedom of the individual. It emphasizes that Man is ultimately responsible for his own actions. Sartre’s notions of absurdity and alienation are connected to existential philosophy.
In his essay, *The Humanism of Existentialism*, Sartre observes that man is solely responsible for his actions as there is no God he is not predestined by any concepts.

Sartre’s philosophy of existentialism is that man is not predestined for his actions he is absolutely free to make his own destiny and is thereby solely responsible for his decisions. Man should be true to himself, in the process experience alienation and loneliness. Feelings of anguish arise as man recognises his freedom of will over the way the world sees him, the way normally he is expected to behave, the norms of behaviour which determines society. This philosophy of Sartre has been critically discussed by prominent critics with reference to Sartre’s writings in, *Being and Nothingness*.

Albert Camus’s name is synonymous with existentialism. The existential elements of loneliness and isolation, the problem of finding meaning within existence are significantly present in his prominent works, *The Stranger* and *The Plague*. *The Stranger* deals with the conflict of reason and experience, of good and evil, of innocence and guilt. Camus felt that meaning in life is to be found in the struggle to be true to oneself and in collaborating with society’s collective efforts for peace and prosperity. Absurdity or irrationality of life and the inevitability of death constitute the unavoidable angst or agony of the human condition. The protagonist of *The Stranger*, Meursault guns down an Arab impulsively and is sentenced to death. The novel deals with his reflections on the absurdity of his situation as he resigns to his fate. He looks at life objectively and lives only in the present, does not concern about the past merely because of the fact that past is gone so it is meaningless. Camus’s existential treatise, *The Myth of Sisyphus* also deals extensively with the meaninglessness and futility of existence. He adopts the Greek legend of Sisyphus to convey his philosophy of absurdity. Consciousness of the meaninglessness of life can lead to resistance and search for one’s true identity. Baker observes that Albert Camus dealt with the theme of absurdity in his works because of which he is an existential writer.

Soren Kierkegaard’s criticism of theologians’ wrongly converting religion – a highly subjective issue – into a philosophic dogma can be said to be the starting point of the later existential creed of the sanctity of personal experience. Endorsement of the idea
that individual experience is of paramount importance is found in the works of philosophers like Jaspers, Heidegger and Unamuno and novelists like Dostoevsky, Kafka, Sartre, Simon de Beauvoir, Andre Malraux and Camus. The problems of Existentialism as projected by Sartre in his works are essentially centered on concepts like the following:

i. Existence precedes essence.
ii. God is an idea invented by man to perpetrate the submission of gullible masses to the authority of state and church.
iii. Man’s lot is to live in this absurd world with the knowledge that he cannot hope for any surcease or aid outside himself.
iv. A glorious future for man is still possible because backed by the rational outlook and atheism people can really work for the establishment of an egalitarian society.

In summation it can be concluded that, existentialists believe that man is what he makes of himself, he is not predestined by God or by society. If he refuses to choose or lets outside forces determine him, he is contemptible. For this reason existentialism insists on only actions of will which are the ultimate determining factors of life. Thus the individual has no recourse to any other determining factors including religion, he has to create his own meaning for his or her own self as there are no meanings or structure that come before one’s own existence. In this perspective existential thought has attained the unfair reputation of for pessimism. In general the very idea of creating meaning in life appears to be absurd and meaningless. Even the tenets associated with existentialism such as loneliness, alienation, fear, angst, etc. are appears at the outset as pessimism. Nevertheless, existential philosophy does not advocate a negative approach to life or reality, the philosophy in fact is all about understanding oneself and revolves around the boundless capabilities of an intellectual and ethically conscious individual to bring about positive change in his life and subsequently in the world. So positive change is crucial for the true existentialist; in order to lead a fulfilling life otherwise life becomes meaningless and purposeless and a complete void to them. Taking into consideration this view point existentialism is not at all about pessimism but about bringing a positive meaningful change in one’s life.
Writers like Franz Kafka and Fyodor Dostoevsky had contributed greatly to the existential notions. Fyodor Dostoevsky, a 19th century Russian novelist in his novel, *Crime and Punishment* focuses on the existential dilemma of the protagonist, Rodin Raskolnikov, who kills a pawnbroker for her money and attempts to justify his actions by believing that murder is justifiable in pursuit of a higher purpose. He explores the existential anguish of Raskolnikov, in the book which was translated into English in 1956 by Constance Garnett. Franz Kafka is considered to an influential existential writer of the 20th century. His short story, *The Metamorphosis* presents his existential view in the character of GregorSamsa, the character transforms into a beetle. In the body of a beetle he attempts to serach for his self - identity. The existential view of Kafka that, any given choice will govern the course of a person’s life is well illustrated. Kafka is known as a writer of absurd literature. Sanderson states that, *Existentialists maintain that human existence is ‘basic’. It is, therefore, best studied from inside a subject's experience rather than outside.*

Existentialism has also been successfully explored in Indian English literature. The Indian English novelists have attempted to explore the individuality of man, his self examination and search for his identity, his refusal to accept the traditional values propogated by religion or philosophy. His determination to pursue his own will though it may appear illogical or unreasonable and his meaninglessness of life leading to absurd theories are the tenents of existentialism. These philosophies and thoughts are prominently seen in the writings of existential writers. Chaturvedi states that,

> Another most significant feature of the Post Independence novels produced during the period between 1950s and 1980s was a shift of emphasis from the external to the internal, the socio-political issues to the individual problems.

According to general critical consensus ‘Modernity’ in the novel consists in a daring exploration of hither to forbidden themes, an amoral analysis of human behavior, a deliberate debunking of repressive morality, a sympathetic portrayal of the subliminal drives directing human emotion and action and an unwillingness to conform to accepted ideas of heroism and respectability. Modern novels also boldly present an unvarnished account of life in the raw. Profundity and purposefulness seems to have no place in recent novels in which life is portrayed as an absurd and enigmatic riddle. The reason for this is not far to seek. Prompted by the rationalistic
outlook of the scientific age to see in religion not a reservoir of strength but a debilitating dependence, modern man is impelled to give up his implicit faith in religion. Disillusioned by man’s inhumanity to man in times of war and peace, finding no substitute for religion in any ‘ism’ or ideology, crushed by the frantic pace of modern life, hemmed in from all sides by strife and stress the people in modern age justifiably feel that they are drifters in life with no moorings and this pervasive desolation has found poignant expression in most post modern novels. The objective of most recent novelists seems to be to analyze the causes for this soul-sickness and to explore ways and means by which the two more virulent spiritual maladies – loneliness and alienation can be held at bay. In the course of this pre-occupation the perspective of the novel has understandably shifted from sociological evaluation to psychological analysis. The shift of focus of Indian English novel to existential angst can be apparently noticed in the writings of Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi. These novelists concentrated on the existential suffering and agony of man in their writings. The tradition initiated by Anita Desai was continued by Arun Joshi, Nayantara Sehgal, Salman Rushdie and their contemporaries.

Kamala Markandaya, a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora concentrates on cross-cultural, interracial conflicts leading existential angst in her novels. Her novels deal with different predicaments of identity crisis. The theme of loneliness and alienation are very strongly dealt with in almost all her novels. She presents restless characters, characters who want to be freed from inner anxiety. They are lonely, emotionally insecure; her characters tend to be oversensitive to violence and death. As a novelist she extensively dealt with themes of loneliness and alienation; the confrontation of East- West attitudes; the traditional, spiritual and modern values of Indian societies. Her novels portray strong, independent woman characters in the face of poverty, gender discrimination and innumerable woes of womanhood. Markandaya’s portrayal of sensitive and strong women characters and their quest for identity and their existential crisis represent the struggle of women in general to establish and assert their identity in a male dominated traditional Indian society. She is the author of ten very prominent and noteworthy novels. Two novels, Possession and The Nowhere Man very strongly and intensely with existentialism.
Kamala Markandaya in her novel The Nowhere Man superbly portrays the diverse critical strands of man’s agony in the face of impending old age and inevitable death, the plight of immigrants in an alien country and racial discrimination. Srinivas of The Nowhere Man, is the ‘nowhere man’ who, after passing two-thirds of his life in England is considered an outsider. He is pestered by the local racists to leave the country. He is confused and disoriented as to where he belonged, an Indian who lived in England for so that he lost his ethnic identity and finally becomes a rootless person with nowhere to go. Srinivas appears to be the spokesperson of several Indian immigrants who lost their own ethnic roots and remain rootless and miserable in an alien country. An examination of the novels of Markandaya reveals that she is intently concerned with presenting the plight of her female protagonists who are constantly in search for their identity. Their internal and external struggle, the process of asserting their identity is well evident in her female protagonists. Their strong urge to locate their acceptable place and identity in society in spite of immense struggle is their primary concern. Interestingly all her women characters reveal a positive and optimistic attitude towards life in spite of being suppressed and dominated by various factors. They are portrayed as stronger than their male counterparts and they have their unique ways and means of leading a meaningful life. By exercising their own free will, exhibiting their own self, they get fulfillment and recognition in life. Markandaya successfully and subtly explores the themes of existentialism.

Anita Desai in all her novels reveals her penchant for existentialism while she brings out the sufferings, loneliness and powerlessness of married women suppressed by their existential quest. The problem of the tragic tension between the individual and their unfavourable environment acquires the dimensions of existential angst. Anita Desai’s novels have been repeatedly examined from existential perspectives. Her Fire on the Mountain is mainly about the Nanda Kaul and her existential problems. Nanda Kaul prefers to alienate herself and live in isolation at Carignano. Desai also portrays the existential quest of Kaul’s great grand daughter Raka, her intense suffering and absurdity. Kaul’s friend Ila Das also is haunted by existential agony because of her untiring struggle with the overpowering forces of society. Fire on the Mountain is thus studied from the existential perspectives as it efficiently tackles issues of loneliness, alienation and absurdity of existence. Desai’s Cry the
Peacock is about Maya, her inability to handle her detached workaholic husband. Being extremely sensitive she feels lonely, dejected resulting in the ultimate catastrophe, where in a state of insanity she kills the husband out of frustration.

Arun Joshi like Anita Desai has extensively dealt with the trauma and agony of modern man, the existential angst, man’s alienation and loneliness. His main focus is on the exploration of the man’s psychology through the protagonists of his novels. Arun Joshi’s extraordinary insight and his profound knowledge of human psychology is evident in his sensitive portray of man’s rootlessness, restlessness and existential quest. Arun Joshi novels from the Foreigner (1968) to The City and the River (1990) are by themes of frustration, disintegration, rootlessness, a sense of alienation and existential predicament. His novel, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is an existential novel it deals with the strange case of Billy a privileged young Indian. He abandons an engineering degree to study Anthropology and on his return to India he eventually vanishes from the civilized society. His intense overpowering urge to lead a primitive tribal life compels him to run away to the hills and jungles of Chhatisgarh. Joshi’s The Apprentice deals with search for the purpose of life of its protagonist. The novel begins with Ratan’s act of penance, the polishing of the shoes of devotees. In the course of his unburdening of his heart to a student whom he happens to meet at the temple Ratan, the protagonist offers details of his gradual moral deterioration. The novel depicts the search for purpose of life of the protagonist Ratan Rathod and his plight in "society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose" (70). The ambiguity of the title The Last Labyrinth augments the novel’s existential thoughts by converging them with various layers of meaning in accordance with the change wrought both in the external scene and the increase in awareness of the characters. SomBaskar, the hero of the novel is different from the earlier heroes in many respects. Unlike Sindi he is very firmly rooted in a well delineated religious and domestic background against which he rebels but whose echoes he continues to carry in the recesses of his mind. SomBhaskar blunders through life chasing one ephemeral pleasure after another, forever dissatisfied, forever disgruntled. The prominent characters in it carry with them a sense of alienation, loneliness and pessimism. The novel depicts the existential dilemma of its characters in hostile world but this predicament, however, has been replaced by the socio-political crisis of the city, which is a conglomerate of individuals and can be said to
represent the whole humanity. The city, depicted in the novel is itself rootless and alien to the natural atmosphere. In such a setting, the characters feel their existence rootless, absurd and are in search for something meaningful. Arun Joshi’s choice of themes like expansion of the human spirit in the atmosphere of freedom, agony of the lonely soul lost in a hostile world etc., typify universal experiences rather than national or cultural idiosyncrasies. The Indian novelists dealt with the new subjects of human existence and man’s quest for self in all its complicated situations, they offer a picture of tensions and conflicts that defy neat, pat solutions.

Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and JhumpaLahiri are easily the best exponents of existentialism in Indian English fiction. They do not bother about giving elaborate details of social settings as they study man more as a victim of his own inner environment rather than of the external material or moral climate. Their characters are more concerned with their own highly sensitized world of sense and sensibility than with the average Indian’s greatest problem of all-keeping body and soul together. Each one of these novelists is highly realistic in as far as he or she captures both the agony and ecstasy of an essentially subjective response to the passing panorama of life. For all their erratic behaviour and whimsicality the protagonists in the novels of these writers are sincere and courageous, forgoing the easier path of obedience to an external code and opting to make their own feelings the operative principle guiding their destinies. The non-availability of a moral reference point outside their inner natures is at once a proof of these protagonists’ strength and the enormity of their burden of loneliness in having to win their own scheme of values.

The shift of focus of Indian English novel to existential angst became clearer particularly with Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi, who explored the agonized existence of modern man in their writings. Kamala Markandaya, a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora concentrates on Cross-cultural and interracial conflicts in her novels. Her novels deal with different predicaments of identity crisis. The theme of loneliness and alienation are very strongly dealt with in almost all her novels. She presents restless characters, characters who want to be freed from inner anxiety. They are lonely, emotionally insecure; her characters tend
to be oversensitive to violence and death. However, alienation and existentialism are strongly projected in *Possession* and *The Nowhere Man*.

Imbibing of new ideas and concepts and gaining a new imaginative fillip from the achievement of earlier writers is integral to the blossoming of artistic instinct and Arun Joshi’s case best illustrates this. It is more in the nature of exploring ‘fresh woods and pastures new’ rather than of servile imitation that writers like Arun Joshi draw freely from continental writers like Kafka and Camus. It should not be mistaken for a repudiation of his Indianness as to be traditional does not mean to be insular. The criticism that there is too much artificiality in modern Indo-English novels as they deal with problems which are pertinent to Western ways of life does hold good as far as Arun Joshi is concerned. His choice of themes; expansion of the human spirit in the atmosphere of freedom, agony of the lonely soul lost in a hostile world, etc. typify universal experiences rather than national or cultural idiosyncrasies. As it is a philosophic concept of life that has sometimes been successfully explored in literature and not a literary school of thought, existentialism has no particular style or form associated with it.

To generalize, nationalistic orientation can be said to be the most distinctive feature of the Indian English novel in the pre-independence era while that of the post-independence novel seems to be the psychological probing of the individual destiny, shaped and molded by overweening historical and sociological changes. Its thematic concern is with issues of de-colonization, with political and cultural freedom of people who were formerly subjugated to colonial rule. Postcolonial literature is thus basically concerned with the critical evaluation of the contemporary discourses.

This doctoral thesis captures the existential tenants of postmodern situations in the selected works of Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri; and provides an overview of the changing cultural norms and altering controversies of identity crisis. The literary works of Arun Joshi’s, *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Anita Desai’s, *Cry The Peacock* and *Fire on The Mountain*, Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Interpreter Of Maladies* and *The Namesake* will be discussed to throw light on the causes and consequences of existential anguish and to reach an appropriate understanding of the existential crisis in postmodern situation. The
common hypothesis undertaken in this study is the existential anguish and alienation shown in considerable variations in each case.

Anita Desai born in 1937 is an expatriate writer of Indian origin who experienced a mixed cultural upbringing. She was brought up in a multi-cultural atmosphere as her father D. N. Mazumdar was a Hindu Bengali Indian and her mother Toni Nime was a German Christian. She was born and brought up in India however her mother’s foreign culture had a tremendous influence on her. The multi-cultural ambiance at home changed into a cross-cultural atmosphere when she migrated from India to England and then to the United States. Anita Desai is also multilingual; she is well versed with German, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and English. As she spoke German at home, we come across ample German words and phrases are in her writings. Desai had the advantage of being exposed to various different perspectives of people, her personal experiences and the varied perspectives have enriched her fiction. She is able to smoothly blend them while writing about India and Indians as well as about migrants in India and Indian migrants in the West. She has enriched Indian English fiction with her immense literary works. Anita Desai fiction has been studied and critically analysed and acclaimed from various different perspectives; feminist, philosophical, psychological. The psychological examination of her protagonist’s psyche is however very robust. She portrays a graphic picture of the alienation and exile of her characters. Desai’s fiction mainly deals with the inner turmoil of her protagonists subsequent to unsuccessful relationships especially between husband and wife. They are about human relationships, alienation and loneliness. Her female protagonist are lonely, alienated and suffer from existential crisis. They are constantly trying to discover and rediscover meaning in life. Brinda’s pertinent comment about the Desai’s concern for female characters, living in separate, closed, sequestered worlds of existential problems and passions, loves and hates further elaborates the idea.

Anita Desai’s novels, *Cry the Peacock* and *Fire on the Mountain* deal with the theme of exile and alienation and the existential angst of her characters. She employs different fictional techniques depending upon the circumstances and the demands of her characters. Desai’s narrative technique and the sensitive moving projection of the psychological trauma of her characters established her as a renowned novelist at par
with the prominent existentialists. It will be appropriate to quote Nagappan’s critical views about *Fire on the Mountain*, he observes that there are only three prominent characters and all of them suffer from existential crisis.

Arun Joshi is one of the most prominent Indian English novelists who have dealt with the theme of existentialism. He has greatly enriched Indian English fiction with five remarkably distinguished novels revolving around existential issues. All the novels of Arun Joshi probe existentialist’s issues and the choices his protagonists have to make in order to determine life’s meaning. His protagonists are constantly striving against challenging situations. His novels are strongly influenced by the existential philosophy of Satre, Albert Camus’ and Kierkegaard. Arun Joshi is one of the first Indian English novelists to have extensively dealt with existentialism in all his novels he thus holds a unique place in the contemporary literary scenario. Joshi is considered to be the pioneer of existential novel in Indian English literature. In *The Foreigner* Arun Joshi deftly handled very sensitive, serious and thought provoking issues, like rootlessness, alienation, detachment, identity crisis and self-realization. Similar serious concerns were raised in his second novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Billy’s urge for primitive life and his disgust for the sophisticated materialistic modern society are so intense and overpowering urge that he abandons his entire family; parents, wife, child and friends to embrace a new unknown primitive life in the forests. This sort of overwhelming and uncontrollable yearning and consequent outcome is the resultant of existential quest. Arun Joshi’s other novels *The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* also deal with strong existential thoughts. Though existentialism is a western concept, it is in fact as observed by Trimbakro,

> An old wine in a new cup, a new name for an ancient method of Buddhism and Upanishads which insist only on the knowledge of self, this analysis is based on the fact that Man, being a victim of ignorance of his innate tenderness of morality becomes selfish which leads to a sense of blankness over the spirit that makes the world a waste and a vain show.

Jhumpa Lahiri a second generation immigrant projects the loneliness and alienation of her characters like Anita Desai and Arun Joshi. Lahiri was born in London and brought up in Rhode Island but frequently visited India with her parents. Her
experiences of her visits to India, Calcutta were not very comfortable as she experienced cultural crisis. She could not feel at ease with her ethnic identity. Lahiri in his first book, a collection of short stories titled, *The Interpreter of Maladies* which was critically acclaimed and won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize and her first novel, *The Namesake* deal with clash of cultures and problems of identity and integration. In both her works Jhumpa Lahiri, critically studies the nuances of being caught between two different cultures. Her characters have to assimilate the social, religious, and ideological differences of two diverse cultures. In the process they experience existential angst and sense of isolation and meaningfulness of life.

Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri have attempted to bring out the psychological struggle of their protagonists who suffer mental trauma only because of their quest for being authentic to themselves. This existential concern is also immensely portrayed in the writings of several Post-Independence Indian English novelists. The presence of the tenets of existentialism in fiction visibly reveals the rationale that modern Indian English fiction writers are aware and conscious of the sensitive issues of the psychological problems of people. Jacob Golomb’s observes that,

*Camus states that Art, by providing a concrete, though imaginary description of authentic life in an imminent world, is the best means for awakening the greatest number of people.*

iii. **Review of Literature:**

Existential philosophy has influenced Indian English literature immensely. The changing paradigms in Indian English literature reflect the sociological, political and psychological changes in our society. A review of literature highlights the different perspectives of existentialism and the varied techniques adopted by writers to portray the thematic content and the sensitivity of the protagonists. Moreover, it enables the researcher to attain a clearer perspective and greater insight about the issues and concerns of the existential writers especially the Indian English novelists; Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri, whose fictional works are a major part of the research. A large volume of critical works have been in a number of research journals
and several volumes have also been published on existentialism and existential writers.

**Literary Sources (Books):**

Jonathan examines the existential philosophy of Jean – Paul Sartre with reference to the various interpretations of his theory by philosophers. He attempts to bring out a coherent study of the themes of Sartean existentialism with reference to his book, *Being and Nothingness*. After the publication of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre’s philosophy of Existentialism was misunderstood and twisted as something which is depressing and cynical. However, it is the other way round it helps us to understand our true nature and teaches us to accept ourselves as we really are. Sartre’s theory of freedom and responsibility, his interpretation of ‘bad faith’, his views of character as determination of fate, patterns of behaviour traits, etc. are examined by Jonathan in detail with specific reference to Sartre’s book, *Being and Nothingness* to present an understanding of Sartean Existential philosophy.

Ronald compares and contrasts the philosophical views of Camus and Sartre, the two intellectuals, famous playwrights, novelists, philosophers, journalists and editors. He discusses Camus’s absurdity theory with reference to *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*, which explores the meaningless of existence. Camus and Sartre worked parallel to each other. Camus was the editor of the Paris daily, *Combat* and Sartre was the writer of a French political and cultural journal, *Les Temps Moderns*. Camus appreciated Sartre’s theory of absurdity and admired his works but both the philosophers differed in many issues.

Walter Kaufmann expounds the existential philosophy with reference to the works of novelists and philosophers of existentialism. He analyses the writings of Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Rilke, Kafka, Ortega, Jasper, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. Existentialism is considered to be the outcome of different revolts against the traditional philosophy it does not belong to any particular school of thought. Kaufmann discusses Dostoevsky *Notes from Underground*, which is considered to include the best existential thoughts. The major themes of existentialism from
Kierkegaard to Camus are stated in it. A comparison is drawn between the philosophical thoughts of the first existential philosopher Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky is presented to ascertain the argument of Dostoevsky as an existentialist. Kierkegaard was known as an existentialist after First World War and Nietzsche was also considered an existentialist with his marked dissatisfaction with the traditional philosophies. Another existentialist Jaspers was opposed to the title of existentialism but, *it is in the works of Jaspers that the seeds sown by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche grew into existentialism.*

Heidegger like Jaspers was against the title of existentialism he considered it as an inappropriate title and gives detailed explanation of it in, *On Humanism.* Existentialism came into prominence to an international audience with works of Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre’s image of human situation like that Shakespeare, at times whatever decisions we make we cannot escape guilt. His *The Wall, Childhood of a Leader* gives agonised awareness of the existential issues. *The Wall* presents very valid arguments and gives an insight to the ‘central existentialist motif of confrontation with death.’ Kaufmann elaborate discussions enable the readers to understand the story of existentialism and follow the arguments laid down by the existential philosophers.

Jacob Golomb examines the literature and literary works of existential philosophers from Kierkegaard to Camus and analyses their principles of portraying authenticity. Jacob’s enthusiastic quest of authenticity and existentialism reinforces the relevance of existentialism in the present day context. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus and other were in constant search for authentic heroes and characters, unable to find them they resorted to biblical and historical examples. Jacob draws a comparative study of authenticity, sincerity and honesty with reference to Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* and other existential writers. He concludes that the existential writers perhaps agreed on the principle that, *any positive definition of authenticity would be self-nullifying.* Thus authenticity and sincerity are opposed to one another, they cannot be equivalent. *The main aim of the writers of authenticity was to evoke in their readers the pathos of authenticity.* Authenticity in everyday usage is very easy to understand but in reality authenticity is very complex, it has several shades of
philosophical meanings. Jacob’s analysis attempts to find the answers to the various meanings of authenticity. He states that being authentic is a form of madness; people have to passionate and wild, a little outrageous to be truly authentic.  

*Reflections on Contemporary Indian English Fiction* is a collection of literary articles on contemporary Indian English fiction. The extensive volume of articles are contributed by diaspora writers, the postcolonial perspectives of contemporary writers, globalization, growth of technology and communication have all expanded the scope of Indian English fiction. Literary criticism took into consideration the theoretical perspectives and insights of prominent postcolonial thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and others. The socio cultural reality in the postcolonial Indian English fiction was critiqued by taking into consideration Bakhtin’s ideas. The research papers in the anthology are written by a variety of writers of Indian English fiction with a number of varied perspectives. Tejinder Kaur analyses Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* as a diasporic study. P.S. Ramana’s paper on Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* is about the problems faced by educated middle and upper class immigrants and distinguishes their problems from the problems encountered by Punjabi novels where the immigrants are illiterate and semiliterate. N.K. Neb brings out a pragmatic approach to the immigrant experience in Manju Kapur’s novel, *The Immigrant*. Jagroop Singh article on Amitav Gosh’s novel, *The Glass Palace* highlights the differences between the cultural groups of East and West. Anand Bajaj analyses Arundhati Roy’s novel, *The God of Small Things* by explaining the politics of power and knowledge, casteism and patriarchy from the Foucauldian perspective. Rohinton Mistry, V.S. Naipaul, Shashi Tharoor, Shobha De, Shashi Despande are some of the other writers included in the anthology. The critical articles on the selected novelists offer a valuable insight of the changing scenario of contemporary Indian English Fiction.

Literary criticism on the subjects of alienation, quest and existentialism with reference to selected novels offer an interesting study in *Indian Fiction in English: Problems and Promises*, a collection of critical essays about the issues and concerns of Indian English Fiction. The problems and tensions faced by the native Indians, their sensibilities and expressions in a foreign acquired language are analyzed by R. C.
Shukla. The inevitable inclusion of native words and phrases is discussed with reference to Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope*. Raja Rao made extensive use of Sanskrit vocabulary and Kannad sentence patterns in his novels. The problem of selecting themes from a vast variety was another problem discussed in the article. O.P.Mathur compares the detachment, non-involvement philosophy of Arun Joshi’s protagonist to the philosophy of Gita. Some of the novelists critically examined are Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Mulk Raj Anand and others.

Iyengar discusses the changing trends in Indo-Anglian literature, from the very beginning stage, from the writings of Rammohan Roy to the present contemporary scenario. He presents a comprehensive idea of the vast spectrum of Indian English literature inclusive of novelists, poets and prose writers. Anita Desai and Arun Joshi’s works are critically examined. Desai’s “forte, in other words is the exploration of sensibility, *the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among the barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists.***

30 Iyengar critiques Arun Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and comments that,

> Arun Joshi carried his exploration of the consciousness of hapless rootless people a stage further and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chamber of self-forged misery. **31**

Bhatnagar’s anthology offers an insight into Arun Joshi’s works from the sociological and psycho-analytic point of view. It is a critical study of Arun Joshi’s novels; *The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, The Apprentice, The Last Labyrinth* and *The City and The River*. Joshi’s fiction highlights all the tenets of existentialism and his protagonists are constantly groping with the mysteries of life; search for identity, philosophical quest, rootlessness, loneliness and alienation. The quest of SindiOberio, Billy Biswas, SomBhaskar and RathanRathore are very carefully and sentimentally explored by several writers. Urmil critically analyses Billy’s and Sindi’s quest for self, their inner conflicts and restlessness and their ultimate decisions. Paolo Piciucco gives a detailed account of the fictional technique employed by Joshi in his novel, *The Apprentice*. He adeptly mixes the present and past into an intricate pattern while using the stream of consciousness technique.
K.M.Pandey discusses the use of symbol in *The City and the River*. The narrative and the thematic content revolves around the existential belief *the impossibility of being and the being of impossibility*. The anthology is an excellent study of Arun Joshi’s novels.

Geetha, a Paris based Indian scholar, offers a series of analytic observations of the past three decades of the Indian English novel and attempts to analyse the factors that fashioned and consolidated the genre of Indian Novel in English. Geetha Ganapathy Dore attempts to distinguish the terms postcolonialism and postmodernism with reference to the critical arguments of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. She examines the diversity of postcolonial novel by taking into consideration an impressive wide range of novels spanning several years. She pays meticulous attention to the Indian and diasporic literature with specific reference to the works of Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur and several others. Geetha critically analyses the diverse manifold themes pertaining to Indian social, political and religious concern. She also cites the award winning Indian English novelists; Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arvind Adiga, Kiran Desai, etc and concludes that, *the post colonial Indian Novel in English has become an incontrovertible institution of world culture*.

Komalesha examines the issues of identity and identification of post modern Indian English fiction. Global cultural in the contemporary times is flexible subject to frequent changes. It has lead to the emergence of new identities which are fragmented, hyphenated and palimpsestic. Komalesha discusses prominent Indian English writers like M. K. Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Amitav Gosh, Arundhati Roy and others to present an understanding of the inherited and acquired identities, and also the debates concerning authenticity both in the linguistic and literary identity.

Mathur attempts to trace the patterns in Arun Joshi’s novel and examines his existential perspective. He gives a detailed introduction about the Indian English novelists and also about the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. The first of Arun Joshi, *The Foreigner* is studied from the protagonist perspective of attaining redemption through action. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is examined thoroughly and Billy’s redemption through knowledge is
analysed. The identity crisis is resolved when attain his self identity in the uncivilized society. In *The Apprentice* the protagonist resorts to devotion to attain peace of mind. Mathur traces a pattern in the protagonists of Arun Joshi by critically examining all his works.

**Literary Sources (Journals):**

Gavin\(^4^1\) brings out the impact of globalization on the philosophy of existentialism. Globalization is responsible for the drastic inevitable changes on the sociological, psychological and scientific perspectives. The impact of globalization on existentialism is significant as it brought out pragmatic changes and challenges in the daily life of man. Existentialism is the realization of the true authentic identity of Man this sensitive issue has become more complex with the positive and negative effects of globalization. The challenges of culture, increasing dislocation, deconstruction and reconstruction of cultural identities, fear of the unknown, fluidity of cultural changes have greatly impacted the existential thoughts. Sanderson\(^4^2\) states that the existential experiences of man can be analysed from the psychological point of view rather than superficial experiences of an individual.

Cagri\(^4^3\) elucidates the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre by discussing his two plays, *The Flies* and *No Exit*. He elaborates Sartre’s existential thoughts; seeking authenticity in a meaningless and absurd world and man is what he makes of himself, he is free and responsible for his actions. Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* is about human freedom, feeling of anguish and anxiety when man denies taking responsibility for him, it is ‘bad faith’. The two manners of being are ‘being- for- itself’ which is subjective and ‘being- in- itself’ which is objective are discussed and the themes of existentialism are listed in conclusion; absurdity of life, alienation, anxiety, forlornness, responsibility, individuality, authenticity, passion/engagement and death.

Pal\(^4^4\) too like Cagri critically examines Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential philosophy and theory of humanism. Sartre believed that God did not exist, Man is what he makes of himself, he was against the Christian and positive version of humanism, he rejected them and considered them to be absurd. Pal presents a detailed account of Sartre’s
theory of absurdity by critically examining Sarte’s prominent works; *Existentialism and Humanism, Being and Nothingness, Critique of Dialectical Reason* and his play, *Lucifer and the Lord*. Jean-Paul Sartre rejects the popular versions of humanism i.e. Christian Humanism and Positivist Humanism and propogaes that existentialism humanism is true humanism. His belief that Man is supreme, he has no predestined goal or purpose, he is what he makes of himself is the basis of his existential theory.

Navaneethamani discusses Arun Joshi’s second novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and elucidates the sophisticated and disgusting modern way of life in comparison with the simple unsophisticated life of the primitives in a well expressed and persuasive contention. Arun Joshi’s novel has thus two very different segments which are carefully elaborated by Navaneethamini. The first part of the novels subtly introduces the strong inherent primitive urge of Billy Biswas and his social and intellectual life. In this section Arun Joshi focuses on Billy’s spiritual decay, his rejection of social values, his marital relationship with Meena and their lack of understanding. The second part of the novel deals with entire transformation of Billy through his contact with the primitive life and his meeting with his friend, Romi after ten years and his death. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* can thus be considered to be an attack on the modern materialistic way of life and a propagation of the simple primitive way of life of the savavges. Navaneethamani considers the two distinct parts of the novel as two worlds, the world of the rich sophisticated people and that of the poor simple primitive people, two very different ways of lives, cultures, topographical and environmental differences. The plot is woven around Billy, the protagonist, his sufferings from the pangs of existential angst, his frustration against the very system of life and his final escape from the civilized society into the uncivilized primitive society where he completely feels at home. Billy has to face extreme daunting conditions simply to define his true identity. His quest for values in life subjects him to tensions and agony yet he does not hesitate to pursue his quest. The strangeness, awkarkwardness of Billy is traced back to time when he was a young boy of only fourteen. During his visit to the Konark temple in Bhubaneshwar after witnessing a tribal dance he was greatly disturbed. His scorn for civilized society gradually increases as he grows up. The crisis of identity of Billy is strange his sense of rootlessness is within himself, as pointed out by Navaneethamani. Billy was also
attracted to the life of the primitives he had a lot of empathy with them. He has a unique sense of alienation, his rootlessness is within himself, it has nothing to do with his physical location. Whether he is pursuing his research in U.S.A. or his career in India he is constantly experiencing a strange sense of irritation and scorn for the entire civilized society.

Shanmuga discusses the existential crisis of Arun Joshi’s protagonists and his narrative technique with reference to The Last Labyrinth. Shanmuga points out the intense longing of the protagonist, SomBhaskar for love, for spiritual satisfaction and for finding a meaningful answer to his existential crisis. The internal struggle of Som is excellently presented by Joshi in a very sensational manner with ample use of rituals and mysteries. The Last Labyrinth is unmistakably an exploration of the psyche. The psychological concerns of the modern man such as loss of identity, existential confusion and lack of faith in the religious and cultural values of society are very well explored in the novel. The novelist makes use of symbols to project the search for the core values of life. Symbols of labyrinth, haveli, etc are used to indicate the complications of life. The culture conflict is also brought about as the protagonist, SomBhaskar is well aware of the Indian cultural system and also the western pattern of life. Som’s mother was a very religious person while his father was a scientist yet very spiritual. The Last Labyrinth is the pathetic struggle of SomBhaskar to understand his real self and the real need of his life. The labyrinth is used to signify his loss, his confusion, his existential problem- his quest in life. Like all the protagonists of Arun Joshi, Som too finds a solution to his quest. The novelist uses the symbol of Lord Krishna to make a reference to wholeness in life. Arun Joshi technique of narration, use of flashback style with progressive style and introspection narrative enables him to effectively bring out the conflict in the protagonist. Shanmuga states that Joshi’s style and technique of narration of the story is very expressive and indicative, he constantly draws analogous combinations to convey his thoughts.

Narinder discusses Desai’s In Custody and draws out the struggle of illusion and reality to project the existential desire of the protagonist to manifest freedom of choice. He analyses the individual’s desire to make an ideal choice which results in
psyche tension and conflict. The protagonist of Anita Desai’s novel Devan Sharma, experiences conflict as he is caught in contradictions of existential duality, his existential choice and subjective reflections. The inner confrontations of choices are responsible for existential agony and chaos. Desai in her novels concentrates on the duality of choices, the major dualities of her fiction are masculine verses feminine, tradition verses modernity, attachment verses detachment, emotion verses intellect and rational verses irrational. Anita Desai’s explorations of the emotional world of her characters that are caught in the duality of choices are very well analyzed by Narinder. He discusses the novel, *In Custody* thematically in the existential context. The study elaborates the dualism of illusion and reality. Illusion is deceptive, it does not exist in reality, and it deceives the mind by what is unreal. It refers to the state of deceptive condition or idea. In illusion the person deceives himself as he believes the illusion to be reality. Reality is actual experience. The characters of Anita Desai are confused mentally, accept the delusion to be reality as it is a convenience choice and thus suffer from frustration. They are confused about the reality of appearances. Deven’s journey and his search for his own identity and his relationship with his wife are discussed in the article. The agony of the journey and realization of his true self, the conversion of meaninglessness into meaningfulness, his negotiations of the dualities and the final collapse of the dualities are brought about with reference to existential philosophy.

Kajal discusses the existential philosophy of the protagonist of Arun Joshi’s novel *The Foreigner*. SindiOberio, the protagonist experiences all the existential tribulations; anxiety, identity crisis, quest, loneliness, alienation, struggle, etc. The paper discusses *The Foreigner* as an existential novel. Sindi’s philosophy and belief in detachment is the existentiality of the modern man’s quest for meaning in life. His ultimate realization that detachment means right action provides a solution to his existential struggle. Arun Joshi was greatly influenced by the western existential writers and he was also aware of the collapse of old value systems of our society. He saw the contemporary chaotic, restless condition of modern society. In *The Foreigner* he presented effectively the metaphysical and ethical questions and sought the solution of the crisis from Vedanta philosophy. Sindi was a stranger where ever he went, he was born in Kenya of Indian father and English mother, orphaned at the age
of four, and he was brought up by his uncle. Sindi is compared to Albert Camus’s *Meursaulh*, ‘The Stranger’ both the characters experienced a sense of rootlessnesss. Throughout the novel Sindi strives for detachment, he had misunderstood the true meaning of the term, for him detachment meant no commitment. He had refused to marry June, the girl he loved only because he did want any commitments. Realization dawns on Sindi much later, after the death of June and his friend. He seeks redemption by getting involved with Kemka’s business, the illusion of detachment fades and he understands the mistakes he had made in life. Arun Joshi’s existential philosophy, his views about detachment in life is evident in the character of SindiOberio. Joshi’s concept of detachment can be compared to Aldous Huxley’s philosophy of non-attachment which is a positive attitude as the non-attached person is responsible for ending pain and suffering of others.

Arvind discusses the stream of consciousness style used by Arun Joshi to portray the psychological anguish of his protagonists. Like Anita Desai, Arun Joshi is concerned with depiction of the psychological reality, the inner world of his protagonists in its various levels. Arvind states that Sindi’s realization of his alienation, his tormented condition, his rootlessness and sense of foreignness is presented effectively with use of stream of consciousness technique. Arvind compares Sindi to the protagonist of T.S. Eliot’s *Hollow Man*, both the protagonists suffer from a sense of alienation which comes from their inner consciousness. Joshi uses soliloquies, internal monologues and flashbacks to present the psychological struggle of Billy in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, of Ratan in *The Apprentice* and of SomBhaskar in *The Last Labyrinth*.

Shanmuga examines Arun Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* not only from the psychological point of view but also from ecological point of view. Her perspective unlike Navaneethamani focuses on the shift from human - centered to nature - centered perspective of Joshi. Joshi’s personal trait is revealed through his nature-loving, primitive savvy protagonist Biswas. Joshi through the characterization Billy Biswas presents several eco-socialist views, ethno-scientific and ethno-medical information.
Sethuraman\textsuperscript{56} brings out the existential predicament of the female protagonists of Anita Desai’s novel, *Fire on the Mountain*. A critical study of the novels highlights the deep emotional worlds of women, their psyche, and their existential struggle. The three main protagonists, Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das prefer living in isolation, they are recluses and suffer from existential angst. Anita Desai cleverly brings out their inner sufferings by the extensive use of symbols and imagery. Their self-imposed alienation, quest for identity and existential conflicts; are the prominent tenets of existential philosophy which are examined in detail. It is obvious that Nanda Kaul is an examination of existentialism. Raka is portrayed as a symbol of quest and Nanda Kaul is noticeably a study of conflict between the individual and society. All the three protagonists are examined from the larger concept of existentialism, they opt a life of loneliness because of their innate quest and also because of pressures of society. In bringing out a universal significance of the characters, Sethuraman compares Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* to Shakespeare’s renowned tragedy *King Lear*. The suffering of King Lear is suggested by the elaborate use of animal imagery just like in Anita Desai’s novel. The recurrent use of animal imagery is symbolically used to reinforce the tragedy of human life.

Debarati’s\textsuperscript{57} article attempts to map the journeys Indians undertake abroad, across continents and cultures, their existential crisis in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. She examines the characters of *The Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. The Indian immigrants are attracted to their roots in a nostalgic manner and distinguished the experiences of the first and second generation of immigrants. The reactions of Ashima and Ashoke to her adopted culture are different from their children Gogol and Sonali. Shoba, Mrs. Sen and the other characters of *The Interpreter of Maladies* experience anguish and identity crisis in their adopted country. JhumpaLahiri herself experienced the space between two continents and cultures thereby she could present in detail the perspectives of multicultural experiences.

Sujata Rana\textsuperscript{58} critically examines *The Namesake* an award winning novel of JhumpaLahiri and highlights the identity crisis of the the prominent characters. Her protagonists are immigrants who face the crisis of hybrid identities, and universal experience of Indian diaspora. The first generation immigrants are always struggling
to adapt to the realities of a new culture and identity like AshimaGanguli. On the other hand her children, second generation immigrants easily adapt to the new culture while respecting their ethnic identity. Sujata also discusses the complexities of names in Bengal, the pet names and the good names. Gogol’s crisis is symbolic he has a Russian pet name and an Indian good name. To his father, AshokeGanguly the name indicates survival, survival from a near fatal train accident in India. However, Gogol is unable to understand its emotional significance. Gogol was born in America and he behaves like a typical American although his parents tried to retain his ethnic identity. JhumpaLahiri in *The Namesake* explores the existential issues of the protagonists, as commented by Sujata she dexterously examines the complexities of the diasporic experiences, their uniqueness and conflicts. She projects the cultural conflicts of different generations. AshimaGanguli’s cultural conflicts and her children’s attempts to assimilate the two extreme worlds of Indian and American conflicting life styles are the main subject matter of the novel.

Sanjukta also like Sujata deals with the existential crisis and search for identity of Gogol, the protagonist of *The Namesake*. Lahiri’s meticulous examination of the the first and second generation immigrants, their different attitudes and responses are discussed in detail. She also discusses the complications that arise out of giving a Russian name to a second generation immigrant in US. She analyses the Russian connection, the cultural relationship of Bengal and Russia and reviews the politics and problems of the Gogol. Sanjuta elaborates the Russian Bengal association and comments that Lahiri has named her protagonist after a Russian name, Gogol to basically highlight the connection of Bengali and Russain literature and their cultural associations.

Amita Shresth examines Anita Desai’s *Cry the Peacock* and *Fire on the Mountain*. Her study concentrates on the theme and technique adopted by Desai. Her novels are technical innovations as she does not concentrate on creating the plot but on creating characters. The characters and events blend naturally to unravel the plot. The rootlessness and alienation of her protagonists, their quest and existential dilemma are all well presented by a powerful narrative technique with extensive use of imagery and symbols. *Cry the Peacock* begins with an event, the death of a pet dog this event
is used to reveal the characteristics of the protagonists, Maya and Gautama. The sequencing of the events are psychological not chronological. In *Fire on the Mountain* Desai presents the plot by dividing the novel into three distinct parts, ‘Nanda Kaul at Carignano’, ‘Raka comes to Carignano’ and ‘Ila Das leaves Carignano’. She then juxtaposes all the three parts by presenting three protagonists all the three suffer from existential agony and prefer to live life according to their own terms and conditions. By using the flash back technique of narration the novelist blends the past and present.

Chandran and Baskaran\(^63\) analyse Arun Joshi’s novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* with emphasis on the existential quest of the protagonist, Billy Biswas. The novel is about a strange quest, conflict between the rational self and the resistance to the rational quest, it is an individualistic as well as philosophical quest. Billy Biswas desires to live life realistically devoid of any superficiality of modern society. He has an innate, inherent aptitude for primitive life. He was supposed to study engineering instead he opted for Anthropology. Throughout his life he makes several deliberate attempts to live life naturally, make his own choices. As a student in US he preferred living in Harlem with the Black Americans, choosing to be in isolation from the civilized society. He is constantly drawn by two oppositions civilized society and uncivilized primitive life. Billy exit from civilized society to the jungles, his contact with the savage society of the jungle is a symbolic end to his quest, to his restlessness. The civilized society was like a hollow vaccum for Billy, it did not offer him any peace or purpose of existence, and on the contrary the jungles were more appealing and gave him the sense of identity which he was perpetually searching it, *light up the vacancy of his heart*.\(^64\)

Sridevi\(^65\) discusses Anita Desai’s *Where Shall We Go This Summer* as an existential novel. She analyses the existential crisis of Sita, the protagonist. The novel is about the sense of despair, loneliness and relationship of Sita with her husband Raman. The differences in the attitudes of husband and wife lead to marital discord. Sita is a sentimental emotional wife she cannot accept her husband’s practical approach to life. She suffers from existential agony like Maya of *Cry the Peacock* and Monisha in *Voices in the City*. Sridevi attempts to understand the psychology of
Sitaby presenting a glaring contrast between the carefree lives of Sita in the rural areas with the harsh, restrained urban life. She feels a sense of rootlessness in the city, a sense of emptiness, suffers from all the tenets of existentialism. Her incapability to face reality is the root cause of her suffering. However, later she realizes the meaningless of her fears and anxieties. She prepares herself to face the challenges of urban life and face reality. Anita Desai in this novel focuses on the psychological perspectives and the emotional crisis of Sita and presents alternate solutions to the existential angst.

Sharma discusses the theme of familial relationships of Anita Desai’s novel Cry the Peacock. Anita Desai novels are always critiqued as existential novels, as the theme of loneliness alienation and meaninglessness of life are extensively dealt with. Sharma examines the familial relationship of the protagonist Maya, her inability to maintain a meaningful relationship with her husband, Gautama. Both Maya and Gautama had entirely different upbringings so the disparity in their characteristics and opinions lead to conflict and ultimate disaster. She compares and contrasts two very different characters.

Densingh explains existential philosophy by linking it with the anguish of diaspora. He discusses the development of diaspora in the post-colonial literature with reference to JhumpaLahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies. All the nine stories in the collection portray the diasporic experiences of the protagonists of the short stories. Most of them are second generation immigrants who are unable to cope with the sense of identity with the host country. Densingh examines the interaction of cultures of the immigrants and the gradual influence of the dominant culture. A critical analysis of all the stories highlights the central themes of the collection of stories; sense of alienation, humiliating experiences of Indian immigrants in a foreign culture. Moreover the failing marital relationships and existential angst further enhance the misery.

Priyanka like Densingh examines the themes of identity loss and cross cultural lives of South Asian diasporic community of the protagonists of JhumpaLahiri’s in her collection of stories, Interpreter of Maladies. All the nine stories bring out the
agon of ‘living-in-between’ condition of Indians and Indian Americans, their confusion and pain in trying to adapt to the adopted culture and in retaining the values of the inherited culture. The quest of identity of the immigrants and their psychological confusions and sufferings are subtly presented in the stories.

Vidya comments on the remarkable changes in contemporary Indian English novel and the recurrent themes concerning issues related to multiculturalism in post colonial literature located in metropolitan west. The contemporary writers and their works are discussed with reference to their obsession of blending the past and the present, the imperial and the colonial culture. She examines the Indian English novelists’ right from Bankincha Chatterjee’s novel, Rajmohan’s Wife to Chetan Bhagat’s Three Mistakes of My Life highlighting the various stages of transformation of the contemporary themes and styles of writing.

Amit Shah discusses the changing concerns of the earlier Indian English diasporic writers and the modern writers. However, spiritual and psychological alienation is an integral part of migration whether it is voluntary or involuntary. Alienation, displacement and existential angst are all a part of exile literature. Indian writers like Anita Desai, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Amita Gosh, Jhumpa Lahiri and others have explored these themes effectively. They have widened the sphere to include the global issues of identity crisis of immigrants. Shah states that these novelists have presented the cultural and geographical changes of the immigrants and their exploration of the struggles in an expressive and impressive manner.

Rumita Sharma discusses Anita Desai’s novel, Cry the Peacock. She analyses the temperamental incompatibility of the married couple Maya and Gautama. She has very effectively analysed the threats of blissful married life i.e. lack of understanding and incompatibility with reference to various different episodes such as the death of Maya’s pet dog, Toto; Maya’s strong desire to visit South to see the kathakali dancers as against her husband’s wish, her love for the simple pleasures of life as against her husband’s desires, etc. The temperamental differences between the couple lead to a lot of psychological strain, stress and finally Maya’s psychic disintegration leading to insanity and ultimately the death of Gautama and Maya.
Chaturvedi examines the major trends of Indian English novel by discussing the pre-independence and post-independence era of Indian English novel with reference to prominent novelists like Bankimchand Chatterjee, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. The major concerns of these novelists were portrayal of social-economic issues of India. It was followed by the freedom struggle anxieties and political and historical issues by novelists like K.A. Abbas, Kushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahagal and others. Apart from political concerns another major trend that interested the post-independence writers was the East-West encounter. This subject was extensively treated by Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Manohar Malgoankar. Gradually the focus shifted from projection of external to internal, socio-political issues to existential concerns of individuals. Anita Desai and Arun Joshi vehemently concentrated on the identity crisis of modern man. Another trend of post-independence novel is expression was feminine sensibility which was significantly dealt with by novelists such as Anita Desai, Kamala Das, R.P. Jhabvala, Manju Kapoor, Kiran Desai and other women novelist. Another dominant trend which emerged was Magic Realism in the works of novelists like Salman Rushdie, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai and others. Chaturvedi’s vivid and concise article outlines the major trends of Indian English novels.

While Chaturvedi discusses the major trends of Indian English novel Mashale analyses the post colonial perspectives in Indian English novels. He begins his analyses by giving a detailed definition of the term post-colonial, which is contemporary debatable topic of discussion in literary studies. Mashale discusses the three generation of Indian English novelists. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao belong to the first generation of Indian English novelists. The writers of the next generation who augmented Indian English fiction were Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal and others. The third generation of writers brought a lot of fame and attained international acclaim, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy and others. Several critical theories and schools of criticism impacted postcolonial literature however nationalism played a very important role.
The inevitable influence of social, political and cultural developments of India on the Indian English novel is obvious from the very beginning. Kumar Sanjiv details the transforming realities from the time of the great trio to the present day fiction writers. The earlier Indian English novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao and Kamala Markandaya concentrated on the projection of the realistic situation of Indian, exposed the ugly, unpleasant realities which the purpose of bringing about awareness and transformation of Indian society. Consequently themes pertaining to poverty, pathetic condition of subjugated women, nationalism, partition, etc were the concerns. The post modern novelists have deviated from the great towering personalities of Indian fiction and have set their scenario on an entirely new set of wide ranging complex themes in sync with the age of globalization. Themes as wide ranging as multiculturalism, cultural conflicts, degeneration of ethical values, scams, diasporic susceptibility, consumerisation, BPO’s, etc have dominated the literary world. Indian English novel has redefined the portrayal of social, economic and cultural realities. Novelists like Chetan Bhagat, Aravind Adiga, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Sobha De and several other Indian English writers have gained prominence.

Kamalakkannan attempts to define the term postmodernism which cannot be limited to any single particular criterion. It has a wide connotation inclusive of various aspects of society, art and culture. He critically examines the Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism to get a better understanding of the term. According to Lyotard man position in the present modern world is pathetic. He has no religious, social or philosophical theories to rely on. Everything concerning morality, ethics and justice is questioned and all values have collapsed.

An in-depth study of the literature review and critical works of philosophers makes it clear that literary criticism of the philosophy of existentialism holds great significance in the present context of global and inter cultural scenario. Indian English writers like their western counterparts have explored this philosophy extensively and remarkably.
Aim, Objectives, Scope and Limitations

The aim of the thesis is to initiate critical thinking and interpretations of scholars about the existential issues and how authors have contemplated this idea in their literary works. An understanding of the existential issues and a detailed study of them will enable a decent understanding and empathetic attitude towards people who suffer from existential angst and consequently help to prevent several unpleasant consequences of existentialism, and thereby bring out the positivism of the approach. The objective is to provide students with the required tools to recognize the existential themes, thoughts and ideas in literature. The thesis will examine the selected novels from existential perspectives and will subsequently deal with the relevant concerns of psychological aspect of the protagonists. The limitations of the study will thus been to the existential concerns only, leaving immense scope for the other approaches to literature such as postmodernist’s, psychoanalytical, social, political or feminist.

The present thesis will analyze, critically discuss and draw a comparative study of the selected works of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and JhumpaLahiri: Cry The Peacock, Fire on The Mountain, The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, The Namesake and a collection of short stories, Interpreter of Maladies. The philosophy of existentialism with reference to prominent philosophers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre will be analyzed in detail along with the prominent works of French, German, Russian and English existential novelists. Reference will be drawn from, Franz Kafka’s The Trial, Jean Paul Sartre’s Nausea, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment, Albert Camus’s The Stranger, Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway.

Anita Desai is one of the foremost and finest writers of Indian English Literature. Her original name was Anita Mazumdar, she was born to a German mother and Indian father. She has an international reputation, was shortlisted thrice for Booker Prize. Her novel, Fire on the Mountain (1977) received great critical acclaim and was honoured with Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize, it was also given SahityaAkademi Award. Desai’s The Village by the Sea was honored with Guardian Children’s Fiction Award. Her excellent characterization, rich style and originality of subject matter
have led to comparisons with prominent international writers like Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner and others. Her fictional works, *Cry the Peacock* and *Fire on the Mountain* are intensive psychological study of the existential crisis faced by very sensitive women who are caught in the web of social and domestic responsibilities. *Cry the Peacock* Desai’s first novel is about the psychological journey of Maya, a young housewife married to an elderly man, Gautam. In the *Fire on the Mountain* Anita Desai takes up the concerns of escapist tendency of her protagonists. The main protagonist Nanda Kaul decides to live all by herself in an isolated place however after fulfilling all her duties of a wife and mother. She prefers a live of isolation and peace after living a very hectic life. However Nanda Kaul’s peaceful live is disturbed when she is given the responsibility of caring for her great grand daughter. Desai effectively bring out the existential agony of her protagonists, especially women who are compelled to live as per the dictates of societal norms. She attempts to highlight the existentialist problems and predicaments of women. She explores the emotional world of women, feminine sensibility and psychology. All her protagonists are female who are trying to discover their identity, find a meaningful existence. They are very much different from the normal characters their constant quest makes them abnormal and alienated. Their perpetual deliberations and ruminations help them to understand the unexplored landscapes of lives which were until then unobserved.

Arun Joshi winner of prestigious SahityaAkademi Award is a novelist who concentrates on the existential dilemma of modern man. He articulates the confusion of values leading to identity crisis of the post independent Indian men who are trapped between the traditional values and western culture. Joshi reveals great insight and awareness of the conflicts of the inner psyche of individuals. Arun Joshi’s fictional world revolves around existential characters, constantly pursued by the inner voice of conflict, identity crisis and existential dilemma. They struggle against their own self and against social conventions. Their conflict is within themselves, what they are and the reasonable expectations of society. Joshi’s *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* won critical acclaim. The protagonists, SindiOberio and Billy Biswas offer interesting study of existentialism. Sindi’s identity crisis, his sense of alienation and detachment is different from Maya’s crisis. Maya undergoes intense psychological trauma only for her resilient longing for attachment and involvement
like Billy who suffers because of his own philosophy of detachment, a sense of ‘foreigness’ which he experiences amidst civilized society and an intense longing for the primitive world.

Jhumpa Lahiri, born to Bengali parents in London, brought up in the United States, married to Alberto Vourvolias Bush, an American, and is now based in Brooklyn. Her continental drift through England and the United States is similar to that of Anita Desai. Her sensitivity of cross-cultural experiences shows drastic shifts in her focus and concern regarding transnational identities and their cultural adaptation. The present study approaches the issues of identity crisis and alienation from the perspective of diaspora and postcolonial theory. A critical analysis of the prominent characters of Shoba, Mr. Pirzada, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Sen, Boori Ma from Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* and Ashima and Gogol from the novel, *Namesake* focusing on theories of existentialism will be undertaken. The thesis will analyze all the above mentioned works and draw a comparative study with reference to the philosophy of Existentialism.

The chapters of the thesis are arranged as follows-

**Chapter 1** titled, ‘Introduction’ deals with the changing paradigms of Indian English literature. It also presents an introduction to the philosophy of Existentialism and the theories of major philosophers of existentialism. Soren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger and Albert Camus are some of the prominent philosophers associated with existential thoughts. Existentialism as a movement became widespread after First World War in Europe. It believes that man is only responsible for his actions. Existentialism is about the psychological conflicts of human beings in their attempt to lead a meaningful existence.

Jean-Paul Sartre is considered to be the representative of existentialism. It contains a concise assessment of the common themes of postcolonial Indian English novels and the shifting paradigms of the modern novelists. Taking a departure from the first generation of Indian English novelists, the Postmodern Indian English novelists have concentrated on an entirely new-fangled set of themes which are as wide-ranging and complex as the life in the age of globalization is. The introductory chapter also includes review of literature and the aim, objective and limitation of the present study.
The subsections of the chapter are as follows-

1.1 The Shifting Paradigms in Indian English Literature
1.2 Existentialism
1.3 Review of Literature
   a. Literary Sources
   b. Journals
1.4 Aim, Objective, Scope and Limitation

Chapter 2 titled ‘Existentialism in Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and JhumpaLahiri’ is a critical and comparative study of the six selected novels; Cry the Peacock, Fire on the Mountain, The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, Namesake and The Interpreter of Maladies from the existentialist point of view. The chapter is segmented into three parts to present three different perspectives;

2.1 The Existential Quest
2.2 Alienation and Isolation
2.3 Existential Angst.

The section ‘Existential Quest’ will deal with the constant irresistible overpowering quest of all the protagonists of the selected works, Maya, Raka, SindiOberio, Billy Biswas, Gogol and others to arrive at a supposition that their existential quest are basically responsible for their actions in life, for their destiny. ‘Alienation and Isolation’ section deals with the consequences of the quest and the disappointments due to unfulfilled urges. ‘Existential Angst’ discusses the various tenets of existentialism such as anxiety, anguish, despair that drive the protagonists to act against the norms laid down by society. The resultant acts may vary from insanity and absurdity to self-destructive behaviour or suicide.

Chapter 3 titled ‘Psychological Landscape in Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and JhumpaLahiri: A Comparative Study’ is an extension of second chapter, a critical study of the protagonists of the selected novels, SindiOberio, Billy Biswas, Nanda Kaul, Raka, Shoba, Mr. Pirzada, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Sen, Boorima and others as they share similar pangs of loneliness, alienation and existential crisis. This Chapter also
discusses the consequent effects of existentialism, the various disputes, arguments and intricacies. They suffer nervousness and disappointments unable to understand their existential angst that are responsible for unpleasant and difficult relationships. This chapter includes two sub sections:

3.1 Psychological Conflict
3.2 Escapism.

Chapter 4 titled ‘Technique as Extended Comment on Theme’ focuses on the style and techniques adopted by the three novelists Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and JhumpaLahiri to unravel the plot and bring out the identity crisis of the characters in the selected novels. Technique is a broad term inclusive of all the aspects a writer employs to narrate the story. It includes a study of usage of language, imagery, symbolism, point of view, division of episodes etc. In order to present a comprehensive view of all the aspects of technique this section is subdivided as follows –
4.1 Narrative Technique
4.2 Stream of Consciousness Technique
4.3 Use of Symbolism.

Chapter 5 titled, ‘Conclusion’ sums up themes of the previous chapters and evaluates the fictional works from the existential point of view. Characters that are entangled in the absurd situations constantly trying to find meaning in life are often misunderstood and considered abnormal aberrant in society. Unfortunately their lives are sacrificed like Billy Biswasas and Mayas. A sympathetic attitude can facilitate them to come out of their existential conditions and make their life meaningful and worth living. The chapter briefly presents the views of the critics on the selected novelists; Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and JhumpaLahiri and their fictional works. This section also includes the aim, objective, scope and limitations of the study.

The chapter is divided into the following sub sections-
5.1 Introduction
5.2 Review of Existentialism
5.3 Summation of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and JhumpaLahiri’s characters.
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