i. Existential Quest

The quest for meaning in life is a prominent tenet of the philosophy of existentialism. Meaning in life, according to the existentialists can be found only in the constant grapple with one’s inner self, an attempt to be true to oneself. As stated by Golomb,

*When people are confused as to their self-identity, a serious quest for genuine self can begin. When one is painfully conscious of the danger of abandoning one’s self, a cry for authenticity is heard.*  

The quest for meaning in life may begin with an unpleasant incident in one’s life or by a sense of meaningless or by the simple desire to achieve happiness and fulfillment in life. This tenet of existentialism is very powerfully and lucidly dealt with in all the selected works undertaken for the study, *Cry the Peacock, Fire on the Mountain, The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, The Namesake* and *Interpreter of Maladies*. The protagonists of all the selected works suffer from existential angst as a result of their quest for meaning in life. The quest for a meaningful existence is a perpetual challenge it requires immense courage and determination. Only few people possess the courage to assert their individuality and take up the challenges which arise. As going against the flow of society will lead to loneliness and isolation. Golomb observes that,

*Literary enticement to authenticity is thus directed at the courageous few who are able to bear the uncertainty of the search for authenticity and the pain that will be incurred in the often frustrating search.*

Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* portrays the courage of Clarissa Dalloway to lead a meaningful life, to lead a life of meaningful existence. She makes her own choice and opts to marry Richard instead of Peter or Sally whom she loved. Clarissa knew
that in a male dominated society of England in 1920’s she will have no freedom. Richard on the other hand would give her complete freedom. Clarissa’s existential struggle, quest and anxiety are present throughout the novel. Woolf also brings out the existential angst of a meaningless life in the character of Septimus Warren Smith in his despair and consequent suicide. Mrs Dalloway’s characteristics are akin to that of Maya, the protagonist of Anita Desai’s novel Cry the Peacock.

Anita Desai, a contemporary Indian English novelist writes about the personal lives of individuals, she delves deeply into the inner psyche of her characters. They cannot escape from the realities of life, they have to face them and bear the consequences. Maya, the protagonist of Anita Desai’s first novel, Cry the Peacock is a hyper sensitive young housewife, she is confined in an unpleasant relationship with her husband, Gautama who does not believe in love and intimacy. The age difference between the husband and wife is also more. The practical detached world of Gautama is detested by Maya and she is unable to understand and tackle the situation. Subsequently she is dejected, lonely and demoralized. After the death of her mother, she was brought up with great love and care by her father, like a toy princess, protected from the harsh reality of life. Desai very systematically and gradually portrays Maya existential dilemma, her search for self-identity. The conflict between aspirations and the harsh reality of existence have a crumpling effect on Maya’s inner being. Her constant quest to be true to her inner self is the cause of her suffering. Maya fights a grim psychological battle. Anita Desai depicts Maya as a miserable person who is incapable of shouldering the responsibilities of an adult married woman she is childish and unable to come out of her childhood fairy land even after being married for four long years. Maya’s life is full of tensions, disappointments, anxieties and fears. All these factors drive her to madness, as she is not strong enough to face the harsh realities of life. Desai’s novels highlight the sacredness and dignity of self, the existential quest for peace and harmony within the self. Maya’s loneliness is the also the result of a sense of being neglected by her husband. When Toto, her pet dog dies she feels all the more lonely and anxious. She broods silently reflecting her sorrowful pathetic condition.³

Maya’s quest is interrelated with her desire of involvement with everything around her unlike Sindi Oberio’s, the protagonist of Arun Joshi’s The Foreigner.
Sindi on the other hand attempts to resolve his problem of ‘foreignness’ by being detached. However, later he realizes how he had misinterpreted detachment and moves from the negative philosophy to its positive aspect. He understands that performance of one’s duty without any expectations is actual detachment as per the dictates of the *Bhagwat Gita*. His wife Maya things otherwise she is lively and enthusiastic she wants to enjoy all the good things that life can offer. She loves nature, poetry, music, dance, good food and her marriage with Gautama. Her quest is simple pleasures of life, to be true to herself. Unfortunately Gautama thinks otherwise, he considers her desires as childish, his lack of concern for her sentiments, his practicality drives her mad. *Cry the Peacock* effectively portrays the extremely sensitive Maya’s existential quest.

Maya’s restlessness and anxiety is about the realization that her quest for a fulfilling life with Gautama was impossible as they were distanced by their different sensibilities and attitudes. When all efforts to get Gautama involved in her life fails and his unresponsive to her desperate calls for intimacy makes her realize the futility of their relationship. Like the marital relationship of Clarissa and Richard in *Mrs Dalloway*. Clarissa like Maya belongs to an affluent family but experiences loneliness and frustration due to lack of intimacy in marriage. Her husband, Richard is preoccupied with his social responsibilities and politics. When Maya’s loneliness intensifies, her loveless life becomes unbearable. Gautama like Richard is completely insensitive to her suffering to her existential quest he dismisses her longings, fears and anxieties as childish, often quotes from *Gita* to emphaise the philosophy of detachment and involvement. Maya is extremely disturbed by Gautama’s views about the philosophy of detachment, he often quotes that only if a person’s mind remains peaceful undisturbed without any desire for pleasure, remains unattached and fearless only he can claim to have *steady wisdom*. 4

The agony and psychological turmoil in Maya’s mind due to her inability to achieve her inner peace is comparable to that of Billy of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Billy unlike Maya had a very a supportive, loving spouse but his strange quest for his true self made him restless. In spite of having everything in life he was unhappy and detached because of his inner quest for self-identity like Maya. Maya’s
quest for self assertion ends in a very sad manner as in state of frenzy she happens to kill her husband. Billy on the other hand fulfils his quest by escaping to the primitive world. Both of them feel no remorse for their actions. Maya continues with her usual merriment after the death of Gautam, she is relaxed, free to enjoy her life as she desires. She happily opens cupboards at her father’s place and is thrilled looking at her picture books and photographs, dancing joyfully. Her in laws are unable to comprehend her strange behaviour. Finally Maya in her state of insanity kills herself.

Anita Desai draws a similarity between Maya and the peacocks. The peacocks are known to fight before mating Maya killed her husband and later dies in her enjoyment, in her love with life.

Anita Desai’s main character of *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda Kaul, looks for peace and isolation. Her quest is an existential longing to lead her life only for herself, an independent life devoid of responsibilities and concerns. Nanda Kaul was overburdened with responsibilities as her husband served as the Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University she had lived a very hectic life. Her relationship with her husband was a relationship of convenience. She did not share any emotional bond with him, he was unfaithful and demanding. She never loved him but merely fulfilled the duties of a wife. Maya was very sensitive and impatient but Nanda Kaul was very patience and sensible. It was only after the fulfillment of all her responsibilities as a wife and a mother, after a lifelong period of caring for a large demanding family, of her husband and three daughters, she decides to attend to her quest of self identity by alienating herself and living in Carignano, a secluded place in Kausali. Nanda Kaul is more like Sindi Oberio, in her conscious effort to find her identity by being detached.

Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das, all the three protagonists of *Fire on The Mountain* are constantly in search for their true identities. Their existential quest makes them alienated but they vehemently pursue their goals. Ralph Freedom critiques this form of fiction as, the main figures of the novel are always in quest for a meaningful existence and in projecting their quest for a meaningful existence Desai presents the external world as a parallel to the internal psychological world of conflicts.\(^5\)
Nanda Kaul was determined to find meaning in life she had the courage and determination to isolate herself from her family and friends. She hated to be disturbed she loved the isolation and barrenness of Carignano and enjoyed the quiet and peaceful life. Nanda detests company so much that even the news of the arrival of her great grand child, Raka disturbs her. However Raka happens to be more like Nanda Kaul, she prefers to be all by herself. Raka is a significant character, although a simple young girl, she is determined to revolt against societal norms, seeks her own identity. Her turbulent childhood has made her bitter she detests company and pursues her existential quest of being true to herself. At Carignano she often slips out of the house quietly and explores the mysteries of nature. She only desire was to be left alone, without any fear or worry she has her adventures amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli. Raka's existential quest for finding meaning is life is well conveyed through the forest fire. She sets the forest on fire symbolically meaning getting rid of her existential angst and a new beginning. Anita Desai has portrayed the existential quest of Raka parallel to that of Nanda Kaul. Both of them enjoyed their privacy at Carignano. Another prominent character of *Fire on the Mountain* Ila Das, in spite of ill health, poverty and loneliness steadfastly continues her social work, nothing deters her. Ila pursues her innate sense of social responsibility, her existential quest in spite of all the oddities of life until the end, when she is raped and murdered. Ila’s struggle represents the universal angst of oppression widely prevalent in a male dominated society. Nanda Kaul dies of shock after hearing of Ila Das’s death and Raka sets the forest on fire. Anita Desai has taken three protagonists of entirely different characteristics suffering from different existential issues and brought them together to convey the universal existential struggle of women to find a meaningful existence.

Arun Joshi, a contemporary Indian English novelist in close affinity with Anita Desai is concerned with the existential quest of modern man. While Anita Desai’s protagonists are all women, Arun Joshi’s protagonists are all male characters. Dwivedi observes that,

*Like the works of modern existential thinkers, Joshi’s novels express the absurdity of man’s existence in modern world but they assert their singularity in applying them in the modern context and deriving solutions from native milieu.*
The basic existential tenet that living or actual existence is more important than theories of life is amply verified in the destinies of Arun Joshi’s characters. Sindi Oberoi learns the hard way that ‘foreignness’ is more a state of mind than an alienness caused by the accident of birth in any particular country. Sindi’s mother was an English woman and his father was a Kenyan Indian and when they die he is brought up in Kenya by his uncle. Lack of familial ties leaves his childhood days under the veil of emotional aridity and this sense of rootlessness dogs his footsteps even when he goes first to England and later to America to pursue his studies. Sindi Oberio’s quest for being for lacking a sense of belonging makes him a detached individual. Though he receives the love of many women like Anny, Kathy and June he fights shy of getting involved with any of them for love was equated by him with selfishness, attachment and possession. His objection to marriage is rooted not so much in his defiance of accepted social norms as in his fear of its destructive possessiveness. To him each human self is a solitary cell and nothing least of marriage can ever help individuals to step out of that cell of loneliness. This is the reason for his refusing to marry June though he is genuinely fond of her and is aware of her willingness to becoming his partner in life. He feels the need for love but holds back from extending love to others because of his peculiar fear psychosis. His orphaned condition, his lack of familial ties, his acute sense of rootlessness, his feeling like an alien in every country he visits are all responsible for this quirk in his personality. Added to all this he has a misguided reverence for ‘detachment’ which he has developed over the years more or less as a defense mechanism to avert all possible encroachment on his closely guarded aloofness. Baffled by his emotional reticence June observes that,

*There is something strange about you, you know. Something distant I’d guess that when people are with you they don’t feel like they are with a human being.*

This should not mean that we have in Arun Joshi’s novels a well defined aesthetic credo. He is too good an artist to tether his themes to any single school of thought. The wide range and variety of his artistic inspiration is not jeopardized by conscious calcification of themes into any pre-set ideational molds. What we find in Arun Joshi’s novels is therefore a subterranean undercurrent of existential thought that
leaves a distinctive colouring on each one of his novels without submerging their essential differences from one another either in subject or in style. Writers like Camus have rightly suggested that ‘un involvement’ is neither possible nor normally right, for man as a social being, can find abiding happiness only in ‘solidarity’ or sincere involvement is cause undertaken in a selfless spirit for the promotion of the welfare of society in general. Sindi shocked and distressed after the death of Babu, his friend leaves for India. In India he works for Kemka and later after the collapse of Kemka’s business his decision to take up the responsibility of the firm to save the workers from being terminated reflects Sindi’s realization of the theory of detachment, which is actually involvement and right action. As commented by Abraham,

_Sindi’s theory of detachment however removed from it may be from Indian version, is Indian all the same. The value is Upanisadic and a modified version of that of the Bhagavat Gita, as the effect is similar._

8

We find in Sindi’s redefinition of his earlier views on detachment as ‘right action’ instead of as ‘non action’, an artistic verification of this creed. Arun Joshi’s skill lies in subtly merging this with the Bhagavat Gita’s version of detachment as motive free disinterested involvement in the duties of life. Sindi himself has a vague glimmering that the crux of his despondency lay in his own incapacity to reach out to people and establish satisfying emotional rapport with them and hence his statement about his state of foreignness which existed within him and this feeling of alienation continued to remain with him wherever he went. 9

Bimal Biswas known as Billy in the novel, _The Strange Case of Billy Biswas_ had all the luxuries of life and he is brought up with great love and affection. His father was a Supreme Court judge so he was educated in the best school and college. He had been to Doon school and later to St. Stephens and Columbia University, New York. As son of a Supreme Court judge he did not lack material comforts. As an only child he had all the attention of his doting parents. He had his share of love and loyalty in Tuula and Romesh but all these were offered to him on a platter so to say and that left him with a nagging sense that his life lacked fullness and purpose. He longed to be understood, Joshi attempts to portray the unsuccessful longing and desperate cry of
Billy. Fascinated as he is by the primitive way of life Billy finds in all his attainments only a superficial gloss that fails miserably to satisfy his hunger for the peace and the adventure that only life in the jungle can offer. The first few chapters of the novel are about Billy's social and intellectual life and his strong primitive urge and his gradual spiritual decay, his rejection of social values.

Romi, Billy’s friend is a detached narrator he is unable to comprehend the mysterious quest that impelled Billy to shun the so-called civilized society. Unlike Sindi Oberio in the *The Foreigner* or in *The Apprentice* Billy is a rebel, he never makes compromises, he never falters, and he courageous faces the crisis of life. Billy is from a elite sophisticated family. He has a beautiful wife and son but in spite of his having all the material comforts he does seem to relish them, his strange quest makes him uneasy. This strong spiritual urge, the intense primitive cravings existed in Billy since his childhood days. Even at the age of fourteen a tribal dance makes him extremely restless. His natural aptitude for anthropology made him give up engineering for a Ph.D degree for Anthropology. The only two people who understand Billy’s excessive sensibility and profound obsessions are his friend, and narrator, Romi and his Swedish friend, Tuula Lindgren. Billy’s quest is evident in his friend’s Tuula’s statement, she being a very observant and alert person notices that Billy is overwhelmed by the great pull of the primitive influence which he finds difficult to resist. She very well understands Billy pathetic condition, she says he *is afraid of it and tries to suppress it.*\(^{10}\) The letters written to Tuula give us an idea of Billy’s quest. Billy’s strange love for primitive life is also reflected in his letters written to Tuula, he had once written to her after his return from an expedition about his feelings and attachment with primitivism. Billy had stated that the sense and feeling of oneness with the primitive world remained with him for several days after returning from his expeditions.\(^{11}\)

Billy’s only recourse from the overpowering influence of primitivism, at first was the going to the forests of various states of India with his students of anthropology. During one such expedition to the Satpura Hills Billy is literary possessed by the beauty and charm of the place, the obsession is unconquerable, he simply flees, disappears from the civilized world. He gives up the civilized, hypocritical, deceitful
society and opts for primitive life. As Nawale states Billy’s venture into the forest cannot be termed as an escape from reality, it can be stated as *an escape into reality on the lines of Prince Siddharth.*

Billy unlike Sindi Oberio had a family, tradition, culture and values, conventional roots to support him, guide him yet he feels like a foreigner in civilized society. Sindi’s case was different he had no moral or cultural support system or family whatsoever to retreat to. Thus the novel is about the surrender to one’s innate urge for simple, rustic life. It is about the existential longing for unpretentious, uncomplicated life against modern and materialist sophisticated urban life. As observed by Naik Arun Joshi is a prominent Indian English novelist who is gravely concerned with existentialism as he is well aware of the issues and concerns of the *postmodern Indian society and the implications of the East- West encounter.* His protagonists as observed by Dwivedi are infused with an irresistible desire to establish their own place in *relation to themselves, to their society and also to humanity at large.* Though their existential quest is extremely tiring they do not give up but pursue their quest with greater determination bravely countering the hurdles which they encounter.

Jhumpa Lahiri another prominent Indian English novelist is a first generation American Indian. She thus inevitably concerns her interest in the diasporic experiences and existential angst of immigrants in her very first literary work, *Interpreter of Maladies* and also in her first novel, *The Namesake.* Most of her characters are women immigrants constantly in quest of their identity, in a state of dilemma and confusion as the values of their ethnic country are in contrast to the values of their adopted country. Immigration is a natural process in the postmodern period people migrate for education or for better career prospects. It means an adaptation to new cultures in the contemporary globalized atmosphere. However the process is not simple as people have to tackle various problems and issues. Contemporary fiction extensively explores these existential issues. Jhumpa Lahiri attempts to tackle these issues of immigrants in her collection of stories and also in her novel, *The Namesake.* She deals with these problems in a rational way and tries to come up with solutions to resolve the existential crisis of the immigrants. Most of the stories are set in the background of across countries.
*Interpreter of Maladies* deals with the experiences of Indians who have immigrated to America and the differences in the cultures of the two countries. She analyses the assets and liabilities, the sorrows and joys of assimilation, it also examines in great detail the existential quest of the protagonists of the stories. It is also about the existential quest of Indians and Indian Americans struggling with identity issues. Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* (2003) is extraordinarily subtle in its existential concerns. It echoes the existential quest and angst of disillusionment and despairs, loneliness and alienation of Ashima, Ashoke Ganguli and Gogol. Another collection of stories, *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) also explores simple human emotions such as loneliness, love, jealousy experienced in the search for one’s identity. Thus in all her literary works Jhumpa Lahiri very efficiently brings out the crisis of dual identity, the universal experience of Indian diaspora, irrespective of religion or region and the inner conflicts of her characters in their pursuit of self-identity. Her characters are positioned in a globalized multicultural situation as Homi Bhabha states,

*We are led to a philosophical and political responsibility for conceiving a minoritization and globalization as the quasi-colonial, a condition at once old and new…. ’*\(^{15}\)

The prominent characters of Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*; Shoba, Mr. Pirzada, Mrs. Das, Mrs.Sen, Boorima and others are striving to establish their identity and in the process experience anxiety and distress. They go through an emotional journey of loneliness, alienation and psychological agony. ‘Maladies’ are subtly suggested in all the stories. Jhumpa Lahiri in all her stories of the collection endeavours to unravel and understand the psychological problems and issues of her characters and offers maladies in a distinctive style where the characters are made aware of their own drawbacks and limitations. It reveals Lahiri’s remarkable grasp of the inner world of the protagonists, the indepth psychological probings are essentially used as means of understanding their psychological state of mind.
Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* is a short story of the collection of the same title having manifold connotations within the text. It deals with the understanding and analysis of the problems of the protagonists. The interpreter of maladies is Mr. Kapasi who works part time in a hospital. His job is to translate the patients’ problems to the doctors. His job is to see that the patients’ ailments are rightly diagnosed and they receive the appropriate treatment he is responsible for their lives. His other profession is that of a tour guide, in the story he is giving a tour to a family, Mr and Mrs. Das and their three children. Mrs. Das considers Kapasi to be the right person to confess her secret of adultery and expects a remedy for her inner conflict and stress. She draws a strange sense of relief from her psychology pain after her confession. Mrs. Das discloses to Kapasi that one of her sons is not her husband’s child and asks Mr. Kapasi for his help with this malady, her secret. The secret had been with her for seven long years and finally she could confess about it. Kapasi questions her whether she feels agonised or remorseful about the fact of her adultery. Mr. Kapasi’s question irritates Mrs. Das as she expected sympathy and a remedy for her tension. She walks away from him to join her family. Surprisingly her confession has more far-reaching effect than expected. She is no longer the brooding and disinterested woman she is released from her load of guilt for the first time in seven years. Mrs. Das’s quest abruptly seemed to have ended. The interpreter of maladies, Mr. Kapasi has resolved Mrs. Das’s problem merely by listening to her confession, the conversation between the two develops a link, a connection, and a bond which both of them longed. Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das were unable to connect with their respective spouses they were lonely and isolated, suffering from a sense of alienation and aloofness. Thus they could bond naturally and understand each other’s situation. The story can thus be interpreted as the psychological issues of the immigrants, their existentialism and quest for identity and a longing for psychological connect. She also lays emphasis on communication problems of individuals. She does not concern much with geographical barriers which are visible but with the invisible barriers which are responsible for conflicts and stress.

The story of ‘Mrs. Sen’ is about the Mrs. Sen an elderly Indian immigrant and her identity crisis. Mrs. Sen takes care of a young school boy Eliot of about seven years. She babysits him after his school until his mother returns from work. The story deals
with her constant struggle to adapt to the new American cultural space and built up her new identity. She steadfastly conducts her special Indian-cooking practices, enjoys buying fish and having fish to assert her idea of homeland, her ethnic identity. Mrs. Sen at one point of time attempts to drive on her own in order to assert her independence. She had to always wait for her husband to take her to the fish market as a result was completely dependent on him, her courageous act of driving alone can be considered an act of rebel against her husband on whom she has to always depend. Mrs. Sen who would have never attempted to drive in India learnt to drive to adapt herself to the culture of the Other. She wants to assimilate with the culture of the adopted country the car is symbolically used by Lahiri. Her fear of driving is also symbolically associated with the conflict and anxiety of assimilation. Mrs. Sen’s initial attempt to step out of the boundaries is unsuccessful, she suffers mental agony but, she does not give up she again braces herself to face the stressful situation. Though unsuccessful, she has at least attempted, did not follow the easy path of escapism. She has proved that she was open to the culture of the adopted country, ready to accept the changes of a new diasporic identity, her willingness to accede to American culture. Alienation refers to the state of exclusion, which arises when an expatriate does not grow out of the phase of nostalgia. Her ethnic identity haunts her incessantly. Aware of her differences, she cannot negotiate a new space or a new identity because expatriation for her is a state of mind.

The story, *The Third and Final Continent* once again deals with the immigrant crisis. The unnamed protagonist addressed as the speaker is constantly in quest for his identity. He travels from one country to another and is unable to relate to any of them. He was born in India, goes to Europe to pursue higher education and travels to North America to work. As a student in Europe he adapts the British life style but he retains his ethnicity by residing with his own Indian friends and by following the Indian cultural food habits. The speaker’s search for identity is that of Sindi Oberio’s quest, lacking a sense of belonging living across continents. On the behest of his parents he gets married, an arranged marriage before his departure to America to take up his new job. However his identity crisis remains, he does change his food habits refuses to eat beef which is against the Hindu religious beliefs. He leads a confused life balancing two opposite cultural systems, muddled with a disintegrated sense of identity. Lahiri
attempts to resolve his crisis in a very insightful manner. In America when he once again comes in contact his previous centenarian landlady, Mrs Croft he develops a bond with her and a sense of admiration for her strength and invariably subconsciously he draws a comparison with his own mother’s weakness. He recalls his mother’s rejection of life which intensified his emotional loneliness. The speaker’s affection for Mrs. Croft and appreciation of her admirable emotional strength is used as a bridge by Lahiri to draw the emotional and psychological acceptance of change in the speaker’s attitude towards an alien culture. His Indian traditional wife, Mala on the contrary is much more acceptable and adaptable to the America cultural way of life. She is quite comfortable with her own identity. In this story Jhumpa Lahiri presents a lenient view of diasporic Indians, they accept the changes easily and are optimistic. The difficulties and barriers the speaker and his wife have to cross are more perceptible. For instant the speaker, the protagonist of the story has to learn to enjoy a diet of cornflakes, etc. However, his quest for authenticity is indicated in the concluding lines of the story when he states that,

Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have travelled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known... 17

In the story, When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine, Jhumpa Lahiri concentrates on the nostalgia for one’s homeland in the character of Mr.Pirzada, from Dacca, which was a part of Pakistan, now the capital of Bangladesh. The story makes an explicit reference to the Bangladeshi war of independence in 1971 but Jhumpa Lahiri is not concerned with politics. She is more concerned with the issues of identity and intercultural communication, hybridity and multiculturalism rather than politics. The Indian family’s desperation to invite someone from their homeland, their selecting “discovered” Mr.Pirzada as their guest, their sense of community in the company of Mr.Pirzada, is an existential tension that problematises the very liberal and democratic claim of hybridity. Lahiri uses the character of Pirzada to convey the inner sense of the immigrants. Lila, the narrator is used further to convey the confusion of the second generation of immigrants. Lila is a child, the story is narrated from her point of view, her perception, her awareness and her consciousness in understanding of the difference between the self and the other across the visible and the invisible frontiers.
Mr. Pirzada regularly visits his Bengali friend’s house to dine and to listen to the news about the Bangladesh war. After the war Mr. Pirzada becomes a man of no-nation. The narrator was completely taken aback by her father’s words, *Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered Indian.* 18 Lila’s observation is intriguing when she states that he never understood her father’s words. She wonders how Prizada was different from her parents, their language was same and even their food habits were identical.

Pirzada’s case is more or less similar to that of Boori Ma, a refugee in Calcutta from East Pakistan, the protagonist of the story *A Real Durwan.* Boorima a sixty year old woman is an expatriate in Calcutta after the partition of India. She experiences problem of adjustability to an entirely new cultural and geographical surroundings. Boorima works as a servant in a residential building, the residents belong to the lower middle class section of society. She suffers the hardships quietly, uncomplainingly. Even when her old mattress becomes completely wet due to the rains she does not expect any sympathy, merely sleeps on old newspapers and manages to fend herself whenever she can. Even simple things like tea or leftovers are never offered to her by the residents of the building she often suffers from pangs of hunger. Boorima’s belongings and all her savings were lost during the partition. Moreover, she had lost her family and country. She claims of a rich past, having belonged to an affluent zamindaar family of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), but the traumatic events of Partition have reduced her to the present pitiable creature in Calcutta, at the mercy of ‘other’ inhabitants of the building. Her experience of exile has left her stranded and estranged with the claustrophobic trauma of memories and she continues to mourn the riches of her past when compared to the insufficiency of the present. She tries to escape from the hardships of the present by reminiscing about the past life. Boori Ma’s exaggerated stories of her past are a momentary release from the traumatic and claustrophobic existence in the present. She is like the migrants who “are constantly negotiating their positions between nations, between ‘where they’re from’, ‘where they are at’ and ‘where they are going’, and, in the process creating identities that serve as momentary points of suture that stabilize the flow. Boori Ma’s rejection by the residents of the building highlights her alienation as she once again ends up being a refugee, a homeless and displaced person, who painfully continues her search for identity.
All the stories of the collection *Interpreter of Maladies* are about the disturbed relationships and positions of displaced persons. They are journeys of the protagonists in their quest to find their authentic self. Jhumpa Lahiri uses the strategy of conflict between East and West, multiculturalism, migration across national frontiers to present the existential quest of her protagonists. In the story, *This Blessed House* Lahiri shows that in any relationship both the partners must have enough patience to tolerate each other’s differences both the partners must have enough space to assert their individuality and self identity. In an arranged marriage the partners have to be all the more understanding and tolerant towards each other as they have to yet learn to mutually respect each other’s feelings. Twinkle’s appreciation of the Christian artefacts is an implication by Lahiri that her husband Sanjeev must also learn to appreciate and cultivate a tolerant attitude towards the new culture of the adopted country. Sanjeev is representation of the immigrants’ difficult encounter to a new culture.

The story, *This Blessed House*, is about a newly married couple who move into a house only to find out that the house is special and a blessed one. Jhumpa Lahiri uses the house moving and the discovery of artifacts metaphorically, as the characters are Indian immigrants who have moved to America. The Christian artifact found scattered all over the house indicates that American cultural features are present, it is not an empty space, the immigrants have to accept the elements and move forward in assimilating them. Twinkle, an American Indian brought up in California belongs to the second generation of immigrants so she comfortably accepts the biblical artifacts and decorates them around the house happily. Her husband Sanjeev is a first generation immigrant so we can see his hesitation and wavering attitude towards the artifacts. He is uncomfortable with the suggestion of his wife about displaying the Christian artifacts in their new house and emphasises that they are Hindus. Lahiri uses the differences in the views of different generation of immigrants to project the variation of acquaintance to the new culture. The first generation immigrants like Sanjeev and Mrs. Sen have yet to develop the sense of hybridity. Sanjeev had migrated to America to study while his parents resided in India. Mrs. Sen and Sanjeev are recent immigrants unlike Twinkle who is a step ahead. Twinkle with her dynamic
positive hybridity is superior over the other female first generation immigrants whose confrontation with the Other either involves them in cycles of escape or at worst in a total Otherness. Towards the end of the story Twinkle along with her guests excitedly searches for some other ‘hidden treasure’ and happens to find another artifact of Jesus Christ. While she is very excited Sanjeev finds it repulsive but does not reveal his feelings. He willingly carries it from the attic to downstairs with great care, as his wife cautions him to be careful not to let the faether hat slip.\textsuperscript{20}

The climax of the story suggests that Sanjeev’s love for his wife enables him to accept her broad minded attitude. It is however obvious that the hybrid identity of Twinkle cannot be formed overnight, it is a gradual process which will form with constant exposure to the foreign culture. There is no need to despair or fret there is always scope for a happy settlement for the first generation immigrants like Sanjeev and Mrs.Sen, who can gradually step into the hybrid space. Twinkle’s character is a positive indication to the fear and confusion of the immigrants. She manages successfully to cultivate a hybrid identity setting an example for other immigrants who are confused and fearful of adaptability to a new culture. It is nothing new as migration is an accepted process in the globalized world. Joel and Jopi observe that the prominent critics of hybridity have generalized that fluidity of cultural transfusion due to migration is a common aspect of contemporary world as everyone can contribute to the culture. There will be more cultural contact intermingling of the East and West cultures.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{The Treatment of Bibi Haldar} is a story about the predicament and angst of the female subaltern in the postmodern period of globalization. The story is centered on the protagonist, Bibi Haldar, a simple Indian lady who is extremely poor and homeless. The suffering of Bibi is due to various factors, apart from poverty she suffers due to her exposure to the postmodern and globalization process. Her neighbours unlike those of Boorima’s are very considerate and helpful. They are very generous and caring housewives far more than her relatives living in the same building where Bibi lives as a downgraded sick dweller. Bibi suffered from an unknown unique disease and various different kinds of treatment did not help her at all. In spite of numerous treatments Bibi’s ailment continued. Bibi lived all alone, in isolation on the terrace of
a building and craved for a simple normal life with husband and babies. Lahiri develops the story by giving it an interesting turn towards the end. Bibi becomes pregnant and subsequently delivers a baby boy. The highlight of the story is that the strange ailment of Bibi disappears after she gives birth to the baby. Her identity crisis and alienation is resolved as she decides to give herself a new identity. Lahiri has so well molded the character of Bibi that the ultimate climax does not surprise the readers. It on the other hand presents an insight of the complex human psychology. Bibi failure to fulfill her only desire of getting married made her a misfit in society. The birth of a son cures Bibi Haldar of a mysterious disease in spite of being deprived of marriage.

Sexy is the story of a young woman, Miranda and her affair with an Indian married man, Dev. The story is about sexual relationship between Dev and Miranda and the hopelessness of extra-marital affair. Miranda begins to develop an interest in the Indian culture of the immigrant, tries to know about the eating habits of Dev. In her attempt to understand the culture of the immigrants she visits Indian restaurants, Indian grocery stores and even begins to explore about India. Thus an open-ness to an alien culture is revealed in Miranda’s identity. The relationship between the English girl Miranda and the Indian Dev dies a quiet death when Miranda realizes that she cannot expect more than physical fulfillment from Dev.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* can be examined from an existential perspective, as it about the constant search for identity, the existential quest of its protagonists. Though its hero, Gogol does not make any significant attempt to actually probe his identity crisis, he is subconsciously struggling at different spaces of his life to assert his individuality. His inner conflict of cultural adjustments and moral commitments towards his parents leads him to explore his authentic identity. *The Namesake* is the story of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli and their children. The story begins with the marriage of Ashoke and Ashima and their migration to America. Ashoke easily adapts to the new American culture but his wife finds it difficult to assimilate with the new cultural environment. She desperately misses her family back in India and attempts to assert her individuality, her identity in the new environment. They name their baby randomly after the name of a Russian writer, Gogol as they were awaiting the
grandmother’s letter who was supposed to name the child. Ashima’s quest continues even after the birth of her son, she is confused by the conflicts of lifestyle. Her predicament of being an immigrant is a life time of liability. Anita Desai states that it is a sort of lifelong pregnancy.\textsuperscript{22}

Ashoke Ganguli had named his son Gogol because for him the name has a significant meaning to him it meant a commencement of new beginning in his life. He was saved from a train accident in India only because of Nikolai Gogol’s book. But Gogol is unable to understand the emotional significance. Upon entering kindergarten, Gogol’s father tells him that he will have a new name, he will be known as Nikhil. Gogol is not able to respond to the new name, and wants to be called Gogol only. Names play a very significant role throughout the novel, the identity crisis of Gogol and his existentialism is conveyed by Lahiri with the use of names. Gogol’s crisis arises from his distinctive name. A name, that is neither Indian nor American nor even really a first name at all. The sense of belonging to any particular culture evades him like Sindi Oberio’s situation. Sindi’s quest for self identity made him detached from all attachments. Similarly Gogol isolates himself from his family and tries to adapt to the American way of life. Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli had tried their best to raise their children with Indian values and culture but both the children Gogol and Mousumi grew up inculcating the cultures of their adopted country, they grew up relating to the Western cultural ways of their friends and surroundings. Being second generation immigrants they had to face confusion of dual identity, the diasporic crisis made it difficult for them to assimilate their ethnic values with that of American cultural patterns. \textit{The Namesake} can also be studied from the autobiography approach as Lahiri’s personal deep-rooted life experiences are ingrained in the text. Her personal feelings and confusions while growing up as a second generation immigrant are similar to that of her protagonist Gogol in the novel. In an interview released by Houghton Mifflin Company, Lahiri had said that her constant struggle was to satisfy her parents’ expectations and at the same stand up to the expectations of the American colleagues and friends, so she had experienced dual identity issues.

Gogol in early stage of his life is very comfortable and happy with his name but he comes to despise his name and decides to change it, when he is a senior in college. As a student when he studying about the Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol, his teacher
gave a detailed account of the writer’s life story. This disturbs him greatly as he begins to perceive himself in the replication of Nikolai Gogol. He eventually decides to change himself from ‘Gogol-identity’ to ‘Nikhil-identity. He goes to Yale, completes his architect studies and becomes a professional but still he could not find his true identity. The story his father tells him about his name only seems to heighten his confusion and suffering. The fact that his father named him after his favourite author Nikolai Gogol in memory of a train accident disturbs him. The Nikhil identity appears to him unrealistic as his parents and relatives still connect to him through Gogol identity. Gogol thus undergoes a tedious progression in his life, constantly being influenced by his dual names of Gogol and Nikhil. He tries his best to focus on an individual identity and redefine himself. He attempts to detach himself from his namesake Nikolai Gogol but in the tiring process he disconnects with his own family.

Nikhil struggle to assert his individuality leads him to cultivate the cultural patterns of the adopted country. He falls in love with an American girl, Ruth. His relationship with Ruth however was shortlived as she decides to pursue her literature studies in England. Nikhil later again falls in love with another American girl, Maxine and adopts her way of life by living with her family. His parents had on the other hand had all the while tried their best to keep him connected to ethnic values and culture they had tried to keep him away from American way of life. Nikhil becomes so completely involved with Maxine and her life style that he entirely forgets his parents.

When Gogol was on a vacation in New Hampshire with his girl friend, Maxine he was informed of his father’s sudden death. His mother has called and asked him to go to Cleveland, to his father’s flat to collect all his possessions. Nikhil shocked and miserable does to to Cleveland and there in his father’s apartment realization dawns on him. He becomes aware that he has to fulfil his responsibilities, perform the duties of a son and not be self-centred. He returns to his family and seriously and dutifully performs all the necessary rituals as per the Hindu custom and after a week with his mother Gogol goes back to his work. Maxine, the wealthy, cultured young Manhattan girl is unable to understand Gogol’s sense of loneliness and detachment, which he develops after his father’s death. Gogol finds his relationship strained as he cannot anymore connect with Maxine and they separate. He decides to take his mother’s advice seriously and marry a girl from his own community.
A few months later, his mother refers to him, a Bengali girl named Moushumi, who he starts going out with. After a year when he realizes that he had finally found the right partner, he gets married. However, he is greatly disturbed and disappointed after he comprehends his mistake. Moushumi he discovers also suffers from identity crisis like him. She is not comfortable in her Indian American status, to vent her diasporic crisis she had resorted to studying French. She seeks refuge in a new language and a new culture. Jhumpa Lahiri very subtly points out the simple and quiet agitations and rising revolutions in the second generation immigrants. She documents these quiet rebellions and random longings with great sensitivity intertwining with simple story telling technique and projection of real life problems and issues.

Gogol lives with Moushumi for a while, happy that he has done what his parents had always wanted him to, and married an Indian girl. One day, he finds out about Moushumi’s affair with another man, and he divorces her. This brings him to concluding that just because he is Bengali, it does not meant that he is going to find happiness in just a Bengali girl, and that he can marry anyone. Lahiri takes Gogol back to his family in the last chapter of the book. They spend Christmas together. The story ends with Ashima selling the family home so she can live in India with her siblings for half of the year. However, even towards the end of the novel when Ashoke was no more, the sense of alienation does not leave. Sonia, her daughter was getting married to an American man named Ben. Her son Gogol in his identity quest had tried different complicated paths without much success but finally it appeared that he might find a solution to his identity issues by following the tradition of his parents. He begins to think of his family’s history as a series of accidents from his father’s train crash to his doomed marriage. The book ends, with him thinking that he is now free to do what he pleases without the expectations of either his family or the demands of American society. It is not necessarily a happy ending, but one with a hope, nevertheless. Gogol towards the end of the novel seems to have finally found peace of mind. He accepts his name and position in the globalised scenario. He accepts the book of the Russian writer which his father had presented him as birthday gift several years ago. He retrieved the book which was about to be discarded, Lahiri states that, as his father was pulled from a crushed train forty years ago. He saved the book symbolising his acceptance of ethnic culture along with the Western.
Gogol’s realization that he can find his true identity with both the culture resolves his crisis. He does not have to be one or the other; he does not have to choose. The diasporic crisis of, *The Namesake* has been extensively studied and analyzed by critics but it can also be labelled as a novel dealing with existential concerns as concepts of existentialism are very obviously and noticeably evident. Gogol’s exercise of his freedom and denial of traditional values, his assertion of his subjective self, his constant experience of confusion and identity crisis are some of the theories applicable to the philosophy of existentialism which are noticeably projected by Jhumpa Lahiri in the novel.

The existential quest is a predominant aspect in the works discussed. Anita Desai’s treatment of the quest is the form of probing the inner psyche of her characters and projecting their inner confusions, conflicts and turmoil. The characters of Arun Joshi are looking for fulfillment, trying to seek answers in their physical surroundings while the quest of the protagonists of Jhumpa Lahiri are more in the form of identity and diasporic crisis.

i. **Alienation and Loneliness**

Existential writers deal with varied themes of finitude, guilt, sin, alienation, loneliness, despair and death. Soren Kierkegaard’s theory of existential alienation was developed after Hegal’s philosophy. According to Hegel in the process of alienation the human self externalizes itself and then confronts its own self. However, Kierkegaard’s philosophy of alienation states that individuals are alienated from themselves and against their surroundings which are unfavourable and hostile. Philosophers, Heidegger and Sartre also discussed existential alienation. According to Sartre, we are responsible for our own actions and when we refuse to take responsibility of our actions we experience sense of alienation. This realization leads to anxiety and anguish subsequently it leads to alienation and loneliness. As stated by Sagi,

*Social alienation in modernity, however, has become more ominous and oppressive. Individuals feel themselves strangers, and also feel that society robs them of their authentic existence, hinders the realization of their*
Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri have extensively treated the existential tenets of alienation and loneliness in their works. They have brought out the existential confrontation of modern man with his self. Anita Desai’s protagonists are concerned with their inner self the conflict is within themselves they live like strangers. The crisis is brought out through marital discord. Their inner emotional struggle is against the absurdity of life. Arun Joshi’s protagonists are in conflict with self and society. They are alienated and lonely. The protagonists of Jhumpa Lahiri are again in conflict with self and society, the crisis is because of their quest for self identity in a diasporic situation, in a multicultural environment.

The protagonists of all the works selected for the study experience the feelings of loneliness and meaninglessness in life. Maya, the protagonist of *Cry the Peacock* is symbolic of the existential problem of modern Man, his isolation and meaningless existence. Maya’s obsession with death, with the astrologer’s prediction, her husband’s insensitive nature, and her loneliness sprouts her existential crisis. Her craving for fulfilment and satisfaction in marital life further accentuates her loneliness. She experiences emotional and physical cravings for love and compassion.

Maya’s only source of consolation was her memories of her childhood which she fondly and dearly clings to. She often remembers her childhood days in her father’s house, the reminiscences of her past sustains her to a great extent. Maya’s defense means and process of maintaining her balance to get rid of her inner depression and hopelessness were the pleasant memories of her childhood days in her father’s house. It helped her to relax, ease her tension and reduce her pain. However, the present is unbearable to her. Maya blames her husband for her existential problems. As, he prevents her from doing what she wants to do, she harbours an unconscious, unreasonable desire to kill him so that he does not interfere in her life. Her marriage to Gautama was never successful in fact it is responsible for gradually turning her into a psychopath as her emotional needs could not be satisfied by her husband, who was
too practical. An extremely sensitive and sensuous Maya rebels against the rationalism of Gautama, against his Vedantic philosophy of detachment. She suffers from anxiety, fear and insecurity, which leads her to insanity, violent and self destructive. Maya’s inability to understand her husband is the main cause of her suffering. She holds Gautama responsible for her loneliness and suffering. His practical approach to situations was a striking contrast to her emotional approach. Ultimately in a state of insanity, in a frenzied state she kills him resulting in the ultimate catastrophe.

And then Gautama made a mistake – his last, decisive one. In talking, gesturing he moved in front of me, thus coming between me and the worshiped moon, his figure an ugly, crooked grey shadow that transgressed its sorrowing chastity.  

The protagonists of Anita Desai can be compared to that of Virginia Woolf’s characters, hypersensitive and insecure they reveal their negative responses to life. The impact of existentialism has been very significant in the writings of Virginia Woolf as in Anita Desai. Clarissa of Mrs Dalloway encounters existential anxiety through her self-implicating empathy with Septimus, who later commits suicide. The ordinary, simple lives of human beings are made to seem unusual, extraordinary. The main existential tenet in the philosophy of Virginia Woolf unlike in Anita Desai is the declaration of courage, of survival in the face of death, in the face of truth. Frank observes,

In a final stroke of mental kinship both Nietzsche and Woolf singled out the power to comprehend and take on this truth, to carry this loneliness, as the criterion of an existential courage, instead of fear, of fertility, instead of life hating and reductive Puritanism.  

Maya and Clarissa suffer and experience existential angst but they are contrary to each other. Maya is always fearful, afraid and dispirited while Clarissa’s anguish motivates her to be courageous. Desai’s Cry the Peacock is an exceptional study of the neurotic state of Maya’s mind, her fluctuating moods, fears, dilemmas,
abnormalities, sufferings and her loneliness. Nanda Kaul like Maya lived a meaningless life of disappointments and existential anguish. However, Nanda Kaul is presented as a person of great courage and determination. She chooses to lead a lonely alienated life at Carignano, she detests any kind of intrusion to her privacy. Even the postman’s sight was unwelcome as, she considers him an intruder. However, her tranquility was short-lived. She was thrust with the responsibility of caring for her great granddaughter, Raka. She expresses mixed feelings of anger, disappointment and loathing. She is angered with the thought of getting involved again, she feels cheated by fate, it appear unjustified to her as after fulfilling all her family responsibilities she had choosen to lead a peaceful quiet life. \(^{28}\) Then to be once again to be pulled to a life of responsibility was not welcome. Nanda was being authentic to herself like a true existentialist taking responsibility of a different kind. She had made a conscious decision to lead a lonely life and was being responsible to her own self.

Raka thus becomes an intruder in the lonely alienated life of Nanda Kaul, a recluse by choice and by vengeance. Fortunately, for Nanda Kaul, Raka is also a recluse like herself but by nature and instinct. Anita Desai effectively brings out the existential angst of Raka, which finds expression in her unruly ways. She is child of disturbed marriage and a broken family, unfortunately the unpleasant memories of childhood, about her mother’s sickness and father’s violent behaviour have made her an introvert person. Raka preferred to be by herself, always managed to run away from people. She in not like any normal child, has no needs, does not enjoy company nor is she interested in stories about people or relations. She enjoys the beauties of nature, identifies with the desolation and barrenness of Carignano, prefers being all alone. Anita Desai appropriately observes that the main protagonist Nanda Kaul was a loner on account of her retaliation against a life time of responsibilities and obligations, while Raka was a recluse because of her very character, her very nature is that of a loner. \(^{29}\)

Raka’s existentialism is her independent, rebellious and unapproachable character. Nanda Kaul, who herself preferred to alienated makes several attempts to befriend the child but Raka always had her excuses. She in fact enjoys her loneliness and escapes from the reality which finds unbearable. She easily adapts herself to Carignano as it is
an isolated and peaceful place, she quickly makes herself familiar with the forest its shortcuts and secrets. It is her temperament to be alone, not a deliberate attempt. She calmly ignores Nanda Kaul. Both the recluses, Nanda and Raka are happy with each other, they live in one house, without coming in each other’s ways. However, Raka’s detachment and indifference, her unapproachable attitude becomes a challenge to Nanda. Nanda Kaul cannot discipline her wild ways. In her rebellious way, she sets fire to the forest at the end of the novel. Raka’s aggressive behavior is due to lack of social interaction and guidance from parents or elders. She was at first ignored by society and later she ignores society, embraces isolation and sets her own standards irrespective of societal norms.

Another important character of *Fire on the Mountain* who also suffers from existentialism is Ila Das. She is an old friend of Nanda Kaul, although she is poor she has a lot of courage and determination, risks her life to help people. Her painful present and regretful past leads her to a life of loneliness and alienation. She is presented as lonely character without any family, detached in spite of involvement in life. For her Carignano was a fairy land though she fights hunger, starvation and the harsh realities of life alone. As a welfare officer she discharges her duties in a dedicated manner. She narrates to Nanda Kaul her experiences as a welfare officer and the manner in which she discharged her responsibilities. In the process of preventing the child marriage of a seven year old girl to an old widower she draws the wrath of Preet Singh, the girl’s father. Preet Singh rapes and murders Ila Das in an act of revenge. Nanda Kaul dies of shock after receiving the news of Ila’s death.

In *Fire on the Mountain* Desai is concerned with basically projecting the existential alienation of her protagonists rather than narrating any story nor depicting any action. The novelists’ perceptions and views about existentialism are vehemently and clearly projected by the three main protagonists. Nagappan in appreciation of the intense portray of the existential tenets observes that Desai’s position as an existential novelists is in par with the innumerable existential geniuses and their masterworks like Kafka *Trial*, Camus’ *The Plague* and Sartre’s *Nausea.*
Anita Desai thus through her protagonists emphasizes that Indian culture expects woman to be feminine and fulfill domestic responsibilities uncomplainingly, accept roles submissively. However her protagonists are existentialists, they crave to have their independent individuality irrespective of the consequences. Ila Das meets with violent death, Nanda Kaul dies of shock and Raka’s plight in life reveals that woman cannot escape from the male dominated society. An analyses of the character of Nanda Kaul revels her existential suffering which she bears silently, while Raka rebels and attempts to achieve the unattainable. Ila Das until her unfortunate death is perpetually involved in conflicts with the societal norms. Anita Desai’s novel not only concentrates on the existential issues of female protagonists but also brings to the forefront the pathetic condition of subjugated women in Indian society. She examines the characters of Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das individually in relation to the main tenets of existentialism such as alienation, agony, quest and conflict. Sethuraman’s remarks aptly that the novel dealt with the tensions of the individual characters and also the forces of determinism. 

Anita Desai’s novels are about the helplessness of women confined in unpleasant marriages and their existential suffering. She attempts to give expression to the silent voices of such women who are unable to escape from unfavourable situations and have to endure tension, conflict, angst, alienation and loneliness. Desai has sincerely and persistently pursued the angst of existentialism in all her works from Maya’s crisis in her first novel, Cry the Peacock to that of Hugo’s suffering in Baumgartner’s Bombay.

Arun Joshi’s novels offer interesting insights into the existential theme of loneliness. The lives of the protagonists are rooted in an inescapable feeling of loneliness and separation. In their quest for identity they are like Ellison’s Invisible Man who reminiscences about his suffering and painful experiences until realization dawns on him and he decides to first discover himself. Though initially incapacitated and paralyzed by the agony of alienation they eventually manage to come out of their self-imposed mood of dejection and obtain at least a partial redemption from their earlier frustration. Constant self-examination is second nature to all these heroes who are dissatisfied with the existing set up of their lives and ardently wish for a more
fulfilling future. The protagonists as rebels, decadents and recluses exhibit neurotic tendencies. But it is wrong to dismiss them as derelicts, for they are painfully aware of their own inadequacy in leading purposeful and hence peaceful lives. Their indulgence in rationalizing their actions delays their moment of change and consequently subjects them to prolonged bouts of misery and self-doubt. Self-analysis leaves them in a state of spiritual stasis despite their active participation both in the world of work and relaxation. Driven to make a choice between continued social and emotional isolation and taking up an absorbing new activity-be it as a resort of hope or reparation for past actions, they all opt for the second alternative. In other words unsparing self-criticism, though it takes a heavy toll of their reserves of confidence, does not result in the total undermining of their hope for a better life. Their very stasis is sought to be shown by Arun Joshi, as an important landmark in their endeavour to achieve a clean break from old mores and make a new beginning. Existentialism lays emphasis on pointlessness of life and its universal applicability. This is well brought out in Sindi’s comment of the Indian scene being a repetition of what he saw in America. He does not find any difference in people's attitude, their eagerness, and their lifestyles either in America or India. Sindi feels that it is merely geographical change everything else remained the same. His sense of foreignness was continued irrespective of where he went. 33

Arun Joshi’s philosophy is evident in the serious comments on life and its meaning made by the various characters in The Foreigner. The following remark of Sindi offers not a time worn cliché on life but a justifiable jibe against the Kemkas of the world to whom successful financial management even if it involved the hoodwinking of law meant the be all and end all of existence:

*Life is not a business account, losses of which can be written off against the gains. Once your soul goes bankrupt no amount of plundering can enrich it again.* 34

An echo of Camus’s indictment of suicide is captured in the statement of Arun Joshi, *suicide is the end of a battered old road, not the beginning of a new one.* 35
Camus disapproved of suicide, he felt that by committing suicide a man will be foregoing his only weapon against the injustices of this absurd universe – his spirited protest, for the suicide according to Camus was an act of folly as it ends once for all, all possibility of rectification. Sindi’s loneliness is accentuated by the fact that he is surrounded by people who are lonely too who, according to Arun Joshi become conscious of their loneliness all of a sudden. He gloomily recounts that that he was born without any purpose and he led his life in an aimless and purposeless manner.

Sheila, Babu’s sister is shown as content to watch the drama of life from the wings as she lacks the courage to be a participant in it. Her father is shown as too obsessed with material success to have any time for the finer values of life. Babu Kemka’s self pity and puerile emotional needs and Mrs. Blyth’s awareness of the emptiness of her life are similarly highlighted by Arun Joshi to underscore the fact of Sindi’s loneliness being a part of his human heritage. In the explanation he offers to June as to why he cannot marry her Sindi draws pointed attention to people’s pathetic attempt to find in marriage a panacea for their loneliness. He believes that everyone is alone and being alone is a problem for which solution must come from within. The problem of loneliness cannot be sought by simply bringing people together. Sindi believes that just because two people get married does not mean that they are no more lonely.

Sindi’s self assured tone in the above passage is belied by the anguish he experiences at a later stage in the novel when he comes to know that June, heartbroken at the death of Babu, tried to have an abortion and died in the attempt. The original stand of Sindi that love is a liability, a weakening of the emotional armour that leaves one vulnerable to hurts and exploitation undergoes an interesting transformation towards the end of the novel when he is made to realize that genuine concern for others and willingness to be involved in responsibilities so as to safeguard their interests are the only avenues that can lead one to the sanctuary of inner peace. Sindi’s visit to India is used by Arun Joshi to emphasize the importance of the existential principal of man’s obligation to create a meaning for himself. When existing meanings are not acceptable to him, the first step towards that is to have a clear cut view about one’s own priorities. Sindi, staggered by the realization that as a drifter who belongs to no specific country or culture, he had no guide lines whatsoever on which to formulate his world view, wishes he too can be like
Mr. Kemka whose religion and upbringing have given him an easy to follow value system. He tells Kemka that his life was well crafted with definite set of values, culture and religious beliefs but his own life was aimless and meaningless as he had no religious faith or beliefs to rely on, nor any roots to resort to.\(^\text{39}\)

Arun Joshi in his *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* seems to give a further extension to the theme of alienation he dealt with in *The Foreigner*. He presents in this novel as pointed out by Naik,

> A protagonist alienated from the higher middle class society in which he is born and brought up and in which he is compelled to live, though he finds in himself an overpowering urge to march to a different drum altogether.\(^\text{40}\)

At first glance Billy’s disgruntlement with life appears unverified as he has everything a man can wish for to lead contented life money, brilliant academic record, well connected marriage alliance and a respectable position in society. Billy’s decision that marriage would resolve his problems was a great mistake, as he and his wife are quite different from each other, the alienation of Billy further intensifies. The marital relationship between Billy and Meena, their lack of understanding and the rift between the two different worlds they occupy. Meena occupies a world that insists on social positions and respectability to be maintained at all costs, she is unable to understand Billy’s irritation, his anger, his moods and his existential angst. She mentions this to his best friend Romesh, her disappointment with Billy’s behavior, for his retorts at everybody without any logical reason.\(^\text{41}\)

Billy on the other hand finds his wife to be less involved with his life. She cannot understand his sense of alienation so she is incapable of helping him in his quest for a meaningful existence. Meena is frustrated with Billy’s aversion to modernism and materialism. His aversion is mainly at the upper class society to which he belongs. Arun Joshi propagates that the existential issues can only be resolved within the self. The intense desire for the search of his true inner self forces Billy to escape into the forests, in search of meaning of life, to be one with himself to express his individuality freely without any superficiality. He felt alienated even when he was in the company of his wife and father. Arun Joshi best illustrates in the form of Billy’s
letters to Tuula. In one of the letters he had confessed to her stating that he was going insane and he unable to hold his life, to retain his composure. He is frequently experiencing confusion and loss of identity. He cannot grasp the reality and questions himself about his own identity, of his parents, wife and even his son’s identity.

It brings out Billy’s existential anguish, his alienation and loneliness. He does seem to belong to the civilized society. Tuula and Billy’s occasional discussions reveal the understanding they have of each other. In the first part of the novel the author brings out the inner conflict and disturbed psychology of his protagonist, Billy. Meena's conversation with Romi explores the futility of their relationship, the misunderstanding, physical distances, mental barriers, sense of alienation and the vacuum. The confusion and compromises lead into intense suffering. Billy experiences communication problems with his father and himself, his wife and himself and the society around him. His letters to Tuula confirms his confusion, boredom and meaningless existence. As observed by Nawale, Billy feels isolated even when he is with his family, he feels like an outsider. Alienation and escapism is a prominent theme in the literature of twentieth century.

Arun Joshi establishes one thing firmly and that is if one is not responsible enough to answer the inner voice of self; then he cannot refuge this escapist soul. On the contrary, he will remain ‘The Foreigner’ wherever he goes.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesakeis extraordinarily subtle in its existential concerns. It echoes the existential angst of disillusionment and despairs, loneliness and alienation of Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli and Gogol. She concentrates on the complex problems of the immigrants, their alienation and loneliness, their experiences, their adaptability issues and their cultural conflicts. However, its most predominant characteristic is its strong, deep rooted, constant search for identity. Though its hero, Gogol does not make any significant attempt to actually probe his identity crisis but at the same time he is in search for a feeling of inclusiveness. Alienated by the conflict of his social, cultural and moral obligations he becomes a subject for existential diagnosis.
The Namesake is a story of a Hindu Bengali family, of Ashoke, Ashima and their children. The book begins with the marriage of Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli in Calcutta and then their immigration to Cambridge and later to Boston, and proceeds with the birth of their children, Gogol and Moushumi and then the story of their children takes prominence. Ashoke is open minded, ready to embrace American culture and its way of life but his wife finds it difficult to adjust in the new environment, she clings to the memories of her life and family in India and feels lonely and depressed. Ashima’s sense of alienation is comparable to that of Mrs Sen’s plight. Both of them retain their ethnic identity by wearing saris, cooking fish, associating with other Bengali friends yet experiencing pangs of loneliness and despair. The second generation of immigrants in the novel are Gogol and his sister Moushumi and Sonia, Gogol’s wife. All three of them were brought up in dual cultural environment, they effortlessly blended with Western culture intermingled with their Western friends easily but at the same time retained to a great extent their ethnic cultural upbringing. This often led to cultural conflicts and a sense of alienation and a feeling of rootlessness.

The Gangulis, at the birth of their first baby, when asked to name the boy, as it was necessary to write the name of the baby in the birth certificate, they were confused. Finally Ashoke comes up with the name, Gogol with has immense emotional value for him. He owes his life to Nikolia Gogol’s book, because of which he escaped from a tragic train accident. However, his son is unable to relate to his father’s emotional attachment. When Ashoke decides to change his son’s name to Nikhil before his admission in kindergarten Gogol refuses to do so. He is not able to respond to the new name, and wants to be called Gogol only. The importance of a namesake and identity is brought up throughout the story and becomes a concept that is central to the novel. Throughout his life Gogol suffers from the uniqueness of his name. A name, that is neither Indian nor American nor even really a first name at all.

Jhumpa Lahiri brilliantly portrays Ashima’s loneliness and sense of alienation in her daily life in USA. The Namesake begins with Ashima pregnancy and the birth of her son. In these situations in Indian homes there is always the company of family and
friends. However, Ashima’s only companion was her husband and only three Bengali friends visited her. Ashima’s intense loneliness is stated,

*Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, the baby’s birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true.*  

Ashima repeatedly reads her parents’ letters to overcome her loneliness. She often cooks Bengali food and learns to adapt to her American surroundings but retains her inert characteristics. Lahiri’s portrays with sensitivity Ashima’s emotions, her past and present. Lahiri portays Ashima as a representative of immigrant women’s dilemma, their sense of rootlessness in a foreign country. Even her second work of fiction, *Interpreter of Maladies* focuses on the conflicts identity and the psychological isolation and alienation of the protagonists in the collection of stories. Most of the protagonists are Indian Americans and some are American Indians but all of them suffer from pangs of isolation due to their cultural clashes, their battle to retain their ethnic identity and at the same time assimilate with their Western counter parts. The characters of the short stories face cultural dilemma, they are perplexed, disconcerted and confused, sentimental and homesick and show resistance to the discourse of power in various forms. However, the dissatisfaction becomes less intense in the second generation of immigrants, who comfortably adapt to the culture of the adopted country. She takes simple ordinary issues and through them conveys the existential concerns of her characters. As commented by Gholipour and Sanahmadi, Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction at the outset seem to concentrate on simple ordinary issues but in fact it deals with much more serious subjects as cultural conflicts and identity problems of the immigrants.

All the stories in the collection *Interpreter of Maladies* deal with simple ordinary events but also subtly deal with much serious concerns such as self – identity and cultural conflicts. Lahiri herself is a second-generation immigrant who is at ease in her parents’ homeland as well as in her own, yet sometimes the feelings of alienation, belonging nowhere arises in her mind. The migrant has become one of the symbolic figures of the contemporary society world. It is through fiction contemporary writers
attempt to voice the immigrant’s issues and concerns. Jhumpa Lahiri’s collection of short stories is an in depth study of the cultural borders both seen and unseen which the characters have to violate in order to find their real self. Out of the nine stories of *Interpreter of Maladies*, are set in India, whereas six are set in America, focusing on the lives of first or second generation Americans of Indian origin. Lahiri challenges the categorization of immigrant Indians, the cultural conflicts of East and West and the existential problems of modern man. In this respect, Jhumpa Lahiri’s writings are more about the existential angst of the individual. She is interested in portraying the quintessence of the individual consciousness and in the self as the converging point of various cultural forces. The first story, *A Temporary Matter*, as observed by Shashikant gives ample information about the conflict of two different and the resultant sense of isolation and loneliness which the immigrants encounter in a foreign country.\(^9\)

Shoba is lonely and alienated, after the still birth of her first baby she is unable to communicate her feelings or share the tremendous sorrow she is undergoing with anyone not even with her husband. She drifts into a detached state of mind, considers separation from her husband. Through this story, it is evident that Lahiri lays great emphasis on communication. Lack of communication leads to emotional isolation, particularly for immigrants in an adopted country where there are cultural differences. Mrs. Sen’s alienation is also due to her inability to communicate successfully with her husband. Mr. Sen like Ashoke of *The Namesake* adapts himself to the American lifestyle and is unable to comprehend his wife’s sense of alienation.

Jhumpa Lahiri presents in the story, *The Third and the Final Continent* moving pictures of life. The narrator, a Calcutta boy represents millions of Indian students who study and settle abroad for a better future. The bond between the landlady Mrs. Croft and the Bengali youth is beyond explanation. Mrs. Croft is an experienced and perceptive person, she never spoke more than a few words at a time, most of which she repeats daily to the young tenant but the narrator knows her sense of isolation and fosters an unconscious affection for her. The narrator’s respect and fondness for Mrs. Croft increases after he comes to know that she worked hard for forty years giving piano lessons. As a result her health suffered, she developed swollen knuckles. He is
also reminded of his own mother who refused to participate in life after the death of her husband.

Jhumpa Lahiri in *Interpreter of Maladies* and in *The Namesake* project the maladies of the contemporary society, of individual’s anxieties and torment and of the individual inevitably caught between different cultures and yet belonging in neither of them. All these factors are consequently responsible for alienation and isolation of individuals in various forms. Sartre\(^50\), influenced by Hegel’s philosophy of alienation discusses the concept of alienation in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. He discusses of two different types of alienation. One type is the alienation of the people who are suppressed and psychologically isolated another type of alienation is that which is innately present in the individual it is distinctively rooted in the basic relationship of the individual with the others.

Bibi Haldar, Boorima, Pirzada, Mrs. Das and others of *Interpreter of Maladies* experience alienation in different forms. Bibi Haldar, an Indian woman experiences a sense of isolation and alienation because of her destitute condition and her unique ailment. Boorima, a refuge’s rejection by the residents of the building where she was the *durwan* highlights her alienation as she once again ends up being a refuge. Pirzada, Mrs. Sen, Mrs. Das experience of alienation is due to immigration and culture conflicts. While Billy Biswas and Sindi Oberio feel isolated and alienated due to their quest for authenticity, like that of Maya and Nanda Kaul.

In conclusion we can say that the most prominent existential tenet of alienation is interrelated with the quest for self identity in life. Alienation can be both physical and emotional like that of Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das or just psychological like that of Maya, Sindi Oberio, Ashima or Gogol. One can be in the company of friends and family and yet experience a sense of alienation and detachment, incapable of emotional or psychological belonging or inability to relate to people or circumstances. Alienation of both types, physical and psychological though voluntarily opted can have drastic effects on one's life. As seen in Desai's protagonist Maya psychological alienation and isolation drives her to a state of irrational behaviour, to insanity. On the other hand Nanda Kaul is well composed and relaxed in her self-imposed alienation.
Sindi Oberio bravely tries to adhere to his philosophy of detachment but he becomes restless and keeps changing places to combat his sense of foreignness. The protagonists of the collection, *The Interpreter of Maladies* experience pangs of alienation but Jhumpa Lahiri blends the theme with positive reaction, as they are strong and shrewd enough to find ways and means of combating their sense of alienation. Pirzada, Mrs. Sen, Mrs. Das, Boorima, Bibi Haldar, Shoba, Miranda and other efficiently tackle the issue and manage to lead a meaningful life.

### ii. Existential Angst

Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* explains man’s independence, his autonomy and the responsibility which comes with it. We are aware of our responsibilities, the pressures, the anxieties, the demands of family and society but at times refuse to accept it, deny taking up the responsibility. Our actions and reactions are the result of our changing natures, the suffering and anguish we experience because of our decisions and the way we fulfil our responsibilities at times, withhold us from shoulering responsibilities. This further enhances our anguish and existential crisis. As stated by Jean-Paul Sartre, *in order to avoid this, we deny this responsibility for the way we are and the ways in which we behave.*

Existential angst, an important theme of existentialism is a universal problem. Existential angst includes feelings of anxiety, uneasiness, fear or agony. The causes of the angst are inexplicable, it is not related to any particular condition, and it can be generalized as the fear of meaninglessness in life. The preoccupation with this pressing issue by existential novelists highlights its magnitude and need to be discussed to understand it in the right perspective. Life today is more complex and these complexities are here to stay until one stops judging and expecting. The existential novelists deal with the problems of the modern man, his existence, freedom and choice and responsibility in every field. ‘Anguish, according to Sartre, is awareness of our own freedom over our character’.

Anita Desai presents existentialist’s predicament of her characters through tense relationships of incompatible couples. Relationships between hypersensitive wives and detached, indifferent husbands are used to drawn a comparative study and
highlight the anguish and suffering of the women characters. She voices the miseries and helplessness of married woman anguished by existential angst by sensitively probing the psychology of the human mind. Desai is concerned with preaching or providing solutions. As commented by Sharma, *She never tries to intervene or suggest remedies for their problems. She portrays the society minutely with its suffering, anxiety, and misery.*

Arun Joshi is considered to be the first Indian English existential novelist. His novels are strongly influenced by the existential philosophy of Sartre, Albert Camus’ and Kierkegaard. Arun Joshi unravels the facets of crisis in modern man's life. The basic existential tenet that living or actual existence is more important than theories of life is amply verified in the destinies of Arun Joshi’s characters. Joshi like Anita Desai has recorded modern man’s trauma and agonies in his novels with rare competence and gravity. His main thrust is on the individual psyche of the protagonists all through his novels. Arun Joshi occupies a distinctive place in the post-colonial history of Indian English novel. As a novelist he is also a profound thinker, his concerns are different. He writes about the destruction of man’s native innocence by experience, about his rootlessness, restlessness and existential dilemma, about the crisis of his identity in the present day world. His journey of fictional works from the *Foreigner* (1968) to *The City and the River* (1990) is characterized by themes of frustration, disintegration, rootlessness, a sense of alienation and existential predicament.

Anita Desi’s *Cry the Peacock* is about the fear and anxiety of Maya, the psychologically disturbed protagonist. Anita Desai chief concern in the novel is to project the neurotic fears and anxieties caused due to marital incompatibility. Her fancies, disappointments and frustrations lead her to insanity. Maya is throughout the novel possessed the existential angst of fear of death, loneliness and alienation. Her extreme sorrow at the death of her pet dog is an indication of her hyper sensitive mind. While her insensitive husband propagated detachment. He was unable to understand the extent of her trauma in her mind. Maya's brooding about the unconcerned attitude of her husband is well conveyed to the readers by Desai in her narrative. The figurative image of opal ring and translucent skin help to present a symbolic picture of the tension in Maya’s mind.
Maya mental condition deteriorates in the four years of marriage, her neurotic state, her psychological suffering intensifies. The prediction of the albino astrologer about the death of husband or herself in the fourth year of her marriage haunts her. Anita Desai through the use of visual imagery brings out the troubled mental state of Maya, traces the gradual progress of her insanity. Maya’s angst is like that of Sindi Oberio’s she undergoes terrible mental agony like Sindi, both of them suffer emotionally. However, it is interesting to note that one longs for involvement while the other follows the philosophy of non involvement. Maya craves for her husbands love and attention while Sindi Oberio gets all the love from June without even asking for it. However, both Sindi and Maya suffer like Billy Biswas and Nanda Kaul because they want to be true to themselves as they place authenticity at the center of their existence. Sartre's philosophy of existentialism gives prime importance to authenticity of life.

Desai’s novel *Fire on the Mountain* deals with the existential angst experienced by the female protagonists; Nanda Kaul, an old lady living in isolation, Raka, her great granddaughter’s inner turmoil and the plight of Ila Das, Nanda Kaul’s friend, a helpless woman, who is in conflict with forces that are too powerful to be encountered, resulting in her tragic death. Desai’s protagonists be it Maya, Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ila Das are all women of contemporary India, constantly striving to overcome the limitations of society imposed by culture and tradition. Nanda Kaul’s anxiety and restlessness was due to the superficiality of life which she was compelled to live. She fulfilled her responsibility of being a wife and mother although she was aware of her husband’s extra marital affair and her children’s indifference. She was the victim of forced circumstances, lived a loveless life with a sense of commitment. Experienced an existential angst, an inescapable suffering all her life. After her husband’s death she vacates the Vice Chancellor’s house and moves to a remote isolated place, Carignano to lead a life of isolation, a life free of responsibilities, free of obligations. She loves the calmness and bareness of Carignano especially so after leading a hectic life of attending to innumerable guests, taking care of several children and managing and control of too many servants. Nanda had planned and prepared herself for a life of retirement from domestic responsibilities, a life of peace and isolation while living a hectic life.  

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Anita Desai draws a comparison of city and rural life, a life of hectic activity and a life of relaxation and resignation. However, her anxiety continues even in Carignano, where she was compelled to take care of her convulsing great granddaughter. Her desire to be true to herself could only be achieved by leading an isolated life. The intrusion on her privacy is initially scorned but gradually when she realizes that Raka also craves of isolation and detachment like her Nanda Kaul is no longer disturbed. Raka also suffers from existential angst like her. Sindi wanted be true to himself in his quest for identity by being detached like Nand Kaul.

Sindi Oberio lost his parents at the age of five and was brought up in Kenya by his uncle. His father was a Kenyan Indian and mother was an English woman so his lack of emotional support or cultural belonging was responsible for his attitude. He was educated in Nairobi, London and Boston. He always felt like a foreigner wherever he went, his quest for self identity made him adopt the philosophy of non involvement. So, when he falls in love with June Blyth in America, he refuses to marry her. Sindi represents the contemporary modern man, lonely, frustrated and detached. He lacks a sense of belonging wherever he goes. His conversation with Kemka in India reveals his feelings rootless less and existential agony. Sindi’s predicament, his sense of rootlessness is also a result of the meaninglessness of modern urban, mechanized society which he resents. People have become selfish and materialistic. He notices the class conflicts and the extreme class differences in India. Both Sindi Oberio and Billy Biswas detest modern upper class society and express their resentment. They are foreigners in their society, conscious of the dehumanization of contemporary society. Like the narrator of Invisible Man no one actually seems to care for his identity, Sindi’s agony can be compared to the existential angst of the narrator of Invisible Man who describes himself as invisible in society; his quest for his self- identity makes him invisible. He sorrowfully laments that he was invisible because refuse to acknowledge his existence.

They are oversensitive characters of Arun Joshi who are constantly under stress and are in conflict with their self. They suffer and are unable to communicate, lost and miserable in their quest for self-realization, meaning in life. Sindi’s self imposed principle of detachment results in the death of June and his friend Babu in America. After the terrible consequences of his non-involvement in America, he moves to
India and starts working for Kemka, Babu’s father. Gradually self-realization dawns on him especially after his interactions with Babu’s sister Sheila. Sindi finally understands that performance of one’s duties without any desire is in fact detachment. Thus Sindi’s enlightenment of the new philosophy of detachment transforms him into a very positive person as observed by Malshette. Joshi’s main intention was to express sensitively the slow and steady progression of Sindi from a negative philosophy of detachment to a positive philosophy of attachment. Sindi was initially not at all interested in Kemka’s business. He was steadfastly following his own philosophy of detachment. He was afraid to be attached to anybody or anything but he changes his philosophy after his interaction with a worker of Kemka. Joshi cleverly builds up the evolution of Sindi’s character from detachment to attachment. Existentialism is not about only negative thoughts and frustrations it has a positive side also.

Billy Biswas’s suffering is due to his desire for freedom from the demands of the materialistic modern world. He is attracted towards the primitive world but he belongs to the upper middle class society. Like Sindi, he is troubled with a sense on non-belonging. He is restless by the superficialities of the civilized society. Arun Joshi builds up the restlessness of Billy and his revolt against the civilized society gradually in the novel. Billy was doing Ph.D in Anthropology while his father thought he was studying engineering. He prefers staying in Harlem in New York though he could afford a better place. Billy’s quest for the primitive life makes him a sad lonely person, he suffers mentally. His suffering does not end even after taking up the position of a lecturer in Anthropology in Delhi University and getting married to a Bengali girl, Meena Chaterjee. His suffering further increases when he realizes the incompatibility of his marriage. Like Maya and Gautama, Billy and Meena are temperamentally poles apart. Billy’s frustration with civilized society against his quest for primitive society is the cause of his misery. He blames himself for his plight, he in anguish imagines that God was being revengeful on him for not being true to himself for a long time. Unable to take up the suffering Billy finally quits civilized society and disappears mysteriously into the jungles of Maikal hills. He completely alienates himself from his family and civilized society. Billy’s situation is like that of the post-modern sophisticated upper middle class man. They suffer from
identity crisis, a spiritual vacuum, a sense of uprootedness. Billy meets his friend after ten years and the mystery of his disappearance unravels. Existential angst which is the most important tenet of Existentialism is excellently brought out Arun Joshi in the characters of Sindi Oberio and Billy Biswas.

Arun Joshi’s novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is about the roting system of civilized society, it is an attack on the selfish materialistic society and the benefits of simple primitive way of life. His hero, Billy suffers from spiritual uprootedness, loss of faith and crisis of identity, which society refuses to understand. Happiness cannot be realized through mere possession, true happiness can be attained only through self-realization. Billy could not help seeking something out of the way in the formula made contentment offered to him by his social milieu and when chance takes him to the Satpura hills as teacher escort in an educational tour for students, he realizes that his true home is there in the hills. In a short while he gains the friendship of Dunia, the leader of the gang of Bhils, who happily grants Billy’s wish to join them. How well Billy fitted into the new background and the new way of life is brought out in the following sentence, *they were waiting for the rising of the moon. And he suddenly discovered that he, too, was waiting for the rising of the moon. Never before in his life had he waited thus....* \(^{59}\)

Jhumpa Lahiri’s works inevitably project the psychological struggle in the minds of her characters as a result of globalization and immigration. Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake*, successfully explores the themes of identity, culture, place and custom with deftly drawn comparisons of Bengali and American ways. Her handling of the existential subject can be compared to the earlier writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai or Arun Joshi. However, the subject is dealt in a different manner. Gogol’s is like Srinivas, the protagonist of *The Nowhere Man* (Kamala Markandaya) who feels like an outsider wherever he is, unable either to completely discard his ‘Indianness’ or adapt totally to English ways. Similar to that of Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of Arun Joshi’s *The Foreigner*. For Sindi foreignness is more a state of mind than alienness caused by the accident of birth in any particular country. His ‘foreignness’ lay within me and he could not leave myself behind wherever he went. The disillusionment, sense of rootlessness, loneliness of Srinivas and Sindi are expressed explicitly, their anguish is clearly stated and is obvious in their attitudes and
behaviour but Gogol’s anguish is implied, restrained and understated unlike Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai or Arun Joshi’s characters. Each one of these novelists is highly realistic in on far as he or she captures both the agony and ecstasy of an essentially subjective response to the passing panorama of life.

Almost all the main characters of *Interpreter of Maladies* are troubled and suffer emotionally, go through the pangs of anguish yet at times come out of the trying situations for a better life. Assimilation and acceptance of the foreign culture with ethnic lifestyle, association with ethnic community, lessen their suffering like Mrs. Sen, Sanjeev, Boori Ma and others. There are other characters who suffer emotional frustration due to lack of communication with their spouses like that of Shoba, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Sen and others. *A Temporary Matter* is about the misery of a married couple, they find it extremely difficult to communicate with each other after the still born death of their first child. They fail to communication, become experts at avoiding each other. Sobha resorts to a game strategy to communicate with her husband, to tell him about her decision to leave him. Shoba’s crisis was her inability to deal with her anger and frustration of losing the baby for whose arrival she had planned elaborately. She distances herself emotionally and psychologically from her husband in her state of disappointment and self pity. The couple is able to understand each other only after Shukumar confesses his knowledge of the baby’s sex which Shoba never wanted to know. The confession affects Shoba so intensely that she breaks down emotionally. Letting out the pent up feelings certainly acts like a catalyst in some ways. The marital discord is thus skillfully shown to be a temporary matter just as the interruption in electric power supply has been.

Mrs. Sen is another immigrant character from *Interpreter of Maladies* who presents the existential agony, emotional isolation and alienation of the immigrants. Mrs. in spite of having all the material comforts feels lonely in America as she cannot assimilate with the cultural and social life of the adopted country. Being a first generation immigrant she is unable to develop a sense of belonging to a foreign culture, she is in fact unwilling to change herself. Her Indian cultural values and traditions, her lifestyle and habits are so deeply ingrained in her that she considers it unethical, immoral to change. She is determined to retain her ethnic identity in a foreign country. Her refusal to drive, her elaborate cooking process, her buying fish
from the local fish market, etc are simple ways of asserting her individuality. Mrs. Sen experiences problems of alienation and is unable to accommodate the changing cultural patterns in her life mainly because of her separation from her family like that of Ashima of *The Namesake*. Her alienation was further intensified because of her inability to communicate with her husband. Her husband’s inability to understand her existential angst makes her a lonely person like that of Maya. But unlike Maya she manages to control her angst and finds ways to unleash herself like Ashima. She babysits an American boy, who becomes a source of solace to her, she experiences a relief when she confides in him the anecdotes pertaining to her life. Surprisingly a strange bond of mutual understanding develops between them.

The Indian diaspora in the West migrated for better prospects, it was not imposed on them, the external exile is not significant but the psychological and spiritual condition is important. The story, *The Blessed House*, is about a married couple who move into a house only to find that the house full of Christian artifacts left by the previous owners. Sanjeev’s character is used by Lahiri to convey the painful immigrant experience and their adjustment problems. Sanjeev, a first generation immigrant cannot readily accept cultural changes and adapt to the lifestyle of the West like his wife who is a second generation immigrant. He is uncomfortable with the Christian artifacts and keeps reminding his wife that they are Hindus not Christian. It makes no difference to his wife she admires them as pieces of art and decorates the artifacts around the house. Sanjeev at first reluctant accepts his wife’s point of view. He comes out of his existential alienation and adopts the inevitable changes around him without much struggle.

The story, *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* deals with the suffering and existential angst of the protagonist Bibi. Her pathetic condition is due to her poverty and destitute situation, moreover her strange illness further enhances her suffering. Fortunately for her, she is accommodated in a little space in the terrace of a building. The housewives residing in her building are very kind and helpful, they provide for her meager meals and other requirements. When Bibi becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son her strange ailment vanishes and also existential crisis. Though had always dreamt of marriage and children, she could not find a suitable match inspite of
the efforts of the friendly people around her. However she negotiates for a new identity and seemed content with it. Lahiri has skilfully portrayed the psychological upheavels of Bibi’s mind so effortlessly that the ending of the story is no surprise to the readers. Bibi had always longed for marriage and children, her dreams were unfulfilled but the birth of a child cured her strange illness.

Another story from *Interpreter of Maladies*, ‘Sexy’ is about Miranda and her existential angst. Her suffering is the result of falling in love with an Indian married man Dev, her relationship with him and the futility affair. Miranda’s identity with Indian culture, her attempt to understand and adopt it in order to understand and please Dev and finally her failure to do so are her painful experiences. The American woman is completely ignorant of the Indian cultural values and other regular food habits. She is fascinated by the thrill of exploring a new culture her visit to an Indian grocery store is symbolically used by Lahiri. Miranda is open to the culture of a new country. The relationship between the English girl Miranda and the Indian Dev dies a quiet death when Miranda realizes that she cannot expect more than physical fulfilment from Dev.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s protagonists of *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* Gogol, Ashima, Sanjeev, Shukumar, Pirzada, Boori Ma, Bibi Haldar, Miranda, etc experience existential angst of various types such as psychological anxiety, restlessness, uneasiness, fear, worry, sense of rootlessness, etc. These tenets of existentialism make them isolated and lonely like Anita Desai’s Maya, Nand Kaul, Ila Das and Raka and Arun Joshi’s Sindi Oberio and Billy Biswas. All the characters suffer from existential angst in their attempt to be true to themselves, to lead an authentic life.

A study of the Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri’s works highlight the existential problems and issues of individuals who experience anxiety, when they realize that they are entirely responsible for their actions. In order escape their responsibility they tend to deceive themselves. The existential agony, alienation and angst occur when individuals attempt to lead a meaningful and authentic life. Kierkegaard’s philosophy states that individuals must be true to themselves and truth
comes from within. Other existential philosophers like Heidegger, Jean-Paul Satre and Albert Camus also discuss the precedence of existence over essence. Poonkondi comments that, *all the writings of Sartre and Camus focus on the incomprehensibility of the world or make an attempt to rationalize, disorderly world* ....  

Fyodor Dostoevsky akin to the philosophy of Jean Paul Sarte and Albert Camus and follower of the existentialists, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche held man responsible for his own actions. Man makes his own destiny it is not predestined by God. Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment* expresses his philosophy of existentialism through his protagonist, Raskolnikov. He in dire need of money murders of his pawnbroker and her sister. Raskolnikov's further rationalization about his decision to murder, planning to use the stolen for his education, later using his education for the betterment of his community are serious existential issues highlighted by Dostoevsky. The novel is not about a conventional murder mystery, it deals with the intense psychological workings of the mind of the protagonist, his justification, his conflict, confusion, guilt and anguish. Like the workings of Maya’s mind after she murders her husband. She goes into a state of complete insanity and later kills herself. However, she was always obsessed by the thought of murder and death. She could not forget the albino astrologer’s prediction of death in the fourth year of their marriage. Maya’s justification of the murder of her husband in state of insanity is a subtle comparison to that of Raskolnikov’s when she says, *it had to be one of us, you see and it was so clear that it was I who was meant to live. You see, to Gautama it didn’t really matter. He didn’t care and I did.*  

Existentialism the most significant and prominent philosophy of the past century continues to interest Indian English novelists of the contemporary post-colonial period. The thoughts and views of the great existential philosophers and the characteristics of the fast changing social and economic scenario of India have influenced the novelists greatly and compelled them to portray the existential issues, the agonies and traumas of modern man with remarkable clarity and gravity. Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri are the exemplars of existential writers. The intensity of their projection of the modern man’s plight enriches the readers by providing them invaluable insight into understanding of the philosophy of life. The
existential views of the writers enable us to recognize the importance and consequences of self examination. It also highlights the impact of existential thoughts upon individuals and society. The different perspectives presented by the novelists are drawn from a wide spectrum of characterization, presents a very exhaustive account of the existential philosophy. Golomb in his analysis of Camus theory of authenticity observes that,

Camus recommends acceptance and affirmation of life even if it lacks transcendent meaning. The solution to absurdity is not to escape to philosophy or suicide but rather to accept it as a given.63

The protagonists of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri are all trying to lead an authentic life and in the process the existential angst which they go through and the elucidations of their problems are all varied in nature. Each of the novelists has brought about a different struggle of the postmodern man/ woman and each of them tackles their issues in a different manner, thus various different perspectives of the philosophy of existentialism is brought and analysed. There is no singular approach or solution to existential angst, a wide approach and empathetic study of human psychology can be of help in analysis of the tenets of existentialism.
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