Chapter 3  
**Psychological Landscape**

3.1 Psychological Conflict

Psychological conflicts are innate and natural processes of the mind which occurs when individuals perceive their thoughts, views, attitudes, goals and interests contradicted by other individuals or social groups. All over the world people are facing conflicting situations due to various factors, social, economic and political changes in society and immigration to foreign countries. The changing life styles of people bring about a conflicting situation. Societies with inherent traditional and cultural values become fragile and accommodate the changing values. However, the outcomes of conflict are not always negative. There are both positive and negative connotations to conflict. If the conflicting situations are not handled properly it may have unfavourable consequences such as damaging relationships, increasing differences and disaster. On the other hand when conflict is tackled sensibly it can have positive effects leading to better understanding and problem solving.

Conflict is an important feature of post colonial Indian English literature. In the novels of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri psychological conflict is an integral part of their fiction. In all their novels internal conflict of characters, conflict between characters and conflict of characters with society is deftly portrayed. The internal struggle is between a character and his/her own confusion and fears, their existential quest. External struggle is between a character and his/her societal norms/culture, it is about existentialism, their attempt to be true to themselves and consequently their revolt. Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri are prominent novelists in Indian English fiction committed to projection of the psychological temperaments of the human mind. They do not bother about giving elaborate details of social setting because they study man more as a victim of his own inner environment rather than of the external material or moral climate, their characters are more concerned with their own highly sensitized world of sense and sensibility. They concentrate on the more elusive world of inner thoughts, doubts, desires and dreams within the frame work of their novels. Each one of these novelists is highly realistic in so far as he or she captures both the agony and ecstasy of essentially subjective responses to the passing panorama of life. For all their erratic
behaviour and whimsicality the protagonists in the novels of these writers are sincere and courageous, foregoing, the easier path of obedience to an external code and opting to make their own feelings the operative principle guiding their destinies. The non-availability of a moral reference point outside their own inner natures is at once a proof of the protagonists’ strength and the enormity of their burden of loneliness in having to win their own scheme of values.

Anita Desai in her novels, *Cry the Peacock* and *Fire on the Mountain* offers poignant notations of the anguish of alienation and psychological struggle in the minds of the protagonists. In *Cry the Peacock*, individual and events are examined from the point of view of the protagonist, Maya. The novel mainly focuses on psychological conflict of Maya, her excessive and obsessive desire for love and compassion from her husband, Gautama and his detached practicality. Every episode emerges as Maya’s explication both for what happened and for what it did to her, the net result of the entire narrative acquiring a near fatalistic tone. Maya’s reminiscences of her past life, of her childhood memories bring back to her the disturbed incidents of her life and crowd her mind and terrify her into insanity. Basically kind and genuinely fond of his wife Gautama tries to reach out to her but fails to establish a satisfying emotional rapport because of the diversity in their view points and temperaments. Maya’s present state of craving and despair as against Gautama’s philosophy of aloofness and unemotional attitude brings out the conflict in Maya. However, her quest for -

*Something more real and more substantial is so lackadaisical that it lacks the power to push her towards some enlightenment.*

Maya desires to resolve the conflict within her but does not do anything about it nor is capable of doing anything apart from undergoing intense psychological pressur. She is apathetic and makes only halfhearted efforts. She is not used to doing anything as her upbringing was like princess, everything was done by her father and all her desires were fulfilled. After her marriage she has not changed at all, when people and circumstances are not to her expectations, she merely broods over them and actually makes no concrete efforts to remedy them. Anita Desai brings out the conflict in Maya with the help of simple mundane incidents. Once Maya had requested her husband Gautama to take her to see the Kathakali dancers, which he abruptly
offensively refused to do. She is greatly disappointed and grieved it hurts very much to realize the insensitivity of her husband towards her simple pleasures of. Even her great love for music is considered inappropriate by her husband. These minor conflicts not at considered by her husband but they have a lasting impression on Maya’s psychology. She holds her husband responsible for standing between her and her aspirations, a hindrance to the fulfillment of her desires. Left without any understanding and concern of her husband she has no choice but to constantly compares her father’s character to that of her husband’s Gautama, this further enhances her despair.

Gautama is impatient and irritated with what he considers to be her ‘father fixation’ and emotional cravings and Maya cannot understand his involvement in his world of work. Maya’s inner conflict and the pitiful disintegration of her psyche are intensively portrayed by Anita Desai. It effectively reveals the psychological world of Maya, a world of fear, uncertainty and existential angst. At first glance, Maya’s melancholy, like that of the protagonists of Arun Joshi appears groundless in the face of her having everything that is conducive to leading a reasonably happy and comfortable life. In the usual course of things self-examination normally has a curative effect but in the mental processes of mind under neurotic stress, as it was in the case of Maya even self-examination ends up as a flight of fancy of the zigzag path of associations and as such it cannot be called ‘analysis’ and serves only to churn an already agitated mind. Moreover the haunting prophecy of the albino astrologer about a death in the fourth year of her marriage gradually gains ascendancy in her minds till it becomes an obsessive fear which she cannot share with anybody. Desai tries to unravel the various nuances of Maya’s psychological problem so much in detail with with such clarity that the readers are greatly sympathetic towards Maya’s pathetic psychological condition. The novels of Anita Desai, Chitra states,

*Catch the bewilderment of the individual psyche confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self-gratification and self-fulfillment.*

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Unfortunately the disorientation of Maya’s consciousness was not understood by anybody not even by her husband and it worsened due to the confrontation of social and cultural pressures. She was compelled to confirm to an environment which was not at all conducive to her psychological well being. In her conflict and chaos she pushes her husband off the balcony. The horror and pity of the unbalanced woman’s murdering her husband because he merely blocked her view of the beautiful rising moon and her subsequent killing of herself are effectively portrayed in the novel. Desai uses appropriate images to bring out the emotional ethos of the novel and enhance its aesthetic appeal. Desai’s suggestive title *Cry the Peacock* is an indication of the anguished mind of Maya. A clue to the irony of Maya’s fate is hinted in the title’s reference to the ‘cry’ or the mating call of the peacock. Peacocks are generally said to fight before they mate. Desai uses this significance of life and death, their passion in the face of death symbolically in the case of Maya. Maya’s deep rooted yearning for love finds a poignant expression in the following lines which seems to echo a cognizance of this symbolism. Maya’s desperate cry for help is heart rending, when she is confused about her sanity and wonders who can be of help to her whether her father, her brother or else her husband. She frantically and hysterically calls for her savior as she wants to live and enjoy the beautiful things of life.

Maya’s love for her protective father and her rebellious brother, her inconsolable grief at the death of her pet dog are intended as indexes of her sensitive and sensuous temperament and present a natural foil to the dry intellectualism of her husband, Gautam. All the main characters in the novel have a well defined attitude to life. Maya’s father was content to base his life on the fatalistic creed of acceptance. Gautam believes in detachment. Arjun thrives on ‘protest’ and rebellion while Maya has no such creed to lean on which could satisfy her yearning to love and be loved intensely and totally. The quotation from the *Gita* cited in the text vividly reveals Maya’s mental deterioration. It is considered that anger is the outcome of a sense of longing and fondness for worldly pleasures. It creates illusion which is responsible for memory loss and destruction of human beings.

*Cry the Peacock* very intricately portrays the psychological conflict in Maya’s mind, her trauma of being caught in two simultaneous worlds, of past and present and
her in ability to reconcile to the realities of life. She refuses to grow up, shoulder responsibilities, though married for four years. She perpetually lives in her past memories while Gautam lives only in the harsh realities of the present. Maya prefers to live in the world of imagination and fairy land. Gautam is unable to relate to her world, he cannot understand her extreme sensitiveness and does not bother to respond to her. Maya’s in consolable agony at the death of her pet dog and Gautam’s mechanical response that he would bring her another dog clearly highlights the lack of understanding between Gautama and Maya and brings out the disparity in their characters. Maya’s sorrowful lament when she states that, showing how little he knows of my misery, or how to comfort me draws the emotional sympathy of the readers.

Gautama’s philosophy of detachment can be compared to Sindi Oberio’s detachment theory in The Foreigner. While Gautam attempts to be detached after getting married to Maya, Sindi refuses to get married because he wants to remain detached. However, Sindi changes his attitude when he realizes the impracticality of noninvolvement. Anita Desai very powerfully depicts the inner conflicts of her women protagonists who have been deprived of their basic rights by a male dominated society. Women in general are compelled by societal norms to project an inauthentic self image. However, the intense conflict in projecting that image leads to hopelessness and misery. Women like Maya and Nanda Kaul need to assert their individuality need to create a new image thus conflict is inevitable to succeed. This awareness of new image puts women in conflicting situations. When the existential crisis is unbearable they protest, rebel against the existing power structure.

Nanda Kaul the main protagonist of Desai’s Fire in the Mountain strives for loneliness and isolation as a result of her inner conflict. The psychological conflict of involvement and noninvolvement are very predominantly present in the novel. The conflict is between the psychological need for withdrawal to preserve one’s unity and sanity and also the social need to be simultaneously concerned about the excruciating responsibilities and duties of life. Nanda Kaul rejects company and society after three decades of obligation to her family and prefers to live in isolation. The news of the arrival of her great granddaughter puts her in a difficult situation. Her conflict is whether to accept an intruder in her life or not. However, before she could resolve her conflict and assert herself, her great granddaughter Raka arrives at Carignano. Anita
Desai’s portrayal of conflict in all the three protagonists of the novel is a study of the effects of neurosis. Conflicts between man-woman are an integral part of Anita Desai’s fiction. In modern Indian society women are still expected to be subservient, they are suppressed psychologically. In spite of the revolutionary changes in our society, women’s position has not changed much. As a result they experience existential crisis, unbearable psychological distress which the society fails to understand or just ignores. Maya’s neurotic condition is an excellent example of this situation. Anita Desai’s superb narrative skill in portraying of the ultimate neurotic condition of Maya is brilliant in the following quote from the text. Desai statement is,

> Then they heard the patter of a child’s laughter cascading up and down the scales of some new delight - a brilliant peacock’s feather perhaps? Then it stopped, suddenly, and they heard a different voice calling, shrilly and desperately, from some unimaginable realm of horror, calling out in great dread.  

After the death of Gautam when Maya in her state of insanity is brought to her father’s place she delights in looking at her picture books and photographs, hugging them with shrill cries. Suddenly her tone changes from cries of merriment to screams of fear and horror and then her ultimate suicide.

The disturbance in human relationship or neurosis results in anxiety and conflict. All the three prominent characters of the novel *Fire on the Mountain*, experience psychological conflict and the resultant emotions of anxiety, loneliness and agony. Nanda Kaul of *Fire on the Mountain* develops a defensive attitude of living in seclusion to protect herself from the overpowering influence of societal pressure, similarly Raka resorts to complete isolation. Gurware observes that the characters of Anita Desai use several relational and psychological techniques to shield themselves. Nanda Kaul defends herself by living in isolation Raka adopts the policy of aggression and hostility, while Ila Das is helpless. Gurwara further observes that the emotions of loneliness, alienation and anger are but natural under the given circumstances. Thus the conflict of the characters is basically related to the defensive practices employed by them.
Nanda Kaul, a responsible and duty conscious woman waits patiently for almost three decades to be true to herself, to resolve her inner conflict, to be truly responsive to her to be authentic. Existential philosophy is based on authenticity, freedom and responsibility. After raising all her children and fulfilling all social responsibility Nanda Kaul decides to lead a life of isolation at Carignano. She was self content desiring no company at all and expected nothing from anyone she considered anything else as interference to her privacy. She is like Billy Biswas, who escapes to the forests to fulfill his inner cravings of primitive life leaving behind his son, wife and parents. Reddy observes that the character of Nanda Kaul is a typical model exemplifying existentialism. Raka is representative of an individual’s pointlessness search for a meaningful existence. While the third protagonist Ila Das is symbolic of individuals’ perpetually conflict against the powerful dominating forces of society.

Arun Joshi is one of the most significant contemporary Indian novelist, whose main focus in on the psychological planes of human beings rather than the superficial social, economic or political problems. His choice of themes like expansion of the human spirit in the atmosphere of freedom, agony of the lonely soul lost in a hostile world etc., typify universal experiences rather than national or cultural idiosyncrasies. Imbibing of the new ideas and concepts and gaining a new imaginative fillip from the achievement of earlier writers is integral to the blossoming of artistic instinct and Arun Joshi’s case best illustrates this. It is more in the nature of exploring ‘fresh woods and pastures new’ rather than of servile imitation that writers like Arun Joshi draw freely from continental writers like Kafka and Camus. 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, existential dilemma and about the crisis of his identity in the contemporary society.

Conflict in The Foreigner is present right through the novel. The conflict between the self and the social cultural forces is one of the favorite subjects of Arun Joshi. It is unanimously present in all his novels. The protagonists are subjected to tremendous social, cultural and psychological pressures. This results in a sense of rootlessness and identity crisis in them and leads to a search for meaning in life. SindiOberio is a
typical protagonist of Joshi, he possess in general all the characteristics of his protagonists; conflict, detachment, quest, alienation, etc. which are handled with great expertise. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* deals with Billy’s conflict within himself between his fascination for the primitive world and his superficial life in a sophisticated society. RatanRathor of *The Apprentice* is a prototype of the modern man who is portrayed as the product and victim of the prevailing social order. His conflict is that of right and wrong moral actions. SomBhaskar of *The Last Labyrinth* like Billy inherits a comfortable well-ordered life. He is in need of respite from the fury of turbulent passions raging in his own heart. He blunders through life chasing one ephemeral pleasure after another, forever dissatisfied, forever disgruntled. There is an erratic streak in him who makes him alternate between flashy and flamboyant arrogance and disarming bafflement.

Sindi Oberio of *The Foreigner* was born in Kenya of mixed parentage. He experiences rootlessness and a feeling of foreignness wherever he goes, to Kenya, London, Boston or India. To deal with the perpetual identity conflict within himself he develops the philosophy of detachment. The immense effect of his psychological conflict is implicit in his statement, when he says that he had unnecessarily lost twenty years in his quest for peace. Sindi’s loves his American girl friend June Blyth but refuses to marry her as he wants to remain detached. He wants to be detached but at the same time involves himself in worldly pleasures, as stated by Shanmuga. Sindi all the time expresses his detachment philosophy but at the same have several love affairs and relationships. He had relationships with Anna, then Kathy and Judy before he met June.

Sindi genuinely loves June, likes spending time with, concerned about her psychologically but refuses to marry because he is afraid of possessing or of being possessed. The conflict of the ‘self’ verses society makes him alienated and lonely. Sigmund Freud in his analyses of the Id, Ego and Superego discusses, the psychological conflict of self with environment, it makes one alienated because of identity crisis. The psychological conflict of individuals has been a subject of intellectual discourses of psychologists, sociologists and literary writers. Camus, Kafka, Sartre and other existential writers have extensively dealt with the theme of
self identity and identity crisis. Arun Joshi has also focused on this crisis from psychological and sociological point of view. SindiOberoi is a persistent stranger as he has no psychological sense of belonging to anywhere or to anybody, he considers himself an uprooted young man, without any roots anywhere. He defines himself as an individual without any roots, detached with everything and everyone expect his own self.\(^\text{13}\)

Sindi’s existential conflict between attachment and detachment is confusing and difficult to comprehend. He remained detached from his earlier girl friends Kathy and Anna but he was in love with June. He is really fond of June and she cares for him and is keen on getting married to him. However, Sindi’s existential conflict of being true to himself and his philosophy of detachment prevented him from getting married to her. It made no difference to him whether he lived in Kenya, America or India. He was obsessed with finding solutions to his inner conflict. His restlessness is clearly evident in his statement,

\[
\text{the feeling of nakedness in the hands of existence grew with every passing day}
\]
\[
\text{and a strong urge possesses me to once again roam the streets of the world.}\ ^\text{14}
\]

However, towards the end of the novel when his aimless sojourn in life takes him to India SindiOberio by chance manages to get an opportunity to find the real meaning in life. His meeting with Muthu, an illiterate worker in India proves fruitful. He helps Sindi by advocating the true meaning of detachment stating that sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved.\(^\text{15}\)Sindi understands the true meaning of detachment and agrees to take charge of Kemka industry and work hard to save it from ruin, in the process save the plight of the poor workers of Kemka’s factory. Nevertheless, he thinks that, the fruit of it was really not my concern.\(^\text{16}\) The French existential philosopher, Camus had aptly affirmed that un involvement is neither possible nor morally right, for man as social being, can find abiding happiness only in sincere involvement in cause undertaken in a selfless spirit for the promotion of the welfare of society in general. What is termed as freedom, choice and responsibility.
Sindi’s psychological conflict is similar to that of Billy Biswas. Both Sindi and Billy of Arun Joshi like Maya and Raka of Anita Desai unable to lead normal lives. They find it intolerable and impracticable to conform to the dictates of family and society. However, all the characters make a desperate attempt to do so, to lead a life as per the norms of familial and societal standards. They are restless in their existential conflict, quest for their self identity. Billy irresistible fondness for primitive life is reflected in his letters written to Tuula. He had once written to her after his return from an expedition that, it takes him several days to let go the resonance and fragrance of the forest and to return to his civilized life style which he loathes.  

Billy’s and his family’s decision that marriage would resolve his problems was a great mistake. After marriage his psychological condition worsens, as he and his wife are quite different from each other, the alienation of Billy further intensifies. His family is unable to understand his existentialism. Billy unsuccessfully attempts to suppress his strange cravings for primitive life, a natural life without any superficiality. No seems to actually comprehend the psychological cravings and tensions in Billy’s mind. His existential responsibility to be true to own inner cravings is misunderstood. Billy case here is like that of Maya from *Cry, The Peacock*. Maya’s marriage with Gautama was also a big mistake, her conflict, her misery intensified and the sensitive Maya’s mind drove her to insanity. The marital relationship between Billy and Meena, their lack of understanding and the rift between the two different worlds they occupy are responsible for Billy’s psychological conflict. Meena’s world consisted of status and position in society where respectability was of prime concern. Meena is unable to understand Billy’s irritation, his existential angst. She mentions this to his best friend Romesh, her inability to comprehend his frustration is stated thus, *He comes home angry with somebody, something. He sulks around, and then starts snapping at everybody.*  

Billy's frustration intensifies after his visits to the forest he vents his frustration and feelings of helplessness by snapping at everyone around him, his wife, his son and even the servants.
Billy cannot emotionally relate with his wife, he understands that his conflict can only be resolved within the self. The innate urge to determine life’s meaning in positive terms leads Joshi’s protagonists to wage an incessant war against challenging situations. This fact is clearly evident in his conversations with his wife. Meena's conversation with Romi explores the futility of her relationship with Billy. Their misunderstanding, physical distances, mental barriers, sense of alienation and the vacuum are all devices used by Arun Joshi to prepare the readers for the ultimate disappearance of Billy. 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. Billy’s conflict is a confrontation between tradition and modernity, between traditional values and materialistic approach to life. As commented by Lokesh\textsuperscript{19}, the conflict of Billy is with his identity in the socio economic world of the civilized people and his inner craving for the primitive identity. Conflict leads to alienation and the final running away of Billy to the jungles and settling down with the tribals, it is rehabilitation of Billy. Arun Joshi thus follows a systematic process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction.

The conflict explored by JhumpaLahiri in her literary works is similar to that of Arun Joshi’s and Anita Desai’s exploration of conflict. They are essentially concerned with the conflict in the psyche of their protagonists. Anita Desai and JhumpaLahiri basically concentrated on the psychological conflict of their women protagonists. However, the conflicts in JhumpaLahiri’s works are mainly concerned with immigrant issues. She dexterously brings out the conflict between characters, between individual and society and also between psyches of the protagonists. In \textit{The Namesake} she deals with the psychological conflict of immigrants. As observed by Priyamvada, Lahiri deftly brings out the different shades of her characters who are constantly adjusting their lives in different cultural surroundings. She states that,

\begin{quote}
\textit{Moving between events in Calcutta, Boston, and New York City, the novel examines the nuances involved with being caught between two conflicting cultures with their highly distinct religious, social, and ideological differences}\textsuperscript{20}.
\end{quote}
The Namesake begins with the conflict of selecting a name and leads to further conflicts of identity of the chief protagonist, Gogol. Ashoke names his son Gogol, after Nikolia Gogol a Russian writer. Gogol grows up in America and is constantly faced with conflicts of lifestyle and culture as a second generation immigrant. As a young boy he was comfortable with his name but after a particular age, he experiences identity crisis. He undergoes the process of constructing a psychic identity. Lahiri portrays the gradual development of identity consciousness in Gogol with the help of simple everyday events in his life. When his teacher gives an account of the writer Nikolai Gogol his perception of himself changes. The homework on Nikolai Gogol’s book, The Overcoat is a revealing experience for Gogol, he find outs the writer’s character, he was a depressive and weird person. Gogol becomes very conscious and embarrassed about his name and even gets very angry with his parents for giving a name such a unfavourable name. He wonders whether his friends will see him in the same light as the Russian writer and becomes uncomfortable with his name. His psychological conflict, identity concerns intensify and he decides to change his name and take up the name of Nikhil, the name his parents had decided earlier when he was to be admitted to school. 

Nikhil’s identity crisis does not resolve even after changing his name. He decides to assimilate with the American culture by dating an American girl Maxine but he is troubled by the emotional void and a feeling of emptiness does not leave him. He becomes even more contemplative after the death of his father, he can no longer be comfortable with Maxine and breaks up with her. Later when his mother suggests that he should marry a Bengali girl he marries a Bengali immigrant, Moushumi. The failure of his marriage and the emotional setbacks makes him realizes the trappings within the system of concepts. Gogol’s conflict is to adapt to the American culture at the same time come up to the expectations of his parents. American culture comes to him easily as he is a second generation immigrant but he finds it difficult to retain his ethnic cultural background. As critically analysed by Priyamvada, The Namesake deals with the psychological conflicts of Indian immigrants especially to America and their constant grapple to retain their ethnic identity. Gogol's identity crisis is due to
the choices he has to make to lead a normal life in a foreign country. There is a vast cultural difference between his parents’ views and outside society at large.

*The Namesake* also deals with Ashima, Gogol’s mother, a first generation immigrant who is faced with constant psychological conflict in the process of assimilation with American culture. Ashima’s conflict can be identified with the conflict faced by women expatriates, majority of women like Ashima were obliged to move to America with their husbands. They had literary no choice, while their husband were busy building professional careers these women mostly housewives engaged themselves in domestic responsibilities. They experienced tremendous psychological, sociological and ideological conflict because of their reluctantancy to adapt to the culture of the host country. Ashima nostalgic of her family and friends in India spend her time lazily before the birth of her son.

*She would spend hours in the apartment, napping, sulking, and rereading her same five Bengali novels on the bed.*

Ashima represents the first generation immigrant traditional Indian women, who irrespective of personal suffering attempt to uphold Indian traditional values of society and family. In the process encounter conflicts in every sphere of life and suffer existential struggle. While Gogol and Moushimi second generation immigrants are just not concerned with the Indian traditional norms. Indu examines that while the first generation immigrant proudly retain their ethnic cultural values, the second generation boldly violate them.

*The Namesake* is a portrayal of cultural conflict and its consequences on the first and second generation immigrants. Gogol’s while on a holiday with his girl friend, Maxine and her family draws a comparison between the vacations enjoyed by Maxine’s family and his own family. His reminiscences about his family clearly elaborates the conflict, he had not felt any longing for the holidays he had with his family and it occurred to him they were actually not holidays. Unlike SindiOberio of *The Foreigner*, Gogol is not constantly nagged by his predicament. He gradually
encounters his crisis. Jhumpa Lahiri very subtly brings out the identity crisis of Gogol through his experiences, his relationships with Ruth and Maxine Ratliff, his marriage with Moushumi Mazoomdar and his divorce and finally the death of his father, Ashoke. Jhumpa takes Gogol to a series of varied experiences, conflict and self discovery.

Lahiri while presenting the cultural conflicts between the East and West is actually concerned with more serious issues. She probes the inner conflicts of her characters, conflicts between the self and Other, the existential struggle of human nature. The characters of Interpreter of Maladies, Mrs. Sen, Pirzada, Mrs. Das, Miranda, Lila and others encounter existential conflict. Lahiri efficiently and subtly presents the conflicts and consequences. The stories, Mrs. Sen and A Temporary Matter deal with inner conflict within the individuals, who are Indians in America. The identity crisis of Lila, a second generation immigrant and the child narrator of “When Pirzada Comes to Dine” is revealed through Lahiri’s superb characterization. Mr. Pirzada was a regular visitor of Lila’s house. He regularly had dinner with her parents and they listened to news together. However, when abruptly Lila’s father tells that Pirzada was no more considered Indian since the partition of India Lila is unable to figure out the situation. She becomes more observant, trying to understand the differences when she notices that her parents and Mr. Pirzada possess similar tastes and habits.

Mr. Pirzada and Lila’s parents were good friends, they bonded over dinner and watched television together and had the same tastes. Lila was thus confused with her father’s statements that Pirzada was no more Indian. In the process she struggles to define her own identity, her many-sided complicated individuality. She is an American of Indian ancestry studied American History, celebrates Halloween with her friends. However, when the people residing in her locality point out that they had never seen an Indian witch before she is suddenly made aware of her ethnic background. A simple subtle statement is enough to bring out awareness about the invisible frontiers. Lila is caught between two cultures. The culture followed by her parents at home and the American culture in which she is born and brought up. Lahiri’s characters encounter conflicts of different types. Eliot from the story, ‘Mrs Sen’ is another child like Lila trying to understand the cultural identity of her babysitter Mrs. Sen, an emigrant in America, her relentless struggle to adapt to the new American life style.
and at the same time retain her ethnic cultural identity. The story though concentrates on Mrs Sen’s existential struggle it is also about Eliot’s search for his own identity. He notices vast behavioural differences between his mother and Mrs. Sen. As observed by Debarati, Jhump Lahiri’s fiction brings out conflicts of immigrants very easily and realistically by presenting a multi dimensional, multi-national viewpoint.

The conflicting world of Jhumpa Lahiri is centered on the immigrants’ tension and anxiety when they are faced with two very dissimilar cultures. They struggle to survive in the unfamiliar surroundings. The protagonists of *Interpreter of Maladies* also experience similar feelings of anxiety and conflict. The husband and wife in *A Temporary Matter* struggle to find their place in their relationship after the still birth of their child. Their marriage was on the verge of collapse under the pressure of new needs in a new environment. The story *Mrs.Sen* is about, Mrs.Sen an Indian woman struggles to assimilate into her adopted country. Her conflict is typical of an Indian immigrant woman, who cannot compromise on her traditional Indian culture to embrace the culture of the West. Interaction with Eliot, the American boy of eleven years whom she is baby-sitting presents a prospect to her to get first hand information about the Western culture. Miranda’s conflict in her illegal relationship with Dev in the story *Sexy* is resolved with the help of her friend Laxmi’s son. His definition of sexy as, “loving someone you don’t know” clears her misconception and she realizes the inappropriateness of her relationship.

Indian English novel has drastically changed in the postmodern period in the choice of subjects and language of expression. Characterization is given more important, unravelling the conflict in modern man’s mind is significantly portrayed with insight and seriousness. Projection of contemporary issues in Indian society is the main thrust and focus of the postmodern Indian English fiction. The much appreciated novel of Arundhati Roy which won the prestigious Booker Prize, *The God of Small Things* concentrated on characterization and conflict. Ammu’s love for Velutha is used as a backdrop to present the contemporary conflict of modern society. The societal norms laid down by traditional conservative authoritarian society and the revolt of Ammu to assert her individuality and opinion about love and marriage is the
main focus of the novel. Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* deals with Jaya’s determination, and her refusal to comply with wishes of her husband. It can be critically examined as a modern woman’s conflict and her ambivalent attitude to married life. Manjukapur’s *Difficult Daughters*, winner of Best First Book Commonwealth Prize also concentrates on the existential conflicts of modern society.

### 3.2 Escapism

Existential novelists inevitably deal with the theme of escapism, which is one of the prominent issues of twentieth century literature. Escapism of different kinds is widely present in our society; escapism from one’s responsibilities, from members of one’s family, from friends, from lovers, from society, etc. Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri make extensive use of escapism as a defense mechanism to encounter the existential crisis of modern man. *Cry the Peacock* is about the psychological conflict and the gradual degeneration of Maya’s psyche as a result of her constant preoccupation with the prophecy of the astrologer’s forecast of disaster and her unfruitful marriage to an elderly man. The conflict between her emotional needs and the impassive practical outlook of her husband is unbearable to her. In her frustration she looks back at the pleasant time spent with her father. The past is used as a defense mechanism by Maya to escape the unpleasant present. It helps her at least temporary to escape from her inner conflict and frustration. Anita Desai successfully and sensitively manages to portray the emotional condition of Maya by the use of the symbolism of the peacocks. Maya unconsciously feels relaxed and at ease when she hear the violent cries of the peacocks while mating. The peacocks killing each while mating envelopes Maya’s subconscious and a violent desire to kill her husband awakens in her as an escape from her misery.

Maya reverts to her past memories of her fairy tale kind of existence at her father’s place to escape from her disturbing present. Nanda Kaul unlike Maya prefers to completely isolate herself. She resorts to escape from the world of responsibilities, from mental, emotional and social conflicts after a lifetime of fulfilling domestic commitments. The narrator of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* like Nanda Kaul seeks escapism from the social world. The narrator lives underground in a hole becomes
'invisible' to the world to find his identity. The identity crisis is a universal one as Sellers observed that Ellison conveys the invisibility of his protagonist by keeping him nameless.

Nanda Kaul seeks complete estrangement from the social world to be true to her own identity. Nanda Kaul is very much like Billy Biswas secludes herself at Carignano but fails to achieve solitude, as she is once again forced to shoulder the responsibility of caring for her great granddaughter, Raka. Anita Desai’s novel mainly focuses on the loneliness and existential angst of the three main characters, Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. Ila Das’s portrayal is very impressive, she is helpless and poor but a brave and tireless social worker her courage and determination, her involvement in the welfare of humanity in spite of her abject poverty and loneliness makes her a symbolic figure. Nanda Kaul is forced to get herself once again involved but Billy Biswas simply disappears into the forest, he makes himself totally unapproachable.

The intense desire for the search of his true inner self forces Billy Biswas 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. At first glance Billy’s disgruntlement with life appears unverified as he has everything in life. 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. Arun Joshi best illustrates this with Billy’s confessions to Tuula in his letters, his perpetual questions about his self and his identity bring out his tiring conflict. 28

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. Billy’s case clearly delineates the problem of post-independence Indians with education abroad. The uprooted people suffer from spiritual vacuum, evils of materialism, identity crisis and loss of faith in human values. Billy’s going away from the world of civilization is
neither an act of renunciation nor a cowardly running away from responsibilities. His is not a blind or blundering quest for happiness in life. In his case the question of giving up the “struggle’’ does not arise as his whole discontent is centred on the fact that struggle in his life was conspicuous by its absence. Billy is akin to the nameless protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s novel, *The Invisible Man*. Ellison’s protagonist, a black American looks for a meaningful existence in a meaningless society. His identity quest makes him a curious confessed individual and he experiences alienation and loneliness. However, he does not despair he changes his personality by wearing a hat and glasses and makes his identity invisible. Billy identity crisis is resolved when he runs away into the forest and meets Dhunia and Bilasia. Just meeting them once makes him feel a sense of belonging which he was craving all through his life. He finds a meaningful existence which he could not find in the company of intellectuals, in affluent society in America or in India. His sense of alienation disappears, he marries Bilasia and lives with her in the Maikala hills. Thus primitive society and nature made his meaningless existence meaningful. After several years of living in the forest Billy suddenly meets his friend and during their conversation he reveals his secret, he states,

> *I certainly underwent a deep metamorphosis that was, no doubt, responsible for all that I did subsequently.*

Billy’s sudden exit marks not an erratic decision taken on the spur of the moment but the cumulative effect of a series of little acts of protest. When Billy goes against the social norms his very own people give no second thought to understand the cause for change. The society has no time for individuals, the individual of whom the society is made of. Billy’s joining in the Anthropology course rather than in Engineering as desired by his father, his spending his spare time in the slum areas during his student days in America are subtly used by Arun Joshi to prepare the readers for Billy’s final opting to live with the tribals. Billy’s sterling qualities which were never appreciated in the civilized world in its preoccupation with ‘making and spending money’ came to full flowering in the new surroundings and won for him the unstinted admiration of the tribals. The following tribute paid to Billy by Dhunia best illustrates this by stating, *He is like rain on parched lands, like balm on a wound*. 
Billy’s deep love for Bilasia and the easy grace with which he assumes the mantle of leadership of the tribals, the sense of fulfillment he feels while watching the beauty of Nature proves beyond doubt that his love of the primitive life was not an idle journey but an overpowering passion. Thus in his choice we find not a helpless succumbing to a passing impulse but a positive assertion of a deeply felt desire. By going away he might have flouted the norms of familial obligations but by remaining within the fold of the artificial set up of civilization he would have isolated the highest moral norm of all, the duty to be true to one’s inner prompting. Finally Billy deserting the modern world comes out in a new role that of a healer, a priest and a magician. He cures diseases, wards off tiger, helps in wading problems and spiritual troubles. He develops a sense of belonging while glorifying the simple life and abode of the noble savage, he celebrates the thought that the virtues of the so called uncivilized men may at as a corrective to the money minded, dehumanized society. What could easily appear as the selfish satisfaction of a capricious whim had to be bolstered by Arun Joshi with the strength of conviction and he succeeds in it by carefully interspersing in the pages of the novel interesting little details that underscore Billy’s highly individualistic temperament and unassailable integrity? Romesh’s accidental running into Billy and Billy’s warm hearted consenting to call on Romesh to see his ailing wife lead to a sequence of circumstances that calls a halt to Billy’s life of idyllic happiness. Learning of Billy’s whereabouts from Romesh’s wife, Billy’s father appeals for police help in tracing his missing son and in the police hunt that follows Billy is inadvertently shot dead. Billy’s tragic death is due to his own inner struggle, his determination to make his own choice to stand up against the rigid principals of society. The issue of Billy was disposed of as appropriately stated by Joshi in his rebellious tone that, its rebels were completely eliminated without any sympathy.

Billy’s craving for the primitive life is like the cravings of several modern sophisticated human beings who desire to retire to the simple life of the jungles away from the humdrum of artificial superficial civilization. The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is as commented by Nawale, a story of idealistic longing for the simple primitive life, the kind of life which renowned philosophers like Rousseau, Mahatama Gandhi, William Wordsworth or Thoreau often discussed. The novel records an existential protest against superficial, materialistic and imitative western culture. The novel is about the existential protest against modernism and materialism; it is about
the simple longing for the rustic life of the primitive people as against the complicated life style of the sophisticated urban people. Joshi in fact attempts to justify Billy’s escapism from responsibilities, from family and friends in order to fulfil his intense inner urge. Billy’s spontaneous decision to escape into the primitive world of the forest was not premeditated, it was an unconscious action taken at the spur of the moment. Billy experiences a great sense of oneness with nature in the forests life for him becomes more genuine and realistic. He has no social dictates to neither follow nor live the pretentious life of sophistication and propriety. He easily and comfortably settles with the simple life of the tribal’s. In the forests there no difference between the principles propagated and the practices of life. Billy finds the forest more appealing because it does not offer any superficiality, it exactly opposite of the civilized society which he detested. So he decides to make his rendezvous with providence living in the forest with the tribals.

Sindi Oberio unlike Billy Biswas attempts to resolve his existential crisis by remaining detached. Detachment is the escapist strategy he adopts. His mixed parentage, upbringing in different countries without any family, without any love, lack of spiritual or cultural values makes him a confused and a rootless detached man.

*Against this cultural background Sindi cultivates a sense of detachment to overpower the sad experiences of life. He is a self-deceiver, detached with a sense of delusion.*

Sindi philosophy of non-involvement was an escapist tendency from the psychological conflicts and sufferings. So in spite of his love for June Blyth, he refuses to marry her. His self confession, when he says that he clearly saw himself as an alienated man without any roots to cling to in the modern century explains his detachment philosophy. Sindi after his best friend, Babu's death realizes that his philosophy of detachment and escapism was responsible for three deaths, Babu's, June and June's unborn child. He is miserable as the negative effect of detachment troubles him, unable to stay any longer in America, he leaves for India. Once again he is overruled by his escapist penchant. In India he decides to meet Babu’s father and subsequently he starts working for him. Sindi Oberio can be compared to Anita Desai’s protagonist Nand Kaul. Both of them strongly believe in the philosophy of
detachment but circumstances gradually push them towards involvement. They make all attempts to remain detached and escape from the existential agony and crisis. Societal norms involve them in the responsibilities which they are trying to escape. Sindi had to get involved in reviving Kemka’s business and Nanda had no option but accept the responsibility of her great granddaughter, Raka.

Sindi’s defense wall of non-involvement was the result of his upbringing, his Americanized attitude. He had cultivated an indifferent attitude to escape from his psychological turmoil of rootlessness. He had moved from one country to another but had actually found no answers to his quest for meaning in life. In India, an extremely poor worker of Kemka, Muthu provides with the answer to his detachment, escapist mind of mind. Muthu instills in Sindi the philosophy of *karma* as stated in the Bhagvad Gita. Lord Krishna preaches that to achieve enlightenment one must perform one’s duties. One cannot escape from one’s responsibilities as Muthu replies to Sindi’s non-involvement stance,

> But it is not involvement, sir,’ he said, ‘sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved.’ He spoke quietly but his voice was firm with conviction…

Sindi cannot be detached he is compelled to get involved. In India SindiOberio actually understands the true meaning of his escapism, of his defense mechanism. He realizes that non attachment is in fact attachment, a development of positive attitude to end the sufferings of others. He realized the positivity of attachment and he states that, he comprehended the right meaning of detachment which is taking up responsibility not mere escape from it.

Sindi in a pensive mood contemplates that he is morally responsible for his actions, he cannot escape his karma. During his sincere confession to Kemka, he states that the Gods had punished him heavily for his sins. Sindi works tirelessly to revive Mr. Kemka’s business irrespective of the consequences. Sindi finds a different path to escape from his sense of rootlessness and a sense of foreignness. He works with dedication and commitment to revive Mr. Kemka business, to save it from ruin for the benefit of the workers. His perseverance leads him to find meaning in life. In *The Foreigner* Arun Joshi resorts to the Indian Vedanta philosophy, the teachings of
Bhagwad Gita to illustrate Sindi’s quest for meaning in life, to solve Sindi’s crisis of rootlessness. Sindi is shown as a very strong character he gradually moves from the negativity of detachment to its positive aspects. Arun Joshi emphasizes dominant occurrence of the escapist tendency in the contemporary world with the help of Sindi’s character. Thus the philosophy of escapism is handled very sensitively and with expertise by Arun Joshi, as aptly observed by Gadhavi,

Arun Joshi’s treatment of escapism from various fields like: from the common human relationship, from one’s lovers, friend and more than anything else, the dissection of modern escapism in the light of ShriMadbhagvagita, gives us altogether a new vision of the society. 37

Jhumpa Lahiri like Anita Desai and Arun Joshi focuses on the mind cape of her characters and explores the psychological conflicts and their escapist tendencies. All the nine stories of Interpreter of Maladies focus on the psychological condition, maladies of the first and second generation Indian Americans. The escapist tendencies adopted by the protagonist enable them to cope up with their tensions and conflicts of existential crisis. The couple, Shoba and Sukumar of A Temporary Matter are unable to deal with the pain of losing their child at birth. The inability of Shoba to handle the emotional problems leads to anger and frustration, she escapes her grief by adopting a detached attitude towards her husband and had even secretly planned to move out and live separately all by herself. The escapist tendency of Shoba was mainly because of her inability to accept reality. As she and her husband had made preparations and psychologically prepared to welcome the baby home. Their dreams of parenting was shattered at the birth of the still born baby, this was an unbearable loss for them. They ceased communicating with each other expect in a very formal manner and restricted manner. They as Lahiri 38 states do not interaction and manage to avoid each other by spending time by themselves on different floors of their apartment. Shoba was unable to communicate to her husband about her intention to move out so she devises a game strategy, every day when there was a temporary power cut they would tell each other something they never told before. The game is an escapist tendency of Shoba, it acts as a catharsis. Finally towards the end of the story she declares her intention of leaving Sukumar and musters the courage to state that 39, she had been on the look-out for a separate accommodation and finally she had found one. Shukumar who was
trying his best to cope up with the tragedy and attempting to make his wife comfortable was stunned to hear his wife’s statement, it made him dizzy having come to know that his wife had been planning to live by herself without him. Jhumpa Lahiri very remarkably projects the two different psychological responses to the same situation. Shukumar never discusses the pain directly but makes constant allusions to the tragedy by talking about insignificant things like his wife’s habits, about preparing dinner, about the cab in which Shoba went to hospital, about his efforts to cheer up his wife, his wife shopping habits and throwing surprise parties, etc. These simple mundane memories are the means of emotional escape for Shukumar. Jhumpa Lahiri narrates the story in a realistic manner.

In the short story, *A Real Durwan*, Boori Ma, the sixty four year old protagonist like Pirzada was from East Pakistan, a refugee in Calcutta constantly reminisces about her luxurious past life to deal with the present miserable existence. Her reminiscences of the past luxurious life helps her to escape from her realistic miserable condition. Jhumpa Lahiri’s statement about Boori Ma aptly brings out her mental condition. Boori often talked about her glorious past and her present hardships. She claimed that was separated from her family and a life of luxury and living in the charity of the inhabitants of a building as a sweeper, she guards the building from intruders. In return she is allowed to sleep in the staircase. However, blamed for the theft of a basin fitted in the stairwell she is thrown out, once again exiled. Her life is a life of misery, misfortunes and sufferings, resulting in her physical and psychological disorder.

*The Blessed House* another story from the collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* is an excellent story of psychological adjustment of a married couple Sanjeev and Twinkle. Lahiri makes use of symbols of the house and Christian artefacts as tools to show the emotional and mental escapist tendency of the protagonists just as the Bangladesh war is used as a tool, a backdrop to bring out the alienation and pain of Pirzada. The difference in the attitudes of Sanjeev and Twinkle and the gradual transformation of Sanjeev’s attitude towards the Christian artefacts demonstrate their psychological condition. Sanjeev at first is not very receptive to his wife’s suggestions of using the artefacts but slowly and steadily he changes his mind set. The hybrid identity of Twinkle is a survival skill which sinks into Sanjeev’s mind. The story very subtly
hints at the inevitable philosophy of happy marriage, that is adjustment and compatibility of couples. In spite of several differences couples must have concern and understanding of each other just as Twinkle and Sanjeev. Sanjeev handles his cultural clash in a sensible manner and attempts to understand and appreciate his wife’s feelings about the Christian artefacts. Densingh in appreciation comments, the differences of the feelings of the couple are not religious in nature but the difference in their personal nature.

The psychological changes in the character of Bibi, the protagonists of the story, *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* are brought by Jhumpa Lahiri. The introvert and extrovert characteristics of Bibi are a reflection of her changing personality with the changing phases of her life. Bibi’s psychological transformation can be compared to that of Shoba’s transformation from a very caring and attentive wife to a detached, unapproachable, self observed person. In the beginning of the story, Bibi in spite of her undiagnosed, incurable, ailment and several hardships is projected as an extrovert, having a very optimistic attitude towards life, hopeful, social and pleasant. When the doctors diagnosed that only solution to her ailment, unexpected fits was marriage Bibi was very happy. In fact she starts taking care of herself and prepares for a conjugal life. She gets a *salwar-kameez* stitched and occupies herself doing window shopping for tiara designs, saris and jewellery. She is delighted and starts consulting and planning. However, when she realizes that she was not actually going to get married, her character undergoes a drastic change. She becomes quiet, secretive and introvert. These two sides of Bibi, introversion and extroversion are reflection of her psychology, her personality. The frustration and sorrowful state of Bibi because of the unfulfillment of her dreams is very pathetic. Lahiri projects the sensitiveness of Bibi in an emotional and poignant manner. Her health problems simply disappear when she gives birth to a baby, thus the psychological pangs of loneliness, deprivation of desires were perhaps the causes of Bibi’s ailment.

A critical analysis of the stories of *The Interpreter of Maladies* gives a comprehensible idea of the psychological defence techniques adopted by the various characters to escape from their enormously sensitive and tense environment. Jhumpa Lahiri brings about their mental workings and changing personalities circumstantial to the ever changing situations in life. Miranda, of the story, *Sexy* is an American
woman fascinated with Indian culture. Her fascination at exploration of Indian culture and her hopelessness of an extra marital affair with Dev gives the readers a clear picture of her psychology. Mr. Kapasi of the story, *The Interpreter of Maladies* was initially drawn towards Mrs. Das, as she was the only person who seemed to understand and respect his profession. Her confession of her guilt, the secret about the birth of her second son to Mr. Kapasi relieves her of the psychological stress she was under for several years. Soon her personality changes, from a disinterested person she suddenly becomes involved in the tour indicating the relief of her long lasting crisis.

The speaker of *The Third and Final Continent* is like Mrs. Sen and Sanjeev, having difficulty in assimilation of American culture. His journey from India to Europe to North America is in fact his psychological journey. The cultural conflicts, he encounters, his fragmented sense of identity actually mould his thought process. Mrs. Sen’s inability to assimilate with the western culture and her conscious efforts to retain her ethnic identity are symbolically presented. She carefully drapes saris even to visit the local market to buy fish. Her fondness for buying, cleaning and cooking fish helps to break away from the monotonous western life style. Jhumpa Lahiri’s detailed explanation of Mrs. Sen’s cutting fish 43 best illustrates this, when she mentions how fondly Mrs. Sen stroked the fish before actually cutting them. Mrs. Sen love for Indian music and refusing to drive are some of the devices she uses to escape emotionally from the overbearing western culture. Jhumpa Lahiri portrays through her characters, be it Shoba, Miranda, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Sen, Sanjeev or Bibi that in order to retain one’s psychological balance some sort of defence mechanism, psychological escape is essential.

Gogol of the *The Namesake* is the amalgamation of Eastern and Western culture. He was born and brought up in America with Indian cultural values and traditions. He was comfortable with his odd Russian name but when he was in high school his teacher gives an account of Nikolai Gogol, the writer. The account of his life, his morbidity, his alienation, his madness and his death are quite disturbing to Gogol and he realizes that he has to change his name. He experiences identity crisis. Gogol attempts to escape from the association of his Russian name and the reflection of Nikolai Gogol by changing his identity from ‘Gogol - identity’ to ‘Nikhil - identity’ and tries to reassert his individuality as an American by resorting American lifestyle. His relationships with American girls, Ruth and Maxine and even his marriage to a
Bengali girl Moushumi fails. His constant attempts at shaping and reshaping his life in the process of attaining self-identity are typical of the immigrant’s dilemma in their struggle to maintain their ethnic identity in the midst of western culture conflicts. However for Gogol change of name does not bring him much luck, his unpleasant experiences with girls and his wife Moushmi make him a disheartened individual. Gogol finally realizes that escapism is not the answer, he need not choose one particular culture, he can be happy by having a mixed cultural identity. Gogol had drifted from his origin but subsequently after his father’s death he realizes that his Bengali ties hold him firmly.

Ashima, Gogol’s mother being a first generation immigrant retains her cultural identity by associating with a group of close-knit immigrant friends. She escapes into this circle of immigrant friends to avoid American life style. Her escapism strategy involves retaining Indian style of clothing and eating habits, creating Indian culture in America with her own group of ethnic Indians. However, when her children grow we notice a change in her attitude. She has American friends, enjoys their company, on occasion she has her library friends over to the house for lunch, goes shopping with them on weekends to outlets stores in Maine. Her ease with American lifestyle is evident when she decides to spend six months in her home city, Calcutta and six months in America, after her husband’s death. This indicates that in spite of longing for India she will miss America also as her home. She has spent a really long span of time America, thirty three years she longed for her family and friends in India. But when the time comes for her departure she realizes that she will miss her American friends also.

The psychological landscape of postmodern Indian English novelists is a vast canvas of inner conflicts of modern man, resolutions, frustrations, sufferings, mental agony, and escapist tendencies. The existential angst is not a recent phenomenon it was projected by the earlier novelists also. Existential elements were subtly present in R.K.Narayan’s *The Guide*, in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable, Coolie* and also in Raja Rao’s *The Cat and Shakespeare* and in other literary works also. The intensity and concentration of the existential issues drastically increased in the postmodern period. The earlier novelists’ primary concern was socio-political scenario of India.
The novels of Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri best illustrate the interest of the novelists in the inner drama of the characters as opposed to the earlier writers’ preoccupation with the external world of incident and action. Their novels adequately satisfy the long felt need in Indo-English fiction for variety, value, interest and significance both in theme and technique. Literature is an exploration of the inner landscape of human psyche. It attempts to examine the various nuances of the inner suffering, the unconscious repressed and sublime thoughts of an individual which are generally considered to be unacceptable in a civilized society. The psychological disharmony is thus responsible for the existential angst of an individual and prevents him from leading a harmonious contended life. A critical examination of the literary works of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Jhumpa Lahiri reflected the deeper subconscious thoughts of their protagonists and highlighted the factors responsible for their abnormal behaviours. The post-modern novelists have efficiently and sensitively projected them and have successfully brought out an empathetic and compassionate response from critics.
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