Chapter 2

Existential Predicament of Mystic-protagonists

This chapter seeks to examine existential predicament of the mystic-protagonists portrayed in Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*, Richard Bach’s *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* and Sujatha Vijayaraghavan’s *The Silent One*. After theorizing fiction as spiritual space in the first chapter, it will be pertinent to analyze the existential issues/crisis that affect the psyche of mystic-protagonists who undertake spiritual quest to seek answers to inscrutable questions concerning their human condition and existential predicament. The quest for self-realization forms the core of the existence of mystic-protagonists.

The journey of the mystic-protagonists can be viewed in the light of Joseph Campbell’s schema of quest in his book, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* and Carl Gustav Jung’s process of Individuation. Campbell’s quest cycle contains three stages. The first stage of this journey is separation which begins with severing of the bond of family, home and the known, in response to the primordial, “mythic summons.” Departure/separation is the first stage of any story, where the hero receives a “call” to undergo quest of some sort. S/he must then prepare by gathering knowledge and skills that will equip her/him to step into an unknown world. Call to adventure signifies that destiny has summoned the hero-quester and transferred her/her spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of society to a zone unknown (Campbell 53).

The second stage is initiation and is marked by hero’s contact with novelty, its unfamiliarity and danger which bring about transformation in the worldview. The stage of initiation or descent involves a metaphoric descent into the depths of the quester’s own fears.
It is a stage that is fraught with dangers and sometimes the hero is not able to survive. There are many stories wherein the hero is forced to prove her/his worth by undertaking difficult, seemingly impossible tasks. This is the process of dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of our personal past (Campbell 93).

The third and final stage of "return" is marked by hero’s rediscovery of the old truths and values, somewhat different now in the light of uninsulated experience. The quest becomes the process of becoming and takes the quester into the deeper recesses of his personality. Whereas Jung’s “process of individuation primarily aims at unfolding and understanding the personal unconscious and its superficial layers consisting of complexes. As such, after transcending the sphere of ego, a larger consciousness is encountered which is an inseparable part of the individual psyche” (Sharma, Raja 71). It is a process of becoming aware of one’s self and the way to discover one’s true inner self. The principle of individuation defines the essence of the human. Murray Stein explains the concept thus:

It is absolutely fundamental to human beings to distinguish themselves from their surroundings. This is the essential nature of individual consciousness: to be itself, it must create distinctions and separateness. It is in accord with human nature, therefore, to seek individuation. Individuation is not optional, not conditional, not subject to vagaries of cultural differences. It is essential. (3)

The individuation process consists of four stages, such as catharsis, elucidation, education and transformation. Catharsis implies breaking away from the traditional parental images of family in order to explore the world independently. Elucidation contains a critical attitude in examining things for better reconstruction of one’s personality. The third stage is education, which implies development of new attitude after discovering the shortcomings of
one's personality. The seeker gets the right direction with the help of a mentor. In the last stage, total transformation of the seeker takes place and s/he becomes a psychological whole.

The mystic-protagonists portrayed in the texts being examined here belong to different cultures and climes and seek enlightenment through varied perception of the Ultimate Reality across diverse religious traditions of the world. Haridas Chaudhuri rightly comments on the divergent theological notions about the ultimate reality, which is essentially one bearing different names under different climes. He observes:

Taoism in China speaks of the way of nature. In Buddhism it is called Tathata, pure existence. In Hinduism, ultimate reality is called Brahman, the great, the eternal. In Christianity, this reality is called heavenly father and the Trinity; in Judaism, Jehovah; in Islam, Allah; in Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda. These different concepts emphasise this or that aspect of the Supreme being. But underlying all these divergent theological notions there is one ultimate reality which alone is capable of satisfying our spiritual thirst. (22)

The separation of the hero-quester/spiritual adventurer from his family starts when he wants to break away from everything in order to rediscover himself. In the Jungian process of individuation, the first stage is that of catharsis characterized by purgation of negativities that one develops on account of harsh and bitter experiences in life. It may result in one's liberation from his parental images and home so that he may grow freely to explore the world at large. But the journey of the hero usually starts with struggle in order to create meaning out of meaninglessness of life that bogs him down: “The existentialists regard man’s quest for meaning as something which permeates his whole life” (Chatterjee 27). And the need for this quest arises “whenever men face new crises, when they revolt against the scientists’ insistence that the real is the measurable, and when they tend to despair at the anonymity of
the faceless structure of principalities and powers, the tendency arises for them to explore the contours of inner experience in quest of certitude” (Chatterjee 30).

Man’s consciousness about himself gives birth to an attitude of critical enquiry about man’s existence in the world. J. A. Cuddon explains Sartre’s viewpoint that man himself is responsible to lend meaning to his otherwise meaningless existence:

In Sartre’s vision, man is born into a kind of void (le neant), a mud (le visqueux). He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine, acquiescent existence . . . in a semi conscious state and in which he is scarcely aware of himself. However he may come out of his subjective, passive situation . . . become increasingly aware of himself and, conceivably, experience angoisse (a species of metaphysical and moral anguish). If so, he would then have a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and suffer despair. The energy deriving from this awareness would enable him to ‘drag himself out of the mud’ and begin to exist. By exercising his power of choice he can give meaning to existence and the universe. (295)

Thus, the journey of the protagonist starts with his existential dilemma which arises from the fact that every human being must face anxiety or existential angst while making difficult decisions which is often caused by the choices that one makes. Steiner observes thus:

Anxiety is that which makes problematic, which makes worthy of our questioning our Being-in-the-world. Angst is one of the primary instruments through which the ontic character and context of everyday existence is made inescapably aware of, is rendered naked to, the pressure of the ontological. And, further, angst is the mark of authenticity. (78)
In *Being and Time*, Heidegger propounds the idea of ‘Being-in-the-world,’ Daisen (which literally means “being there”) and which can exist in two modes, inauthentic and authentic (117). He clearly reveals the relationship between anxiety of human beings and their aspiration for the authentic being and it is the anxiety and fear that exist in the world making an individual experience all the elements of inauthentic existence urging him/her to aspire for authenticity. Thus, the mundane existence becomes a positive force and propels the protagonist to strive for an authentic being.

In his book called *Existentialism and Religious Belief*, David E. Roberts observes that existentialism regards man as fundamentally ambiguous. This is very closely linked to its predominant stress on freedom. Freedom means that we have a hand in making ourselves what we are to become (74). In this freedom, man is free, but he is conscious of responsibility, of remorse, of guilt for what he has done. Hence there can be no simple answer to what man should do with his freedom. In one sense, he must himself create the answer by using his freedom to find out just what he wants to become. In this situation, man cannot avoid the dilemma.

This dilemma is often caused by fear of taking the individual choices when it is against the opinion of the crowd. Therefore, in many ways it demands a very strong will for people to make their own choices. Since the choices are personal matters so that in many ways these are often related to individual’s perspective/subjectivity. Beside his/her strong will, an individual’s beliefs or his/her subjectivity and also the support from the community can be significant factors which support him/her for firming the decisions. Subjectivity plays an important role in those choices because it does not rely on what the crowd’s opinions are. Such opinions are considered morally right and good as most of people believe that these are true. The subjectivity or the individual perspective becomes instrumental in decision making.
because the individual himself has full authority on his life. Yet, each individual who fully authorizes the freedom must own/face the consequences because the freedom of choosing obliges the responsibility to run the risk. Moreover, freedom of choosing also makes people aware of the consequences of their choices. Most of the mystic-protagonists analyzed below face the existential dilemma at one point in time or the other in their lives/quest process.

I

The protagonists such as Siddhartha in *Siddhartha*, Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope*, Santiago in *The Alchemist*, Jonathan in *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and Pichaikuppan or the mouni in *The Silent One* are all seekers of the truth and have to face existential predicament as they journey at physical as well as metaphysical planes. They all have humble beginnings and have all human foibles and follies. Like every one of us on the earth, they too face problems and taste pleasures but they have a clear sense of direction unlike the rest of us. Their inner turmoil does not let them stop asking difficult questions in life and find answers to them. They remain restless to overcome existential predicament which hampers their spiritual growth.

For instance, Hermann Hesse in *Siddhartha*, creates an evocative and deeply moving narrative of individual life caught in the eternal questions of human condition. The journey of Siddhartha, the protagonist espouses the universal human struggle for survival, especially in the face of never ending spiral of human failures and misfortunes. Hesse’s protagonist Siddhartha possesses an overwhelming sense of his own existence. He is a prodigious student of his father’s faith, skilled at chanting and meditation. “Siddhartha has already long taken part in the learned men’s conversations, had engaged in debate with Govinda and had practiced the art of contemplation and meditation with him.” It is expected that Siddhartha would rise quickly and become a major figure in his town. His mastery in pronouncing the
word “Om” silently and the capacity “to recognize atman within the depth of his being, indestructible, at one with the universe” shows his extraordinary spiritual potential. His thirst for knowledge, his interest in deep spiritual thoughts makes him stand apart from all the Brahmins. Everybody in the village loved him. The father loved him for being intelligent and expects him to “be a great learned man, a priest, a prince among Brahmins” (3). The mother felt proud of him. The young Brahmin girls feels attracted to him: “Love stirred in the hearts of young Brahmins’ daughters when Siddhartha walked through the streets of the town, with his lofty brow, his king like eyes and his slim figure.” Govinda, his childhood friend loved him with devotion. “He wanted to follow Siddhartha, the beloved, the magnificent . . . as his friend, his servant, his lance bearer, his shadow.” He is loved by everybody. But “Siddhartha himself was not happy.” He felt “no joy in his heart” (4). Collin Butler explains Siddhartha’s state thus:

He is conscious of a discrepancy between conventional assumptions and personal satisfaction which neither adulation nor material advantage nor received interpretations of life’s meaning can overcome. The apparent cause of Siddhartha’s discomfort is the inception of an awareness of himself as a question-begging phenomenon in a situation which provides no ready answers. (117-118)

This existential anxiety gets noticed in “dreams and a restlessness of the soul [that] came to him, arising from the smoke of the sacrifices, emanating from the verses of the Rig-Veda, trickling through from the teachings of the old Brahmins” (4-5). His existential dilemma comes to fore when the “seeds of discontentment” sprout with in him. He feels a sense of dissatisfaction with his surroundings: “He had begun to feel that the love of his father and mother, and also the love of his friend Govinda, would not always make him happy, give him peace, satisfy and suffice him” (5). He feels that despite all his mastery of all
rituals of Hinduism, something inside was still to be satisfied. His “waiting vessel” was still not full as “his soul was not full” (5). His sense of existential meaninglessness in what he is practicing every day becomes evident in his questioning of Hindu rituals:

The sacrifices and the supplication of the gods were excellent—but were they everything? Did the sacrifices give happiness? And what about the gods? Was it really Prajapati who had created the world? Was it not Atman, he alone who had created it? Were not the gods forms created like me and you, moral and transient? Was it therefore good and right, was it a sensible and worthy act to offer sacrifices to the gods? To whom else should one offer sacrifices, to whom else should one pay honour, but to Him, Atman, the Only One? And where was atman to be found, where did He dwell, where did His eternal heartbeat, if not within the Self, in the innermost, in the innermost, in the eternal which each person carried within him? (5)

Siddhartha questions the rituals of Hinduism as he feels dissatisfied with the Brahmans and their seeking without reaching the goal. Siddhartha feels pained to see that “nobody showed the way, nobody knew it- neither his father, nor his teachers and wise men, nor the holy songs”(5). He believes that though “the Brahmins and their holy books knew everything...they did not know one important thing, the only important thing” (6). Siddhartha feels that he has knowledge of atman but “where was this Self, this innermost?” (5).

But Siddhartha cannot understand how the elder Brahmans, including his father, continue to study and practice the rites of their tradition without having ever, even in their advanced years, experienced the Atman in whose existence they have placed all their faith. He is torn by this dilemma, but in order to come out of it he has to make a choice. He believes that true understanding of the self cannot be gained merely by an intense study of
scriptures. He comes to conclusion that in order to find his way to reach the reality of Self, he will have to search within. He says, "One must find the source with in one's own Self, one must possess it. Everything else was seeking- a detour, error" (6). If Atman resides with in then the oneness with it must proceed by focusing on the world with in. His inner turmoil puts him in a state of contemplation: "Siddhartha sat observed, his eyes staring as if directed at a distant goal, the tip of his tongue showing a little between his teeth. He did not seem to be breathing. He sat thus, lost in meditation thinking Om, his soul as the arrow directed at Brahman. He is impressed with the knowledge of the Hindu scriptures and he contemplates on them often:

"Om is the bow, the arrow is the soul,
Brahman is the arrow's goal
At which one aims unflinchingly." (7)

He contemplates deeply and announces his decision to join the Samanas next day: "tomorrow morning my friend, Siddhartha is going to join the Samanas. He is going to become a Samana” (8). Siddhartha’s determination to pursue his quest becomes evident in his confrontation with his father, when he announces his decision to become a Samana. He puts up a silent defiance and waits for his father’s approval. His father feels restless by Siddhartha’s determination to leave the house to initiate his quest. In the morning, he finds that Siddhartha has remained unmoved physically as well as mentally: “The Brahmin saw that Siddhartha’s knees trembled slightly, but there was no trembling in Siddhartha’s face; his eyes looked far away. Then the father realized that Siddhartha could no longer remain with him at home- that he had already left him” (10).

Even though the father is reluctant, he blesses Siddhartha and allows him to pursue the course of his destiny. With a powerful act of self-assertion, Siddhartha departs from his
family and his environment to find his own destiny. His strong conviction to achieve the true meaning of his life and purpose of existence makes him break free from his family in order to achieve his own sense of identity.

Siddhartha along with Govinda chooses the ascetic way of life relinquishing all their possessions. Siddhartha feels to have found a way to find the self by trying the path of the Samanas, the wandering ascetics who lead a life of self mortification and self denial. Accompanied by Govinda, Siddhartha pledges allegiance to them and they are accepted. For his part, Siddhartha knows little of the Samanas when he commits to joining them. They dedicate themselves to mediation, fasting and other methods of mortification. As a result the whole world became a “stank of lies” and “life was pain” (11) for Siddhartha and his only aim remains “to become empty, to become empty of thirst, desire, dreams, pleasures and sorrow to let the self die” with the hope that by negating the worldly passions and desires he will be able to realize the self. He feels that “when all the passion and desires were silent, then the last must awaken, the innermost of being that is no longer self- the great secret!” (12). He takes to the life of self denial by fasting: “He only ate once a day and never cooked food. He fasted fourteen days. He fasted twenty eight days. Flesh disappeared from his legs and cheeks” (11). He wants to unravel the secret of self and wants to conquer it. He takes to the life of self abnegation:

Silently Siddhartha stood in the fierce sun’s rays, filled with pain and thirst, and stood until he no longer felt pain and thirst. Silently he stood in the rain, water dripping from his hair on to his freezing shoulders, on to his freezing hips and legs. And the ascetic stood until he no longer froze, till they were silent, till they were still. Silently he crouched among the thorns. Blood dripped from his smarting skin, ulcers
formed, and Siddhartha remained stiff, motionless, till no more blood flowed, till there was no more pricking, no more smarting. (12)

The path to self-negation leads him to physical pain which he endured until he no longer felt it as pain: “when the pain is gone, the Self fades into oblivion and peace is attained” (12). Siddhartha has a great learning experience with the Samanas. He learns to hold his breath and lessen his heartbeats, practiced self denial and meditation, and finally escaping from the self. But this escaping always makes him confront the Self: “But although the path took him away from self, in the end they always led back to it” (13).

In his spiritual flights with the Samanas, he leaves his body and merges his consciousness with that of a heron and with a decaying jackal, but always he returns to his own body and his own consciousness without having advanced in his awareness of the Self, no different from any drunk, gambler, or seeker of ecstatic experience. Siddhartha’s choice to negate the self in order to find peace leads him nowhere. “Although Siddhartha fled from the self a thousand times . . . [but] felt the torment of the onerous life cycle” (13). He finds himself again in dilemma and feels that the Samana way of life is a mere escape from the torment of the Self. Siddhartha filled with doubt whether he has grown any wiser by following this path. His existential restlessness comes to fore when he answers Govinda: “What is meditation? What is abandonment of the body? What is fasting? What is holding of breath? It is a flight from the self. It is temporary escape from the torment of Self” (14). Thus disillusioned, he realizes that one can actually learn nothing. The thing called learning does not exist. He says thus: “There is only a knowledge, that is everywhere and that is Atman that is in me and in you and in every creature . . . This knowledge has no worse enemy than man of knowledge, than learning” (16).
He seeks an objective enquiry into the spiritual quest of the Samanas. He says to Govinda, “We learn tricks with which we deceive ourselves, but the essential thing—the way we don’t find.” He feels dissatisfied with this life that once had allured him. He doesn’t feel satisfied with the Samana way of life. He becomes critical of their path and declares that “amongst all Samanas, probably not even one will attain Nirvana” (15). He comes to the conclusion that the Samana path takes them away from the glimpse of self-illumination as they are occupied with seeking and nurture the illusion of spiritual advancement. His existential anxiety is expressed when he tells Govinda that he has not found answers to his questions and the thirst has not been quenched: “I have always thirsted for knowledge . . . on this Samana path my thirst has not grown less. I have always thirsted for knowledge; I have always been full of questions. I have spent a long time and have not yet finished” (15).

Siddhartha is unsettled by the implication of his thoughts but his strong conviction to find a path, makes him realize that “[he has] become distrustful of teachings and learning . . . [and] have little faith in the words that come to us from teachers” (19). Govinda is startled by Siddhartha’s decision to move on but accepts it as he believes in highly individualistic nature of Siddhartha and his strong will to reach at higher plain of life. Siddhartha decides to leave the Samana path to seek divine truth and spiritual enlightenment. Siddhartha informs the Samana leader of his and Govinda’s decision to leave. Like the old Brahmin, the Samana grows angry and scolds the young men in an effort to intimidate them. As with his father, Siddhartha then subdues the will of the old Samana, and this time by hypnotizing him, making him mute, crippling his will, even eliciting several bows from him (20).

Only three years after leaving his father, Hesse’s Siddhartha in turn grows tired of the Samanas’ ascetic path. As before, he has immersed himself in the doctrine and practice of a religion, and he has attained a level of mastery and established himself as a promising heir to
a spiritual legacy, only to grow disillusioned, unwilling to live up to the expectations and hopes his elders have placed in him. As with the Brahmin elders, the old Samanas lose their luster as spiritual models for Siddhartha. In order to progress in his awareness, he must integrate what he experiences and thus transform the self. Siddhartha’s realization that he cannot look for such integration in teachers and doctrines signals a shift in his focus toward the authority of inner experience—to first understand and intimately know the self that he so dearly wants to fly away from.

Whereas Siddhartha’s journey to self-realization begins by breaking away from his family and everything he is familiar with, Raja Rao’s protagonist, Ramaswamy gets conscious of his inner quest by getting involved in his family responsibilities and by getting back to a lost heritage of knowledge and wisdom. Ramaswamy is a complex character. Much of the action takes place in his psyche. The following words of the protagonist, Ramaswamy bring out the essence of his journey as a quester:

Existance [...] is a passage between life and death, and birth and death again, and what an accumulation of pain man has to bear. Is it wonder that the Buddha, with palaces and queens, with a kingdom and an heir, left his home to find that from which there is no returning? You could only live in Life, and to find what that means is to know the whole wisdom. (135)

Ramaswamy, the narrator-protagonist of The Serpent and the Rope belongs to a rich Brahmin family of Mysore. He is a Brahmin in true sense of the word as he claims, “I was born a Brahmin – that is, devoted to truth and all that” (5). He is always keen to study, analyze and discuss in order to know the truth. He has a keen, penetrating intellect. Well versed in Hindu philosophies and metaphysics, he is eager to know the truth about other religions and philosophies. Ramaswamy knows grammar and the Brahma Sutras; he starts
reading the *Upanishads* at the age of four and is given the holy thread at seven. He is given the holy thread so early to perform the obsequies of his mother, an event that has a profound influence on his psyche and affects his thought process forever. His one mission in life is to interpret India to west and that is why he takes to the study of history, though his father wanted him to devote himself to mathematics. He calls himself a “holy vagabond”(9), as he travels a number of countries and meets a number of people and is always keen to have philosophical discussions with them—particularly on Vedantic philosophy—so that he may bring about a better understanding of India in the west. He traces his genealogy back to Vidyaranya (Madhavacharya) and still beyond to the sage Yagnavalkya, defies convention but respects creed and establishes himself as a true Advaitin pursuing *Jnanayoga* for his salvation.

Rama becomes a Lecturer in History and takes up the Albigensian Heresy as the subject of research and more particularly the influence of Vedanta on Cathar philosophy. After his education in India, Rama, a post-graduate, goes across the seas on a scholarship to France with a view to quenching his intellectual and materialistic thirst. Thus he intends to establish a link between the Eastern and Western metaphysical schools of thought.

The existential preoccupation of Rao’s protagonist can be seen in his feeling of rootlessness from his native Indian tradition, his identity crises and sense of vacuum that he experiences in his relationships. He suffers from the existential void that is created because of his orphanhood. He accepts the loss of his mother as an irretrievable loss which has left its mark on his mind. Rama’s mother died when he was only seven years old, and his father married a second time and then a third time. He became an orphan at the age of seven. “I was born an orphan, and have remained one” (6). His father loved him and “was protection and kindness itself” (9). But he could not get over the emotional vacuum that has been created by
the loss of his mother. “I have wandered the world and have sobbed in hotel rooms and in trains, have looked at the old mountains and sobbed, for I had no mother” (6). His sobbing is heard throughout the novel right from the death of his mother: “I went to my room. Looking at my mother’s picture I was filled with such pain that I was on the point of sobbing my heart hollow. But I rubbed my eyes carefully, undressed, and like a schoolboy I went to bed” (301). The orphanhood which haunts Rama forces him to journey in different directions and finally he ends up with his realization of a genuine Indian identity. Rama’s observation that, “Life is a pilgrimage, I know, but a pilgrimage to where – and of what?” (26) shows his sense of alienation.

Through rootlessness of his protagonist, Raja Rao is trying to portray the inner conflicts Ramaswamy experiences while intermingling with people of other cultures. Though Rama is a historian by profession, by tradition he remains a devout Brahmin: “There never was time, there never was history, there never was anything but Shivoham, Shivoham, I am Shiva, I am the Absolute” (197). Rama is a descendent of an ancient Brahmin family, thus has firm footing in Indian tradition. His voluntary distance from his motherland always makes him crave for it. When he visits India to meet his father who is on death bed and eventually dies, he becomes conscious of his alienation and rootlessness. The existential anxiety regarding his identity overpowers him: “For I had serious questions of my own and I could not name them. Something has just missed me in life” (26). He feels alienated from his country and tradition. S.P. Swain observes:

He is torn between the concepts of timelessness—his Indian identity and a time bound historical existence—his other identity, that of the historian. The presence of two opposing forces in his psyche—the historical west and the traditional India—keep on warring within his quagmire self. They never reconcile.” (150-151)
Throughout the narrative, he is not able to reconcile between Rama, the historian and Rama, the Brahmin. The spiritual in him is yet to be activated and so remains dormant despite his Vedic footing. He has not been able to prevail over the historian in him because he has not started practicing what he has learnt from the Indian ethos.

Ramaswami’s existential predicament becomes evident in his relationship with Madeleine, his French wife. He goes to France for the purpose of study and during his stay there he is attracted towards Madeleine, a French lady who is five years older than him. At the University of Caen, Rama gets the acquainted with Madeleine Rousslein, five years his senior in age. Madeleine, a French teacher in history is interested in tracing the origin of the Holy Grail in the Cathars. Rama and Madeleine fall in love with each other and after three years, they get married. Madeleine loved Rama partly “because she felt India had been wronged by the British, and because she would, in marrying [Rama], know and identify herself with a great people” (18). Rama, in turn, is fascinated by the European civilization. The domestic life starts off on a happy note mainly due to Madeleine’s love for India and its rich cultural tradition. The reason behind her fascination is his Brahminhood. Her parents died leaving her an estate which is being looked after by her uncle Charles.

Rama, who is a curious mixture of sensuousness and asceticism, is as strongly attracted by the beauty of Madeleine's body as by the virtues of her character. Being an Indian Brahmin, Rama is obviously impressed by Madeleine's active interest in Indian philosophy and religion and by her virtuous character; she is well known among her relatives and friends for being a person of great virtue and piety. Her cousins teasingly warn her that she will end up in a convent. She shares Rama’s interest in the Cathars, because she finds in them kindred souls of purity. This streak of asceticism endears her to Rama, who never tires of talking about his purity and Brahminism.
The two love each other deeply and their married life is marked by mutual understanding, sympathy, and trust. They spend early years of their marriage in playful fun and amusement, like children. Looking at them from a distance, theirs will appear a marriage of true minds. They indeed enjoy a reputation among friends and relatives as an ideal couple. George compliments them: “I have never seen a European couple act and behave with such innocence” (81-82). Their marriage is truly a marriage of minds, having close temperamental affinities. Through this marriage, Rama comes near experiencing self-realization. She is extremely sincere in her efforts toward making this marriage successful.

Rama’s original intention was to obtain his doctoral degree and then to return to India with his wife and become a Professor at an Indian University. But this proves to be a dream because events take a different course. A child is born to them whom they call Krishna and later Pierre. Hearing of his father’s illness, Rama returns to India. With his father’s death Rama feels wholly orphaned. Soon he receives the sad news about the death of his one month-old son Pierre of bronchial-pneumonia. The story has thus started the action of the novel and prepared the physical basis for the spiritual evolution of Rama. Rama’s stay in India after his father’s death brings out the missing link in his relationship with Madeleine. This journey becomes the first step towards Rama’s spiritual realization as it brings out his a sense of vacuum in him. Rama accompanies his Little Mother to Benares and other holy places on the Himalayas to perform his father’s obsequies. His visit to the holy river has a metaphysical significance.

Thus, Rama’s return to India has the effect of generating in him a deeper interest and keen awareness of his Indian roots. His realization that he is now the head of the family, combined with awakening of his Indian heritage, brings about a great transformation in his inner being. In India he enjoys the close intimacy of his family: “Living in the intimacy of my
own family—where every gesture, idiosyncrasy, or mole mark was traced back to some cousin, aunt, or grandfather; where there was subtle understanding of half said things, of acts that were respected . . . gave a feeling of complex oneness, from which one could never get out save by death, even after that one could get into it again in the next life, and so on till the wheel of existence were ended” (277).

This journey brings a change in his attitude towards Madeleine as S. P. Swain observes:

Ramaswamy’s attachment to his stepmother, to his sister Saroja and to Savithri, generate in him an awareness of different facets of the feminine—mother, sister and concubine and he feels an inner vacuum. He realizes the absence of something significant in his affinity with his French wife Madeleine. His encounter with the feminine principle symbolized in his relationship with little mother and his sister Saroja makes him able to reckon all of sudden the cause of his alienation from Madeleine. (151)

In his native land, now he becomes the head of the family. Before he returns to France, Rama tells Saroja, one of his three half-sisters that Little Mother will be his representative. To him, Saroja is an ideal Indian woman. Rama takes with him one of the sari of Saroja and Little Mother’s ancestral toe-rings as gift for Madeleine. But he can never give them to Madeleine.

On his return to France he is at once conscious of a difference: “For once I felt a stranger in France” (59) because of Madeleine’s cold behavior. He notices the difference for the first time of her not being an Indian. His soul does not find satisfaction in this relationship, and makes him yearn for a perfect union of mind and spirit. Though he and Madeleine are husband and wife, a true affection does not bind them. When she interrogates,
“What is it separated us, Rama?” he says, “India” (331). Bhattacharya explains the reason for their separation thus:

To her, marriage was like a pair of parallel rails on which runs the life’s train. She had accepted Rama, she wanted to possess him wholly, but she could never merge her identity with that of his, she could never become a member of his larger family, accepting his tradition as her own and continuing with that tradition in future; she could never be like the Brahmaputra that merges with the Ganga and conjointly flows to sea. (292)

Madeleine shows great concern for Rama’s health and serves him with total devotion. Even when things cease to go well with them, their love remains unaffected. Rama continues to hold her in the highest regard, and Madeleine continues to think of his welfare. She initiates the action of divorce so that Rama can go back to the warmer climate of India which is good for his lungs; she also presents him with his freedom so that he can marry a young Hindu wife. Rama and Madeleine are, broadly speaking, alike in temperament and character, and they seem to be made for each other. She is proud of Rama’s brilliance and loves him dearly. But she feels insecure. She thinks she has failed Indian gods but she is mistaken, for Rama can easily worship her gods.

Madeleine comes under the influence of Georges, the Christian fanatic, and drifts away from Rama. Death of Pierre makes the agnostic Madeleine religious but not philosophical. She is not able to obtain the detachment that Rama has almost mastered. Rama’s approach is altogether different. Rama, is not worried because death for him is not the end of life but the continuation of it. It is not as agonizing to him as it is to Madeleine, the Westerner. Rama's philosophical attitude towards life makes him take his son’s death with an easy mind. Rama remains unperturbed over the death of his son, Pierre.
Madeleine is aware of Rama’s “masculine isolation” and “Indian alone-ness” (36). Rama is naturally bent to find answers to some deeper questions about existence. She observes that Rama’s “people [Indians] are sentimental about the invisible, we about the visible. And to me you were the invisible made concrete, so visible, incarnate Beside me - and my husband” (37). She implies that Rama, being an Indian, is concerned more with the invisible Madeleine is aware of Rama’s “Inner strength -- the wall, the stone wall that will never yield” (40). Both Rama and Madeleine's points of view diverge beyond a certain point. Madeleine, as a Westerner steeped in materialistic philosophy, looks at life as a manifestation of one's temporal wishes. She is concerned with the visible, and the here and the immediate. At the same time, she does not fail to see the East and its impact on her husband, Rama and that forces her to get estranged from him without any possibility of reconciliation at any point. This shows that Rama is all set to go to another, higher level towards self-realization. Rama wants her as his “companion of pilgrimage. . . to lie at the feet of God together and unalone” (99). After his return from India, Rama confesses to her: “Mado, something has happened” (65). They are conscious of differences, of something that has gone wrong. When Madeleine asks him, “Have I failed your gods?” He answers her without any understandable reason: “You’ve failed me” (66). This un-understandable reason comes to surface with the appearance of Savithri in Rama’s life that becomes a potent influence in his life. The tragic occurrences like the death of his son, demise of his father, retrieval of Madeleine from worldly affairs, and death of his second child aggravate Rama’s feeling of solitude.

The quest for self-realization for Ramaswamy is enhanced by his active involvement in human life and activity. Through his involvement in these relationships he seeks to achieve self knowledge. His existential awareness of his alienation, his rootlessness from his motherland and an unfulfilling marriage sets his quest in motion as he becomes more
concerned with the truth of human condition, his freedom to make meaning in life. His recognition of the nature of life as he lives it, leads to his spiritual awakening.

II

In the course of life man is faced with various kinds of situations where he has to make choices, nevertheless, making a choice in any kind of situation causes existential dilemma. In order to overcome the dilemma, decisions have to be taken, no matter how difficult they are. The existential predicament is usually caused by the fact that the process of decision-making sometimes becomes extremely personal so much so that the choices that one makes are contrarian to other people's choices in the society. Meanwhile, the society's opinion is equated with the crowd in Kierkegaard's existentialism, usually constructs people on the basis of what they should/should not choose. The crowd or community implies the common opinions which are considered morally right and good opinions because most of people believe that such opinions are true. It is the crowd who criticizes/ punishes its members who do not follow its norms.

Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* is a study of one such a protagonist who has to go beyond the society in order to realize his true self and be an authentic being. He tries to find answers to such question as to the reason why we are born, the purpose of our life, the identity of the entity that guides us, and whether we have the power to shape our destiny through the portrayal of his protagonists. Santiago, the protagonist of *The Alchemist* is a poor Andalusian boy who is faced with an existential dilemma when his parents want him to be a priest. For his parents as a simple farm family, having a son who becomes a priest will give them a sense of being important in the society. Therefore they even send their son to the seminary since he was a child. However, for, Santiago the most important thing in his life is travelling. In spite of being a priest, in his young age, Santiago decides to be a shepherd.
Since his childhood, Santiago wants to know the world. He feels that “I could not have found God in the seminary” (10). For him, understanding the existence of God is not only by entering seminary. He has to make a choice and he tells his father that “he wanted to travel” (8). When his father gives him reason that “the people who come here have a lot of money to spend, so they can afford to travel . . . . Amongst us, the only ones who travel are the shepherds,” Santiago shows his determination: “Well, then I’ll be a shepherd!” (9) as his financial condition offers him the only choice, and that is to be a shepherd.

Becoming a shepherd does not diminish his spirit to pursue his dream as he observes: “The world was huge and inexhaustible . . . it is the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting” (10). Santiago’s choice to be a shepherd illustrates that Santiago has the freedom to choose. As the consequence of his choice to be a shepherd, Santiago has to accept all the responsibility. His journey starts with separation from his family and region. Being separated from his family is a new situation that he must face. Being a shepherd also means that he has to be alone, but he makes sheep his companions: “It was as if some mysterious energy bound his life to that of the sheep” (4). Although he still able to meet other people when he arrives in a town but he spends most of his time in the field with his flock as they do not make him sad and feel lonely.

Thus, Santiago is aware of the consequences of his choice to be a shepherd. Moreover, his acceptance towards the obstacle is the proof of his responsibility towards his choice. Thus Santiago uses his ‘power of choice’ to get himself out of the predicament to lend meaning to his existence. But Santiago is again faced with the dilemma to choose whether to be a shepherd in order to meet the merchant’s daughter or to leave his job as a shepherd in order to look for the hidden treasure in Africa after he dreams about finding a hidden treasure. Santiago is fascinated by the merchant’s daughter and “the desire to live in
one place forever” (6) overpowers him. Santiago is very enthusiastic about the meeting because the last meeting really impresses him. But he doubts whether the merchant’s daughter still remembers him or not. “He was excited, and at the same time uneasy: maybe the girl had already forgotten him. Lots of shepherds passed through, selling their wool” (6).

Santiago worries his future meeting with the merchant’s daughter because he is afraid that it would make him to stop travelling that he values the most. His heart knows that “shepherds, like seamen and like travelling salesmen, always found a town where there was someone who could make them forget the joys of carefree wandering” (6). These choices puzzle him. Santiago doubts whether he should pursue one of the choices or not; going to Africa and sacrificing all his sixty sheep for something he knows nothing about or meeting the merchant daughter whom he is not sure that she still remembers him. It is complicated choice.

Santiago is filled with existential anguish because “he had to choose between something he had become accustomed to and something he wanted to have” (26). Before it, Santiago asks a Gypsy woman to interpret his dream, but does not take her seriously and goes back to his routine life. Melchizedek appears and tells Santiago not to let fate govern his life. He asks Santiago’s purpose of being shepherd and Santiago replies: “Because I like to travel (21)”. Melchizedek explains whatever the hurdle may be, “people are capable at any time in their lives, of doing what they dream of” (21).

Melchizedek appears to initiate Santiago on his journey to find his personal legend. Santiago decides to go to Africa in order to find the hidden treasure. After Santiago makes a decision, Santiago meets Melchizedek for the second time. Here the function of Melchizedek is to help Santiago to firm up his decision. He gives Santiago two stones called Urim and Thummim. Urim is the black stone and it signifies ‘yes’, while the white stone is Thummim.
which signifies ‘no’. These stones will help Santiago to read the omens but Melchizedek suggests Santiago makes his own decisions thus teaches Santiago to trust himself because it is only he who has a full authority over himself. The strong levanter wind urges him to move freely: “The boy felt jealous of the freedom of the wind, and saw that he could have the same freedom” (27). He realizes that one must be free to move and develop without remaining tied down by material possessions. He makes his choice and concludes that “the sheep, the merchant’s daughter . . . were only the steps along the way to his destiny” (27).

As he chooses to look for the hidden treasure in Africa, Santiago must sell his sixty sheep which he takes care for two years in order to get the money to go to Africa. Santiago does not lament his condition although Santiago’s decision results in leaving his good life as a shepherd and also his dream to meet the merchant’s daughter. This is the proof of Santiago’s responsibility towards his choice. This is not an easy choice. He prefers to be a shepherd because he is able to follow his dream.

When Santiago arrives at Tangier port, Africa, a man robs all Santiago’s money. Santiago is depressed by this condition since he thinks that the man would be his guide to the Pyramids. The worse is that he does not know anything about this continent especially about the language spoken in Africa. This condition puts him into dilemma whether to go back to Spain or to continue the journey to the Pyramids. Soon after this incident, he wants to get back to Spain again, a place he is familiar with. He loses faith in his dream. But remembering the stones and Melchizedek’s words immediately renews Santiago’s commitment to his quest and he cries out with new enthusiasm: “This wasn’t a strange place; it was new one” and affirms his faith in his dream: “I am an adventurer looking for treasure” (40).
His action of asking the stones explains that he experiences dread. He doubts his
ability to choose because his previous decision making leads him to part with his wealth.
Afterwards, he learns that he has to make his own decisions because he himself has the power
to decide what he wants. The feeling of having the power brings a positive energy to
Santiago. Santiago becomes more confident and he is less desperate than before. Although he
does not have a cent in his pocket but he has a faith. The next morning, Santiago welcomes
his new adventure happily. He walks to the narrow street of Tangier. In this street, he finds a
crystal shop. Santiago offers an exchange to the crystal merchant: “I can clean up those
glasses in the window, if you want,” said the boy. “The way they look now, nobody is going
to want to buy them.” The man looked at him without responding. “In exchange, you could
give me something to eat” (43).

This shows his commitment to stay in Africa. He does not lament his condition again.
He becomes hopeless when the crystal merchant adds that he can give Santiago the money he
needs to get back to his country as Santiago won’t be able to earn enough money to go to the
Pyramids. This really weakens his spirit. It becomes the reason why Santiago decides to work
for the crystal merchant and said that he needs the money to buy some sheep, not to go to
Egypt. The dilemma ends at this point. He has already decided to work for the crystal
merchant to earn money to buy some sheep. The reason of choosing is the fact that Santiago
is someone who does not have anything in this new continent. He does not have knowledge
about the continent, he cannot speak the language, he does not have the money, and also he
does not know how far the Egyptian pyramids are. He considers his own ability whether he is
able to continue the journey or not. This aspect also influences his pending journey to the
Egyptian pyramids and working at the crystal merchant’s shop.
Santiago’s spiritual journey starts with severing of his bond with family (the stage of catharsis in Jungian Individuation process). He reaches what is the second stage of elucidation when Santiago becomes occupied with the questions of existence which helps him in the reconstruction of his personality.

Richard Bach in *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* depicts the journey of the protagonist who chooses his own path by breaking the conventions to realize his true self. The journey of Jonathan Livingston Seagull follows the pattern of Campbell’s quest cycle in term of the three stages that of separation, initiation and return. The protagonist Jonathan, is frustrated with his daily routine to search for food and fight over it. He is pained to see the meaninglessness of gulls existence and limitation of his life: “Most of the gulls don’t bother to learn more than the simplest facts of flight—how to get from shore to food and back again. For most gulls it is not flying that matters but eating.” But Jonathan has a strong desire to fly: “It was not eating that matters but flight” (4). His passion for flight makes him experimental and he starts flying even though he does not know much about the techniques yet. But his desire to go beyond dismays his family: “Why is it so hard to be like the rest of the flock, Jon? Why can’t you leave low flying to the pelicans?, the albatross? Why don’t you eat? Jon, you’re bone and feathers!” Thus Jonathan’s dream meets negative response from the family and all the gulls around him. When he argues that he wants to go beyond the daily chase and fight for food, his father dismisses his idea and asks him to concentrate on food. He repudiates him: “If you must study, then study food, and how to get it. This flying business is all very well, but you can’t eat a glide, you know. Don’t you forget that the reason you fly is to eat” (5).

Society thus has its sway over Jonathan and for the next few days he tries to behave like other gulls: he tries to screech and fight with the flock around the piers and fishing boat,
diving on scraps of fish and bread. However he could not make it work and find all this pointless. He feels that he can spend all this time learning to fly: “Jonathan gull was off by himself again, far out at sea, hungry, happy, learning.” He dares to make an individual choice as against the opinion of the gull society. He learns new lessons of flight every day and in the process “learned more about speed than the fastest gull alive” (5).

As Jonathan becomes his own guide and learns through his own experiences, he has his share of doubts and failures. As he flies high he couldn’t control his speed. He doesn’t give up and keep practicing but again loses control and results in “terrible uncontrolled disaster” (10). And he becomes overburdened with this “weight of failure” and it breaks his will to continue on the same path: “he wished feebly, that the weight could be just enough to drag him gently down to the bottom, and end it all” (11).

A sense of disappointment and doubt regarding his passion for flying overpowers him. He feels ‘dread’ regarding his passion for flying: “I am a seagull. I am limited by my nature” (11). He feels doubtful and existential anxiety and meaninglessness of his endeavor prevails over him. He decides to return to his normal life. For some time, he feels satisfied to have become “just another one of the flock” (14).

Though Jonathan failed many times, got discouraged and tried to conform, the passion/ fire in his belly along with the drive to be better, forced him to try harder. Being a very introspective gull, he would deconstruct to determine what he did and makes improvements. He finds the secret of flying for a gull is to fly with short wings. He succeeds in overcoming his doubt and bounces back with determination and enthusiasm: “His vows of a moment before were forgotten, swept away in that great swift wind.” He starts practicing again and feels “alive, trembling ever so slightly with delight.” He breaks the rule of Gull Flock and pushed his limits and reaches the speed of two hundred miles per hundred and he
realizes the power, joy and beauty of speed. He shows faith in his choice and by breaking the promise shows his responsibility towards his choice. He feels that “such promises are only for the gulls that accept the ordinary. One who has touched excellence in his learning has no need of that kind of promise” (15). It was an achievement that no gull had achieved in the gull community. Jonathan discovers the loop, the slow roll, the point roll, the inverted spin, the gull hunt and the pen wheel. Jonathan feels elated at the prospect of giving meaning to a gull’s life. He wants to tell the Flock that a gull’s life has something more to achieve rather than fighting for food only: “We can lift ourselves out of ignorance, we can find ourselves as creatures of excellence and intelligence and skill. We can be free! We can learn to fly!” (17).

He feels happy at this sudden realization that life can be meaningful too if they try to find it. But when he lands among the gull flocks, Jonathan is called to “stand to centre” (24) for shame because he has violated the limits of gull life. He is charged with irresponsibility towards gull family as gull flock believes that, “life is unknown and unknowable, except that we are put into this world to eat, to stay alive as long as we possibly can” (25). No one dares to speak against the Council Flock but Jonathan poses his question: “who is more responsible than a gull who finds and follows a meaning, a higher purpose for life? . . . We have reasons to live, to learn, to discover, to be free!”(25).

But the gull Flock turns its back on Jonathan and he is banished from the Flock to live a lonely life on Far Cliffs. Jonathan feels existential alienation and sadness as he says, “Other gulls refused to believe the glory of the flight that awaited them” (25). But this solitude helps him to look into himself and he learns many other ways of flying high and how by learning to fly he does not need to be dependent on fishing boat and stale bread. He learns to fly through dense fog. In this learning process he comes to know the reason that “boredom and fear and anger are the reasons that a gull’s life is so short” (26). Because of the freedom he has,
Jonathan must consider each choice in every dilemma. If Jonathan does not have the freedom, he just follows what is chosen by the crowd; Jonathan does not need to make considerations. By having the freedom of choosing, Jonathan is conscious of what he chooses and he is responsible to bear the consequences of his choices.

In *The Silent One*, Sujatha Vijayaraghavan makes the mystic stature of her protagonist obvious at the beginning through reverent attitude of the people toward him. The novel opens at the mystical note where the village boys of Kodumudi region are trying to guess the age of a mystic called 'thatha' by the people. But they feel helpless as they say, “so many grains . . . so many years, he could, of course give the precise number, but it did not matter.” All the calculations were useless as “one by one the details made up so many hundreds of years and in the end defeated themselves, making time hang its head in shame”(1).

Vijayaraghavan introduces her protagonist as a mystic at the very beginning. In fact, he is held in reverence by the villagers of Kodumudi region. He has taken shelter in a nearby forest: “The Kodumudi Range of hills are closely set and has always been a refuge for those who wished to withdraw from the world of people and things” (24). And people from nearby villages come to seek his blessings but without disturbing his peace. The author states, “Nobody ever ruled that he was not to be disturbed or that he should not be followed when he walked. It was just that everybody knew how to behave with him.” The mirasder had a tradition of carrying a pot of milk to the mouni whenever he visited that area. But “he never accepted any food or drink. No one had ever seen him put out his hand for anything . . .” (8). The mystic mouni is free from all the bondages to which an earthly being is attached. He moves freely like wind and leave everyone blessed with his presence. He is often seen in the cremation ground by Vetiyan, who drapes the mouni with a white cloth which he had pulled from a corpse. He feels that the mouni is “just like a moving corpse,
that’s all” (9). But the Vetiyans also has a sense of appreciation for the ‘mouni’ because “there was something more, though what that was he did not know” (9). The mouni becomes a leitmotif that touches the life of generations with his deep mystical silence. The vagaries of existence do not bother him while people around him are grappling with the existential problems.

Though the narrative traces the life journey of the mystic mouni, it also brings to fore the strong bond of father and son as the *samskaras* of the one generation are carried over by the next generation. Thus, the grandfather, Iswara Sarma, and Pichai’s father, Paramasivan who too attain salvation or self-realization are the stepping stones in the spiritual growth of the protagonist, Pichaikuppan. They become ‘guru’ figures who initiate their sons into *bhakti* of their family deity and *jnana* yoga through the study of the scriptures, to attain salvation. It is the path of attaining the enlightenment that the protagonist follows. It becomes imperative to understand the journey of Iswara Sharma and Paramasivan, their apprehensions and dilemmas on their quest for self-realisation.

Iswara Sharma was a Vedic scholar of repute and a “satavaadhani” (a Vedic practice which helps in training the mind.) He was considered “a genius who had the rare gift of applying himself to a hundred challenging intellectual tasks at the same time, succeeding in all of them” (65) and was revered by everyone. The study of three Vedas, *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Samaveda* required rigid discipline and great effort. Lakshamma, his wife remembers how “Iswara had practiced continence in thought, word and deed even after he was married” (10). Iswara sarma initiated his son Paramasivan into his spiritual journey towards self-realization through the ritualistic worship of their ancestral deity. Paramasivan was passionate about his studies and wanted to follow his father, who was the master of the art of
“sataavadhanam”. He was an ardent pupil who “never had enough” (78). He practiced with his father every day and followed his rigid routine:

He was always up first, although his father never slept for more than three or four hours. Already bathed and neatly dressed in a long white dhoti and upper cloth, with sacred ash smeared all over, he would be ready to draw up water from the well, for his father’s bath. By the time his father left the courtyard and entered the house, all the necessary accessories in the prayer room would be ready. (78)

During the ritual worships of the family deity Bala, he would observe every detail minutely. But soon he finds himself in existential dilemma regarding his action of worshipping the goddess in the stone. His conscious becomes occupied with the question of existence of goddess in the stone: “was she really in the stone and did she know what was happening.” He kept thinking of goddess all the time and as it became unbearable for him, he asked his father: “is she really in it?” (78). But his questioning was met with silence on the part of his father. Days passed and the boy kept doing his routine but the silence of his father overwhelmed him: “the stillness was such that he was frightened even to look around the scene of worship or think of something.” He kept performing his service to his father but his question was not attended to. His inner turmoil was not silenced though he “learnt to be silent, first by his words becoming still on his lips and then inside his mind” (79). The days passed and he grew silent.

His father initiated Paramasivan into worship of family deity Bala with a word from him that he “will continue to perform this worship all [his] life” (81). The boy felt happy because of the faith shown by his father in him. The father dispels his anxiety by answering him. The father says that he can find goddess everywhere, even in the stone because “she has become everything.” But tells him that this claim can be validated by one’s own experience:
“You will know her within you and you will know yourself as her, without any difference” (81). He tells him that ultimate goal of life is to merge in her. He now becomes the fellow-worshipper of the deity along with his father. But the restlessness and the anxiety of the soul never left him. He expresses his doubt regarding the ritual worship, his father performs everyday thus: “Had his father known what he had aimed to get? Why was he still worshiping the deity, when everything was within?” (81).

He finds contradiction in his father’s saying that everything lies within and his worship of the deity. Sensing Paramasivan’s restlessness, the father answers him with a question, “What happens when a river runs into the ocean?” (82). He tells his son that the river loses its existence and becomes sea. At this stage Paramsivan doesn’t get the essence of his father’s teachings but he begins to trust his father. Gradually Iswara Sarma withdraws from the ritualistic worship, speaks less and confines his diet. The passing away of his father propels Paramsivan in his quest for awakening as he decides to find the answer to his father’s question: “The answer had to be understood not merely by his words but by finding out for himself” (84).

Thus Paramsivan’s existential dilemmas are result of his lack of faith in what he is practicing at the moment. Unshakeable faith is essential for any kind of spiritual endeavor. However various types of doubt may arise about the method of practicing meditation or a particular technique. These doubts distract the mind. During this time, unshakeable faith (shraddha) in the objective, in himself and in the methods which he has adopted is needed. And in order to reach his destination of self realization, he has to overcome it by his faith in his action. Thus determined to find an answer to his father’s question about the existence of the river when it merges with the ocean, he seems to have overcome his anxiety as he knows clearly the path he has to follow. He becomes confident about his direction towards the
spiritual fulfillment: “I can answer him only when I know for myself” (84). A great change comes over him and he completely devotes himself to the study of Vedas to be the master of Vedas to become a Trivedi like his father. Paramsivan achieves his goal and is hailed as Trivedi.

The existential preoccupation is discernible also in the tribesmen from the mountains who are at mercy of the feudal lords who use then like slaves for their own purpose. In some unknown period of time, the tribe from mountains grapples with the threat to their existence. The author takes us into the world of Marutorammai, tribal mother of wood carriers in their mountain forest. The tribesmen live in harmony with mother nature and Oomaiya (the silent mouni) is their lord who “was the eldest brother of their mountains and trees and had seen the tree sprout from their seeds and rocks grow from stones” (43). They are never tired of hearing stories about Oomaiya. The mootan, the headman of the tribe knows about Oomaiyan: “In the long years that their tribe had known him, he had never once put his hand asking for his share. The mootan knew that Oomaiyan had seen several generations of the headmen” (41). Every elder tribal man knows about him so does Marutorammai, an aged midwife of tribe and “she had seen him since she was a very small girl” (42).

She is held in high esteem by the tribesmen as she knows her people and their fortunes. The author states: “If there was one in their tribe, apart from their gods, the earth, the sky, the spirits of their ancestors and the rocks and trees who knew of their people, their past and their fortunes, it was Marutorammai” (42). But their existence is threatened by the feud lords, who drag the tribesmen to work for them whenever needed. A king from the northern state is on a pilgrimage to the south along the course of Cauveri, to talk about a Trivedi (the silent one) who lived with the southern king’s uncle for at least six or seven years. The wood carriers have been arranged from the neighboring settlements of tribes that
are not too deep in the forests. The wood carriers carry heavy loads on their head and work in life threatening situations with heavy loads on their head and have been dragged out of their settlements. The author narrates thus:

The wood carriers had come a long way from their homes, dragged out of their settlements to chop and carry wood, to hunt, to get baskets of the best, silvery fish from the streams and ponds and to supply rabbits endlessly, to fetch endless pots of water from the wells of the estate till the king stayed there, to cut grass for the horses and for the cows that would gather there from nearby villages, to grind cotton seeds for them and wash the cows and rub down the horses, to skin deer and boar before they were roasted, and to work in silent wakefulness in the day and at night, without losing a thumb for thieving. (41)

The mootan imagines a better time ahead for the tribe: “they would move up westward into thicker jungles, into higher ranges, where they could not be reached” (43). He remembers Marutorammai and how she always talks about Oomaiyan and she once said that “Oomaiyan was their Mootammi’s man” (44). Marutorammai’s grief and pain can be felt in her strong desire to “go back to the mountains from where we came” (46). She feels that their existence is threatened by the feudal lords who will “wipe us out and make every life bag dry. The tribal men’s existence in consonance with Mother Nature (Mootammai) is threatened by the “beasts who rides horse or those who live in big houses, to work for whom you are taken away” (47).

Her only hope lies in Oomaiyan as she firmly believes that “he will come to us.” She condemns the feudal lords as their souls have been corrupted by worldly influences and therefore “they make a sound to hide what they hold inside.” She has firm faith in Oomaiyan, who understands the language of mother nature as “he has nothing to hide” (47).
remembers Oomaiyan as one with mother nature and even “tigers and elephants knew him to be one of their kind. She becomes emotional when she recollects their history as “children of Mootammai.” She vehemently tells her people that “Oomaiyan knew Mootammai for his woman” (49) and call them fools as they are not willing enough to be part of their history. She tells the tribesmen of Oomaiyan who was found in the mountains and never lived in hut: “He was always in the forests” (51). She exhorts her tribesmen not to forget their actual place. She expresses herself vehemently:

Mootammai, whose body is earth, whose hair is the rain cloud, whose breasts are the mountains and whose milk flows in the rivers will search for such a man and embrace him. She will take for him the shape of a beautiful woman, with thighs that have the scent of wild lotuses and arms that are like sweet tubers. So if you want to live there- we must move on- you must not hide what you hold inside. Then you will become strong, and the wild elephants and tigers will give you place as they gave place to our Mootammai, Agathimootan and Oomaiyan. (51)

She feels pained to see that the very existence of theirs is at stake. Her only comfort is a faint hope Oomaiyan, who will take them out of this predicament.

There are other minor characters in the narrative who are grappling with the desire to meet the silent one in order to achieve salvation. The priest, Mouli Sastri grandson of Krishna Sastri, of the temple in Kodumudi hill, knows the mouni as he hears about him from his grandfather Krishna Sastri. “because of the long spells statue like retreat the silent one had made in the small shrine of the goddesses . . . inside that darkness, without air, without food, he stayed on, wrapped in tranquility, with the old priest guarding him fiercely” (20). The silent one departs leaving the old priest in waiting for his blessings. The old priest leaves his ritual worship and food as his longing for the silent one becomes potent.
Another character is a debauched king, whose life becomes a search for the silent one after his first encounter with the divine presence in Suvarnagiri when the mouni enters into king’s encampment in the mango groove. The enraged king hacks the arm down but the silent one keeps on moving to the amazement and fear of all: “They had all been terrified because they had feared that the one they saw in front of them was no ordinary man but something else, something very powerful that had taken a human form, which they had touched, that too with the hand of power” (145). The silent one takes his arm and puts it back in its place. The divine presence of the mouni has a deep impact on the king and it changes his life forever.

The existential loneliness is also experienced by Lakshamma and her daughter-in-law and Parvathamma. Iswara and Paramasivan’s quest to self realization results in existential isolation of Lakshamma and Parvathamma. The practice of satavadhanam keeps the male members of the house occupied with their studies all the time and it leads to the development of an intimate relationship between mother-in-law, Lakshamma and Parvathi. Parvathi was a kid when she was married to Paramasivan. Over the time they develop a great understanding, love and respect for each other. Though the spouses show great respect and concern for each other but their conjugal life remains mostly unfulfilled. Lakshamma remembers the alienation she felt in the relationship in her youth as Iswara was too occupied with his studies and practiced continence. She remembers how once being touched by her plait unwittingly during his studies, he had washed him again, changed his clothes and again continued with his chanting of mantras till dawn. And it pains her to see that Parvathi is undergoing the same lot. The passing away of Iswara accentuates her sense of separation from him and lives a lonely life as Parvathi is too young to understand her anguish. Lauri jo Moore discusses the impact of isolation on an individual: “Separation from the world, the experience of feeling lost and lonely, is the Intrinsic state of the human condition that
includes intrapsychic, interpersonal and existential isolation. Anxiety covers acceptance of
the fact that human being are born alone and die alone” (458).

This existential isolation can be seen in Lakshamma’s fear of dying without seeing a
grandchild. She is pained to see that there is no intimacy between Parvathi and Paramasivan.
She slyly tries to know whether they sleep together, eat together but feels disappointed to
know that Paramasivan never enters the room and often sleeps outside in Pyol when
Lakshamma is not at home. Her anxiety never subsides and she feels more distressed:
“Grandfather, father, son . . . for whose sake did they do this penance? All this asceticism?
Surely she will die without seeing a grandchild” (104). Paramasivan is hailed a Trivedi but
Lakshamma dies without consolation in the silent house. Parvathi grows into a mature
woman but lives in aloofness due in the silent house. She keeps herself busy in household
chores and cooking as more and more scholars starts visiting her husband. Pichai is born to
her at late stage of her life. She gets comfort in her son, Pichai though. After passing away of
her husband she lives a life of isolation always waiting for her son to come and dies in the lap
of her son as per her last wish.

III

As evident from the above analyses, all the mystic-protagonists have to face existential
predicament at one stage of their lives or the other. Being seekers of truth they have their fair
share of trials and tribulations and must undergo pain and suffering if they wish to realize the
self. All the mystic-protagonists are conscious seekers who having an urge to find the true
meaning of existence. This conscious awareness of the self makes them feel inner anguish as
they are trapped in traditional social setup where any individual spiritual venture is frowned
upon. Thus, it results in confrontation with the society as one needs to break free from
dogmas and false notions to chalk out one’s own course of action.
For instance, we find Siddhartha preoccupied with existential anguish as he is not able to find his goal of realizing the true self by following the ritualistic routine of his father’s religion. He feels pained to see that despite his mastery of all the scriptures and performing daily rituals, he is not able to solve the mystery of self. Thus his inner anguish fills him with doubt regarding Hindu religion as a means of salvation. He feels an urge to break free of this bondage, thereby exploring a new path all by himself.

Ramaswamy’s anguish on the other hand, results from his becoming aware of his deep spiritual yearning when his inner vacuum and sense of rootlessness from his country occupy his thoughts on his trip to India to see his ailing father. He is deeply rooted in Indian Advait philosophy but feels alienated in a foreign land with his foreigner wife. His inner turmoil makes him aware of his spiritual aspirations. His journey to India, his motherland, brings him closer to rich spiritual heritage of India causing existential anguish in him—hence his desire to explore the path to self-realization.

Likewise, Coelho’s protagonist, Santiago, ventures into the unknown world with dream to explore the world. He chooses to be a shepherd rather than a priest as his family wanted him to be. He bears the pain of leaving his family and love behind. Santiago’s anguish can be seen in his choices and his responsibility to stick to the consequences of these choices in order to fulfill his personal legend. Due to his choice of becoming a shepherd, he is faced with dilemma at every step of his journey which makes him look at his journey new perspective whereas Jonathan listens to his inner voice to follow his dream and becomes existentially occupied when he has to pay the price of following his dream of flying, by living a banished life, but it becomes a medium to start his journey to higher level. The silent protagonist of The silent one is shown as having reached the stage of self-realization. His life becomes an inspiration for those, who are grappling with pain, anxiety and problems of existence.
Thus, all the mystic-protagonists analyzed above have to undergo torments of existence in order to break free of them during their quest processes. The inner, existential anguish in a sense becomes a means to develop an understanding of their inauthentic existence thereby propelling them to move ahead in order to realize their essence of being.