ABSTRACT

This study undertakes a fundamental assessment and reappraisal of R.K.Narayan’s existential concerns in his novels. Significant insights into human situations, human emotions and the predicaments are highlighted. The inevitabilities of human condition present a bleak picture in life. However, existentialism has optimism and hope because of the potential, human beings have, to transcend those inevitabilities. The works of various existentialist philosophers and psychologists have shown the way to give meaning to lives that lack purpose or fulfillment. The perspectives of Jean- Paul Sartre, Albert Maslow, Carl Jung, Rollo May, Victor Frankl and Paul Wong’s have been thoroughly analysed and integrated.

Though Narayan’s fiction has been probed from various angles to elucidate his vision of life and his artistic concerns, there still remain aspects to his work that provide scope for meaningful analyses. While his delineation of the problematic nature of existence and the thematic pattern followed order-disorder, return to normalcy has generated much discussion, not much has been devoted to examine his characters’ dilemmas in an existential point of view.

In recent years, R.K.Narayan’s critical study has shied away from the existential concerns which bring positivity and self-discovery in a man’s journey of life. However, this study argues a failure to acknowledge and address the existential predicaments philosophically and psychologically in the works of R.K.Narayan.

The first chapter is the introductory chapter which gives a brief survey of our Indian English literature and contextualizes R.K. Narayan. It is an endeavour to capture the evolution of the Indian English fiction in its thematic concerns and the writers contribution to the legacy. This paves the way for the second chapter which surveys the influence of existentialism on the writings which offers a historical account of the existential thoughts in the early modern period. By identifying the existential concerns and ideas in the work of various thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel, Camus, Maslow………..even Indian writers who have explored in the same area have
been be portrayed. The themes of existentialism Anxiety, Alienation and Search for identity and realization of self has been discussed.

The third chapter of this study provides a preliminary sketch which offers the existential perspectives of R.K. Narayan in the novels during the pre-independence period and post-independence period and how he has dealt human emotions in his stories. His technique of subconsciously addressing to the existential anxieties and to rediscover the richness of lived experience by returning to the existential –humanistic roots.

It also suggests that R.K.Narayan and modern existential thinkers share a deep interest in the creative fusion of fiction and philosophy as the most faithful means of articulating the experiences and philosophical quandaries that existence as a human being entails.

The subsequent chapter explores the existential agony faced by R.K.Narayan’s women in the novels and how the anxieties actually bring about self-development. The fifth chapter makes a comparative study of the writers who are existentialists or who were contemporary to him or are similar to him in his writings.

My readings trace the broad trajectory of the existential thoughts and human emotions in six of his novels and stories based on the psychological concerns of the protagonist.

The concluding chapter draws the findings of the preceding chapters. It also reinforces his existentialistic views. The protagonists in all these novels face six existential anxieties during their journey of life. The search for identity, self-realization binds together all the characters who in their flux of thoughts, in the ebb and flow of emotion discover one self. They find themselves in cul-de-sac from which the novelist Narayan extricates them as if these predicaments are a part and parcel of life. They are naturally faced by them and such experiences will only help them come out of it and will enable them to make choices and lead a meaningful life.

I am also highlighting that human relationship, human emotions and human situation are the essence of human existence. Narayan as a humanist loves
life. He accepts evil as an integral part of life. My study also asserts that all six
types of existential anxieties play a significant role for human beings to
flourish and grow and thus R.K.Narayan’s novels and stories have a positive
impact on his readers who grow psychologically strong, have the capacity to
wrestle with the existential concerns and uplift humanity and improve the
human condition. Thus, existentialism echoes in the works of Narayan and
treats him as an existential positive psychologist.