CHAPTER - 5
EXISTENTIAL DIMENSIONS
Existentialism is the name given to a modern philosophical movement which during pre-war and post war periods achieved tremendous popularity in Europe particularly in France. The possible coinage of the word existentialism which has been included in the field of philosophy seems to be the result of the addition of the suffix ‘ism’ to the word existential, which is an adjective and whose substantive is existence. In Sanskrit it means Astitva. The word existence is chiefly used and understood in the sense of ‘being or the fact or the state of existing, actuality and reality’. For the existentialists, the word refers more to the act of existing than to the state of existing and so existence is not a state, but an act, the actual transition from possibility into reality and thus, is the living, changing concrete fact.

Existentialism, a popular name in the philosophy of existence, has recently touched the wide fields of cultural activity, literature, political thought and religious thought in different parts of the globe, has been understood in several senses, both by its proponents and opponents. Opponents of this trend give a gloomy picture of it by disparaging and describing it as the shocking, the sordid or the obscure and the word itself for them is nearly meaningless. But this gloomy picture strikes the note of optimism when a close analysis of this trend and the circumstances under which it gradually developed is made. In modern times, man feels more uprooted, insecure and alienated from society than in the past. Horrifying memory of two world wars and the resultant widespread destruction and organized attempt to illuminate his meaningless existence are certain factors which compel man to think
about himself and about his relation with others in this modern world of chaotic nature. Existentialism thus is the legitimate offspring of the diverse, complex political situations of the age. Since human reality is not a finished product determined by the definable laws, man is always becoming or making or shaping himself. It is the question of continuous effort that proceeds from his inner passion from freedom. Existential freedom brooks no limitations, from any quarter and rises above all dimensions - social, economic, political and theological.

Two novelists of Indian English literature—Arun Joshi and Anita Desai have earned world wide acclaim. They both are common in treatment of themes—existential aspect in particular. They reveal the confrontation of man with his self and the question of his existence. Anita Desai, with her writings, shows a departure from current modes of Fiction writing in India—a shift from the external world to the inner world of an individual. The novels of Anita Desai mark an important phase in the growth of existential and psychological fiction in India because they capture the atmosphere of the mind and directly involve the reader in a flow of particular consciousness. Anita Desai is essentially an existential novelist. She deals with the existential themes. Existential themes of freedom, decision, guilt, alienation, anxiety, boredom, destruction and death find their way in the pages of the novels by Anita Desai. Her novels deal with the terror facing single handed ferocious assaults of existence. No emotional problem is more threatening to a novelist today than the problem of portraying the predicament of modern man in this world. Anita Desai is one of those novelists who has made significant efforts to delineate the existential dimension of the modern man and woman. Consequently, in
the pages of her novels, there appears ‘anti – hero’ endowed with all the complexes and fears devoid of any trust in people and in the future. Being a woman novelist she cites more intensely with the heroines of her novels, yet very honestly she studies the heroes too. She does not associate with any feminist movements as she makes it clear that her concern as an artist is with individual man and woman. She is chiefly interested in exploration of psychic depths of her characters.

Unlike a photographer, Anita Desai portrays Maya in her novel *Cry, the Peacock* as a most sensitive woman suffering from neurotic fear and marital disharmony. She appears in all three parts of the novel, Maya’s neurosis-growth, development and crisis. She has developed a father fixation problem and after her marriage she finds Gautam, not a loving husband but a poor substitute for her father. He proves a medium to reach her father in her unconscious mind. Naturally there is little in common and they simply maintain matrimonial bonds. To Maya freedom is not possible unless she removes her impression of Gautam in her inner consciousness. Maya strikes at Gautam’s reflection in the mirror and tries to kill him. This shows a gradual transformation of her character into a criminal. But Anita Desai dramatizes the character and the situation simply to give a clear shape to the inner self of Maya. Maya seems to be self seeking for a change in her life. She connects her present with the past and tries to go into a sheltered life. Efforts by Gautam to heal up her internal wounds fail as her consciousness gives it a dramatic turn. Her continuous longing for something fails to establish complete communication with reality in life. She continues to suffer from the feeling of suffocation and disassociation of her internal self even after the
sugar coated pills of relief given to her by Gautam. Maya is obsessed with prophecy of disaster and in the very beginning longs for the company of her husband after the death of Toto: “She sat there, sobbing and waiting for her husband to come home. Now and then she went out into the verandah and looked to see if he were coming” (Desai, Cry, the Peacock 5).

Maya desires to revert back to her childhood memories to escape from the present. Maya in her ultimate state of insanity longs for a change in life. In her such efforts her consciousness ceases sensations of colour, smell or sound. As Meena Belliappa observes: “She has a haunting perception of whiteness against a background of overwhelming darkness” (9). The message of loneliness and the spell of darkness separate both Maya and Gautam. Gautam tries his level best to provide emotional succour to her yet this does not redeem her loneliness. It is only Gautam’s kind gesture for soothing her indulgent mood, but it is far from the kind of communication that Maya seeks. Gautam touches without feeling where as Maya feels even without touching. Her experience of love appears to be short lived.

The Cry of the peacock and at the same time the cry of Maya frustrates her within. She is no longer in control of herself as she is torn by doubts and dread. The whole atmosphere around her indicates subhuman existence. Her hopelessness is not individual but it is universal. Her neurosis is collective neurosis which seems to be a definite danger to the identity of women as a whole. In our contemporary society a woman longing for love is driven mad or is compelled to commit suicide. Maya is obsessed with the idea of death from the very beginning but when heart aches she seems responding to her way of life. The mental agonies and the tension in her mind project the misery of her
existence and it narrows down the poetic beauty of her life. Her intense longing for love and life and the resultant encounter with the Albino astrologer and her husband keeps her deserted not for a specified period but for a whole life. She finds her husband unimaginative, unsentimental and dogmatic. On the other hand Maya is hysterical and indifferent to the outside world. As a matter of fact Maya’s desire is dismissed without taking into consideration the intensity of her love for Kathakali dancers. Gautam tells her that a Kathakali dancers group is expected to come over to Delhi in winter and it will be convenient and less expensive to her. This way he tries to satisfy the fierce longing of Maya. She always lacks something to communicate with. Whenever she discloses her mind to Gautam he does not understand her, on the contrary he rejects the things outright. He calls her neurotic, a spoilt baby and her life a fairy tale. He does not appreciate the richness of her life. She herself remarks: “Poor Gautam, not to be able to notice the beauty of lives, not to hear the melancholy voice singing somewhere behind the plantains, not to have time to count the starts as they come out one by one—my poor, poor husband” (Desai, CP10).

Maya unable to establish a rapport with Gautam does not find meaning in her life. She remains a lonely creature living helplessly and searching out her own existence. Her loneliness, her aching heart and gradual deterioration of her psyche make her an existentialist character. But like Savitri in The Dark Room and Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice, Maya does not act directly. She never revises her old judgment under new circumstances nor does she follow the examples of Anna in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina. Having developed the concept for the new woman Anita Desai tries to introduce us to Maya who
plays the role of an existential character. She concentrates on characters rather than social milieu. She never creates common characters but she gives extremity of despair to her characters that are basically existentialist. Anita Desai is very much liberal in use of symbols. This helps her to beautify the narration of story and provide life to the situation. *Cry the peacock* is itself symbolical. The repeated cries of the peacock and the cry of the neurotic Maya are symbols to denote the inner self of the protagonist. R.S. Sharma feels that “the cry of the peacock is a symbol of Maya’s life in death and death in life” (25). Anita Desai portrays Maya as a most sensitive woman who feels that freedom is not possible unless she removes her impression of Gautam in her inner consciousness. Her belief in the prophecy brings disaster and this ultimately terminates in mere superstition at the end of the novel and the dancing image of Shiva has brought only destruction.

In *Voices in the City* Desai gives us three major characters that are tortured by their own meaningless and hollow existence. Consciously or subconsciously they go deep into their own psyche and expose their inner selves. Nirode is in fact, a rootless character without any definite goal in life as he changes his goal one after another. He is obsessed by failure in achieving success in life that creates a void, a sense of emptiness. This he admits to his friend David, “then I want to see if I have that spirit to start moving again towards my next failure. I want to move from failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom. I want to get to the bottom without meaningless climbing, I want to descend quickly“ (Desai, VC 40). Nirode quotes Camus while admitting the above facts of life. Nirode experiments with failure like a true existential character, seeking meaning in life though he gets nothing except he comes to
the realization in the end. The quest of Nirode shows his emptiness and bankruptcy. He finds no difference in love, hate, resistance or compromise. Though he is somewhat different at the last stage in his spiritual findings, he suffers a new jolt at Monisha’s death, and the new set of life he begins. These philosophical discussions, historical denunciations and withdrawals are not very convincing. Most of his psychological conflicts and spiritual crisis are simply reported and not realized. Therefore, it is simply his outburst of irritation or denunciation.

Amla, his unmarried sister, poetically describes his detachment from the world and his indifference that makes him a rootless creature in a big city like Calcutta. She sums up his position in the following word: “In his states of purely detached acceptance of a world not worth realizing, nothing could matter enough to trouble him. In fact, it was easier for him to live here, where he could rest in such anonymity” (VC 44).

It seems that Nirode is under the influence of Camus, Kafka and Baudelaire as he is an immense rootless; a wanderer and a misfit. He does not compromise with the world nor does he become a revolutionary in a true sense, rather he loves to be a reactionary. To some extent he resembles Camus’ hero Meursault of his novel The Outsider. However, Nirode remains a psychic rebel with his feelings of utmost intensity and absurdity. There is not only Nirode who has before him a vast human island but in it Monisha is also a character who has a miserable psychic life. She has a vacuum inside and outside both. Anita Desai adopts the technique of the diary which adds pathos to the empty married life of Monisha. Her report with her husband Jiban is marked only by loneliness and lack of communication. She frantically tries to
search for a real meaning in life but she is utterly frustrated. Nothing sustains in her life. Nothingness in her makes us judge her character having no surface value. Monisha prefers nonexistence to a meaningless existence. She defines love as an awaken condition of the conscience but fears and avoids it because love implies a sense of duty. Therefore, she remains an exile in her two families, mother’s as well as husband’s. Her hypertension does not help her relate herself meaningfully to the external reality. She fails to combine the ideas of personal freedom, domestic duties and social responsibilities. As ill luck would have it, she is also denied by nature the chance to bear children. Thus, she seeks identity in the deepest darkness of the space. The reported arrival of Amla does not make any difference to her feelings as her condition in indicative of something non–existent. She likes darkness between the space and the stars. It is her tragedy that the few moment of night silence turns into one unlit west. She thinks of the street singer’s emotions that spread through her eyes like dark lakes as she fears they would dissolve and disintegrate her into a meaningless shadow. Here, we have presence of traceless, meaningless and uninvolved condition. She discovers that her inner flame is somewhat different as she thought of: “Heat sieved her eye balls, a great fog enveloped her, not the white one of dreams but black acrid, thick with her arms she rustled with it. She fought it; it was not what she wanted” (153). In fact, Monisha’s mental agony increases from page to page in the novel. She gets more and more tormented. She accepts that the absence of the element of love has made both brother and sister all alone. To this aspect of Monisha Dr. Madhusudan Prasad rightly observes:
In her existentialist search, Monisha ultimately discovers that it is the absence of the element of love that has made both brother and sister such rebels. There is no escape from what she is in and that makes her feel the futility of her hollow existence and ultimately drives her to suicide. (27)

Monisha, like Nirode, wants to be free but unlike him she finds it difficult to free herself. Her longing for privacy and longitude remains unfulfilled; rather her life follows a subdued pattern of monotonous activity without any meaning. Her husband’s posting to Calcutta and her childlessness further detract her from privacy. She withdraws from the material concerns of family and retreats behind the barred windows. From these windows she advises Amla to always go in the opposite direction. It is an advice to rebel. Amla notices her stillness and death like submission and thinks of her as a lifeless statue. But Monisha’s stillness is not steadiness or detachment, it is not feeling or suffering, it is death like stillness. Ultimately Monisha’s death gives Nirode the knowledge of a reality that he had never known before. In the hours between Monisha’s cremation and her mother’s arrival, his mind alters into a terrified apprehension:

Not of this dramatic end to the long estrangement between him and his mother but of the feeling that never again would he know that elevation of the ferment of conscience, that drugged, dull sleep in which he had rocked obliviously for so many years.

(11)

Amla is also an existential character. Her attitude towards life, youthful excitement and wonder is entirely differed from Nirode and Monisha. She tries
to opt out of the absurd and lead a happy life attending cocktail parties, dinners and dances. She takes joy in conversation with the painter Dharma. Amla finds Monisha’s and Nirode’s silence and withdrawal mystifying, but she finds a sense of hollowness and futility. Her dream of love and involvement with Dharma gets shattered when he comes to learn that he is a married man and has disowned his daughter. She bids farewell to his love which had begun to overpower her. Thus she moves from revolt to conformity to sense the atmosphere of dissolution. Temperamentally, like Nirode and Monisha she comes through love to surrender. Arun’s marriage to a British nurse in England, Monisha’s suicide and Nirode’s relentless effort to obliterate self identity make Amla a pathetic and alienated from her mother. Through these three characters it can be inferred that Anita Desai succeeds in her portrayal of not only the individual human relationship against the backdrop of a cosmopolitan consciousness of a big city in India but also the growth of individual consciousness from a cynical sense of loss of identity to the mystical realization of the meaning of existence. We agree with Anita Desai when she says, “neither Nirode nor Amla actually escape from their dilemmas, do they? I see art as an exploration an enquiry, not an escape” (Shrivastava 220).

In the novel, Anita Desai has made an attempt for the first time in Indian fictions to relate the subjective world of individuals to the extent of giving it sound footing. Her effort is to project a locale not only as a milieu but as a force to affect the emotional sensibility of men. Calcutta in Desai’s fiction is more complex than Malgudi or Kanthapura. The characters who come within the range of influence react directly to it; where as Malgudi or
Kanthapura has a different way of life. We see this urban consciousness taking place in Anita Desai. Though the canvas of *Voices in the City* is larger than *Cry, the Peacock*, it does not satisfy because of single sentimentality. Here Anita Desai finds it necessary to explore the inner as well as the outer climate to disperse several sensibilities. In this way dispersion gives a unifying impression to the pressures her characters are subjected to. *Voices in the City* articulates an impression of incompleteness. Monisha reveals through her diary the inner landscape of her psyche which proves fatal for her end.

Anita Desai moves out of her familiar Delhi and Calcutta locale in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. In this novel she projects the chains physical and psychological and explores the difficulties of adjustment with an immigrant individual of England. As the novelist describes Indians living in England, she makes an attempt to create English atmosphere and in this way she is once again at her best with rich visual imagination. The characters define themselves and they express reaction against the alien atmosphere. London is beautifully described with its crowds and shopping centers. Though the characters are unreal the conflicts and the crisis leave an imprint on the mind of the reader. The three major characters are Dev, Aditya and Sarah. The blackbird’s feeling of an unwelcome tone in England and the tensions arising out of an alien atmosphere are faithfully described.

In this novel we have Desai’s deep existentialist concern exploring adjustment, belonging and ultimate decision in the lives of three major characters Dev, Aditya and Sarah. Desai captures this conflict in fictional terms through Dev, “One of those eternal immigrants who can never accept their new homes and continue to walk the streets like strangers in enemy
territory, frozen, listless but dutifully trying to be busy, unobtrusive and, however, superficially to belong” (BB 208). At each step Dev’s reconciliation suggests a psychic situation that involves cross culture context and the impact they have on individual responsibility. Dev has come to study at the London School of Economics. His contact begins right from Aditya’s house who has settled in London with an English wife Sarah. The cultural difference there expands and Dev moves out looking for a job. He undergoes various experiences and cultural shock. His tensions are not due to the fact that he finds himself in an unfamiliar situations but he is familiar to what is around him. He recognizes the people, their faces. It is rather the gap between the expected and the immediately known that disturbs him. He is self conscious of his identity which he does not find there. This crisis of identity is not only for him but it seems to have a larger dimension. Its dimension expands to Dev, Aditya and Sarah. The self awareness of the educated Indian immigrants and their wavering between acceptance and rejection makes many of them to be either a stranger or hostile. In the novel Dev’s dilemmas are also seen emanating from his emotional and instinctive responses to the London scene. He wanders on the streets in search of his new identity. London thus reflects various psychic stages that he goes through before he discovers his affinity in the countryside. In this vast human island he finds himself alienated and suffers spiritual agony through his hellish experiences in the London club. Like Sindi Oberoi of Arun Joshi’s novel The Foreigner, Dev seems to be rootless as he feels himself an outsider, a foreigner and an immigrant.

Desai’s protagonists are placed in comparatively free positions; they are aliens or orphan either factually or emotionally. They come from
incomplete families where either one or both the parents are dead or absent. The protagonists either disown themselves or are disowned by their families. Maya, in *Cry the Peacock*, has only the memory of her mother through the photo on her father's desk. The Ray children in *Voices in the City* are alienated in different degrees from their mother. Sita’s mother in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* had run away from home leaving her children to the care of their father. A similar withdrawal from her parents is there on the part of Sarah in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*. She has at once placed herself outside the family and cultural situation by marrying an Indian. In clear light of the Day the children resent at the long absences of their parents and they are aware only of their exits and entrances. Nature is not merely a matter of heredity; rather it is a matter of inclination and tendency. It is a combination of instinct, feeling and thought unconscious or subconscious. It moves towards wholeness to reach a position of being self critical. The division of self has its own function. It leads to self knowledge and self understanding. A similar sense of unreality haunts Sarah and she worries and wonders about her identity. The two roles do not seem to match or meet. She feels like an impostor when she plays the role of English secretary while being the Indian wife. This situation is more complex than that of Aditya. Anita Desai would have found in her character enough scope for the tragic dimension of her other heroines. However, Sarah is practical and balanced and therefore she faces the reality boldly. But at times she feels divided to decide which her real self is. When Aditya prepares to leave for India, she also decides to accompany him knowing well that she is bidding farewell to her English self: “It was her English self that was fading and dying; it was her English self to which she must say good bye” (209).
Dev is caught between acceptance and rejection, between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. He is tortured emotionally and intellectually. In London, he dreams of an Indian Empire where the roles between the two cultures, Indian and English, can be reversed. In his contradictory responses to England, Dev often displays characteristic psychic traits of an excolonial. Uncertain of himself he sometimes gets into fury and violence. He finds himself unable to deal with the situation in a matter of fact manner. He also fails to convince others about the stand he has taken. He appears to have become provocative and sensitive. He complicates and confuses his human relationship. The novelist seems to give expression to his spiritual anguish with understanding and compassion. Desai peeps into that area of experience where racial and cultural encounters giving rise to bitterness are unavoidable.

We see the sensitivity of a woman like Sarah who is aware of those forces that have changed her destiny as a female. Her emotions and feelings have greater depth than that of Dev. Dev is angry and exhausted because of the fact that he is denied and rejected. But with all her acceptance Sarah remains an outsider in her own chosen world. While Aditya and Dev have the option to have their natural condition and make their own choice, Sarah is left with no such choice. She has to surrender to the decision of her husband. Aditya, in seeking his own self, is totally unconscious of the loss of the self that his decision may hurt Sarah. England indicates vast Human Island for Dev, Aditya and Sarah. The tension in the lives of the characters is not found to be as rigid as it ought to be. The black bird is expressive of both the temptation and the gloom that it creates. Since Aditya and Dev are free of their
temptation and gloom respectively, they can afford to bid the black bird a good bye.

Apart from three major characters that we have come across in the novel, there are other types of characters too. The varieties of characters include a Swami, Madrasi, Punjabi, Bengali and others. The Millers and Ross Commons are the English characters that are notable for their deep rooted feelings towards the immigrants. There is only one sentimental English lady Mrs. Moffitt who is influenced by the oriental philosophy and spiritual power. She is willing to open an Indian club to organize weekly get together. In the long past and the living present Indian life is largely ethical and individuals have a feeling to belong to a family, society, nation, culture and tradition. Anita Desai seems to stress the point that every one has a sense of meaning of life but this is unfortunately disappearing from modern life. The reasons are not far fetched. Geographical and cultural differences are and have been at the root of all problems existing between the two races. Feelings of anger, anguish, alienation in communication and futility have wide impact both on eastern and western life.

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Anita Desai dramatizes two opposite conflicts. The protagonist is a nervous, sensitive, middle aged woman. She finds herself isolated from her husband and children. This sense of isolation springs from her emotional imbalance. She finds herself in an unbecoming situation as she is unable to accept the values and the mode of attitudes of the society she lives in. Every individual she comes in contact with appears to be dull and drab to her. Nobody and nothing appears to have any meaning for her. It is on account of her own inability to cope with the situation
in which she finds herself; she tries to run away from that very thing which
appears to be threatening her very existence. Sita, the heroine, tries to
visualize the world of her dreams. But ultimately she intensifies her desire to
recapture the experience and excitement in her. Therefore, she finds herself
in a dilemma where she cannot decide as to where she should to go that
summer. She hangs between married life and her self fulfillment. While she is
awaiting the birth of her fifth child, her experiences of a housewife and mother
accumulate in her deep anguish. She does not find any genuine happiness in
her marital relationship. Her hopelessness gets heightened and that is
responsible for making her insensitive, cruel and indifferent to her husband
and children. Her insanity drives her back to preserve the sense of sanity by
escaping from her routine life in a Bombay apartment to rush to Manori, an
island in the West coast. Her immature longing tortures her and her bondage
to Raman and children create conditions which do more harm than good to
her. At times, she is even found to be on the border line of insanity and it is at
such moments that even the members of her family find it difficult to accept
her as a normal human being. Man finds life difficult to tackle when he finds
that it is something beyond his reach. It is this feeling of being unable to do
anything good in life that makes existence difficult. This seems to be the
problem, haunting the mind of Sita all the time.

Sita loses contact with life and develops an unrealistic attitude towards
it. Though she is against giving birth to the fifth child, yet she has something in
her which makes her think and react otherwise. She actually wants to protect
the child to be born against the cruel atmosphere in which she is living. Sita
has grown sick of life and it is this sickness which generates dullness and
disappointment in her mental makeup. She finds the present atmosphere suffocating and unbearable and it is for this reason that she wants to leave the place for Manori where she hopes to seek her childhood and thereby be happy again. She thinks that the island may save her from the suffocation of Bombay. She also thinks that the island she has moved to may provide her the much needed relief she has been looking for all her life. It is in order to look for change in her present existence that she chooses Manori as a place of shelter. But even this place, later on, fails to come up to her expectations.

Sita’s dilemma has to be seen in the context of her relation with her father. Her father’s mysterious conduct on the Manori Island had left an indelible impression on her psyche when she was a child. Despite her marriage and children, she has not been able to free herself from the unconscious massive spell of her father. Psychologically speaking, father plays a great role in female discrimination. An animus dominated woman is not prepared to listen to any logic, even if she has a developed Eros function. Edward Whitmont observes: “The relationship to father or brother shapes the woman’s connection with the realm of meaning, rational order, initiative, assertion and authority” (208). Sita’s problems are beyond Raman’s comprehension and as such she is left to decide on her own course of action. The only moment of happiness in her life was when she saw an old man caressing a sick, weak young woman in a park. It is Sita’s seeking of a communion in which body, mind and soul mingle completely. She longs for an idealized and transcendental love. It is her deep sense of loss and the absence of that mysterious marriage of the masculine and the feminine in her own life which adds a new dimension to her crisis. The terms of her relation
with her husband are well defined in the limited canvas of mundane needs and possibilities. Her withdrawal to the island of Manori is significant in the sense that it still has some mysterious attraction for her. In a way the island memories of her childhood are juxtaposed with brilliant vision of rare rapture in the garden.

Sita is a deprived child, like Maya. Her failure to connect with the outside reality can be attributed to the psychological void caused by the lack of experiencing the mother directly and with intensity. It is a universal fact that mother plays a significant role in the psychic frame of a child. Mother’s absence remains a shrouded mystery both to Sita and her brother Jeevan. The cause of Sita’s failure to relate meaningfully with her in-laws, husband or children, can be assigned to the lack of instinctive training which a child receives unconsciously from the mother. Her brother Jeevan, like Maya’s brother Arjun too breaks free himself violently to create an independent place for himself as a trade union leader. But Sita exhibits no much existential choice, so her visit to the Manori Island offers her an opportunity to reassess and rearrange her psychic makeup. Sita’s visit to Manori Island is significant as it is a journey from ignorance to knowledge from illusion to reality. It leads her to “self discovery and recognition of reality” (Jain 36). Her short stay on the island forces her to accept the fact that in order to catch up with the flow of life, one has to be alive to the reality of the situation in which one finds oneself. It is on the island that she makes rather cruel demands on her children and betrays utter lack of concern about their interests, her daughters’ education and so on. As such she proves herself an emotional drain on the family. Her return to Bombay with her husband is her return to the positive
aspects of the feminine, where she rises not only above her earlier role of an average woman but also her late regression into the terrible feminine. Sita understands the significance of her role as a mother and a wife, she regrets that she had “escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city to the unlivable island” (Desai, WWS 139). Sita appreciates better the truth and meaning of life as Raman’s words inspire her to embrace life in its vivid aspect.

The world of self, represented by the Manori Island turns into a great illusion. In fact her journey to the wilderness of Manori Island can also be interpreted as her desire to connect with her platonic ideal of life. But her decision to follow her husband back to Bombay signals her coming back to life. This is her acceptance; her dialogue with the reality principle is symbolized by her husband. If the world of Bombay can be taken to be the symbol of ugliness, the Manori Island does in no way promise the bliss of heaven. It is on the strength of this very knowledge that a wiser Sita walks back to the world of Bombay to strike a new existential equation. Journey to Manori and return from Manori can be seen therefore as a protagonist’s existential quest for a discovery of her self. Rightly, therefore, Anita Desai states that: “The child is born lives and adjusts with the life Sita escaped from. It compromises, it accepts dullness, either closes its eyes or else condones destruction, ugliness and rootlessness” (Atma Ram 26).

In the end, Sita reconciles and compromises with her life’s situation and accepts life with all its naturalness. Sita makes the choice because she is a part of the earth, of life, and can no more reject it. In this way Sita rises above egotistical constraints, pettiness and drabness. Mythically analyzing,
Sita’s visit to the Manori island is like a journey into the under world. Sita’s quest for self is distinctly different in flavour, though it carries the same essence as the other heroines like Maya, Sarah, and Nanda Kaul etc. It is of interest to note that the negative feminine appears merely on the surface in her psyche to prompt her to make a fruitless jump to the mystique of her father. Though she is refined and clarified after her disillusionment in encountering the superficial reality of the Manori Island, her retreat to the footsteps of her husband on the beach signifies that Sita essentially belongs to the category of great mother and is rooted in reality. In fact, she emerges as a new woman only after the dialectical, pragmatic, dialogue with the reality represented by her husband. Her consciousness has altered and awakened. In this way Sita’s return to Bombay is the progress of a pilgrim to selfhood. Manori Island also serves as symbol of purgatorial experiences to awaken Sita to her essentiality of a wife and a mother. Sita’s quest is thus the quest for a real pragmatic rational and meaningful connection with the reality of life. Her quest is thus an existential quest from darkness to light, from illusion to reality and from individuality to selfhood.

Indian English fiction like its western counterpart after 1950s has shifted its focus from the public to the private sphere. Now, the novelists’ interest is directed towards delineating the individual’s quest for the self in all its varied forms. A typical protagonist of modern fiction is a split personality locked up into Hamletian dilemma. He is a tortured soul who always finds himself in a tragic mess. Much of modern fiction is either an existentialist fable or psychic drama. Self alienation has worse effects on an individual than social alienation. It is the more basic form of rootlessness. It is this inner crisis
of the modern man that has occupied Arun Joshi’s primary interest in his novels that are built around the dark and dismal experience of the soul.

Joshi delves deep into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds emotions, impulses and instincts at work. It would not be out of place to mention that for a brief period in 1957 he worked in a mental hospital in the United States. His sensitive mind was impressed so much that we find his chief protagonists describe an inner life within the underworld of the soul divided against itself, its aspirations and conflicting urges turned on the will and action – the novelist’s search light carefully scrutinizing it all in full focus. This is the reason why there is something deeper than empathy for such characters in his heart. In one of his fictional observations Arun Joshi writes “Life’s meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions, but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish for ever.” (Joshi, The Strange Case Of Billy Biswas 8). The central motive of the novelist is the exploration of the mysterious underworld which is the human soul. Arun Joshi’s protagonists are painfully aware of their precarious position in a hostile world, feel helpless in the fundamental sense that they cannot control what they are able to foresee. Paul Tillich says, “Man is drawn into the world of objects and has lost or is continuously losing” (142). Modern man has lost touch with the world, having no heart, no fellow feeling and nothing to cling to. These absurd situations give rise to existentialist emotions which Joshi has dealt with in the themes of his novels. In all his novels he unfolds the facets of identity crisis in modern man’s life. His protagonists are essentially foreigners wherever they go. They happen to be walking dead bodies indicating alienation.
Arun Joshi’s maiden novel *The Foreigner* “is one of the most compelling existentialist works of Indian English fiction” (M. Prasad 51). The formative part of the novel develops in the backdrop of the west, and the latter phase in India brings in acculturation at the end. In the story of Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist who is thoroughly an existentialist character—“rootless, restless and luckless in a mad, absurd world” (Thakur 157). He is a perennial outsider, an uprooted Youngman living in the latter half of the twentieth century who belongs to no country, no people and finds himself in the predicament of a foreigner wherever he goes. His rootlessness “is not merely one of geography or nationality, it is rooted within his soul like an ancient curse and drives him from crisis to crisis” (Mukherjee 202). He is one who does not have roots anywhere in the world. Sindi is a child of mixed percentage. He is born in Kenya of Kenyan Indian father and an English mother. He is orphaned at the age of four and is brought up by his uncle who too dies soon. He is totally broken and anchorless as in his infancy he was deprived of parental love and affections. Infact, he finds himself incapable of receiving any emotional involvement with the milieu of his real origin. He is a born foreigner, a man alienated from all humanity. His dilemma is socio-psychological resulting from social disfunctioning. Sindi’s case typically represents the state of alienation expressive of aloneness and aloofness. To him it appears as if the world is devoid of God. He has no system of morality. Morality and immorality do not have any distinction for him. Psychologically speaking, a person so isolated as Sindi Oberoi is bound to be cynic and frustrated. Right from his boyhood he gets tired of living. As a student, he grows utterly indifferent as to what he studies and what profession he opts for.
At the London University, he has had a brilliant academic career. At Boston, he takes a doctorate in mechanical engineering, but he attaches no special importance to it. He is offered a job in college faculty but he opts for a place in New York from where he comes to New Delhi. The varied experiences he undergoes illustrate his predicament of sociological alienation and it is further deepening into psychotic engulfment. Wherever he goes he feels out of place and out of tune with life. He actually wants to know the meaning of his life. The experiences that he has in London and New York take him to the roots of further isolation. Later on, he creates an illusion that he has learnt detachment. This life turns over a new leaf when he meets June Blyth, a beautiful, sensual, affectionate American girl at a party. June is free, frank and generous, always trying to be of help to someone. Sindi loves her deeply and has intimate relationship with her. Her love for Sindi is more than a mere sexual gratification. Time and again, she requests him to get married to her. But Sindi, emotionally sterile, does not respond favourably to her request. Sindi’s cold detachment isolates June and makes her go to Babu Rao Khemka who loves her with a dog like devotion. He gives her all that she needs. He is a simple character having roots in Indian soil. His values are middle class values that are choked down in the glossy living of the west. To him, America seems to be a dream land and a country promising a lot of opportunities. By this time Babu has also turned into a split personality. He loves to enjoy the free life of America. At the same time he has got his moral inhibition as he is born and brought up in Indian orthodox background. He loves June intensely, decides to marry her but his conventional morality comes in the way. June, on the other hand is a complex character. She
dangles between Sindi Oberoi and Babu Rao Khemka. The dilemma of her character makes her an interesting study. It has already been established that she is truly devoted to Sindi Oberoi. When she comes to know that she has become pregnant and that too by Babu Rao Khemka, who being no more alive, she feels utterly frustrated. She undergoes an operation for abortion and during the course she dies.

Sindi Oberoi is responsible for the death of both—Babu and June. It is really, his false and cold detachment that leads to the tragedy of Babu and June. Her death acts as a tragic nemesis and brings about a great change in Sindi Oberoi. Coming back to India, he joins the Khemka Industries. He finds himself a stranger in India to both the corrupt rich man and the poor exploited labourer. A fresh crisis comes in the life of Sindi when Mr. Khemka is sentenced to jail on playing fraud with income tax accounts. The workers of the firm persuade Sindi to take over the charge of Khemka’s business and save them from starvation. It is at this critical juncture that we find Sindi on his way to becoming wiser. His understanding deepens when he associates himself with the poor and starving. This point of time can be taken to be his reawakening, his rebirth and his regeneration. From now onwards he begins to detach himself from others as much as possible. But he realizes that detachment in the true sense of the term should not only be from the world and its objects but also from ones own self. He is led to understand that actually he is the cause of Babu’s and June’s death. It is for this reason that we find Sindi’s life undergoing various changes and he happens to experience different facets of life at different stages. He seems to learn the so called code of detachment and by and large he learns from his experience that it is
involvement that can and does redeem man. Mohan Jha rightly remarks that the change in Sindi's life from detachment to involvement is certainly “a study in experiences” (173). The novel, no doubt, is full of instances and descriptions that make it read as an existentialist quest to find a meaning in the meaningless absurdity of life, for an insecure man like Sindi, everything is purposeless. He turns out to be a thorough going absurdist to whom this world is full of suffering and life is all disillusionment. He is brought face to face with his stupidity and hypocrisy. He fails to apply a check on his senses but talks of practising detachment. He is a man of false conduct and can be rightly called a hypocrite.

The protagonist Sindi is a typical representative of the contemporary man who, irrespective of all sorts of scientific and technological advancement of the modern times, finds himself in a tragic mess. Arun Joshi seems to reject the American way of life. That is why he makes Sindi search for authentic existence. He eventually achieves the state of a happy co-existence and harmony. He not only settles in his business but also with Sheila and above all with himself. O.P. Mathur and G.Rai rightly say that “Sindi's quest for identity is a Yatra, a pilgrimage from existentialism to Karma Yoga” (107). It brings about a moral growth in Sindi. It is certainly a step towards right direction, towards the supremely blessed state of human existence. Sindi at the end of the novel turns to be a pure human being who is ready to sacrifice, to share with Muthu, Sheila and other factory men with hearts joined together. Throughout the novel the idea of foreignness is kept before the reader. The insecurity, remoteness, alienation and transitoriness associated with the word foreigner from the entire structure of the novel that portrays the protagonist's
sense of metaphysical anguish of the human condition. These existentialist notions have been so cleverly handled by Arun Joshi that the novel is never allowed to have an over dose of philosophy like the novels of Raja Rao.

Arun Joshi’s second novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is often described as existentialist in certain respects. It is concerned with the crisis of self, the problems of identity and the quest for fulfillment. Like the existentialist writers, Joshi is mainly concerned with the man’s feeling of anxiety and alienation at great length. K.R.S. Iyenger actually remarks, “In the novel Arun Joshi has carried his exploration of the consciousness of rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery” (514). Billy’s quest is deeper than Sindi’s. Billy is not uprooted in the sense Sindi is. He is born and brought up in a fairly comfortable background. Though he lives with his family members he is not in harmony with them. He is all alone, isolated and alienated. His awareness of the deeper layers of his personality makes him an existentialist being, estranged and alienated from the superficial reality of life. His is the predicament of an alienated personality who never feels at home in the modern bourgeois society. This is an attempt to find out violable alternatives so as to find some way out. He is extraordinarily sensitive and unlike Sindi, he listens to the voice of his soul. In all respects he is rare, extraordinary and distinguished. He is one of those rare men who have poised without pose. Romi has much affection for Billy and expects him to come into his own. Romi meets Billy who offers to share with apartments which he gladly accepts. The partnership develops into an unusual friendship which lasts till the end. Billy has a dislike for an organized life. He, though born and brought up in an aristocratic family is filled with
hatred for the systematized civilized life which aggravates his problems of identity instead of resolving it. This predicament becomes a strange case as he turns out to be a split personality—split between primitive and civilized. Billy finds modern civilization fast disintegrating, as well as normless and meaningless.

From his early childhood, Billy’s case has been strange. He feels sick of the so called upper class. As a matter of fact he drifts into the world of tribals. Romi gets an opportunity of observing the strangeness of Billy when he finds him defending before his father the child’s sacrifice by a clerk to propitiate the Goddess Kali in order that the clerk’s young son suffering from Leukemia, should get well. He develops an intense hatred for the so called civilized people. To him, modern civilization seems to be telling upon the health of the contemporary man. Billy is seen reflecting and pondering over the lot of man. He hates the world that hangs on the peg of money. He is like Mathew Arnold’s Scholar Gypsy who is happy, living with the primitive people who live close to the way of nature. He is given to understand that Meena is unable to respond to him. A product of phony society as she is, she fails to quench his thirst to satisfy his soul. There is a gap of communication between the two. Billy is east while Meena is west and both east and west cannot meet together. This widens the gap between the two. Ultimately this results into Billy’s turning an introvert. He forsakes his responsibilities towards his family, his wife and son. He cares only for his responsibilities towards his soul. He is in fact, “a pilgrim of the spiritual world” (H. Prasad 53). His tortured soul terribly needs application of some balm by someone who can share his suffering with a view to getting the right kind of solace that his injured soul
needs, he meets Reema Kaul, who has loved him passionately since the day she met him. His trips to Bombay take him closer to her but later on; he finds his relationship with Reema futile and meaningless. In reality, he is in search of a surrounding that is in harmony with his soul. He listens to the calls of the hills, the streams, the trees, the forest and the tribal people. They seem to be calling him. Billy is so much fed up with the so called civilized world of greed, hollowness and hypocrisy and feels so much drawn towards the primitive life that he leaves his wife, his only child and his own parents. Billy’s fascination for the primitive life is the search for his identity. In the forest, he comes into contact with the tribal people and finds them better than the so called civilized people. He finds Bilasia to be the right woman to satisfy his soul. It is Bilasia who causes explosion of senses—the proper medium to reach soul.

Billy renounces the civilized world and its symbols in Meena and Reema. In Bilasia, the physical and the elemental needs got harmonized. Bilasia is his missing self. Billy and Bilasia are "two selves of the same personality" (H.Prasad 58). Bilasia’s sensuality lures Billy as she is exceedingly attractive sexually. Bilasia is found to be the very essence of the primitive force. Now Billy realizes that he is a primitive pilgrim and it is primitivism that will lead him to his destination. He knows that his love for the primitive is a step towards his spiritual awareness, his realization of the soul, his existentialist quest for meaning and values in life. In this connection Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly remarks: “renunciation has always been an Indian ideal of life” (97). Billy’s withdrawal from the world is in the nature of a reflex action. He withdraws in order to preserve himself from the destructive forces of civilization. His is not an escape from reality but an escape into
reality on the lines of prince Siddharth. It is onward movement from darkness to light. He gets self realization when he meets the tribal girl Bilasia. In short, Arun Joshi in his novel offers a dramatic presentation of the complex character of Billy who in the first part of the novel finds himself rootless and alienated from individuals, society and civilization. In the latter part he takes refuge in the world of tribals only when there is no option left. It is in the tribal world that he finds his identity, his roots. Thus, the novel stands as a bitter commentary on the tyranny of the forces of phony civilization that crushes man’s desire for self existence and kinship with nature.

Joshi’s third novel The Apprentice, which is inspired by Albert Camus’ The Fall, also depicts the pitiable plight of the contemporary man “sailing about in a confused society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose” (74). It is a confessional novel wherein the narrator – protagonist unfolds the story of his life in the form of an internal monologue. Ratan Rathore, who is both the hero and the antihero of the novel, probes into his inner life and exposes the perfidy, cowardice and corruption of his own character at the mock-herculean level. He is a thoroughly existentialist character who confirms to the doctrine that man forms his essence in the course of the life he chooses to lead, and as Sartre would put it in his choice lies his freedom. He is neither a rebel like Billy Biswas nor a rootless foreigner like Sindi Oberoi. He is a practical man who finds his idealism shattered in the corrupt society, and adapts himself to the mysterious ways of the world. The novel is both a treatise on current social and political scene and a lament of a tormented soul. It reminds us Charles Dickens’s Hard Times. Here the social reality becomes the nucleus of the novel where in Ratan like Sindi and Billy,
comes out yet another reflective introvert whose life corresponds to bitter social norms and consequently undergoes suffering and, a coarse salvation towards the close.

The novel enacts three stages in the human–divine comedy of Ratan. The pre-independence period is dawn, the period of idealism, the face of innocence, the post-independence India is the broad day–light of experience, the inference of corruption, the last part the area of expiation is the door to the purgatory.

(H. Prasad 65)

Thus, the novel stands as a psychological study into innocence, experience and expiation of the protagonist’s life history. Ratan Rathore is a young man whose self has two distinct parts—the higher self and the lower self. He is of a double inheritance—the patriotic and ideal world of his father and the worldly wisdom of his mother. He is greatly inspired by his father’s active participation in the country’s freedom movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. His father abandons his practice as a lawyer, gives away most of his wealth to join the revolutionaries and is ultimately shot dead by a British sergeant while leading a procession of freedom fighters. His father wants him to be of use to society, but his mother advises Ratan to earn money as man without money is a man without worth. Ratan is in a fix regarding his choice between two conflicting philosophies.

Ratan becomes a split personality. His higher self is trying to hold a check on his strange bargains with the world. His latter self is dictating him for the pursuit of career in life. Being a self-less idealist like his father, he holds his ideals above everything else. He feels deeply shocked at the atrocities
committed by the British and holds himself somewhat responsible. But suddenly he falls a prey to his lower self and all his enthusiasm evaporates. After his father's death, Ratan goes to all the friends of his father for help in getting a job. But he meets frustration everywhere. He finds himself miserably alone, disheartened and disillusioned. His faith in the positive values of goodness, virtue, humanity and sympathy is broken. He is convinced that chaos, absurdity, brutality, insensitivity, hypocrisy, fear and restlessness are but different aspects of life in the so called civilized world.

His surroundings as well as his true self have the crushing effects on him and he feels alienated from both. Although his father regarded man's desire to make a career as bourgeois filth, his son ironically is devoted whole heartedly to building his career to make a head way in this different world by fair or foul means. Ultimately with the help of a room-mate at the inn, he gets a job as a temporary clerk in a government office of war purchases. This adds a new dimension to his life. Henceforth, his only aim is to make his career. Being the son of an idealist father and having a spark of idealism, amidst ashes of corruption left in him, he feels restless in the unjust world. But soon, he flouts human values for the sake of a career and experiences the notorious traits of the so called civilization like bribery, hypocrisy, lying, drunkenness and womanizing. He feels sad after refusing the enormous bribe of rupees ten thousand offered by a contractor's son. The desire for getting promotion makes him lose his identity. He becomes a man of modern times—cunning, deceptive, selfish and easy going. He marries the cousin of his boss only to please him. In return he gets the confirmation of his job and is upgraded as an assistant with dozen clerks working under him. He is later rewarded with the
job of an officer in the department. By now he is driven to understand that the world runs on the basis of deals. In fact his own marriage is a deal for his career.

Under the predominance of his lower self, he as a free individual exercises his choice to pursue his material ends on the line of existentialistic ideology. Ratan confirms to the doctrine that man forms his essence in the course of the life he chooses to lead and that in his choice lies his freedom. The hopelessness of life inspires ill feelings in Ratan and begins to climb the ladder of success by adopting foul and questionable means just to raise himself in life. In the meantime his higher self brings about a change in his behaviour. He begins to behave as if he were one of the greatest articles entitled ‘Crisis of Character’. But this remains limited to his world of thinking only. The tragedy of Ratan lies in his consciousness that practically “he has been gradually sinking into abyss of darkness, of corruption, exploitation and bourgeois faith” (Das 41)

With a troubled conscience Ratan goes to Himmat Singh popularly called the Sheikh who gives him enormous bribe and tempts him into a big bargain. He stoops down to indignation and passes defective war material which results in the death of his own friend brigadier. Various kinds of corruptions harden him so much that he loses the capacity to be shocked. This goes on for years together and thereafter, he is always at war with himself. The moral dilemma of Ratan Rathore is at its climax. His existence is shaken by the agonizing question as to why he took that bribe, his consciousness is very much like that of Clamence in Albert Camus’ The Fall when he says “Yet I was unhappy about this as if I had violated the code of
hour” (Camus 41). He is in a pitiable plight. The inner conflict displayed in Ratan’s consciousness gives an existentialist dimension to the novel. The mental torture of Ratan results into his physical disfigurement. His body bends to one side. He loses physical briskness and comes to have a feeling of being used up. The sheer vitality seems to have gone for ever because of mental tension.

At the time of Indo–China war when the Chinese threatened the nation, the leaders, instead of preparing the nation for war are engaged in preparing fiery speeches. Later on the nation loses war and undergoes the phase of humiliation and public censure. Ratan Rathore feels guilty and responsible for what has happened to himself at the personal level and to India at the national level. In order to seek peace, consolation and moral courage Ratan happens to visit the temple, but to his utter disappointment he finds even religion not free from corruption as the priest is ready to grease his palm to save his dishonest son from punishment. Now, he begins to think about existence and realizes the futility and hollowness of his whole life. He begins to frequent the temple and cleans the shoes at the gate just to feel safe morally and ethically. The awareness of stark realities of human existence becomes the measure of Ratan’s achievement in terms of realization that one must try and not lose heart, not yield at any cost to despair. The novelist purposely and correctly ends his novel with a dawn which is both inward and outward. To sum up, the novel is “a striking study of belief in Karma and purification of the soul, and it comments the abiding values of humility and self purification in human life” (Reddy 229).
Arun Joshi’s *The Last Labyrinth*, his fourth novel explores the dilemma of existence with greater intensity and against a wider backdrop of experiences. It probes into the turbulent inner world of its protagonist Som Bhaskar, a millionaire industrialist, who represents the contemporary phase of the dilemma of modern man groping through the labyrinths of life, existence and reality. It exhibits the confluence of the existentialist anxiety as exemplified in *The Foreigner*, ‘The Karmic’ principles of detachment and action on the pattern of *The Bhagwadgita* as shown in *The Apprentice*, and the ceaseless longing for the essence of life being obsessed with a latent quest as observed in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Thus, the concourse of the ‘triveni’ in the form of mystical urge of Som Bhaskar is presented in his never ending longing for the vitals of life and existence.

The narrator hero, Som Bhaskar, relates in flash back the events of his life involving him and Anuradha for whose possession he risks his life and business. His inexorable pursuit of this woman he craves for but cannot properly acquire despite possessing her physically becomes the be all and the end all of his existence and assumes the dimension of his quest for the meaning of life, love, God and death, the greatest of all mysteries—*The last labyrinth*. Som, a young educated and intelligent industrialist is married to Gita, an extraordinary woman who has borne him two children. Inspite of this Som is led by undefined hunger. He knows that a life without Gita cannot be imagined yet he runs after several women. He feels hungry for the joys of life and undergoes new experiences in business and sex. But ironically enough, instead of having a sense of fulfillment he comes to have a terrible sense of emptiness. “It is the voids of the world, more than the objects that bother me.
The void and the empty spaces within and without” (Joshi, LL 47). Som feels plunged into a bottomless pit of despair like a shipwrecked sailor sinking into the ocean. His insatiable hunger is physical, mental, material and spiritual. He seeks substitute satisfaction in sex, wealth and fame but grows increasingly restless. He grows very anxious to know what he really wants. The desire to know as he says is a labyrinth. In fact, infliction of contradictions is very much there in his blood. He happens to inherit these opposite influences from his parents. Even his grand father contributes a lot. Contrary to the scientific temperament of his father his mother is a woman of religious temper. Her temperament is that of profound faith and endurance. She develops cancer but does not take the pills. She believes that only Krishna can cure her. Later on, she, however, dies of cancer. From his mother Som inherits faith in religion and love for Krishna. Thus, the two–science and religion–create a strain within his self and torture him. He suffers from inherent sickness. Som becomes a physical case and projects very deftly those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology disclose to us. “He is full of inner disharmony and is loose cluster of masks or fragment of identity” (H. Prasad 89). His mind is a labyrinth as right from the very beginning he feels insecure.

Throughout his life Som seeks someone who can resolve his contradictions and provide him comfort and solace. It is with this keen desire that he makes love to Leela Subnis, a professor from London. She offers him the joy as well as analyses all his problems. When Som asks how he would be able to face the challenges of life she advises him to look within and look for an answer. But his love affair with Leela fizzes out within six months. His
misery is the result of the conflict within his mind. He is a split personality. He is torn between the two selves—the one is the scientific, analytical, and materialistic and the other personifies the endurance of his mother, trust of his wife Gita and their joy in suffering with a view to cleansing the soul. It is the mysterious and mystical Indian way of life that can administer some sort of consolation and peace to Som. The characters symbolizing this particular way of life are Gita, Gargi, the Sufi peer, Aftab and above all Anuradha. Gita has shared life with Som and yet she is engaged in cleansing her soul. The Sufi peer is a prince who leaves princely comfort in search of God. Gargi, the daughter of the Sufi, is a God woman, a living proof of God’s presence. She is supposed to have realized God. Some kind of an existentialist fatigue has been with Som Bhaskar throughout. Consequently he develops an aridity of feeling, a sense of inner frustration and a kind of detachment from almost everyone and everything till he encounters Anuradha for the first time in a Delhi hotel at a reception organized by Aftab Rai for the plastic manufacturers associations. Anuradha casts a spell on him. At the invitation of Aftab Rai Som visits him and Anuradha at his residence, The Lal Haweli which is built like a labyrinth. He is rather surprised to know that Anuradha just lives with Aftab and is not married to him. Surprisingly enough, Anuradha, Aftab Rai and the Lal Haweli represent obsolete antiquity, and are a mystery, a labyrinth of life and reality. Above all Anuradha exercises such an overpowering fascination over Som that he neglects his business, his family and his health to possess her, turns to be a mysterious entity. She is the most absorbing inhabitant of the world of labyrinth. Joshi has distinguished her from others. Obviously Anuradha looks mysterious, and there is a mystery within Som
also. Som’s efforts are directed towards explaining this mystery of the world, the very labyrinth of life. Aftab and Anuradha take Som to a cottage by the side of Ganga where he meets Gargi. On coming back to Haweli, when Aftab goes to sleep and Anuradha is left alone with Som, she tells him the mystery of Gargi, how Gargi's father was a prince who turns a Sufi peer and lived with Aftab’s father. It is now onwards that Som Bhaskar feels drawn towards Anuradha. Anuradha in turn, allows Som to love her and have sexual contact with her but never to be separated from Aftab. This hurts Som and makes him turn against both Anuradha and Aftab. He buys all the shares of Aftab and grabs all his property. Symbolically, this journey of Som takes him from the physical to the material and is likely to take him to his soul, the essence of human existence. He seems to come out by and by, from the labyrinth of reason into the straight forward clarities of faith. He seems to be captivated by the mystical urge to realize his identity. His yearning for Anuradha is the yearning for the realization of his soul. Now, he takes Anuradha to be his soul. From his earlier stage of ignorance when he believed that there is no God, he now steps into an altogether different world, the world of belief and faith that God exists. He has now moved on the right path that will lead to the destination, the realization. He knows that God should be realized, and that realization is a continuous process of attainment by constant effort. He had desired to purchase Aftab’s shares and he engages himself in possessing Anuradha and planning for his identity. The novelist seems to suggest that the labyrinths of life can be resolved through unwavering faith, trust and intuition rather than science, logic, brain and rationalism. Som’s existentialist anguish is heightened by the fact that life to him offers no simple solutions. Some sort
of existentialist fatigue continues to take possession of his body and soul. Like his father Som is vexed by the mere thought of death. It is this fear of death that creates in him a sort of riddle which he tries to fathom and knows but fails miserably in his attempt. Thus, the existentialist weariness stays with Som till the end. Like Abhimanyu, he is caught in the chakraview of life and death and finally gets lost forever.

In fine, Anita Desai’s wounded self which is dramatized largely in terms of woman world, doesn’t expand in space and time but always turns inward. Familial disharmony brings in a kind of self alienation, which in turn impels Desai’s protagonists to subject themselves to a search for meaning in life. Their search centres around the existential dilemma in which Desai’s protagonists find themselves. Most of Desai’s, protagonists suffer from an extreme sort of introversion. We may not be wrong in saying that they are an intelligent but obsessed lot. Desai’s novels are remarkable not only for theirs stylistic excellence but also for their socio-cultural commentary on modern modes of existence. City life in India, in all its variety and detail, constitutes a large, part of her writings. The cities mentioned in her novels are not actualities but are the recreated images of the Indian social scene. Breathing the polluted air of the city, her characters try to escape from their cages sometimes successfully and sometimes not and in the process get themselves mentally disturbed and spiritually, battered. The narrative base in Anita Desai’s fiction is the family. The family’s life together is an endless process of movement in an around consensual understanding, from attachment to conflict and withdrawal- and over again. Separateness and connectedness are the underlying conditions of a family life and its common
task is to give form to both. Anita Desai’s fiction not only gives shape to separatedness and connectedness that emerge from a family saga, but dramatizes the way in which self receives wound, which are either aggravated or healed by the socio-cultural structure which is soil and existence.

Arun Joshi’s fiction, without appearing as an overt sociological exercise, gathers within its fold most of the issues that trouble and torment the post-independence generation. The way out of the Labyrinth is not to make the self a mirror but to liberate it by constantly reminding oneself that the Labyrinth is not an unsafe place to exist, provided one is apprenticed to the sublime principle of giving, which is very well exemplified in Anuradha in The Last Labyrinth. Arun Joshi has impressed us immensely with this thoughtful utterances and masterly treatment of existential themes. All his novels deal with the existential problems of mankind and in their hectic search for a solution to them they usually tend to be serious and thought-provoking. His protagonists pass through disturbing mental process and tense—tailored behaviour in a given situation. Joshi is a great artist of psychological insight that enables him to see into the life of things. In his fictional world he tries his level best to delineate the predicament of the modern man who is confronted by the self and the questions of his existence, who is painfully aware of his precarious position in a hostile world and who comes to feel helpless in the fundamental sense that he cannot control what he is able to foresee. Modern man is a machine having no heart and no fellow feeling. He is torn in this by a dual code of behavior and he lives lazily by treachery, cowardice, hypocrisy and wit. These absurd situations give rise to
existentialist emotions which Joshi has dealt with in the themes of his novels. In all his novels he unfolds the facets of identity crisis in modern man’s life. These protagonists are essentially foreigners wherever they go. They happen to be walking metaphors of alienation.
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