CHAPTER II

EXISTENTIALISM IN AMERICAN NOVELS

We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression . . . We are God's middle children . . . with no special place in history and no special attention.

—Fight Club

As it is discussed in the previous chapter, the twentieth century existentialism is post–World War II phenomenon, and had no significant presence in the United States before the 1940’s. Jean-Paul Sartre and associates are credited with establishing the philosophy in France, and later introducing it to Americans. But conventional wisdom about existentialism in the United States is mistaken. The United States actually developed its own unique brand of existentialism several years before Sartre and other existentialists published their first existentialist work.

According to Cotkin’s analysis, along with America’s tradition of optimism and swaggering confidence, there has always been an intense consciousness of death and despair in the American spiritual landscape: ‘The history of existential thinking in America began before Sartre first uttered the word ‘existential.’ Existential concerns have long colored the American intellectual temper. Dread, despair, death, and dauntlessness helped to frame the existential imperatives of figures as diverse as Jonathan Edwards, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, William James, Edward Hopper, and Walter Lippmann” (6). However, from Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, and Richard Wright’s The Outsider is the real beginning of the American existentialism, especially in connection with

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American novels. The era of 1950’s was the era of new beginning of the American writing. Certainly, American literature attained a new maturity and a rich diversity in this period. Significant works by several major writers were published and established new dimensions in the American literature. The radical changes in the field of science and technology, and the changing climate of the political scenario have affected the writers’ mind. The works composed during this milieu reflect the political and psychological turmoil of the time.

Under the shadow of nuclear war the human life became highly fragile and hopeless, vulnerable minds were come to be looked upon it as a constant cause of anxiety. American writers turned increasingly to black humour and absurdist fantasy. Many found the naturalistic approach incapable of communicating the rapid velocity and the utter improbability of contemporary life. A highly self-conscious fiction emerged by exposing its own literary devices, questioning the nature of representation. This is, because of the Second World War had thrown the world into a turmoil and chaos of far reaching proportions saturated in the world. The enormity of death, besides the sinister implications of the various techniques of wartime upheavals, left an indelible scar on the minds of the people. Outcome of this indifference milieu might be Salinger’s first novel The Catcher in the Rye, which is concerned with the changing life style of the post-war Americans, and its impact on family relations.

2.1 The Catcher in the Rye:

J. D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye contains the three core existential thematic aspects: death, alienation, and authenticity. The main
protagonist, Holden Caulfield, can be proved as an existential hero within the content of these three core aspects of existential philosophy. There is an important relationship between Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*, which he translates as ‘Being there,’ and his later concept of ‘Being-towards-death’. *Dasein* means, what does it mean for me to be in the world? That is, what is it for me to exist? There are two interpretations of death according to Heidegger: objective and subjective, which are, he believes, entirely different; one can see death either with one of these perspectives. The ‘objective’ perception of death is to become conscious of the fact that after some days you are going to die, and that nobody lives forever. The ‘subjective’ view of death means that every single day of your life you realize that death can occur at any moment and there is no necessary reason why we should live another day. Heidegger opts for the subjective view because it makes us conscious of the fact that time is going to run out. This fact of life makes it impossible for us to change the meaning of our lives. In short, the rational perception of death, which is objective, means ‘everyone must die.’ On the other hand, the subjective perception of death means that ‘you, the individual, will die.’

Holden Caulfield lives a subjective perception of death as Kierkegaard and Heidegger viewed in their existential doctrines. He is preoccupied with anxiety of death and Salinger has made Holden’s concept of death central to Holden's behaviour in the novel.

Holden’s preoccupation with death means that he is always talking to himself about death or relating his reality and situations to the concept of death. Family and practically all human interactions are interrelated with death, from Holden’s perspective. Even his story-telling can be
linked to death, which ultimately leads to his preoccupation with death, a feeling that nearly overshadows the novel. Holden cannot abandon memories about Allie:

He’s dead now. He got leukaemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent. He was terrifically intelligent. His teachers were always writing letters to my mother, telling her what a pleasure it was having a boy like Allie in their class. And they weren’t just shooting the crap. They really meant it. But it wasn’t just that he was the most intelligent member in the family. He was also the nicest, in lots of ways. He never got mad at anybody. (38)

Thus, Holden misses his brother, because their friendship and closeness guided Holden’s life, or so, he believes in retrospect. Two years after Allie’s death, Holden still feels bitter against the world, which is evident of his harshness towards others. He has not accepted Allie’s death and will not accept that he himself is also going to face the death in future. This fact lays at the basis of Holden’s behaviour that is, his inability to function in his family, school, and social life.

He, now, thinks that his preoccupation with death makes him to have an attitude that life is a game. “It prevents him from concentrating on those activities like day-to-day school chores which we don’t extraordinarily think of as games but which, in the presence of death, tend to recede toward the unimportance we usually ascribe to games” (Rosen
Holden is not serious for his learning or being a meticulous student, because he is surrounded by phonies.

Holden’s constant fear of ill-health, aging, death and his recurring search for an adult to help him are due to the loss of his brother. This fear of death is apparent during his trip to New York City, especially, while visiting the Museum of Natural History. His fear of sickness also surfaces while visiting his teacher, Mr. Spencer. Holden describes,

The minute I walked in, I was sort of sorry I’d come. [. . .] there were pills and medicine all over the place, and everything smelled of Vicks Nose drops. It was pretty depressing. I’m not too crazy about sick people anyway. (7)

Holden frequently refers to Mr. Spencer as ‘old Spencer’ because he associates this man with ‘old age and death’. He always relates cold with the death and the world as a cold place, because Allie’s grave is a cold place in the cemetery. When the weather is nice, his parents go out quite frequently and sticks a bunch of flowers on Allie’s grave. But certainly Holden does not enjoy seeing Allie in that crazy cemetery. For Holden, it was not too bad when the sun was out, but unpleasant when it starts to rain. He feels it is awful, it rains on Allie’s lousy tombstone, and it rains on the grass on his stomach. Holden associates rain and freezing with Allie’s grave and his death. He also associates the cold with disappearing; when he in his way to Mr. Spencer’s home. he describes afternoon as, a kind of a crazy afternoon, terrifically cold, and no sun is out or anything and he senses like he is disappearing, while crossing the road. When he rings Mr. Spencer’s doorbell, he thinks, he is really
frozen, his ears are hurting and he could hardly move his fingers. And while welcoming him, Mrs. Spencer asks him, “Are you frozen to death?” (5) It is now obvious to Holden that frozen means death. When in Central Park, he cannot find the lagoon of his childhood, so he asks its reason to driver, who answers that lagoons may be died by the chilled atmosphere. By knowing this, he becomes upset thinking that he also may catch pneumonia and will die. He imagines his funeral, who would be there, and how his mother and Phoebe would react to his death. Thus, it could be said that at any moment his fear of death paralyzes and prevents him from growing into adulthood.

Holden’s preference for ‘Being’ over ‘Becoming’ is clear during his visit to The Museum of Natural History in New York City. In the museum, he is in his comfort zone, where nothing changes and the exhibition remains the same—viz., “the figures in the glass cases never change: the Eskimo is always catching the same fish and the deer keeps drinking the same water” (Matthews 86). The concepts of time and death are irrelevant in the museum and there is a permanency that provides Holden comfort; because reality does not have to change and Holden does not have to face death. In Mr. Spencer’s history class, he gives students option to write anything about the Egyptians. Holden chooses to discuss Egyptians’ secrets of preserving dead bodies. He chooses this topic for writing because the Egyptian tombs had a great appeal for him. At first sight, his essay about the preserving process seems innocent: “Modern science would still like to know what the secret ingredients were that Egyptians used when they wrapped up dead people so that their faces would not rot for innumerable centuries. This interesting riddle is
still quite a challenge for modern science in the twentieth century.” (11) However, knowing Holden’s fixation with death, “so that their faces would not rot,” demonstrates his desire for permanence. Thus, this process appeals to Holden because of the preserving element used in it, as a means against the natural dissolution of non-existence. It suggests that Holden is seeking at least symbolic escape from the reality of non-existence.

It is obvious that Holden’s unwillingness to partake in a world will ultimately destroy him as it destroyed his younger brother. Allie’s perfect image is the most important figure in Holden’s life; it keeps him focused on death. The idea to keep himself aloof from the society is the central part of the novel, and it is the thrust for Holden’s continual death wish. As Marsha Matthews maintains, “The severing of himself from the world” (87) his fear of death, alienates him from his classmates, teachers, and his friends.

Holden becomes clearly depressed of his utter dissolution, whenever he imagines his own death and that of Allie. There are two examples of his fear of dissolution that is disappearing. It first occurs, when he crosses Route 204 to get to Spencer’s house, and second when he is crossing side streets, walking up Fifth Avenue in New York City. He has the feeling of disappearing:

Every time I’d get to the end of the block I’d make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I’d say to him, Allie don’t let me disappear. Please, Allie, Allie. And then when I’d
reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I’d thank him. (198)

In the novel, there are more than twenty references of the death. Whenever he talks about war and even about his apartment at Pencey Prep, he always relates the topic to the death. For example, on his way to the Wicker Bar to meet Carl Luce, Holden thinks about war, and he declares,

I swear if there’s ever another war, they better just take me out and stick me in front of a firing squad. I wouldn’t object. . . . Anyway, I’m sort of glad they’ve got the atomic bomb invented. If there’s ever another war, I’m going to sit right the hell on top of it. I’ll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will. (141)

The death theme continues when Holden discusses his dorm at Pencey Prep, “the kind in which you could get members of your family buried for about five bucks a piece” (16). When Holden wants to go out West, he mentions, “I might come home when I was about thirty-five, I figured, in case somebody got sick and wanted to see me before they died, but that would be the only reason I’d leave my cabin and come back” (205). Holden’s great fear of death leads to moments of resignation—death. He ambivalently says, “I almost wished I was dead.” two times in the novel. The first comes after his fight with Stradlater, when they are talking about Stradlater’s date with Jane Gallagher. The second comes after the fight, when Holden goes to Ackley’s room and asks him if he has any cigarettes. Ackley says, “No, I don’t as a matter of
fact. Listen what the hell was the fight about?” Holden does not answer him. On the other hand, he indulges in his own thoughts: “All I did was, I got up and went over and looked out the window. I felt so lonesome, all of a sudden. I almost wished I was dead” (48). Thus, in the novel, Holden constantly thinks of death. However, there is the only exception when he observes his younger sister Phoebe is on the carousel in the park.

From psychological point of view, Holden’s constant remarks about death in the novel suggest his death phobia. It disregards the application of Kierkegaard and Heidegger’s philosophy of death. Thus, psychological analysis might be right in the context of psychological criticism of the character. It is, nonetheless, valid to maintain that Holden does indeed exhibit a subjective view of death, which correctly places him in the Existential stream of thought. However, Holden’s status as an existentialist does not depend on the only one existential theme—death, but it requires more explanation of other additional concepts like alienation and authenticity.

Alienation is a concept which has been extensively analyzed in the Existential fiction. Alien individual’s quest for his own identity is a major concern of Existential fiction, and this concern is central in The Catcher in the Rye. It puts an alien individual juxtaposed between life and death. Holden feels alien because of the death of his brother, and his condition in the hostel. His exposure to death and alienation in the hostel compels him to think like an existential hero. The Catcher in the Rye begins with Holden standing on cannon at Thomsen Hills. It is a Saturday in December before Christmas, and Holden is overlooking the traditional football game between Pencey Prep and Saxton Hall. He does not
participate in the game because he has lost the fencing team’s equipment. In fact, he is neither interested in playing nor watching the game. His detachment from the game represents his rejection of the environment at Pencey Prep. The opening scene not only elucidates his rejection of the environment but also illustrates the extent of his alienation from the people around.

The people that are alienated from their society lack the ability to express themselves, and feel that other people ignore them and do not care about what they say. When Holden visits Mr. Spencer, his old history teacher, he tries to explain why he failed four subjects at Pencey Prep and was able to pass English. However, in the middle of his explanation, Holden suddenly notices that Mr Spencer is not listening to him. Even though Mr. Spencer has good intentions, Holden is still unable to communicate with him effectively. It can be exemplified again when Holden and Stradlater converse about Jane Gallagher. Holden becomes aware that Stradlater is not listening to him. Being upset about Stradlater’s date with Jane Gallagher, Holden goes to Edmund Hotel where he meets three girls. At the hotel’s ballroom, he invites Bernice, the blonde girl, to dance with him and admires her, “You really can dance. You ought to be a pro. I mean it. I danced with a pro once, and you’re twice as good as she was. Did you ever hear of Marco and Miranda?” Holden’s dance partner responds, “What?” he realizes that she is not even listening to me, instead she is looking all around the place. Holden’s frustration with the fact that Spencer, Stradlater, and Bernice do not listen to what he says intensifies his alienation. People do not listen to Holden because he is alienated from their world. The reason why people
are alienated from Holden is because Holden alienates himself from the people. Holden is alienated from every character in the novel, except Phoebe. He feels that people neglect him but the fact is that he himself is alienated from them and reality.

Holden always seeks to have isolation and peace. In The Museum of Natural History, Holden talks with two young boys about the Egyptian tombs and the embalming process. When he goes down a narrow hall to see the mummies, the young boys get scared and run away, but Holden remains silent. He is alone there and experiences a sense of peace and isolation, which he always thinks. He says: “I sort of liked it, in a way. It was so nice and peaceful.” (204).

Holden has found the people whom he meets in New York are nothing but ‘phonies’. He does not want to develop meaningful and fooling relationships with them. While reading the chapter about his experience in New York, we get distinct impressions that Holden is extremely lonely and, this loneliness is the main reason for the state of alienation. Holden cuts himself off from his family life, from his school environment, and even from his classmates because of his anti-social behaviour. As Matthew Broccoli rightly points out:

Holden’s inability to communicate with the adult world adds distance to his separation and emphasizes his ever-growing conviction that he does not want to join it. Loneliness is always a component of alienation, and Holden is lonely (63).
Another important cause of Holden’s alien situation might be in the social and historical context of the time, in which the story is explored. The World War II brought the United States out of Depression, and the 1950s provided most Americans with time to enjoy long-awaited material prosperity. In this period of prosperity the material comfort becomes the priority of American people. It seemed that one was living for earning money and enjoying the luxurious life. The spiritual world, social and familial commitments of people become secondary to the material luxurious life. Family life of the people of the era is found destroyed by materialism. Holden belongs to such kind of family. He longs for the pure love and the sincere care of his family. After being expelled from school, Holden does not want to go back home again because he is afraid of the blaming of his parents. His father is a rich lawyer, who provides him good education, but he is failed to nurture his sensitive mind. His mother is very hysterical in emotion, but cannot understand him. She does not know what he really wanted. So his running away from the home obviously manifests that he does not find comfort in family. His quest for family love and the failure to achieve it makes him alien inwardly as well as outwardly.

After examining the numerous incidences in the novel, it becomes obvious that Holden cannot communicate effectively with Spencer, Antolini, Stradlater, Ackley, Sunny, the prostitute; Maurice, the pimp; the Taxi cab driver and other characters in the novel, with the sole exception of his sister Phoebe. Holden fails in an attempt to establish relationships, and his frequent failures to have successful relationships make him consider himself as isolated. As Mersault is declared as an outsider in the
society due to his anti-social behaviour, Holden is also an outsider in the society for the same cause. He can’t establish his relations in the society. He wants to run away to the remote woods where he will not have to communicate with others. He wants to become a ‘deaf-mute’ (198). It is the recognition of Holden’s extreme alienation from his environment. This acts as a firm foundation for the judgement that he has met the requirements, necessary for being characterized as existentially alienated.

The Existential concept of ‘authenticity,’ developed by Heidegger and Sartre can be traced in this novel. Heidegger’s claim is that one may exist either as an ‘authentic’ or an ‘inauthentic’ human being. The concept of unauthentic life is governed and controlled by what other people think, and by the rules of society. The lives of such unauthentic persons may convince them to take a certain action, or live by certain rules. The concept of authenticity can be defined in contrast of this concept. They raise questions about the validity of directive norms from society, and they reject certain behavioural codes of the society they belong to.

There is nothing more Holden hates than being an inauthentic; consequently he begins to search for authenticity. Holden exhibits frustration and aggravation against certain kinds of phoniness such as, hypocrisy, ignorance, indifference, and moral corruption. As pointed out by Richard Gill and Ernest Sherman, “an authentic individual constantly strives to attain self-awareness, rather than keeping to safe and customary paths inherently alien to him, chooses to realize his own true self” (20). The concept of authenticity is defined by Sartre as, “the courage whereby man consents to bear the burdens of freedom” (Scott 177). For both
Heidegger and Sartre, the unauthentic person seeks to enter the world of things so that he can exist in much the same way as a table or a chair exists. That is, they give up their responsibility to find their true self and, instead, they have a mundane existence and are moulded into the social norms of society.

Holden rejects all the directive norms of his society. His choice is not influenced by what other people think about him, but what truly he wants to be. He enjoys the freedom as an ‘authentic being’. Though in the social scene, it is taken as a granted that student must study hard and should secure good marks; he fails in all the subjects of his course, except English. It is because he dislikes his school, which attempts to make him inauthentic. The school goes against his personal sincerity and present him as something he isn’t.

He does not follow blindly behaviour of his peers and roommates, but only does what appeals him most. According to Stradlater, Holden does not behave according to the behaviour that is accepted at Pencey Prep. It might be wrong to say that Holden’s actions are influenced and decided by his environment. Rather, his behaviour is governed by his own standards and what he understands about himself. When he sees Phoebe on the carousel, he experiences an epiphany and realizes that he cannot protect Phoebe from having unique life experiences. He acknowledges that although his motivations are authentic, noble and naive, a change of world view and a change of self are inevitable. He is freak, an outsider as he behaves unconventionally. Through his action he suggests that you have to exist in the unchanging world, and what you make of yourself, is totally up to you.
Holden attempts to liberate himself from the banalities of life by not pursuing wealth, a nice car, a beautiful house, and a ‘la dolce vita’ lifestyle, like his brother, D.B. What do he has in common? He never stops an attempt to define himself in society, and each time he fails, but he tries again. He is an existential hero because he makes his own choice; he keeps on trying even though his choice fails him, and because he refuses to compromise.

For Wiegand, a non-conformist is a person who is threatened by the forces within society. Holden significantly contributes to the conflict that exists between him and society. For example, Holden’s memory of the death of his brother motivates him not to care about his relationships with people. His constant awareness of death is termed by Wiegand as a “spiritual illness,” which is a cause of his alienation from society and is not caused by a confrontation with it. “Although the non-conformist hero is constantly threatened by external forces in society which seeks to inhibit and to destroy him,” (253) but this is not true in the case of Holden. Holden does not flunk out of Pencey because he is not able to meet the unreasonable demands placed on him. Rather, he flunks out because he does not pay attention in class and does not want to get involved in the process of learning. Learning is not a priority for Holden if it is going to lead to nothing. Holden is responsible for his alienation from his classmates at Pencey, his teachers, his parents, and his previous classmates at the two private schools that he attended prior to coming to Pencey, because of his “spiritual illness,” that is his preoccupation with death.
Throughout the novel, one can observe many instances of inconsistency in Holden’s behaviour. For example, his preoccupation with death and his strong behavioural characteristics of alienation. These instances impress the reader by exemplifying the marked inconsistency in Holden’s actions that radically change the reader’s opinion and evaluation of Holden as a person. We know that he does not care what people think of him therefore he does not try to have respect from his teachers at Pencey Prep for his academic achievements or his brilliance. Then the question is that why does he care about hurting the feelings of Mrs. Morrow when he is on the train and tells her that her son is a wonderful guy. He admires her son by asserting that he is a positive addition to the student body at Pencey Prep. But at the same time a reader comes to know that his reading about her son is negative one. Holden describes him as “doubtless the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey” (54). Then the question is that why would Holden care about Mrs. Morrow’s feelings when he does not care about the feelings of his classmates, parents, teachers, and people he meets in everyday life? Its answer might be that he does recognize an authentic moment in a mother’s love. By behaving so he exhibits his authentic existential behaviour.

Other examples of Holden’s inconsistent behaviour are his respect and admiration for the nuns, to whom he contribute $10; his tolerance for Ackley’s disgusting behaviour in picking his nose while talking with someone, and Holden’s willingness to act as a friend for Ackley. These inconsistencies in Holden’s behaviour cannot be easily explained. It challenges the perception of Holden as an inconsiderate, insensitive
sixteen year-old boy that does not care about himself, his parents, and his classmates. He is in a distinct boundary situation, in which he has rejected his parents and his teachers who are generally perceived to be significant others in the life of a teenager. As Stradlater says forcibly, “You don’t do one damn thing the way you’re supposed to. I mean it. Not one damn thing” (41). Holden’s behaviour in these situations can be interpreted as misfit against a potentially authentic position. As Heidegger frequently notes,

[A] pure authentic position is not immediately attainable but, instead, must be worked towards step by step. The move from unauthentic to authentic requires a resolution of the will and is only gradually achievable. (Przepukowski 150)

Thus, Holden is in the early stage of this authentication process. All the incidents referred above indicate that Holden is changing from a sensitive, caring teenager to an existential adult. His preoccupation with death and his notable behaviour in the alienation mode are in concord with existential themes, examined by all existential theorists. However, it can be argued that Holden is searching for authenticity. His behavioural incidences make move him gradually, to a state of responsibility, sensitivity, and authenticity.

Holden’s awareness of the fact, that death is stalking him, makes him liberate from the banalities of suburban society in the New York City. He realizes that being alive and giving meaning to his existence overshadows the particulars, such as success, fame, and money. They do not have the same criteria for judging success, as society does, because
life for him is finite. For Him, the ultimate end is death, in that there is no distinction between someone who is rich and famous, and someone, who is a street bum. He is existential hero because he wants to give meaning to his existence and in the pursuit of doing so; he views himself as having gone against society. Although each existential philosopher’s doctrines are different slightly, and there is no general agreement among them, there is universal agreement that existentialism is a philosophical movement, which can only be accurately explicated by its existential themes. In this respect, Holden appropriately fits into the existential themes of death, alienation and authenticity.

2.2 The Outsider:

Richard Wright’s *The Outsider* was first published in 1953, when Europe and America was buzzing over the philosophy of Existentialism. The theme of ‘identity’ is prominently depicted in Wright’s literary endeavors along with the literary tradition to which he belongs to. *The Outsider*, in fact, is a contemplation of the author on the existential search for identity. In the novel he has used the basic tenets of existentialism to present the picture of a lonely individual in the modern world. The motif of the novel is clearly stated in the epigraph, taken from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. The novel tells the story of a modern man and his transformation into a murderous psychopath. He examines how the human civilization is undermined by the forces of tyranny and terror. It also reflects a modern world in which an individual is continuously hounded and neutralized by fascistic regimes. As Wright is a black activist and an advent of liberal humanism, some critics (Kingsley Widmer) labeled this novel as ‘black existentialism’. But if the novel is
read without any bias, it becomes apparent that Wright has deliberately underestimated the black identity of the protagonist to signify the existential dread and the quest of identity on the larger scale.

A close examination of the novel, *The Outsider* leads us to present Damon as a black intellectual caught in a web of anxious and dreadful life. It is one of the major situations generally depicted in the Existential fiction. The quotation, "Dread is an alien power which lays hold of an individual, and yet one cannot tear oneself, nor has a will to do so, for one fears what one desires" (Epigraph to Section 1 of *The Outsider* by Richard Wright.), from Kierkegaard, establishes Damon’s life, from the beginning of the novel, as a dreadful one. It really sets up the absurd world, in which he lives before his existential choice. In *The Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard explains that man can “qualitative leap” out of the ambiguity of dread by performing an act with conscious forethought (38). Dread is embodied in the object that man initially desires, and the conscious act itself awakens new desires within him. Dread is not simply fear, but it is an active emotional force. It attracts and repels man’s desire for possibility of freedom, by forcing a “static conflict between hopeful expectation and fearful uncertainty” (Tate 370).

As a matter of fact, the dread in Damon’s life is shown through the first section of the novel. He is a young black intellectual postal worker at Chicago, trapped in a dead-end, miserable existence, and feels overwhelmed by tremendous burdens. The first burden in Damon’s life is his unsuccessful conjugal life. His wife Gladys Damon is a shrewish woman, who spends her time pressing him for money. She begins her day by physically and verbally abusing her husband. She violently suppresses
Damon and does not assume her role of housewife. Damon’s bitterness at being lured into marriage has grown into a rage that he frequently and violently vents on his wife. He warns Gladys that her time for this kind of behaviour is running out: “This is the last time you’re going to do this to me.” (Wright, *The Outsider* 18) Another problem in Damon’s life is his emotional mother. She is too religious and pious that she makes him feel guilty. Damon feels that she does not love him, like his father, she rejects him. He feels that she has been cruel to him, especially, when she beats him and neglects to give him food. His unsuccessful relationship with his mother comes to a point of hatred and bitterness. Her fanatic behaviour troubles him by arousing the feeling of guilt due to which he always remains under the dread and anxiety.

The third burden in Damon’s life is his love affair with his mistress, Dorothy Powers. She is fifteen years old and a good natured girl, who becomes Damon’s beloved following his familial misfortunes. After courting Dorothy, he thinks to marry with her, but his wife refuses to divorce him. Consequently, Dorothy becomes pregnant, and he thinks that she is now off beam for him. Nevertheless, Dorothy also threatens him that if he does not marry with her, she will be accused him that she has been raped by him. Though she cares him a lot, he always behaves sadistic and masochistic with her.

The last but not the least burden in Damon’s life is his tedious job. Damon finds his postal work in Chicago boring and troublesome. He and his friends spend most of their leisure and work time together by chatting about sex, racism, sports, the meaning of life and death, and their future dreams. The work is killing to him, but he has to work there for money as
he cannot live without it. His friends are rather naive men; they do not think like Damon. They quickly convince themselves that all is right, and they blame themselves for their problems. But Damon is aware of his familial problems as well as life in a distorted world that imposes its ambiguities and contradictions on him.

Another important fact regarding Damon is that he is a Southern black man. He is similar to many other Southern Blacks, who had escaped from their Southern roots in Mississippi, and migrated to Chicago, where they supposed more desirable environment for Blacks. They know that there is no assurance for respectable life in Chicago, but there is at least the possibility of work for them. Among them Damon is fortunate to be employed as a postal worker during the Great Depression, when jobs are scarce for everyone. Nevertheless, Richard Wright makes clear that Damon and the other black postal workers suffer under extreme conditions of discrimination in their work environment. Damon feels trapped in his job as much as he finds himself trapped in the marriage, and his relationship with his mother and his mistress. During his tedious day work at post-office, Damon is subjected to a shift of sorting mails under the scrutiny of white supervisors, who always inflicts stress and tension upon him.

Because of all these tremendous burdens, Damon feels insulted at being alive, and humiliated at the terms of existence. He feels the kind of nausea prior to any existential choice. It is in that sense Damon becomes a tragic figure and failures in his life, not because who he is, but because he meets the destiny of many people, like him. In his state of anguish, he asserts loudly, “Why were some people, fated, like job, to live a never-
ending debate between themselves and their sense of what they believed life should be? Why did some hearts feel insulted at being alive, humiliated at the term of existence?” (19) As Hawthorne’s black-veiled priest senses sin and guilt in others, Damon develops a sense of identifying an ‘outsider’ in others. The outsiders are such people that feel a wall of separation between themselves and the society. Damon sees at prostitutes, Communists women, and non-whites in general as if they are outsider (Singh 137). It is a problem of modern life and black man’s place in it. He has vicious self-hatred in the lives of black Americans. It is his antenna-like sensitivity to all ‘outsiders’ that highlights the depth of his alienation, and also that it is a social malaise rather than psychic imbalance. Loss of this sense of wholeness defines a situation that is existentialist to the core. The need to authenticate oneself in a stultifying environment leads to “an undying craving for freedom” (ibid. 138).

The plot of the novel dramatises the existential theme of freedom deliberately. His wife Gladys has forced him to sign the house and the car over to her and demands that he has to borrow eight hundred dollars from the Postal Union to clear the titles of both. It is when he is returning with this money from the post-office, he meets subway accident. The unexpected subway accident, in which he is believed to have been killed, provides him an opportunity to escape from his dreadful life. Indeed, dread and hatred have motivated his flight from Chicago to New York. He supposes that he will be escaped from his previous burdensome life, anxiety and fear by utilizing this choice and entered in the new life in New York. But his new identity does not give him relief from the dread but creates more anxiety in his life.

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After his supposed death he assumes new identity. After assuming a number of aliases, he journeys to New York. New dreads and anxieties, which are created by his new identity, shadow him throughout his life, till his death. When he hides in a brothel, (before he leaves Chicago) he encounters with a co-worker, Joe Thomas, who recognises him. Damon becomes restless and anxious being uncovered his identity. This dread of identification leads him to kill the co-worker to protect his secret and his dread and anxiety of life makes him a murderer. This initial, unprepared murder provides the additional motivation which drives him to commit murder after murder on the path of his eventual destruction.

While his journey to New York, he needs a companion. In order to fulfil his need of companionship, he wants to talk with Houston, a district attorney, but he is afraid that he will endanger his new identity—life. Thus, though he has started his new life, his sense of dread grows rapidly. Wright rightly depicts this anxiety through several predatory images. On one occasion Damon imagines Houston as a cat and he himself is its prey: “[Damon] felt like a bird veering and flittering toward the wide, unblinking eyes of a crouching cat” (187). The cat does not have to make an open attack; on the contrary, the victim ironically invites his own destruction. This analogy reinforces Damon’s acknowledgement of Houston as a formidable force and also reveals the extent to which he continually endangers himself with compulsive talking. This sense of endanger and dread compels Damon to murder serially. (Tate 376)

When he reads the diary of Eva Blount, he learns that she has married with Gil Blount, who does not love her. He has married her only because to keep her property within the party. She wants to leave him, but
party says she should not, otherwise they will slander her. Damon becomes anxious over this cynical violation of individual rights. He becomes anxious about his freedom and is worried that party would also restrict his individual rights. In this fit of anxiety he kills Gil Blount and Herndon, while they are fighting in the office with each other. This act of premeditated murder becomes Damon’s “qualitative leap” out of the ambiguity of dread. By murdering, both Blount and Herndon, he tries to remove his burden, but this heinous deed creates new dread in his life. In the desperate attempt to hide his crime, He kills another high ranked communist official, Jack Hilton, because Damon fears that Hilton will reveal his guilt. But it is his misfortune that this final murder makes party suspicious; as a result, party members shoot him dead. Thus, Damon, who has lived his entire life under the burden of dread and anxiety, becomes a burden for others.

These criminal propensities of Damon alienate him from the society, in which he seeks his identity. Damon’s attempt to rescue self from this dreadful existence of senseless criminality brings him frustration and despair in his life. It makes him loose his sense of judgment and alienate him from the rational world; which leads him to the abyss of darkness and nothingness. However, his isolation is self-imposed, stemming from his intense idealism and contradictory to the social realism. His violation of social moral codes and ethical values bid him to propagate his ideology, which helps him to intensify his loneliness. His inability, to find solution from his numerous intellectual pursuits and philosophical beliefs, gives him depression and dementia.
When he escapes from subway accident and assumes a new identity, he decides to go to New York. In his attempt to hide his identity he alienates from the society. His too much alienation from the society makes him to have a contact with someone. In his utter loneliness he tries to speak to a prostitute in a brothel. He tells her the subway accident and the abandonment of his old life; however, she does not believe his fantastic confession. As a result, he feels even more engulfed in desolate and unchanging isolation. His departure from Chicago to New York has made him alone, as he feels, “the outside world ha[s] fallen away from him and he [is] alone at the centre of the world of the laws of his own feeling” (210). Thus, as the train plunges into the darkness of the frozen landscape, Damon plunges into the “strange but familiar world” (211) of his own mind. “In this regard Damon’s trip to New York provides the external circumstances for his advancing descent into psychological despair” (Tate 374). In such peculiar situation, he wants to speak with Houston to get comfort from his loneliness, yet he fears that talk might disclose his new identity.

In New York, he joins a communist party but he finds that communism is oppressive and fascistic. Communism centres its focus on the society; it considers social welfare instead of individual. Communism is different from his ideals that stress the power of freedom of choice and concentrate his attention on individual life. The effort is also made by Wright to depict the demonic characteristics of Nihilism and Communism. In Existentialism, the social values and emotions are separated from individual. Existentialism, through which Damon seeks to escape, is found to be an abstract ideology in terms of his visionary
expectations. It helps him to isolate and lead to abstractions and nothingness. Ultimately, he is unable to find meaning in such an existence. He sums up his life’s dilemma in this way: “What is man? He had knowingly set himself a project of no less magnitude than contained in the awful question”(227).

Damon’s realization of the emptiness of his life and futility of high philosophical ideals lead him towards nothingness. His tragedy has to do with his discovery that man is condemned to nothingness. This knowledge marks the intensification of his dread and final descent into madness: “May be man is nothing in particular. May be that’s the terror of it” (174). This kind of tragic experience, that Damon is undergoing. This is the final phase of the existential quest where man becomes nihilistic. He loses his humanity because of his belief in individual will and freedom of choice that do not permit the free association with the society. Damon’s final comment, “Nothing exists—Alone man is nothing”(280) is a confirmation of his hopelessness in real life.

According to Existentialism, one can gain his real identity by rejecting his past and his former self. This situation is described as ‘radical conversion’ by Sartre. It means one must design a new personality and existence for himself which is called as ‘being for itself’. In The Outsider, Damon is alienated due to his race and society; this alienation forces him to embark on a quest of identity. His personality was further broken by his sense of alienation. This quest of identity makes him hungry for knowledge, freedom, and the recognition. He desires that the society should accept him as it is and should treat him on human ground. However, unfortunately, everywhere he feels discarded:

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by his family and friends, fellow members of his class, the Communists, the Church, the State and the Fascists. This feeling of rejection arouses in him the feeling of dread, despair, and distrust. The sense of loss and lack of compassionate understanding from those around him are made him alien, a lonely man, and an outsider. He refuses an unauthentic life which he leads in Chicago and starts new life in New York. Consequently, this refusal leads him towards the destruction of others and himself.

Damon can be compared to Camus's Mersault; both are self-confessed existentialists. They are enlightened with the futility and irrationality of life only at point, where they are beyond redemption. Like Mersault, Damon, also kills and dies in defence of his philosophical views. Mersault is alienated due to his culture; he is a French man in Algerian Arab society. He fights back by rebelling against the system in consonant with his existential philosophy. Damon also rebels against his own society by wilfully violating its laws. He is rejected by his own society because of his criminal behaviour. Thus, Damon's quest for identity is personal rather than racial.

The subway accident can be associated with Damon’s rebirth. It is an unexpected opportunity for him to escape from a world defined by obligation, responsibility, and authority, which has only meaning in the society. Stressed and overburdened by his many problems Damon jumps at this chance to create a new existence, a new person out of his disposable past:

What was his past if he wanted to become another person? . . .

. Now, his past would have to be a deliberately constructed
thing... Others took their lives for granted; he would have to mould his with a conscious aim. Why not? Was he not free to do so? That all men were free was the fondest and deepest conviction of his life... He would do with himself what he would, what he liked. (87)

In his attempt to reject the formal self and create a new life for himself, Damon concludes that “if he could conceive it, he would be able to do it” (281). Comparing himself to “a writer constructing a tale,” (281) he realises that he would have to imagine a thing to invent it. He assumes the Existential principle that ‘A man creates himself’ (Sartre 405). So, he proceeds to design the course of action obliged by his own ideals that would be an expression of his perfect freedom. He frees himself from entrapment of subway car accident by smashing another’s head. He makes his way through the human debris of the wreckage and out of the dark enclosure. This situation can be resembled with the situation of childbirth. This act might be called as wilful self creation. Thus, for Damon, “an act of will is an act of self-creation, and the act of self-creation, an act of will” (Henderson 402). Damon’s trapped situation of his previous life is entrapped by his physical entrapment in the subway disaster. In this entrapment he bashes the head of an already lifeless body and steps out of the situation. The bloody violence which will characterize his new life is foreshadowed in the circumstances of the accident. He becomes free and authentic being without any guilt and burden.

In existential terms, there is a freedom to act without limitation of any kind. Damon has also the freedom to exercise a most fundamental choice. He is free to act but he could not exchange his existence for the
existence of another. After his escape from past he chooses what he wants to be. In Existential philosophy, freedom and existence are indistinguishable and the action of a free individual implies the freedom. Action is not just function, or merely activism, but it involves the freedom and existence of man. This complex and confusing nature of the freedom is revealed brilliantly in the action of *The Outsider*. Each person has to make decisions in his own unique situation and accept responsibility for these decisions. After the subway accident, Damon decides not to return to his previous life and goes to New York. With his arrival in New York, he gives himself a new name and identity as a Lionel Lane, the name of dead fellow passenger, who is buried in the graveyard supposing as Damon. He acquires Lane’s birth certificate and draft card to close his identity. By assuming the identity of Lionel Lane, Damon is affirming the Sartrean existentialist maxim that: “Man is nothing else but what he makes himself” (Sartre 345). He does this deliberately and takes responsibility whatever has happened or will happen. Afterwards even his killing Herndon and Blount is his own decision which might be called as a ‘radical freedom of choice’. He had earlier killed Joe Thomas for purely practical reasons but his killing of Herndon and Blount is his conscious choice. “He knew exactly what he had done; he had done it deliberately, even though he had not planned it” (227). Like his character Bigger in his another novel *The Native Son*, Damon too must exercise his existentialist choices. It is necessary for him to express himself, and in the course of novel he expresses himself through “deadly violence” (Singh 141).
Damon’s second birth destroys the context of his former world, and now he is a free man in the absence of previous context. It is his “own will which asserts supremacy, and he becomes author and creator of his own life” (Henderson 402). He creates the text of his new life by choosing a new name, identity, and history. Even to some extent he creates or at least chooses a new context (New York). Damon is thus defined by his choice and his will as a free and authentic individual. In a sense his birth is an act of will and of choice. The violence of his rebirth prefigures the violence of his new life.

The ideal of universal freedom demands the discovery or creation of norms that will protect the freedom of others. Damon fails in his effort to live authentically according to social codes. He fails, because he dreams of becoming one of those men who were outsiders and the new life he creates, and his relationship with other characters are based on deception. As an existential hero, he explores the question of freedom but provides no hopeful answers. For him the possibility of creating a meaningful sense of freedom seems far-off. He finally discovers that the egotistical exercise of freedom destroys those around him, including the one person (Eva Blount) he loves. Thus, the existentialist’s determined struggle to be free at any cost usually leads to his downfall. In his attempt to make his life meaningful and escape from the burdens of life, he destroys others existence and eventually, destroys himself.

2.3 The Moviegoer:

Since, its publication in 1962, Walker Percy's National Book Award (1962) winning novel, *The Moviegoer* has achieved widespread
critical and popular success. It is his first novel that explores protagonist’s search for meaning. After scrutinizing biographical details of Walker Percy in the first chapter, it becomes obvious that he is under the influence of philosophical writings of Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus, Sartre, Heidegger, Marcel, and Kierkegaard. The novel, *The Moviegoer* is most obviously a Kierkegaardian novel. The novel’s epigraph is a quotation from Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death*: “. . . the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair” (Epigraph to *The Moviegoer*). Percy makes no secret of his debt to Kierkegaard: he mentioned it frequently in interviews, and gives precise explanations of how Kierkegaard’s philosophy and method helps him to shape his novel. By doing thus he directly explores the fictional approach and philosophical preoccupations of his novel. He says, “I would have written *The Moviegoer* without Kierkegaard but it was helpful, exciting, stimulating to have the categories there—to have them so clearly seen by Kierkegaard. It is a theoretical frame of reference” (Dewey 116).

The account of how Percy came to Kierkegaard shows his unique formation as a philosophical novelist. His education was scientific, not literary. After graduating, he trained as a medical doctor, but gave it up when he suffered with tuberculosis. It contracted him while working in a pathology ward in a New York hospital, where he read existential philosophy: “But after I began reading the French existentialists I soon realized the Kierkegaard was the founding father of the movement. They all gave him credit for that, even the atheistic existentialists—Sartre, Heidegger” (Ibid 106). So Percy’s motive for writing fiction was originally intellectual and philosophical. His novels do not use exotic
locations or extensively researched historical settings, instead, they concern themselves with how individuals relate to the worlds they live in, and make sense of their own lives. Percy explores deeply in man’s malaise and searches away from it. This ennui is an almost universal condition of the thoughtful; who are we? Why are we here? It is both a condition of man, but also particularly related to the cultural era of modernism in which we live. Man, i.e., Binx, the protagonist of the novel, seeks a way out of this condition.

The period of the novel is 1950’s; in this era the contemporary society was under the tension of holocaust; the era was also well known for the Cold War period. Many people of this era felt proud to call themselves as 'non-conformists’. But the society, which they belonged to, was the society of conformists. A conformist is a man, who believes in the suppressing of the original spontaneous behaviour, and behaves according to the social norms. The non-conformist persons call themselves ‘inner-directed’. The protagonist of the novel, Binx, is not ‘non-conformist’; instead Percy depicts him as an ordinary citizen, who expresses his individuality through his style of living.

In existential fictions, protagonists are always depicted as alien individual, and who follows the non-conformist model of thinking. He spontaneously does what he wants to do. He manipulates his freedom of choice for his own interest. For instance, Camus’s Mersault kills Arab, Wright’s Damon changes his own identity, Salinger's Holden also uses his own choice, and Gardner’s Grendel kills human beings to prove his authentic behaviour. In contrast, Binx is a social being behaving according to the social expectations. Though this character is conformist
and the story explores the society of 1950s, still this novel is not the novel of social realism; rather one can observe the ironic tone of the narrator. John Bickerson Boiling, the main protagonist of *The Moviegoer* called "Binx" by most of his friends, and "Jack" by some of his relatives, is the narrator and main protagonist of the novel. As a well-educated, intellectual and ironic observer of life, he can be compared to Nick Carraway, in *The Great Gatsby*, Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, or Jack Burden in *All the King’s Men*. In his radical alienation from society, however, he seems closer to Camus’s Mersault.

The novel depicts the Kierkegaardian existential philosophy. The characters of this novel represent the three stages of life—aesthetic, ethical, and religious—described by Kierkegaard. Binx Bolling, as said by many critics and by Percy himself, moves from Kierkegaard's first stage, the aesthetic, at the beginning of the novel, to the third stage, the religious, at the end of the novel. Most of the time in the novel Binx sticks with aesthetic sphere. After reawakening to the possibility of a search, Binx continues to explore the aesthetic way of life, while opening himself to glimpses, not of the ethical sphere but of the religious one. By the end of the book, he makes a leap of faith directly into the religious sphere. Percy is a Catholic convert and the religious sphere, which Binx enters at the conclusion of his search, is distinctly Catholic in character.

According to Kierkegaard, the aesthetic stage of life means a life lived for ‘the moment’ or ‘immediately lived’. This stage is described as a style of life in which a person always attempts to satisfy the natural instincts and impulses. An aesthetic person can be defined as a person who only concerns with his own happiness, and he believes that he can
get the happiness only through the external world. He lives only for
enjoyment and gets worldly, surface level satisfaction through it. He
plays the role of observer of the society but not serious participant, such
person one can describe as a man without inner life. It is, because such
person acts and behaves according to the choices or moods of others. His
behaviour is motivated by the forces that extend beyond his control.

To the dismay of his family, particularly, his aunt represents
parental authority in Binx’s life. His Aunt, Emily, would prefer Binx to
take his place in the ethical sphere: to live like B in Either/Or: to marry,
settle down, raise a family, and assume a responsible and respectable
place in society. However, Binx has been living a Kierkegaardian
aesthetic way of life, living purely as an observer, experimenting with
sensations, aloof from the world, alone, participating in life at a
calculated distance from it. Though he is a native of New Orleans, he
does not choose to live in one of the city’s better-known and more
colourful quarters; instead he chooses to live a life of obscurity in
Gentilly, a characterless suburb.

Binx is a happy man living his life by fulfilling all the sensual
desires. His movie-going and having sex with secretaries is an attempt to
find out the happiness from the external world. He himself asserts, “The
fact is I am quite happy in a movie, even a bad movie” (7). His behaviour
is ruled by the social expectations; he acts according to the other person’s
choices. In his behaviour there is no spontaneity. While describing
himself he points out his impression in the society, “I am a model tenant
and a model citizen and take a pleasure in doing all that is expected of
me” (7).
He is far from being a serious and idealistic person; rather he wastes his time in a very ordinary job as a stock broker. He has affairs with his pretty secretaries, and wastes his time going to all sorts of movies with them. In the initial stage of his life he has also been very idealistic about life, but he leaves all those dreams and tries to live an ordinary life. He says, “. . . [he] dreamed of doing something great. But there is much to be said for giving up such grand ambitions and living the most ordinary life imaginable” (9). He is not different from the contemporary American materialistic society. In this regards, Hobson rightly says that Binx is, in fact, caught in the aesthetic sphere of what Kierkegaard calls the objective-empirical, or the value system of the consumer society (30). All these people of the society get money in order to be a consumer of the best products, fulfil their sensual desires, and increase the pleasure of life. In this connection, Binx is a perfect representative of the aesthetic level in Kierkegaard’s scheme. He lives for his senses, and can be called as hedonist or sensualist. It is obvious in the very initial part of the novel that it applies the principles of existential philosophy. The protagonist, Binx, seems us simply living his life according to the social expectations but it is not so. His description about his life suggests the ironic tone and we come to know that he knows that what he is not.

Binx and most of the other characters in the book live in Kierkegaard’s first level, the level of the unexamined life, without meaning or purpose except to feel pleasure and the approval of the other automatons. These people are governed not by an authentic self-responding to transcendent truth, but by the spirit of this world. Thus,
movies and affairs are just a partial solution to extricate himself from these feelings. But Binx’s search and action switches him from aesthetic ideology to the religious doctrine.

An ethical person believes in the living life as a moral actor. In order to fulfil the moral obligations, an ethical person avoids the personal desires and even his freedom. In this stage of life, the priority is not to the personal desires but to the duties assigned from the society. In an aesthetic stage, a person attempts to achieve the sensual momentous pleasure, in contrast at an ethical stage, a person attempts to realize what eternal, universal value is.

The strong evidences of an ethical personality can be traced in this novel. As Martin Luschei points out that Emily is a strong character (102); she tries to impose the ethical values on Binx, though he rejects afterwards. In the beginning of the novel narrator describes his aunt Emily. This female character represents the ethical stage of life. According to Kierkegaard, in this stage of life a person lives for his responsibility and duty. His awareness and commitment towards his responsibilities are strong. The novel begins with the receiving of a note from Aunt Emily to Binx asking him to come to lunch. As this was not for the first time happening in his life, he assumes that she wants to have a serious talk with him about his future and what he ought to do. She attempted several times to make him aware of his responsibilities. An important ethical characteristic of her personality is exposed in the first paragraph. Binx remembers the teaching of his aunt on the occasion of the death of his brother. His Aunt, who was in charge of him, when his brother, Scott died, told him, “Now it’s all up to you. It’s going to be
difficult for you but I know you’re going to act like a soldier” (4). She asks Binx to devote his life to his responsibilities as soldier, doing his duty and giving his life, if necessary, for his country without concern for self. Her imaging of Binx as a soldier symbolizes the ideal of ethical dedication; but Binx, as an aesthetic man living life for sensual pleasure, disappoints her.

Aunt Emily is actually his great-aunt, the youngest sister of his grandfather, and Kate is the daughter by a former marriage of Emily’s husband, Jules Gutrer. His step-cousin Kate is engaged with Walter Wade, but she is a manic-depressive and shows suicidal tendencies. In fact, they are close companions since their childhood; she is afraid of the outer world because she has hardly gone out of the house. What Aunt Emily wants Binx to do is to take his step-cousin Kate to a certain place to watch one of the Mardi Gras parades, so that it would help her (Kate) to change her mind setup. Here she is attempting to force him again to take the responsibility and act as a moral actor.

She is stoic in philosophy and represents the fusion of ethical integrity and dignity in the society. She believes in the tradition of her family. Her suggestion, “Every moment think steadily as a Roman and a man, to do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity and a feeling of affection and freedom and justice” (78), suggests that she lives in the ethical stage of life, and she also wants Binx to do the same. She wants to preserve the family honour and tradition of the Boilings, and to maintain this she ask Binx as a last male representative of the family, to follow the aristocratic ethics and behave according to noblesse oblige. Many of her thoughts and behaviour suggest that she believes in the
aristocratic social system rather than the democracy. She believes that one must act with responsibility and ethical purity to make his contribution significant to the society. She is just concerned with her duties for the society without undertaking the unworthiness of the society. She does not believe in God and even does not strive for divine sanction. She is just true to herself and believes in her action and its responsibility. Thus, she represents the ethical stage in this novel.

Binx, on the other hand, denies all these ethical ideals; he represents contradictions with the ideals and behavioural codes which. His aunt forces him to consider the social expectations and moral responsibilities but, on the contrary, Binx concerns with his individual desires and sensual pleasure. The reason of this contradiction is seen in the active ties and concerns his aunt wants to impel on him. It is related to the society without any particular individual and so abstract in nature. Motivations for these actions are not the natural instincts but the artificial emotion of pride. Binx is unable to do anything of this sort, because he is aware of the momentousness of life and futility of human actions. There is no reason to work for something, which has no meaning and may be filled with more pain than joy. He declines to accept Aunt Emily’s views, or, metaphorically, to move onto the ethical stage.

Another important stage discussed by Kierkegaard is the religious stage of life, which is not concerned with any institutional religion. A person switches himself from the ethical stage of life to the religious one, when he comes to know that ethical ideology is not sufficient to provide the solutions to solve the riddles of the life. The ethical stage of life is insufficient to provide the justification to his choice and action. The
religious stage of life believes that the God is higher than any moral and ethical values. A person can fully surrender himself to the God with a ‘leap of faith’. This ‘leap of faith’ constitutes entrance into the religious sphere. In the aesthetic sphere an individual is concerned with the ‘pleasure and pain’ of his life, however in ethical sphere he is concerned with ‘good and evil’ of his duty and responsibility. In the religious sphere, a person is concerned with the ‘sin and grace’ of his faith.

The religious stage in the novel is represented by Lonnie Smith. He is Binx’s half-brother from his step-father Roy Smith. Lonnie suffers from a fatal illness and is confined to a wheelchair. The Smith family is Roman Catholic and a devout, as they attend Mass prayers regularly. Nevertheless, Binx himself makes it clear that Lonnie is the only character who lives in religious sphere of life defined by Kierkegaard, “The Smiths, except Lonnie, would never dream of speaking of religion” (159). Even at Mass, only Lonnie receives communion and the others lapse into a “blank-eyed vacancy” (160). His conversation with Binx exhibits his knowledge of Roman Catholic doctrine. He has also good knowledge of technical, ethical and ascetic matters. Binx has a glimpse of the religious sphere in his relationship with Lonnie, who dies at the end of the novel. Lonnie endures his physical suffering with great courage, and at the same time, actively pursues a life of mature piety through religious observance. Lonnie’s fatal illness provokes Binx into making the final leap of faith, connecting with his remaining half-siblings in a close and loving way, overcoming the cold distance of the aesthetic posture.

After Lonnie’s death Binx confidently answers the questions, asked by his half-siblings about Lonnie’s status in the afterlife. This time Binx
is speaking in such way that he has never spoken in the course of the novel. He has acquired the authority to speak of the religious sphere from the aesthetic sphere. This is a profoundly Kierkegaardian moment. Kierkegaard emphasises the radical difference in between utterance from the aesthetic and ethical realms and the religious. Another notable point necessary to incorporate here is Binx’s own attitude towards religion. One can trace out the seriousness of Binx about the religious matters by observing his behaviour with Lonnie. He speaks Lonnie with complete seriousness, instead of feeling sympathy for Lonnie he feels proud of him and admires him to have sincerity in his faith. Lonnie “has the gift of believing that he can offer his sufferings in reparation for men’s indifference to the pierced heart of Jesus Christ” (137). Binx also is not far from having this faith, he is not just admiring his faith but he has it in himself.

He contemplates for the first time after watching a Negro, “his forehead an ambiguous sienna colour and pied: it is impossible to be sure he has received ashes” (235). He is earnest in his search of Ash Wednesday, in this connection Allen comments that “Binx is ready for his leap into a higher way of life, just as surely as Ash Wednesday follows Fat Tuesday” (41). On Ash Wednesday Binx does aware of his sin, his weakness, and his denial of Kate. Although he is not agree with all of Aunt Emily's criticisms of his character, he knows that some of the things she has said are true, and thinks that she may have persuaded Kate of his unworthiness. Under these circumstances, it is obvious that he does not assume with self assurance that Kate still wants to marry him. He sees her decision as a sign of God’s grace and accepts it. Since, Binx knows
the writings of St. Augustine, he no doubt believes that human decisions are depended upon God’s preeminent grace. So, Binx becomes slightly more positive and active afterwards. It is from this point onwards subtle changes in Binx are noticed. He takes care of Kate and reassures security in her fear and uncertainty of life. He promises to take her seriously and not to laugh at her but to treat her as a subject, an authentic “Thou”. The shift in the attitude of Binx towards his relations with Kate suggests his shift from one sphere to another sphere. At first, due to the sexual dysfunctional in his inability to make love to Kate, Binx explains of their first attempt at sex, “We did very badly and almost did not do at all. Flesh poor flesh failed us” (200). But in the end, he ultimately marries her; it indicates his ability to embrace the religious sphere.

The epilogue suggests that Binx firmly leaves the aesthetic sphere of sensual, momentous pleasure for the religious sphere of the ‘leap of faith’. He is now thirty years old and marries Kate; and he is not much interested in speaking about his search. His disorienting dreams have gone and he has left his job to go to medical school. Thus, through the epilogue we learn that he has taken a religious leap of faith. Binx has managed to find the way successfully through the aesthetic and ethical spheres to reach at the end of his search for religious salvation; and it was achieved by him through a Kierkegaardian leap of faith.

Everydayness is another important aspect of Existential fiction. The epigraph of the book is taken from Kierkegaard’s philosophical treatise *The Sickness Unto Death*. Though it is not possible to relate this epigraph with the novel immediately, but, from Binx description, “sunk in the everydayness of his own life” (13), in the first chapter reveals that
he is aware of something. “Heidegger indicates the importance of the everyday: ‘Everydayness is all the same being “between” birth and death’ (SZ: 233). This everydayness has a triple structure. It is the structure in which conditions of possibility are just taken for granted and function unremarked. Thus everydayness reveals itself as the opposite of the disruptions of common sense brought about by philosophical analysis” (Hodge 182). The implication here is that most people are sunk in the everydayness of their own lives. This “everydayness” is the reliance of the self upon objective concepts rather than upon the sum of an individual's experience.

The author depicts the everydayness of life in this novel to define human existence with its futile action. Binx is well aware that his life is sinking into despair, boredom, and everydayness. In fact, he is rather ironic while, narrating his everydayness. He tries to escape from his everydayness by going to movies and having affairs with secretaries. But this movie going and affairs become a part of his everydayness. He searches for a heightened reality outside his everydayness. He finds everyone dead, because they lead life through the conventional and trodden path of society; he sees their everydayness as a form of death. They are so engulfed in the humdrum qualities of life that they are not really living anymore. Binx’s external everydayness motivates him to search heightened reality which becomes a device to leave him free for his ‘search’. It reminds Binx that what he wants is the reverse of all this. He himself realizes that his own life is futile, and therefore, he does not want to live life according to it. He tries to gain different meaning to his existence from everydayness.
Percy does not use the non-conformists attitude of the period. Instead, he has created a world where everyone believes in himself as a unique person, but on the contrary acts just like everyone else. He reflects the stereotypical world, where everyone behaves, and, even thinks like each other. The action of the characters is what is expected generally from society in that situation. The instances of this argument we found throughout the text: a couple seen for a few minutes on a ferry boat behaves so typically that one can identify the actions and feelings of the couple as a general behaviour in the society. Even the protagonist thinks, “Surely I have seen them before too” (145). Another example of this kind is a man reading Stendhal in a train; he thinks himself as a unique personality in the society, but in fact he is another type which can be identified in the society. Binx identifies him as a romantic person through his postures.

Binx’s present tense narration, a large amount of his personal speculation and memories are used to create a character on the edge of crisis. In general terms Binx’s crisis is a form of existential despair. Specifically, the novel recognizes the philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard as an important precursor, the concept ‘despair’ is important in his philosophy, but the novel is not simply a gloss on Kierkegaardian terms. Instead, the novel uses subtle alterations of a model laid down in Kierkegaard’s, The Sickness unto Death, to examine the nature of the modern self.

The course of the novel explores Binx’s journey from a man in the throes of existential despair to a man who is at least capable of dealing with that despair. Binx’s life is a simple set of events. He is either
describing the problems he sees; attempting to escape from those problems, or attempting to deal with them. His life in Gentilly, a New Orleans suburb has been an exercise in escape. As the plot of the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly evident that an attempt to ignore his despair will have dire consequences. Even, as Binx is slowly failing to escape his despair, he tries to develop his relationship with Kate Curter, his step-cousin. This relationship will set the stage for his ability to deal with despair.

His feeling of despair is exposed in the first chapter when he is talking with Eddie Lovell. This conversation is totally insincere and without any real communication. Even, Binx describes it as a mechanical and just a muscular action without embark any new meaning. He describes:

His lips move muscclarly, moulding words into pleasing shapes . . . a good machine. . . . No mystery here!—. . . He understands everything out there and everything out there is something to be understood. (18-19)

Binx does not feel sorry about his insincerity in the communication as he is totally aware of its futility. This feeling of futility leads him towards the feeling of despair. When, as a formality, Eddie says, “come see us!” Binx answers just as dishonestly, “I will!” but somewhere in his mind he knows very well that he will not. (21)

This conversation sites the difference between Binx and Eddie. Binx is aware of his despair. The awareness of despair separates Binx not
just from Eddie but from other characters of the novel. For Eddie life is not despair but “this is how one lives” (18). His thoughts and actions reveal that he is self satisfied and leading ‘the good life’. He represents the persons who do not act as autonomous individuals. They are not spontaneous in their action but just obey the existing opinions of the group and class to which they belong. They believe that their identity is formed by doing successfully whatever is modish and fashionable in their contemporary society. Binx is different in the sense that he is aware of this kind of irony, he satirizes himself, and at the same time, existing attitude of the society by saying that he takes pleasure in doing all that is expected from the society. He tries to establish his identity by putting identity cards, library cards, and credit cards in his wallet. Proving one’s identity through all these identity cards is a normal and generally observed fact in the society he belongs. He realizes that these cards belongs to him could make his identity, different from his society like, “through the little pile in search of a clue just as the detective on television pokes through the dead man’s possessions, using his pencil or a poker” (11).

The title of the novel The Moviegoer describes primarily an aesthetic individual living life for sensual pleasure, and secondly, an alien individual who goes to movies to come over his feeling of despair and malaise. In fact, his movie going and sexual affairs with secretaries do little to eradicate the feeling of malaise which has settled over his life; and leaves him mired in despair. He watches movies not because it entertains him but to escape from his despair. It doesn’t matter much to him that whether movie is good or bad. But it is not true because
afterwards he himself admits “The movies are onto the search but they always screw it up. The search always ends in despair.” In the reality he is bored with the everydayness of the hero. The hero “takes up with the local librarian, sets about proving to the local children what a nice fellow he is, and settles down with a vengeance. In two weeks time he is so sunk in everydayness that he might just as well be dead” (13). Similarly, he grasps the futility of his affairs with his secretaries; these affairs were useless to overcome the feeling of despair. At the end of the novel, he reveals, “The remarkable discovery forces itself upon me that I do not love her so wildly as I did last night. But at least there is no malaise” (135).

2.4 Grendel:

Grendel (1971) is John Gardner’s third novel has established his reputation in the history of American literature. It is the retelling of events found in the Old English epic poem Beowulf. The novel has been told from the monster's point of view. The monster, Grendel, is the protagonist of the novel, who narrates his own story in an existential point of view. For Gardner the novel seems “about reason and faith” (Gardner 18). In fact, Grendel is a rethinking of the two different concepts: one is the existentialist meaningless universe and another is meaningful heroic universe, where every action is imbued with purpose and power. The story of Beowulf explores the heroic deeds of a hero Beowulf, who kills Grendel to save human beings. In this novel, as title suggests, the protagonist of the novel is Grendel, and not Beowulf. In the novel, Grendel raises many questions regarding the meaning of life and the way humans define themselves. Additionally, Gardner portrays
continual analysis of the life to investigate meaning, and final approval, of existentialist viewpoints.

Many Existential novelists create an alienated individual who is overshadowed by anxiety of death, and the quest for real identity. For instance, Camus’s Mersault is culturally alien, awaiting for his final destination as a death sentence; Sartre’s Roquentin is also alienated and thinks of death, and very much curious about his real identity; Salinger’s Holden is alienated due to his emotional mindset and his anti-social behaviour and Wright’s Damon is also alienated first, due to his conflict and later, due to his anti-social behaviour. All these novelists try to depict their heroes different from normal human beings. They do not live their lives following the codes and conducts of the society. However, John Gardner has projected Grendel, a monster, as a protagonist for his novel *Grendel*. By choosing monster as a protagonist, he naturally banishes all the banalities and the traditions of the society.

As it is generally seen in the existential novels that a situation might be social, cultural or self implemented which makes the hero an alienated individual with existential consciousness. Grendel is alienated because he is a Monster. The feeling of estrangement is aroused in him when he is trapped in a tree painfully, while he lured out to the upper world, for the first time, attracted towards the smell of a newborn calf. He tries to call his mother for help for a long time, but she does not come. In his pain and desperation, he imagines her shape in a black rock, in a shadow, and at a cave entrance, but each vision turns out to be a cruel tease. At this point, Grendel feels alone because no one comes to help him. His anxiety increases when he looks around and sees nothing but ‘a
crazed jumble of images’. He thinks that perhaps his mother could help him but it is in vain. This time Grendel realizes himself as a disconnected individual. Then, a bull appears and, despite Grendel’s screams, attacks him and its horns break Grendel’s leg up to the knee. The violent act of bull and his feeling of alienation make him accept that his mother can no longer provide meaning in his world—only he can.

This moment of sudden awareness might be seen as first step towards an existential enlightenment of Grendel. In this plight of the alien world, he declares, “I alone exist.” It adds a new perception to his existing world. He comes to understand that the premise “I alone exist” as a producer of meaning. Just as meaning earlier derives from other sources including his mother, now it centres on Grendel himself and which is created by his own perception. Thus, he acquires knowledge that the world is nothing but a chaotic mess of casual, brute violence. He understands that he alone exists and he sees everything else in the world is merely another stimulus for his action. He, like an existentialist, believes that life is pointless. When he sees the Danes building their society, seemingly oblivious to the meaninglessness of their lives, he becomes furious and vows to destroy them.

Another important fact which increases Grendel’s feeling of alienation is his mother. His mother is accompanies him but she is unable to share emotions and feelings with her son, because she lacks the capacity for language; she can’t produce meaningful communication. She even cannot establish a normal relation with her son. She is also dominated by emotional instinct, so even if she could speak, she would likely be an unworthy conversational partner. Grendel lives in a world in
which his attempts of communication are continually frustrated. The animals that surround him are dumb and undignified. Another cause of alienation is that he is an intelligent being amongst his surrounded animals. He has many animal-like qualities. For example, whenever he feels hungry he needs a blood to drink and meat to eat. He is also something extra than other animals that is he lives among the unintelligible animal world without any companion to share. The intelligent, inquisitive Grendel then, often finds himself talking with the sky, or the air, and never gets a response:

The sky ignores me, forever unimpressed. The cold night air is reality at last: indifference to me. As a stone face carved on a high cliff wall to show that, the world is abandoned. (2-3)

Eventually, his communication becomes an extended interior monologue. The word that perhaps best describes Grendel’s state of mind in the novel is ‘stranger’. He feels himself alone in the universe without any connection to the rest of nature.

Grendel’s thinking capacity attracts him towards another animal around him that is man. His relationship with human beings is defined by his intellectual interest in their philosophies. He responds emotionally to the human concept of community. At first, he tries to communicate with human beings but his biological identification as a monster, fails him to do that. In chapter four, he is very confused about humans, and at last he decides to make friendship. But his dreadful appearance frightens people and they try to kill him and he too, without any option, responds back. To
communicate with humans, he accepts his role as brutal monster; then only he is able to engage face-to-face with human beings. But his brutal act makes him lonelier than ever before. Thus, he is portrayed as an alienated individual seeking for his true identity.

Another important aspect of the Existentialism is that a person himself creates his own essence and his world. Before the era of science and the age of reason, there were various universal concepts like ‘God’, ‘Right and Wrong’, and ‘Heroism’ which were accepted by irrationally due to the religious faith. But in the course of time the place of religious faith was shattered and was replaced by reason. However, with emerging interest in science and technology, modern society, at the end of the Renaissance, removed the God from their lives. Due to the ‘death of God’, humankind was left to reconsider and re-evaluate the origin of meaning. Existentialist philosophy investigates in this direction; Jean-Paul Sartre proclaims that people have the power of choice and responsibility to create their own identities. He believes that a person is born with a ‘blank slate’ that he or she must fill in. He believes that with the help of freedom of choice and responsibility each person can create his or her own world.

Grendel believes that ‘perception is reality’. He creates the universe, because it is only his experience of his environment that makes it real. This belief leads him to decide that he alone exists. Eventually, it leads him to believe that only he matters, and he can therefore do whatever he wants. In his extended monologue, he proclaims: “I create the whole universe, blink by blink” (22).
Existential philosophers deny the inherent values of the society. They believe that man can create his own life and can assert any meaning to his life. Many existential fictions depict this belief by showing the rebirth of the hero or the process of acquiring new identity. For instance, in the novel *The Outsider*, after the subway accident the hero Cross Damon gets a new life. Many critics describe this as a rebirth of Damon. This rebirth enlightens him with the existential freedom of choice which is followed by responsibility. In this novel one can describe Grendel’s visit to Dragon as his rebirth. After the visit to dragon he finds the new changes in him. The difference between his attitudes towards humans can be traced in his two visits: before visiting dragon and after. In the first visit Grendel tries to join the Danes as a friend, he carries the body of the dead thane as a kind of peace offering. But unfortunately, he was misunderstood. After the meeting with Dragon, he approaches the Danes. This time he once again carries one of their compatriots, but the previous attitude of peace is shifted to a signal of war. In an inversion of the earlier gesture of peace, Grendel bites off the head of the guard—a clear act of war. In his first visit he feels doubt, distress, loneliness, and shame, however for this time he feels satisfied. He himself calls it as a rebirth; he feels he has finally become something. Through Dragon’s nihilistic philosophy, he perceives that nature of the world is essentially meaningless. After the visit, he manifests himself as a dark and intangible and more intense nihilist.

As in the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden is confused about his identity he can’t decide, whether he behave like a teenager or an adult, he is even confused about his actions. Similarly, Grendel is confused...
about his identity and about his actions. He is seeking for his identity. Many times in the novel, we find him thinking friendly about humans, and on a certain points he becomes a brute and eat them. These events suggest his confused state of mind. He cannot decide whether he behaves like a monster or a human. It is, because he cannot establish a friendly relationship with humans, and he is also not interested in establishing relations with other dumb animals. This loneliness and lack of communication lead him towards a confusing state of mind. This confusion becomes thicker when he meets another monster Dragon. Dragon asks him to live life as he is, and not to imitate humans. Again the time comes in his life when all the parameters are abolished, and what is left is an individual being, with his confused existence.

In his visit to dragon, he gets a power by which no weapon can hurt him. This new power changes him; he feels close to human being, but also feels lonelier. After enlightened with this power, on one occasion, when he hears shaper’s song, he goes into the meadhall where a soldier attacks him, but his weapons proved harmless to him. He thinks this new power is his real identity, so he proclaims, “I had become, myself, the mama I’d searched the cliffs for once in vain” (130). He has proud of himself. But in the core of his conscious he is unsatisfied and feels paralyzed with his new identity.

He cannot identify himself with his mother because she lacks communication capacity and even can’t share his emotions. The same thing happens with other animals around his cave. He can’t identify himself with humans, though he can think and even communicate like them, because, in fact, he is a dreadful monster for them. In this way he is
neither able to identify himself with his own mother nor with other humans. The question of his identity remains unanswered; on a few occasions he behaves like an animal and on other, his behaviour is motivated by conscience which can be identified with humans.

In the Existential fiction the question of identity is related to his socio-cultural background. But in this present novel the question of identity is emerged out of the biological difference. Majority of Existential fiction explore the existence as meaningless. Basically, the existential philosophy attempts to investigate the meaning of the existence. But many of the existentialist philosophers declare it as a meaningless.

Shaper creates an ordered worldview through his songs which make Grendel confused and he prefers to take an advice of Dragon. Shaper’s philosophy is optimistic and orientated towards society; conversely dragon proposes the absurdity of human action. In fact, in the context of philosophy, we can observe the philosophical shift in Grendel, which changes him from existentialist to the more extreme philosophy of nihilism.

Many times, Grendel thinks that he has found a meaning of his life, a reason for his existence, but this new finding leads him towards disillusionment. When he hears the song of old Harper, he gets disillusioned by Dragon. He not only denounces the poetry but all other human endeavours and beliefs. Dragon enlightens Grendel with the knowledge of the past and future. Dragon puts forth the absurd and
nihilistic plight of human life and explains him the falseness of man's logic and philosophy.

Existentialism as a school of thought believes in the absence of God and a total lack of meaning in human action. Existentialists put forth the truth that no inherent morals or values exist in the world; rather they believe in the freedom of choice and shouldering the responsibility of decision. They think that with the freedom of choice man can assert meaning or no meaning in his life. Nihilism, as a school of philosophy takes existentialism a step further and exhibits the bleaker view of the world. Both of these schools simultaneously deny the existence of any inherent meaning or value in the world. Dragon is firm on his perception that the human values like, piety, charity, nobility, and self-sacrifice are totally irrelevant. He shows Grendel that few centuries will erase all evidence of human society, and eventually what remains in the last is nothing; all the values, fame, will fade with time. After his encounter with the dragon, Grendel begins to see the world as a meaningless place. Grendel experiences a nihilistic epiphany:

I understood that the world was nothing: a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears. I understood that, finally and absolutely, I alone exist. All the rest, I saw, is merely what pushes me, or what I push against, blindly—as blindly as all that is not myself pushes back. I create the whole universe, blink by blink—An ugly god pitifully dying in a tree. (Gardner 22)
Many critics of *Grendel* points out an echoes of the two different texts, one is the ancient epic *Beowulf* and another is existential master piece, Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.

Grendel’s behaviour can be analyzed on the ground of Sartrean Philosophy. Many critics show the relevance in Grendel’s dialogues: “I observe myself observing what I observe”, (29), with Sartre’s view of the self-reflective that is, “preflective cogito” which means nature of consciousness. In his dialogue, “Then I am not that which observes! I am lack. Alack!” (29) he uses the French verb *manqué* in English which means to lack, and in Sartrean context it means ‘the lacking quality of consciousnesses’. After Grendel’s visit to Dragon, he becomes a consciousness of nothingness. Eugene Ionesco, while defining absurdity, points out that absurdity arouses when the actor is cut off from his setting. The same thing is here with Grendel, he is cut off from his setting. The Knowledge of Past and Future transfers him into the nihilistic being. Grendel’s condition is natural; Sartre calls it anguish, before the ‘radical freedom’. He is not hiding from the fact that he exists as nothingness. According to Sartre, a man cannot escape from this condition. Thus, Grendel is relating himself with Sartre’s phenomenology.

By humanizing Grendel, Gardner tries to portray the absurdity of war in the novel. In the original poem, *Beowulf*, struggle is inevitable, but in a noble and glorious ways. In *Beowulf*, drinking, boasting, swearing of oaths to serve and ring giving are the Meadhall counterparts to courage and loyalty on the modern battlefield. Conversely, in Grendel, war loses its nobility and contaminates whatever is associated with it. Clashes
between small groups of hunters in the winter are only distracting and foolish brawls in the face of hunger:

Ice clung to their eyebrows and beards and eyelashes, and I’d hear them whining and groaning as they walked. When two hunters from different bands came together in the woods, they would fight until the snow was slushy with blood, then crawl back, gasping and crying, to their separate camps to tell wild tales of what happened (31).

In the epic poem *Beowulf*, Hrothgar’s speech is noble and dignified, but in the novel it suffers from shameful contamination. For instance, “The hall became quiet, and after a moment Hrothgar spoke, tones low and measured—of necessity, from too much shouting on midnight raids” (41). Here, the dignity of the king is obscured; no one is listening to him attentively, and instead they shout loudly in the king’s presence. Another instance of absurdity is the story of Unferth. Once, he was a brave soldier, but in a drunken rage he killed his brothers and now wants to be a hero. He explains his idea of heroism to Grendel, but when once he knows that Unferth longs for heroic death, which is able to make him hero, he denies killing him. “Grendel’s refusal to kill Unferth, for instance, not only denies him a heroic death but also humiliates him in front of his fellow thanes” (Butts 93). By choosing this option of not killing him he confirms his faith on the meaningfulness of life, the philosophy he has learnt from Dragon. To Grendel, war is “idiotic”: “The pain of it! The stupidity!” (5). For Unferth, war creates the necessity of heroism, “always having to stand erect, always having to find a noble language!” (84). For Grendel, nobility and heroism is nothing but
stupidity. When Unferth combats with him, he takes it trivially and amuses by laughing at him.

And now I was raining apples at him and laughing myself weak. He covered his head, roaring at me. He tried to charge through the barrage, but he couldn’t make three feet. I slammed one straight into his pock-marked nose, and blood spurted out like joining rivers. It made the floor slippery, and he went down. Clang! I bent double with laughter. Poor Jangler-Unferth tried to take advantage of it, charging at me on all fours, snatching at my ankles, but I jumped back and tipped over the table on him, half burying him in apples as red and innocent as smiles. He screamed and thrashed, trying to get at me and at the same time trying to see if the others were watching. He was crying, only a boy, famous hero or not: a poor miserable virgin. (85)

The reduction of the hero to tears is one indignity, and the use of apples to do it, is another. The scene precludes respect, and Grendel’s laughter lacks the pomp of glorious victory. In J. R. R. Tolkien’s words, the poem ‘Beowulf’ “stands amid but above the petty wars of princes” (87). Gardner’s Grendel may rise to those petty wars, but certainly never above them.

The decline of religion and rise of science and technology leads society towards the age of reason. In this age, each and every thing is judged on the ground of logic. All the traditional ideas which can’t be proved on the logical ground are shattered, and if there are no substitutes...
then it is replaced by nothing. The existence of God, which provides faith for every existing fact, is denied. The idea of truth and its universality is shattered by existential philosophers. They show the idea of truth as a subjective. Existential fictions also try to attempt to depict the subjectivity of truth.

Grendel attempts to force humans to accept his own version of reality that the existence is meaningless. But in the core of his conscious he is unwilling to accept the nihilistic plight of the dragon. Despite dragon’s discouraging words, Grendel tries to seek comradeship, beauty, and love, but receives only rejection from the Thanes. This leads him towards the meaninglessness. In the novel there is attack and counter attack of two different Schools of Philosophy—Optimistic and Pessimistic. As Voltaire’s *Candide* depicts the two characters that represent two different philosophies. Dr. Pangolass represents Optimistic philosophy and Martine represents Pessimistic philosophy. The similar technique is used in *Grendel* to judge the two schools; Shaper is the optimistic philosopher whereas dragon is the tutor of Absurdism or Nihilism. The motive behind the use of this technique is not just to assess these schools of philosophy but to depict the subjectivity. The same thing is viewed from two different poles. One asserts that the logical world view is universal truth, on the other, one denies this truth and points out the momentousness of the fact.

Grendel narrates a blind singer as a Shaper. In this context, the meaning of the noun Shaper is a person who can shapes the opinions of people. Shaper narrates the subjective plight of history which shaped as glorious one. But in fact, Grendel points out the truth that history has
been brutal and petty at times. The motto of the author is to depict the subjectivity of the truth. Time to time and people to people, truth changes its perception. This maxim of existential philosophy is depicted as a major theme in this novel.

The existential concept of ‘Authenticity’ and ‘Inauthenticity’ can be implemented here. Till the end of the novel Grendel is confused about his identity; he can’t decide whether he is a monster or a human. He gradually switches from monstrous evil identity to the emotional human self. Basically this shift is from ‘authentic’ to ‘inauthentic’ being. Grendel is a monster who needs to survive on human meat and blood. But in the novel, many times he has left his path and lives unauthentic life. For example, he feels intimacy with humans; in fact this is not his nature. Shaper’s song and his description of the decorative and influencing history of Danes influence him. He feels that he must behave like human beings. His act of carrying the body of a dead Danes with a gesture of peace and friendship is unauthentic one. The feeling of pity, sympathy, and love are not motivated from his natural instincts, and even through his true conscience, but it is generated from his ‘bad faith’. This act is influenced by his observations of human society. He becomes aware of his authentic self, when he visits dragon. His second act of carrying body and ‘gleefully’ cutting off the head of that soldier is his true nature.

Afterward, he again switches from authentic to unauthentic behaviour under the influence of the beauty of the queen Wealtheow. He is confused about his own feelings for her. He attempts to find out the meaning in her beauty and innocence, but at the same time he hates her
and wants even to kill her. Thus, his feeling of hate is his authentic feeling, but feeling of love is unauthentic one.

2.5 Fight Club:

_Fight Club_ is a 1996 novel by Chuck Palahniuk, which explores the experiences of an anonymous protagonist struggling for the meaning of his existence. This novel is a good documentary about the changes in American pop culture masculinity. Along with the Existential quest for identity and the meaning of life, many other important social and cultural issues that have been discussed in modern times are explored in the novel. It also explores the belief that every individual faces the challenges and dilemmas that are imposed upon them by their culture and their society. These issues lead us towards the questions that whether fall into the routine of the cultural, social and physical norms or not? These norms are often governed or in many cases even created by advertising and the media. The novel visualizes the influence of advertising and the media on the modern life which is shown as a purely materialistic and a consumer culture. _Fight Club_ focuses on existentialism in the modern context. It follows the existential principle that an individual must search or if possible try to create meaning in a chaotic universe; and generally, in Existential fiction this individual is often treated as an object of suffering. It also takes into consideration the social alienation and pathetic human condition.

The theme of ‘Alienation’ is treated as a major theme in the Existential fiction. The protagonists of this fiction are generally, alienated from their society and culture. This alienation creates a vacuum in the life which shatters the values of society and generates the search of the real
meaning of life. The narrator of *Fight Club*, Joe is an alien individual leading his dreadful life in a modern consumerist society with a wide range of psychological disorders.

He is alienated from his family because his father has abandoned his family. Due to this, he becomes an emotionally alien individual. It results in psychological disorders, including insomnia and narcolepsy, Dissociative Identity Disorder, suicidal and sociopathic tendencies, and insanity. The psychological disorder makes him socially alien. His doctor diagnoses him and instead of giving medical treatment he advises him to visit a support group to discover what pain really is. He joins a support group of people who live their lives under the dark shadow of the dread of the death. As Binx in *The Moviegoer* travels through the public transport because he feels alienated from society and feels good in the society, similarly Joe in *Fight Club* feels good after joining the support group. They both feel livelier in the society.

Another good instance of the theme of alienation in the novel is the support group itself. It reflects the alienation in modern society. Joe describes the members of this group as, “Everyone smiles with that invisible gun to their head” (19). The people of this group are with life-threatening diseases like, leukaemia, tuberculosis, brain dementia, blood and brain parasites, and bowel and testicular cancer. Every member of this group is alienated from society due to their diseases. Due to their illness, they are often excluded from participation in normal social life. They join this group to escape from the alienation. Narrator also goes there to escape from alienation, and finds out what real pain is, he wants to listen to people crying with pains, whose lives are under the death
threat. By crying with diseased people, he gets comfort from the stress of his alienated, dull and bland life. But when Marla Singer joins the group, he recognizes that she is a faker like him; he starts feeling again insecure and isolated in the group. Meanwhile, Joe meets Tyler; many critics call him as alter-ego rather than a different character. This situation is also described as a psychological disorder—Multi Personality Disorder—in which a person leads two different personalities within him. On the other hand, it can be said that in order to escape from his alienation his mind creates two personalities within him.

The novel, *Fight Club* exhibits the existential principles ‘Freedom of Choice’ and ‘Responsibility of Decision’. Through the freedom man can create his new life and the protagonists of the Existential Fiction attempt to create new life with the help of their freedom. In such fiction, protagonist is an alien individual who denies the socio-cultural ties and enjoys freedom of choice. His each action becomes spontaneous without concerning social expectations. For instance Camus’ hero, Mersault denies all the banalities of society and lives life with restoring the spontaneity of his action. He murders an Arab; he does not want to see the face of his dead mother; he enjoys tea and cigarette on the final procession of his mother’s funeral; all these actions are not motivated from any pre-concerning mottoes. But they are the spontaneous responses to the external stimulus. He is aware of the effects generated through his actions, and even then he takes the responsibility of it and denies confessing his actions as guilt. He is a good instance of a model of Existential Hero. He is alienated from society and culture and this alienation frees him to enjoy his freedom. In the case of *Fight Club*,
psychological disorder makes Joe alien from the society; and this alienation leads him towards his ultimate freedom. He enjoys the freedom of action without any socio-cultural banalities. It is a general human tendency to disconnect death from social consciousness; the death is taboo and very serious matter which cannot be shared in the society. This separation from the society and emotional disconnectivity leads an individual towards spontaneous action and the responsibility. In the case of Joe, it might be the burden of modern consumerist society which leads him towards the psychological disorder; and if society is not caring for him, then why should he care for the society? To escape from this entrapped situation he prefers freedom of choice. After joining the club and behaving spontaneously, he feels better. He describes:

This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom. If I didn't say anything, people in a group assumed the worst. They cried harder. I cried harder. Look up into the stars and you're gone. . . . Walking home after a support group, I felt more alive than I'd ever felt. (168)

This freedom confronts the daring to face the sickness and death in all of its most hideous permutations. The novel frequently explores suffering, death, nothingness, and absurdity. The preoccupation with all these elements as an integral part of the novel can be seen as one of the essential characteristics of the Existential fiction which was discussed in Kierkegaard’s *Sickness Unto Death* along with Camus’s philosophical analysis of suicide in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. All these elements reflect the more authentic scene of human freedom.

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Simone de Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity* explores the major aspect of existentialism that is ‘Freedom’, which is essentially identical with being. One cannot exist without freedom, though the exercising of freedom can be suppressed or oppressed. Freedom is important for each to make ethical choices that push further acts of freedom. Simone de Beauvoir has explained six unauthentic attitudes, opposed to the authentic and ethical life. They are: the sub, serious, nihilist, demoniacal, adventurous, and the passionate person. These attitudes exist in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* in different characters. So it is possible to examine Beauvoir’s unauthentic attitudes and their relationship with each by using fictional character of *Fight Club*, as examples.

The first attitude, the sub-man, exists in the character, Raymond K. Hessel. The sub-man has total lack of interest, and is indifferent to himself and the world. He “feels only the facticity of his existence” (Beauvoir 1948, 44) and does not care the world, around him. He reduces his existence, by refusing to use his freedom. What is particularly dangerous about the sub-man is that because he chooses no project, he is open to the manipulation of others, for purposes that he does not choose (Beauvoir 43-44). He always fears of failure, and therefore he avoids trying for success. In the novel Raymond K. Hessel is a sub-man, he is a night clerk at the local Corner Mart, and has been living a life of boredom. He works because he must, and because he had been thrown into a world, where he must work to survive, otherwise he would not have done this work. Besides this work, his life consists of sitting on a couch and watching television. He never disturbs by whatever happening in the world until it directly strokes his facticity. He is content with living
only in the realm of being and thinking only of the present, rather than seeking existence and looks to the future to fulfil his projects of freedom. Actually his goal in the life is to be a veterinarian, but he feels it is too hard for him. He thinks that he might be failed in this endeavour. Thus, by realizing the possibility of failure he decides not to do more to achieve this goal; the uncertainties of life scare him. When Tyler forces him to go back to school and be veterinary, he does not say anything, because fears of failure, so narrator gets angry, and says:

\[
\text{Get out of here, and do your little life, but remember I'm watching you, Raymond Hessel, and I'd rather kill you than see you working a shit job for just enough money to buy cheese and watch television. (108)}
\]

The serious man is the next attitude of unauthentic person. Like the sub-man, the serious man fears to uncertainty. The “serious man” also rejects existence, but does so in such a way that, “He loses himself in the object in order to annihilate his subjectivity” (Beauvoir 1948, 45). The serious man is really not far different from the sub-man. The only main difference is that the sub-man chooses to hide from freedom by not acting at all, and the serious man behaves as per society’s dictations. By doing so he loses his right freedom of choice. “However, where the sub-man tries to protect it from all failures, the serious man sets itself up for failure” (Ericson 3). At the beginning of the novel, the narrator lives the life of a serious man. He is the modern man as if society has scripted him and lives it to its completeness. His each and everything is dictated by men’s magazines such as his apartment, furniture, clothing, job, refrigerator etc. He says, “I loved my life. I loved the condo. I loved
every stick of furniture. That was my whole life. Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The dishes were me. The plants were me. The television was me” (110-11). Thus, as per society, especially consumerist society has dictated, his life is "perfect and complete”. But when, an explosion breaks his apartment into pieces, he finds himself separated from the object, which he has maintained. After the destruction of his apartment, and thus, his consumerist life, instead of falling to the attitude of the sub-man, the narrator begins a journey to authenticate himself. (Ericson 4)

The nihilist person chooses to be nothing. The failure of the object as pursued by the serious man leads to nihilism, and the object is then to “be nothing” (Beauvoir 52). According to the nihilist is both correct and tragically wrong, “The nihilist is right in thinking that the world possesses no justification and that he himself is nothing. But he forgets that it is up to him to justify the world and to make himself exist validly” (Beauvoir 57). This attitude usually arises after childhood and in the adulthood. Such person feels that their known world is disappeared and also feels nothingness when one’s dreams and hopes of fulfilment fail. Though the goal of the nihilist may be to become such as the sub-man, he will never reach it because he already knows his limitations. For example, “What you have to know is that Marla is still alive. Marla's philosophy of life . . . is that she can die at any moment. The tragedy of her life is that she doesn’t” (108). Actually, dying Chloe is not to be yet dead, but Marla Singer wants to be dead. She wants to hit that rock bottom nothing. She surrounds herself with suffering, death, and dying because these are the real things of her own existence, but her tragedy is that she herself is not
suffered of any disease. The dying words of cancer patients in their support groups mock Marla, because they are such things which Marla can never know herself to be. (Ericson 4)

The demoniacal is a next attitude of the unauthentic being for Beauvoir. The nihilist person looks for to be nothing; however the demoniacal person seeks to break down others to nothing. In fact, the demoniacal person lives the serious life; nevertheless when he fails to maintain it for himself he tries to attack others. The target of his attack is always a serious man and the institutes of the serious man. Through this attack demoniacal person tries to gain a meaning to his life. Though his existence is founded on debasing others’ existence, he doesn't totally break down, what he is fighting with. Instead, he maintains it as well so that he will always have it to beat on.

Fight Club and Project Mayhem are both institutions for the cultivation and utilization of person in the demoniacal attitude. The narrator thinks that in the Fight Club he can attack the serious man that once commanded his life. “By pulling men from their seriousness and showing them a new life, the narrator is able to constantly beat on the system which creates the serious man without destroying it” (Ericson 5). Tyler Druden says he “. . . was in a mood to destroy something beautiful” (122). As he is a demonic person, he plans to attack on the serious man’s institutions. His will is to beat more to the serious men and to destroy more ‘beautiful’ things. Business men, bartenders, office suppliers, and mechanics are his attacking target, in order to help them and find a new attitude in life. Fight Club’s sister branch, Project Mayhem is another institution for the demoniacal person to attack the serious man’s life. But
this time, instead of to beat on the serious man, Project Mayhem follows
Beauvoir’s words that by “following a strict injunction to commit
disorder and anarchy, one achieves the abolition of all behaviour, and
therefore of all ends and of oneself” (54).

Next, Beauvoir examines the type is “the adventurer.” This person
is constantly acting, but there is no purpose behind the action other than
“action for its own sake” (Beauvoir 1948, 58). This person “finds joy in
spreading through the world a freedom which remains indifferent to its
content” (Beauvoir 58). The adventurer lives to be free, and his each act
is a free choice. It is chosen because that is what one desires. Though the
adventurer is pure in its free choices, this attitude lacks a level of ethical
purity. Like the serious man, the adventurer acts, but the lack of a
coherent project of freedom informing the action robs it of any ethical
content. The ethics of free will rely on others’ freedom more than just
always freely acted for oneself. An ethical choice is also one that freely
acts for others to maximize the whole of freedom. Tyler Durden is an
adventurer person. He acts as adventurer from his introduction to the
narrator to their final confrontation. As an authentic person he chooses
and acts freely as per his own wish. Tyler wears only those clothes that he
likes most, rather society or what media imposes. Tyler works where he
wants, he does what he feels. Though many adore him, there is no
indication that he seeks fame. Money is obviously not his goal. What
Tyler strives for is the freedom for all. So how then is Tyler not
authentic? Tyler is unauthentic and unethical in that his exercising of
freedom is constantly conflicting with the freedoms of others. Tyler
wears what he wants by stealing from others. Tyler uses to work, where
he wants, by blackmailing and terrorising. Tyler does what he wants to do by restricting what others may do. It is because he says, “Disaster is a natural part of my evolution,” and further he supports his action by saying, “The liberator who destroys my property is fighting to save my spirit. The teacher who clears all possessions from my path will set me free” (110).

The final unauthentic attitude given by Beauvoir is that of the passionate man, who is trying to be true to one thing. The “passionate man” is like the serious man in his selection and adherence to an object. However, whereas the serious man sees the object “as a thing detached from himself,” the passionate man believes that “it is disclosed by his subjectivity” (Beauvoir 64). The passionate man is never fulfilled; he has always a need for something. Although Beauvoir does not mention, it seems that passionate man exist within each of the previous unauthentic attitude. For instance sub-man passionately seeks to flee from his responsibility; the serious man is passionate about being whomever he objectifies himself as; the nihilist passionately seeks to be nothing; the demonical person passionately seeks to beat and burden the serious man; and the adventurer passionately seeks to become all, at all costs. Likewise, Raymond passionately escapes his dreams. The narrator passionately seeks perfection. Marla passionately seeks to experience extinction. Those are in Fight Club and Project Mayhem passionately seeks to beat and humiliate their former serious beginnings. Tyler passionately seeks to do whatever he wanted. (Ericson 7-8) When the narrator’s condo sets in flames he says to Tyler, “May I never be complete. May I never be content. May I never be perfect” (46).
Existential philosophy makes distinction between ‘authentic existence’ and ‘unauthentic existence’. Unauthentic existence is governed by the Universal patterns of genuine humanity. These patterns are moulded by moral codes, political or religious authorities and wildly influenced by the consumerist culture. Mary Warnock describes unauthentic existence as,

We may accept, in our day-to-day life, all the standards, the beliefs and prejudices of the society in which we find ourselves. We may be content to wear ready-made cloths designed for people in general, to use public transport and Public Park, to read newspapers written for people in general, and, in every detail of our lives, we may fail to distinguish ourselves from the mass of mankind at large.

(55)

Existential philosophy makes rebel against such kind of existence; it believes that an individual can enjoy his life without any ‘obligations of the moral values of the society’. Nietzsche asks a question ‘Why be moral?’; the same question is also put forth by the ‘aesthetic man’ of Kierkegaard.

The novel *Fight Club* explores the authentic and unauthentic existence within a single individual by using multi-personality disorder. In such kind of mental illness a person displays multiple distinct identities or personalities, which are also known as ‘alter egos’. Each of these alter egos has its own pattern of perceiving and interacting with environment.
The narrator is a prototype of unauthentic existence. His actions are not spontaneous but rule governed. His behaviour represents the framework of general behaviour of his society. The destruction of condo makes the narrator alien from his familiar world of material. It is also suggests that the narrator is a representative of his age:

And I wasn’t the only slave to my nesting instinct. The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue. (43)

The advertising and the media has a power that amazingly influences to create social standards and norms. The results of these bombarding messages of electronic media experiment are quite surprising and show the powerful impact on the cultural and social values. The social and personal behaviour and thoughts are under the spell of the uniform patterns developed under the influence of advertising media.

The narrator talks about his DKNY shoes, his CK shirts and his fancy IKEA furniture. The narrator attributes his existence to all these materialistic objects. The life for him is to buy various products that gain social status for him. In this way he attributes the meaning of his life to these household objects. He is trapped in this bad faith and he is aware of this fact; he himself admits, “Then you’re trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you” (44). For the narrator, production companies reflect a higher or more respected social status and therefore he wants to be associated with them. He tries to create meaning
of his life out of the materialistic objects. He is always conscious about the social codes and cannot tolerate the departure from it.

Tyler is exactly opposite to the narrator; he has an authentic existence. His actions are not rule governed but they are direct response to the environment. He is innovative and spontaneous in his actions and thoughts. The character of Tyler itself is a rebel against the consumerist culture of the modern society. When the narrator’s condo was destroyed in the fire, Tyler convinces him that he really didn’t lose anything important “. . . but hey, you did lose a lot of versatile solutions for modern living” (46). It underscores the materialistic value of the modern life. Tyler goes completely against the grain of society, everything advertised to him, and cultural standards of his society.

The passions and desires of the narrator, which were suppressed in his unconscious mind under the burden of the society, are exploded in the form of Tyler. He takes on the role of devil’s supporter against the rules of society and cultural norms. Tyler does not care about the society and its criterions of an authentic existence. He believes that the experience itself is the most important aspect of life. This belief grants him the freedom of choice. This freedom of choice makes him enable to behave authentic. He behaves exactly what Sartre says in the context of freedom of choice:

You are free, therefore choose,—that is to say invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do; no signs are vouchsafed in this world. (Kaufmann 298)
In the course of the novel, Tyler describes the modern society he belongs to is a puppet in the hands of external socio-cultural environment; he exclaims,

I see all this potential, and man, I see it squandered...an entire generation pumping gas, waiting tables-slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don’t need. (76)

Tyler is bored with the routine life of the society. He finds that every person is imposing certain rules in their lives; they are accepting what they are told. Everybody in the society is willing to listen to what the media, advertisers and society tells to them. Tyler differentiates himself from masses in this sense, he lives his life for himself and accepts only what he chooses to accept.

Tyler continues to criticize the modern society. He adds that when an individual makes himself different from their insomniac-consumer lives, he realizes that he has been lied to all along. He realizes that the objects he own doesn't define who he is, as a person. He rejects the basic assumptions of civilization, and the importance of material possessions in it. Everything in this society is completely superficial and momentous. He tries to explain the mankind what really they are; he says, “You are not special. You are not a beautiful or unique snowflake. You're the same decaying matter as everything else” (68). It seems that Tyler attempts to destroy the notion of social norms, ‘an American dream’, and the power of the media and advertising.
Another important fact is that a pain is used as an important experience to prove one’s existence and manhood. Fighting and the pain give them a self-affirming acknowledgment that they are actually alive. The men use pain to prove their own existence, their own manhood, and the existence of some form of God. Pain is the essential factor in experiencing life, and realizing one's own existence. Fight club, for the men that join it, gives a place where they can transcend cultural norms and “become more human.”

Thus, *Fight Club* is a novel, which tries to explain the human existence beyond the materialistic possessions. *Fight Club* tries to remind the freedom of choice and the authenticity of human existence. The novel teaches that death is something that should not be feared, but rather accepted. It tries to create a society in which everything is opposite to the way it is perceived today.

At the conclusion, by analysing the five American novels in the light of Existential aspects, it is obvious that all the five novels are existential novels. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* exposes the alienation and preoccupation of the death of young, Holden from existential point of view. Wright’s *Outsider*, is the first true American novel which deals with existential aspects, such as freedom of choice, alienation, dread and meaninglessness of human. It deeply concerns with freedom of choice and points out how freedom of choice makes one to feel his real life and on the contrary, it may also destroy one’s life. Gardner’s novel, *Grendel*, depicts the most confused character than any other novels. Its main protagonist is not human but a monster, which is confused by his own appearance and the human, and thinks seriously about his own existence.
in a meaningless world. Walker Percy’s hero of *The Moviegoer*, demonstrates Kierkegaardian three spheres of life. *Fight Club*, Chuck Palahniuk’s first novel is a striking example of existential novel. Its hero, like Damon in * Outsider*, enjoys his freedom by destroying traditional value system, and wants to create something new that will append new history to his life. After scrutinizing the select novels, it becomes clear that heroes of all the five novels are deeply concerned with their own identity in the society. Their struggle to know ‘who I am’ and ‘what is the meaning of life’ is a prime motto of the existentialism. In this sense all the five novels are existential novels and are mainly concerned with human existence. As far as the objectives of the present study concerned, there is no obscurity to declare that second objective of the study, to make a comprehensive statement on the existentialism depicted in the select novels of American Novelists, is accomplished here. However, the entire second objective will be achieved by analysing the select five Marathi novels from the existential point of view in the next chapter.