Review of literature:

Existentialism is a philosophical thought which has influenced literature greatly. Literature is a projection of the social, political and cultural influence of society. The comparative literature of the authors chosen and books reviewed will highlight different perspectives of existentialism and different techniques adopted by the novelists to convey the plot and bring out the sensitivity of their characters. The readers can get a broad range of themes, problems and responses to the concerning issues.

Literary Sources:

Navaneethamani\(^1\) elaborates the two distinct parts of Arun Joshi’s second novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. The first part deals with Billy’s social and intellectual life and indicates strong primitive urge in him. It attempts to establish his spiritual decay, his rejection of social values. The marital relationship between Billy and Meena, their lack of understanding and the rift between the two different worlds they occupy. The second part is devoted to his transformation through his contact with primitive life, his meeting Romi once again after 10 years and his death. Arun Joshi’s novel is a mocking assault on the materialistic civilized society and an exaltation of the primitive culture. Billy’s going away from the world of civilization is neither an act of renunciation nor a cowardly running away from responsibilities. His is not a blind or blundering quest for happiness in life. In his case the question of giving up the “struggle” does not arise as his whole discontent is centered on the fact that struggle in his life was conspicuous by its absence. Navaneethamani names the two parts, the two worlds as ‘The Civilized World’ and ‘The Primitive World’ respectively and draws the extremes of the two, two different cultures with different geographical locations. The plot is woven around the protagonist Billy Bimal Biswas his sufferings from pangs of conscience which keeps him in a perpetual state of irritation against the social set up in society and his running away to the primitive world.

Vashist\(^2\) concentrates on two purposes of language: communication and identification. The story of Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* is set around the time of Partition and written with absorbing intelligence and sympathy, it is the story of a woman torn between family duty, the desire for education, and illicit love. The novelist, Manju Kapur deviates from the trend of writing only in standard English, most of our Indian writers in English have made use of both the languages in their creations. Since the last quarter of the 20th century, South Asian writing has increasingly received greater acclaim all over the world. The success of the Indian writing represents an enormous boost to the reputation of its authors outside the borders of the sub-continent. Both English and Hindi have
evolved as languages in our country and it is only in India, that one can hear the amalgamation of the two. Manju Kapur has amply brought regional influences in her writings showcasing the prominence of indianization in the individuals. The usage of mix of indianized words and English is twofold. On the one hand, it is through the usage of these Indian words that the readers are able to attach themselves with the characters of the novel. The readers can feel and sense the same emotion as felt by the characters portrayed by the novelist. The indianization of the language is thus a powerful medium of creating a link with the readers.

Sharma presents a semiotic analysis of Anita Desai’s novel *In Custody* in the denotative and connotative sense. Anita Desai’s fiction has strong psycho-somatic overtones. It has cultural undercurrent equipped with dualities of meaning. The paper gives detailed analysis of the binary patterns and observes how Desai juxtaposes traditionalism with modernism, emotion with rationalism, material with immaterial, presence with absence, attachment with detachment, self with other, fame with anonymity, and masses with classes. The writer gives an appropriate introduction to Anita Desai’s writings in general and goes on to the text, *In Custody* and explores the context of social relations and processes. A detailed analysis is brought about at describing nonverbal activities or connotative meaning of text which are produced simultaneously with words or alternating with them.

Nayar analyses Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Unaccustomed Earth*, it is a collection of short stories in two parts. The first part consists of five short stories namely “Unaccustomed Earth”, “Hell-Heaven”, “A Choice of Accommodation”, “Only Goodness”, and “Nobody’s Business”. The second part entitled “Hema and Kaushik” consists of three interrelated short stories namely “Once in a Lifetime”, “Year’s End” and “Going Ashore”. All the eight short stories revolve around the institution of marriage. The writer analyses the institution of marriage and successfully points out the exact causes of failed marriages in each of the stories. All the eight stories are critically studied and it is concluded that all the marriages portrayed in the book failed because they were not marriages of love but marriages of convenience. Jhumpa Lahiri has shattered two standard myths of failed marriages. The first myth is that the interracial marriages fail due to the shortcomings on the part of the Western partner. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, we find that the Western partners were loyal but it was the Indian partners, who went astray. The second myth is that interracial marriages fail due to cultural reasons. The analysis has disproved this too. The interracial marriages did not fail due to cultural differences but they failed due to the lack of love.

Cordelia discusses the feminist perspective of Chitra Banerjee’s *The Mistress of Spices*, it is the story of Tilo, a young woman who is trained in the ancient art of spices and ordained as a mistress charged with special powers. she administers spices as curatives to her customers. An
unexpected romance with a handsome stranger eventually forces her to choose between the supernatural life of an immortal and the vicissitudes of modern life. Spellbinding and hypnotizing, *The Mistress of Spices* is a tale of joy and sorrow and one special woman's magical powers. The article critically analyses the women characters of the novel from the feminist perspective. With the rise of feminism across the world, a new generation of Indian feminists has emerged. Women have developed themselves according to the situations and have become advanced in various fields. Tilo, the mistress of spices, has many disguises and names that reveal her multiple identities. The woman characters, Lalitha, Dhaksha, Geetha and others face all kinds of problems in their life. Though women are happy for a short period, they get into the circle of problems soon. The plot of *Mistress of Spices* revolves around the central character, Tilo, her struggle and her strong individuality.

Shanmuga talks about the narrative structure in *The Last Labyrinth*, allows the real conflict to be projected in a dramatized form providing both a ritual enactment and a magical relief, for the society in question. *The Last Labyrinth* is unmistakably a novel about an Indian mind explored by another Indian. Hedonism, cynicism, loss of faith, confusion of values, which are very typical of the upper crust Indian society, finds a say in the novel. The search for the core of life is obviously revealed through symbols like labyrinth, haveli, etc. On another level, it is the story of the deep-rooted yearnings of love, spiritual mortification and gratification and the pathetic narration of a lost soul, groping to grasp the meaning of life and death. The conflict of twin culture is obvious in this novel also. He is a product of Indian and western culture on one hand and the son of a very religious and pious mother and a scientist cum spiritualist father. *The Last Labyrinth* is a story not only of obsession, but of great love, not only of self-destruction, but of salvation. It is a story of memories and huge confusing havelis, and finally of the wonderment of life.

Dasgupta tries to identify the similarities and differences that define the identity of a trans-cultural person in *The Namesake*. She also brings out the complications that arise out of giving a Russian name to a second generation Bengali boy in US. She brings out the identity crisis of Gogol and his subsequent change of name to Nikhil.

Dubey attempts to define identity with reference to Kiran Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss*. It is a book that weaves together the legacies of colonialism and immigration in multiple characters. She explores complicated questions of assimilation, class, race, nationalism and family. The characters are ordinary people living ordinary lives but quite well depicted.

Verma discusses the mysterious character of Som Bhasker, the protagonist of *The Last Labyrinth*. The entire story is about Som Bhaskar’s obsession for Anuradha. The novel depicts the pain, the agony, the selfishness and madness of love. Som Bhasker inherits his father’s vast wealth, is married to Geeta, a devoted wife but he is attracted to Anuradha who is alluring and mysterious.
Her conduct is such that Som cannot understand her, she accepts, reject and flees from him. Verma discusses the mysterious woman and Som’s unconquerable desire for her with help of images of labyrinths.

Sethuraman\textsuperscript{10} brings out the existential predicament of the female characters of her novel, \textit{Fire on the Mountain}. Anita Desai has niche for exploring the emotional worlds of women and bring in the feminine sensibility. She examines the psyche of her female protagonist, Nand Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. All three of them are recluses and suffer from different kinds existentialism. Anita Desai portrays their existential predicaments through the use of symbols and imagery.

Densingh\textsuperscript{11} gives an explanation of the term, ‘diaspora’ and the issues of resistance and protest among the indigenous settlers and the diasporic communities of the commonwealth and how Jhumpa Lahiri handles these issues. The nine stories in the short story collection \textit{Interpreter of Maladies} are sub-titled Stories of Boston and Beyond and these deal with the pangs of loneliness and a sense of being an outsider felt by the second-generation immigrants of Bengal in the alien land. Lahiri defines her position in the work by viewing herself as an interpreter of the emotions of pain and affliction. Densingh critically analyses the short stories in the context of loneliness, alienation, culture crisis in an alien culture and diasporic experiences of the immigrants Indians.

Ridda\textsuperscript{12} focuses on the specificities of Jhumpa Lahiri’s writing, notably the utilisation of a choral narrative that epitomizes a particular kind of diasporic subjectivity. In \textit{The Namesake} Lahiri focuses on the problems of identity construction, while in “The Interpreter of Maladies,” the narrators and characters unanimously share the “maladies of exile,” a sense of dislocation which derives from belonging neither to one place nor the other. The same theme of dislocation is discussed in \textit{The Accustomed Earth}, another collection of her short stories.

Mudasir\textsuperscript{13} analyses the meaning of the term, ‘post modernism’, its derivation, significance in the philosophical, aesthetic and cultural debates over the past few decades. The views of theorists and critics of postmodernism, Louise Althusser, Foucault, Linda Hutcheon and Derrida are discussed. The discussion clarifies certain common misconceptions about postmodernism, some of which are that it rejects preferentiality of language by reducing everything to the concept of text, regards history as no more than a fictional construct and the human subject as merely an effect of power.

Kamalakkannan\textsuperscript{14} defines postmodernism in the present day context which refers not just to art and culture but more comprehensively to aspects of modern society. He also attempts to examine Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism as “\textit{incredulity towards metanarratives}”. Postmodernism raises its voice against consensus and propounds dissention; in the postmodern world it is impossible
to attain a universal consensus. Consensuses can be reached only by accepting that there is
dissention.

Filipczak\textsuperscript{15} analyses the American Dream to understand the issues of identity formation of the
immigrants Jhumpa Lahiri’s stories “Unaccustomed earth” and “Only Goodness”- Three general
issues are explored: what the depiction of American Dream reveals about Indian immigrant
experience, how the idea of the Dream differs between generations and how it is linked to the
question of immigrant identity formation. Lahiri offers new insights into immigrants’ experience in
the two selected stories. The examination of the American Dream in Jhumpa Lahiri’s
stories is an investigation of Indian immigrant experience in America, the goals and motives that
drive immigrants to another continent, and consequently it reveals the vision of America that inhabits
immigrants’ imagination.

Balagopalan \textsuperscript{16} examines Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel, \textit{The Namesake} as well as the short story
collection \textit{Interpreter of Maladies} which presents the reader with pictures of the life of expatriates
and defines the conditions of the Diasporic people. Lahiri explores the ideas of cultural and personal
isolations and identities through her various characters. The character of Gogol and his various
experiences directly related to his name are described in depth. Both \textit{Interpreter of Maladies} and \textit{The
Namesake} contain themes of conflict in relationships between couples, families, and friends.
Through these relationships she explores the idea of loneliness and identity crisis both personal and
cultural.

Kumar\textsuperscript{17} explores the range of the various themes undertaken by the postmodern Indian
English writers. Cross-border migrations was the common subject during colonial and postcolonial
period. There a number of Indian diasporic writers such as Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Nirad
C. Choudhury, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bharati
Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, M.G. Vassanji, Farrukh Dhondy, Amit Chaudhury, Upamanyu
Chatterjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, to name only a few, who have written diasporic literature
depicting typical diasporic sensibility of the immigrant Indians. It is only because of their sensitivity
towards the changing national realities with the fine mix of fiction that Chetan Bhagat, Aravind
Adiga, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many other Indian English writers are among the largest
selling authors today. Moreover, their writings are in accordance with the global trends and changes,
multicultural environs and cosmopolitanism. As a result they create a tremendous impact and
impress the readership beyond spatial boundaries.

Carson\textsuperscript{18} analyses Richard Wright’s novel, \textit{The Outsider} (1953) which is most explicitly
existential novel. The character of Damon expresses the central tenets of existentialism that man is
nothing else but what he makes of himself and that man chooses his own self. In *The Outsider* the
Communist party embodies values inimical to individual freedom. Throughout the novel, Damon’s
struggle, his personal fight is for the realization of himself. While Richard Wright denied he was an
existentialist, *The Outsider*, nevertheless, articulates the prominent tenets of existentialism.

Sridevi [19] discusses the emotional crisis of Anita Desai’s protagonists who live in a chaotic
society she voices the fears and concerns, the hopes and aspirations of her characters in her own
artistic way. Two novels, *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where shall we go this Summer* are analysed in detail
to portray the inner crisis and tension existing in the life of her characters. Anita Desai delves deep
into the forces that condition the growth of a female in the patriarchal male dominated society. She
observes social realities from a psychological perspective without posing herself as a social reformer.

Rana [20] presents an exhaustive discussion of Jhumpa lahiri’s works, *Interpreter of Maladies*
and *The Namesake*. The majority of her stories are about exile, about people living far from home
and moving to new world. Both the works, the collection of short stories and the novel explore the
ideas of isolation and identity, not only personal but also cultural. Her characters face the crisis of
hybrid or dual identity, which makes their existence very complicated and problematic. This is an
experience universal to all Indian diaspora, irrespective of their caste, region and religion. Rana also
examines the works from the autobiographical point of view of Jhumpa lahiri.