

Chapter - IV

Aspects of Self-Alienation Reflected in Arun Joshi's *The Last labyrinth* and Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

IV.0 Introduction

The present chapter discusses the third Existential Aspect, Self-alienation, as reflected in the novels *The Last Labyrinth* by Arun Joshi and *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai. Self-alienation, loneliness or boredom are terms which are used simultaneously in every individual's life, while they are in the pursuit of truth. Every human being experiences loneliness within himself which inevitably provokes questions about his angst, emptiness, solitude, and his search for meaning of life and existence. It is considered rather an inescapable fact of life, as it is the most profound and disturbing experience in everyone's' life. The human race has suffered and is still experiencing the anguish resulting from despair, loss of meaning and aloofness which directly affects a person in his quest of authentically and meaning of life. But, unfortunately some of the naysayers and cynics turn towards and opt for fatal and lethal side of existence, which further results in the destruction of the individual and his/her loved ones. Psychologist R. S. Weiss defines "loneliness as a response to the absence of a particular type of relationship or attachment." (Weiss, 1973, 17) He further elucidates that there are two types of loneliness; emotional and social. Emotional loneliness occurs when there is a loss or absence of a closely attached person for example, as a spouse or a partner. Social loneliness refers to isolation one feels when there is an absence of an engaging social network. It is even stated that "Social loneliness is a subjective and multidimensional state involving emotional distress, social inadequacy, and self-alienation." (Rokach and Brock, 1997, 284-98)

K. S. Rook, for example, defines loneliness "as an enduring condition of an emotional state that arises when a person feels estranged from, is misunderstood or rejected by, and/or lacks appropriate social partners for a desired activity,

particularly activities that provide a sense of social integration and opportunity for emotional intimacy". (Rook, 1984, 209)

When an individual is not contented with his existence and the surrounding world, he is frustrated by the burden of responsibilities and the simulated life. The distressing environment, phony personal relationships, emotional turmoil, and absence of social network, are a few of the major causes of one's feeling of alienation and aloofness. Some people are not able to let go their past as well as the present inconsistencies of life, which results into their loneliness and dark thoughts. They create their own gloomy world, and torture themselves with imagined wrongs and in search of their true existence they suffer psychologically, viciously tormenting themselves.

Alienation is a major aspect which characterizes existentialism. In existentialist sense alienation is alienation from one's own being. It is not being at home in the world. It is an alienation from one's own being. The most profound alienation is between one's consciousness. In the contemporary society alienation appears among the young, the intellectuals, the artists and also among the under-privileged. Alienation also includes the feeling of separation and moral breakdown of an individual. According to the existentialists, human being lives in alienation in his entire life. He is neither a part of it nor does he ever understand the nature of his existence. Everything is dependent on faith, rather than any rational belief. There is no meaningful root of our past and even direction about the future. This aloofness can be seen within the family, between the parents and their children, between relationships such as husband and wife, siblings, and the society; social, personal and work relations in which we survive. It is considered as the greatest problem in the history of mankind.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that deals with the search for meaning of the human existence. As Kant says, it is not confined to mere term in philosophy; rather it is meant to study the 'thing-in-itself'. It studies the everyday anxieties, concerns, actions and reactions made possible by human freedom. It deals with the questions, such as Who am I? Where have I come from? and What is

the real purpose of my existence? and the universal truth about birth and death. Every human being is unique in itself and at the same time has the power to choose from all the possible alternatives in life, striving for the real meaning of his existence and purpose, yet at the same time he is solely responsible for his actions, he and only he has to face the outcome of his actions.

In the pursuit of truth and pleasures, the human being faces alienation and aloofness. And the purposeful confrontation of the despair, which constitutes the loneliness of being, becomes a means of recovery. Alienation remains in the innermost being of the self, expanding as each individual becomes aware of and confronts the life in detail. It means to live isolate and remote from the world, rather it means to tackle the critical questions of life and death. It is the experience of discovering one's own questions regarding human existence, and of confronting the sheer contingencies of the human condition. In other words, we can say that, alienation and death are inseparable aspects of human existence, necessary for a rational human life.

The selected novels here study how the protagonists of both the novels suffer self-alienation in their respective lives. The protagonists in both the novels, Som Bhaskar and Maya face the existential aspect of elf-alienation. *The Last Labyrinth* is a serious and disturbing narration which demonstrates the protagonist Som Bhaskar tormented in his inner world. He is a millionaire industrialist, who is married to a woman of his choice, living with luxuries of life. He is seen lost in the labyrinth of his needs and desires, yet he is not satisfied in his life. His search from Bombay to Benaras for the real meaning of life, his existential anxiety and the great hollowness in his soul. On the other hand, Maya, the main character of Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock*, suffers greatly after she gets married with a person of her father's age. The lack of love, affection, and incompatibility in the married life results into isolation, and that turns out to be fatal, as she kills her husband and commits suicide. The aloofness and isolation and the search for her real self results into a tragic end. Desai's debut novel, *Cry, the Peacock* was published in 1963, and it is considered to be the best of her narratives till date. The way she presents the

suffering of the Indian woman in her protagonist, Maya, is very insightful. She portrays her as an individual who is lost in the dilemmas of her own life, suffering isolation as she tries to search for true meaning of her existence, but loses self-control with devastating result.

IV.1 Existential Aspect: Self-Alienation

My attempt in this chapter is to explore the existentialist aspect self-alienation in the novels *The Last Labyrinth* and *Cry, the Peacock* written by the renowned Indian writers, Arun Joshi and Anita Desai, respectively.

Self-alienation is considered simply as meaninglessness, powerlessness and formlessness experienced by the individual. When an individual does not have any purpose to live in this world, then he feels alienated in his life. He experiences social distancing from the world and himself. Self-alienation can be considered to be the condition of being isolated either from oneself or from the outer world, for instance there is lack of social life and any form of relationship with the world which is considered as the most brutal one. Human being's search for the meaning of his existence is revealed in his personal and practical concerns. It is up to each individual how to face the threat of meaninglessness in his life, which is the root cause of self-alienation. German existentialist, Martin Heidegger said that when we choose and act with full awareness of our ultimate freedom, responsibility, finitude, and aloneness, we are in an authentic mode of existence. In contrast, the person who flees from these human conditions and permits others to define and shape his values, surrenders himself to an anguished and inauthentic life.

Human beings are the most complex, flexible, and adaptable of all creatures on the Earth. Evolution is nature's way of creating. The psychological problems and the isolation are the result of the development and progress which human being is heading to. With that all problems are evolved unconsciously and automatically. This could also possibly be initiated through punitive relationships disturbing the identification process during childhood. The individual does not necessarily become antisocial, he is only asocial. In the process of distancing oneself from one's own feelings or activities, modern man is so much a self-alienated, that it has become a

part of his nature, even as one who has been continuously ill may mistake that illness itself for a normal condition of his body. It is a state of mind in which one takes a falsified personality of oneself for one's true personality and labours all his life for the fulfillment of the urges of this personality. It is this misconception regarding oneself that is the cause of many forms of one's painful life, of sense and ego-indulgence. The feeling of 'emptiness' in himself now is because he had no worth in himself except that which was foisted on him externally by the values which are supposed to be associated with wealth and authority. Human being living in a materialized and power centered society rather than his own real self is one major cause of alienation from one's own self.

There can be alienation of self from the world around oneself, caused by the inability of oneself to accept, abide by or follow social customs or the manners and traditions of society. It can also come about on account of a high opinion one has of oneself in respect to the society in which he or she is living. When the mind is restless and cannot find peace in life due to self-isolation from other people it directly leads to self-alienation.

Alienation occurs when a person withdraws or becomes isolated from other people and his or her environment. People who are alienated will often reject loved ones or society, and feel distant and estranged from their own emotions. It is a common human condition that can affect anyone. There are many potential causes. It is a sociologically and psychologically complex state. In addition to having social and psychological implications, alienation can affect health and aggravate existing medical conditions, both mental and physical.

According to Sociologist Melvin Seeman, alienation is very complex and pervasive condition, which he divides it into five types:

- 1) Powerlessness: When a person believes that his or her actions have no effect on outcomes.
- 2) Meaninglessness: When an individual is unable to understand his or her situation and doesn't know what to trust or expect.

- 3) Normlessness: When a person feels disconnected from social norm or believes that social rules for behavior broken down.
- 4) Isolation: When a person feels detached and creates his or her value system and goals and beliefs. It results into socially isolated human being.
- 5) Self-Estrangement: When a person feels disconnected with himself and everything becomes uninteresting and meaningless.

Even psychologists refer this term to an extraordinary variety of psychological disorders, including loss of self, anxiety, despair, rootlessness, apathy, loneliness, powerlessness, isolation, pessimism and the loss of beliefs or values. The psychological point of view is mere theoretical and limited. In the process of human history society has become more and more complex and extensive. As a result of this extension and development the life has become much more complex.

Isolation is the aspect of alienation in which the individual feels separated from society or culture. The feeling of meaninglessness reduces man's attachment to society since whatever is meaningless is also powerless. Isolation signifies powerlessness of the individual in the social context. He loses the power to select among the alternatives. For some people, life itself becomes meaningless. As this feeling of meaninglessness becomes deep rooted, one becomes isolated from the group, the society and life itself, and may even commit suicide.

In existential philosophy, alienation is an indispensable component of man's condition. According to Kierkegaard, man's being depends upon a constant tension between existence and essence, the choice between anguish to alienation in the form of inauthenticity in being, the loss of freedom, etc. Sartre in his 'Being and Nothingness', explicates this existential characterization, the aspect of alienation among people. He explains that this aspect is expressed in the constant tendency of man as an individual to objectify the other while protecting himself from being perceived as a thing. He thought that one way to defend oneself against alienation

was in authentic existence wherein the individual makes a radical affirmation of his own freedom. In every respect human being loses his personal values and feels alienated from himself. Alienation consists of all the obstacles that make man unable to participate in human society and fulfill himself as a person.

The present chapter is meant to study the Self-alienation existential aspect in both the selected novels, and how the protagonists lived their lives in isolation of their self, and which further affected their lives to the core.

IV.2 Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth*

Joshi delineates the spiritual agony of his lonely searchers. The characters of his novels are absolutely puzzled fellows restlessly searching for their roots and trying to know the purpose of their existence on this planet. His fourth novel, *The Last Labyrinth* is a deep search into the dark and innermost issues of the human mind, trying to illuminate the hidden corners of the mental make-up of the characters. In his fictional world, Joshi tries his best to elucidate the predicament of the modern man confronted by the question of his existence. As a novelist exposing human predicament, Joshi visualizes the inner crisis of the modern man and convincingly illustrates how the most besetting problems that man faces today are the problems of the self, like alienation, identity crisis, sense of void and existential dilemma. His fiction explores this existential predicament and focuses on the way the self tries to come to terms with this alienation in his social and family life. In the citation of the Sahitya Akademy Award [1981] it is noted how the novelist has portrayed restless search for meaning by the protagonist. It says:

The Last Labyrinth is considered an outstanding contribution to Indian English literature for its restless search for a meaning in human existence, its treatment of the multiple levels of reality, challenging narrative technique and an evocative use of language. (Joshi, 2012, Preface)

The Last Labyrinth is the story of Som Bhaskar, of the emotional turmoil in the complex relationships in his life. He has sensible and beautiful wife, two

adorable children, has his education at the world's best universities, huge industrial empire with millions as savings in his account, and yet he is not contented with his life, and is relentlessly chased by underlined hungers. His dissatisfaction with his life, his hankering after something resulted into his indulgence in competitions with other companies, getting involved with other women, and yet he remains utterly dissatisfied. Som is never ever satisfied with anything in his life. His problem is that his needs never end even when he has everything, and he incessantly demands more:

I want; I want; I want.

I want. I want. I want. Just like that? (Joshi, 2012, 70)

But his craving ruins his own life. At one point he gets involved with a business-man's fiancé, Anuradha, and later she becomes his obsession, like a drug he cannot live without. Because of his obsession his marriage falls apart, his business suffers a lot. The maze or the labyrinth of his yearning leads to his entanglement in the web of materialistic things. This novel is the story of Som Bhaskar's unrelenting craving to find something meaningful in his life. His search takes him from Bombay to Benares to explore the meaning of life and death, illusion and reality, desire and acknowledgment.

Som Bhaskar carries with him a sense of alienation, loneliness and pessimism, in a hostile world. An industrialist who becomes a millionaire at the age of thirty, he is married "to an extra-ordinary woman" (Joshi, 2012, 11) of his choice, who has borne him two children. He, however, is relentlessly driven by an undefined hunger, as well as hunger for money, hunger for fame, hunger of the body and a hunger for some spiritual sublimity. He lives in a make-believe world of his own, alienated from the society around him. All his life his troubles are multiplied not only because of 'the terrible loneliness' of his heart but also because of his awareness of the lack of meaning in his life. He is torn between his inner and outer world and wanders through the maze all through the novel.

He suffers from an intense feeling of inadequacy, a feeling of rootlessness and a feeling of rudderless boat being tossed on turbulent waves. (Joshi, 2012, 23)

From his school days, when he was encountered by the headmaster's wife, till his marriage to the most beautiful girl of his own choice, he is lost in the maze of his own. He finds himself groping through the labyrinth of life and death. At last he becomes convinced that life is full of complications and meaninglessness;

Labyrinth within the labyrinth. (Joshi, 2012, 23)

Som cannot find any reasonable answer to his questions, doubts and inner voices. His quest for life's secret becomes hopelessly complicated because of his yearning to have the best. Finally, he tries to commit suicide but he is stopped by his wife, Geeta. Set in a world of mystery, and the darkness of human emotions, rich businessman Som goes to take over the company of a strange eccentric man Aftab, and is consequently drawn into his world of shadowy awareness.

Som incarnates the quintessential male hero in the literary production of his author, intelligent, sensible, curious, self-centered, somewhat indrawn, and well-educated with a split personality. The novel depicts the craziness, pain, agony and selfishness of love. Human being is confronted by the self and the question of his/her existence is directly correlated with the identity issues.

In the end Som is driven to the brink of death by a heart attack, but he miraculously survives, while Anuradha disappears without a trace. After his recovery, he is hell-bent upon finding Anuradha. His frantic pursuit to search for Anuradha leads him through absurd situations. Som eventually learns that Anuradha had decided to sacrifice her love for him in order to save him from death at the time of his heart attack. The title of the story is self-explanatory, at the end of the story, Anuradha disappears in the last labyrinth to hide herself from the protagonist, Som. She disappears in the last labyrinth, leaving him in doubt whether she has committed suicide or has been killed.

It is rightly said by Edmund Fuller,

Man suffers not only from the war, hunger, prosecution, famine and ruin but also from inner problem--a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way to existence. (Joshi, 2012, 3)

The root cause of Som's problem is that he has been relentlessly chased by the undefined hungers and is being haunted by the mysterious voices. His problem has not been aggravated by one factor alone. Primarily, it exists because of his awareness of the meaninglessness of life. The inner conflict of the protagonist arises from his unlimited hunger to understand the mystery of life and the mystery of the world. The search for meaning and aloofness is clearly marked in the protagonist of *The Last Labyrinth*.

Like other novels of Arun Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* also is the search of his protagonist, Som, for the meaning of life. The metaphor of labyrinth signifies what is inexplicable in life. The *Last Labyrinth* signifies death, but before Som reaches it, there is incessant struggle between his rationality and faith. He vacillates between Bombay and Benaras, the materialist world and the world of spirituality.

Som Bhaskar is a tycoon, who has acquired phenomenal material success at a very young age and has never known sufferings and has no taste of failure in the materialistic world. His education has turned him into a rationalist, which prevents him from taking sanctuary in faith when he is confronted with what is inexplicable in life. His affluence at the young age develops a sense of detachment in life. But, when he meets Anuradha, the devotee of Krishna, his sense of detachment is challenged, and he confronts the other world, which is different from his American and continental world. There is a conflict, then, between his rationality and the mysterious labyrinths of the 'other' world. At the end of the novel he confesses to Dr. K:

_____for many years from now, I have had this awful feeling that I wanted something. But the sad thing was it did not make the slightest difference when I managed to get what I had wanted. My hunger was just as bad as ever. A year ago,

I could not imagine, a wish, which is fulfilled, would have made the least difference to my life _____. Then came Anuradha. It could be that she made an impression on me because she was so different from the women I had known. So, at least, I thought in the beginning. Later, it became more confused. There was more to her than met the eye. A world spinning all by itself. I was infatuated with this mysterious world. (Joshi, 2012, 189)

His faith in the power of rationality comes in conflict with, labyrinths of Krishna, the faith of Anuradha, and Aftab's mysterious Haveli, which baffle him. Som's nightmares, recurrent dream about his plane crashing against the mountain, his father's and mother's death, his father's restlessness and questioning about the First cause, all these deeply affected him.

Som, who had so far implicitly believed in the rationality and the orderliness of the West, finds it crumbling:

But Michigan was crumbling: the West itself was crumbling, in Vietnam and Detroit and the by-ways of New York. (Joshi, 2012, 77)

It does not help in overcoming his awareness of his loneliness, and experiences an existential fatigue throughout his life. His reliance on the Western rationality is challenged by the voids in his mind. He is in search of certitude, the last answer, the end in itself:

If only one knew! If only miracles were to take place, as of old, and one could suddenly, irrefutably know. Without nagging, enervating doubts. I want, I want. If only one knew what one wanted. Or, may be to know what I wanted. To know. Just that. No more. No less. (Joshi, 2012, 53)

But he finds this hopeless. As Gargi, the daughter of the Sufi, tells him:

We are like children trying to reach up to a crack in the door to peep into a room. (Joshi, 2012, 215)

He suffers existential angst because his life cannot offer him a simple solution. Dr. K tells him a story of a boy looking for transparent pebble, and when asked if he did not find it, he simply replies, "Even then it is all right." (Joshi, 2012, 186) But it makes Som uneasy. He does not have a simple solution like the boy has. What he needs is faith. He needs to be certain that the spiritual world and the material world can meet. He is aware of the existence of the other world. The incident of the boat-ride with Aftab and Anuradha, the metaphor of children reaching to a crack in the door to peep into a room has been used to make Bhaskar aware of the existence of the other world. Bhaskar, as an Indian, is torn between Western rationalism and the Indian ethos. He appears to be lost in these labyrinths. Som wants to know from Anuradha and from Gargi about the God in the hills. He says to Gargi:

No, don't misunderstand me. I want to know. Probably, I want to believe. But one can't order belief. (Joshi, 2012, 213)

Som Bhaskar pleads with Anuradha also to enlighten him about God. He asks her:

Is there a God where you are? Have you met Him? Does he have a face? Does He speak? Does He hear?_____ Anuradha, if there is a God and if you have met Him and if He is willing to listen, then, Anuradha, my soul, tell Him, tell this God, to have mercy upon me. (Joshi, 2012, 222)

Som's Existential angst results from his dilemma, he being the product of two worlds, the Western world of science and rationalism and the Indian world of faith. Like the writer, (Arun Joshi), his hero, appears to be influenced by the existential writers like Camus. Som's anxiety, his alienation, results from the world within himself. He becomes aware of his loneliness, of human inadequacy. He is the man

who suffers from being a man oscillating between belief and refusal to believe. Som finds the world meaningless.

At the age of thirty five, Som has become weary of the world, experiencing boredom and has the feeling of being fed up. He tells Anuradha:

I'll tell you what is wrong _____. I am dislocated. My mind is out of focus. There is something sitting right in front of me and I cannot see it. (Joshi, 2012, 107)

Besides, he is always haunted by mysterious voices, which only he can hear, saying:

I want, I want. Through the light of my days and the blackness of my nights and the disquiet of those sleepless hours. (Joshi, 2012, 11)

To quench this undefined hunger he wants to possess an object, which can be either some business enterprise or a woman. But what he manages to get does not satisfy him. The rationalist Leela Sabnis tells him that he tries to play games with the world, and says:

You are lonely on the one hand. On the other you have built a shell around yourself. (Joshi, 2012, 80)

Som's loneliness and his feeling of the lack of relevance in his life make him feel that the world is meaningless. Life appears to him as "a labyrinth within the labyrinth" (Joshi, 2012, 29) He uses metaphors like the lanes of Benaras, or a fisherman's net for this complexity of life. The World appears to him full of voids and the empty spaces. This is what he experiences in Benaras also. Som is also vexed by the thought of Death. He wants to know the secret of death. He cannot stand the sight of death. If death is inevitable, he asks, what the point is in running in pursuit of little pleasures and little vendettas. Som's alienation is the result of his nagging, enervating doubts about life and death. He asks Aftab what lies in the last labyrinth in the Lal Haveli, and Aftab tells him, "why, death, of course." (Joshi, 2012, 37) He would like to know what the destination of man is after death, if this last

labyrinth is the terminus. But there is no answer to this. He would like to know what lies beyond the last labyrinth. Som, the rationalist, tries to combine the two worlds, the matter and the spirit, which leads to his frustration and disillusionment. He tries to kill himself, but his wife, Geeta, stops him gently shaking him out of his melancholy.

IV.3 Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

Most of Anita Desai's works engage complexities of modern Indian culture from a feminine perspective highlighting the Indian woman's predicament of trying to maintain self-identity. Meena Belliappa says:

Desai's protagonists are "mostly women, who, though they have reached different stages in life (from school-girl to grandmother) are all fragile introverts 'trapped in their own skin'. Their emotional traumas sometimes even lead to violent death". (Naik, 2002, 241)

In her novels, it is visible that the characters are searching for a way of living, which would respond to the innermost yearning of the Indian woman for self emancipation and self-dignity. Her female protagonist Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* is abnormally sensitive and unusually solitary to the point of being neurotic. Prof. Srinivasa Iyengar has observed:

Since her [Desai's] pre-occupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters. (Iyengar, 1985, 464)

The protagonist of *Cry, the Peacock* is Maya, the only daughter of Raisahab, the aristocratic father, who marries off his daughter to the middle-aged intellectual lawyer, Gautama. Raisahab and Gautama are both spiritually enlightened. For them, attachment like love leads only to unhappiness. They are preoccupied with their intellectual issues, while Maya lives at the biological level. The problems in her

married life spring from this incompatibility. She needs in her life a friend, a companion, who would love her like a normal husband, who would fulfill her emotional needs. In her marital life she longs for adult love relationship with her husband. She is, however, unhappy, and laments about:

A husband who did not give another thought to me, to either the soft willing body or lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed. (Desai, 1980, 9)

Instead of understanding her needs, Gautama thinks that she is immature and unable to cope with the realities of life. He holds her father responsible for bringing her up on fairy tales, and luxuries of life. But, Maya finds Gautama's intellectuality and his detachment shallow and grey, colourless. She broods over it:

Grey, grey, all was grey for Gautama, who lived so narrowly, so shallowly. And I felt sorry for him, for his slow, harmless, guiltless being who walked the fresh grass and did not know he touched it. (Desai, 1980, 196-97)

Maya is disturbed by a prophecy told her by the albino priest about her or her husband's death in the fourth year of her marriage. This ominous fatality influences her married life. She broods over it, torturing herself.

In *Cry, the Peacock*, the cry is metaphorical suggesting Maya's cry for her physical hankering after her marriage with elderly, cold Gautama for whom physical union is gross. She becomes lonely, and she is nostalgic of her life in her father's house. She is estranged from even Gautama's family because she could not understand their intellectual discussions on politics and social issues.

Maya's bungled marriage to Gautama and its lack of emotional attachment stands in sharp contrast to her jolly and love-laden infancy. Her childhood memories overshadow her present with gloom. It is the faithful description of psychosomatic growth of a female character, who cannot cope with the practical world of the husband and feels dejected, forlorn and demoralized. The novel is mainly concerned with the theme of disharmony in the relationship between husband and

wife. Desai looks into the reasons for marital discord and illustrates how such discord affects the family. Maya and Gautama have been projected to live in sharp contracts. Maya, the central figure, is alive through all she senses and lives intensely for each moment. Her husband Gautama is remote, detached, intellectual and somewhat bewildered by his wife's hyper-sensitiveness. Both of them are, as a matter of fact, poles apart in their nature. Maya is dreamy, sensitive and emotional, while Gautama is realistic, insensitive and rational. Maya is poetic and high-strung while Gautama is detached, philosophical and remote. Maya has tenderness, softness and warmth while Gautama is hard and cold. They are thus plagued with the virus of strained relationship because of their incompatible temperament. The matrimonial bonds that bind the two are very fragile and get fractured.

What pains Maya most is her loneliness in the house, she cannot establish effective communication with her husband Gautama. Maya's worldly nature makes her well inclined to derive the fullest satisfaction from everything related to the marriage. But on account of Gautama's age and attitude towards life and his wife, it is the greatest disappointment a woman can have. She admits frankly of her sexual dissatisfaction on account of Gautama's unpardonable negligence. She complains:

How little he knew of my suffering, or of how to comfort me.
Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he
did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing
body, or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed.
(Desai, 1980, 9)

Her husband's cold and strict behavior and most significantly his age have affected Maya's life and she is denied emotional and physical satisfaction of married life. Maya's longing for companionship in her life is dampened by non-attachment of Gautama. Their marriage becomes unfruitful, which results into her self-alienation. The prophesy by the Albino priest about her or her husband's death in the fourth year of marriage greatly contributes to her anxiety. With the three years of married life without a child and the challenge of living without love for next forty or fifty years is like a nightmare for her. Maya's childlessness haunts her and the death of her pet

dog Toto creates a void in her life. It makes her inconsolable as she feels that her last straw of attachment is broken. With the death of her pet dog Toto, she feels that she might lose herself as her life is uninteresting and monotonous. Her social life is minimal and she feels suffocated even with Gautama. Like Som Bhaskar, she also yearns for more and more and is never satisfied with her secure home, rich husband, her luxurious married life. She longs for some change but her demands are always nullified by Gautama. She wants to visit Darjeeling to refresh the childhood memory of its scenic beauty and cool weather. But Gautama refuses the proposal. She would like to go to the south to watch Kathakali dances of Southern India but her husband coolly declines that and tells her to wait for Kathakali troupe to come to Delhi.

Maya has tried her best to love Gautama. Like the peacocks, longing for sexual communion, Maya cries for the company of Gautama as Som Bhaskar did for Anuradha. The cry of the peacock becomes the cry of Maya but she is shattered from within and even her soul is bruised. The priest had predicted her peacock like predicament.

Do you not hear the peacock's call in the wild? Are they not blood-chilling, their shrieks of pain? "Pia, Pia", they cry. "Lover, Lover, Mio, Mio. I die, I die"_____Have you seen peacocks make love, child? Before they mate, they fight. They will reap each other's breasts to strips and fall bleeding with their beaks open and panting. When they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate. (Desai, 1980, 82)

But, Gautama remains coldly ignorant and unresponsive to Maya's cry, and her bodily needs. She always longs for her husband and his love but Gautama leaves Maya wanting and unfulfilled. She always tries to fulfill her long deprivations but she is not strong enough to rebel against the outer world and this causes isolation and depression. On the other hand Gautama always considers her as childish, distasteful and weak. Due to all these misunderstandings and

communication gaps their relation becomes bizarre and they never have any relation or bond in their marital life. Maya is always seen yearning for Gautama's love, and finally realizes there is no love in her married life.

Had there been a bond between us, we would have felt its pull____But, of course, there was none____there was no bond, no love____hardly any love. (Desai, 1980, 108)

It is believed that when an individual suppresses the desires for a long time, the desires get multiplied in the unconscious mind and he/she condemns himself or herself in the effort to fulfill them. And when that is not achieved it results into aloofness and anxiety. After being frustrated by Gautama's coldness, Maya starts seeking shelter in her surroundings. Maya's [metaphorically, peacock's] scream is neither reciprocated nor heard by her lover. In the absence of love, she becomes intensely lonely and alienated. As the time passes, she begins to lose grip over herself, suffers from neurosis, and turns into a psychopath whose emotional needs are seen to be in collision with the extremely practical outlook of her husband, and his gross unconcern over the basics of life. She is caught between two worlds: one lost permanently and the other unbearable, both physically and emotionally. She enters another world, the world of madness. In the fit of her obsession, frustrated state of mind, and meaningless relationship, she pushes Gautama off the parapet of their house. Thus, she murders her husband in a fit of insane fury and commits suicide. Maya's preoccupation with death is not for death's sake, it is understood to be a means of freedom and escape from suffering. Death would possibly provide the freedom from her desire associated with Gautama.

She longs for the life that would permit her to touch him, feel his flesh and hair, hold and tighten her hold on him. (Desai, 1980, 102)

The conception that an individual needs something more than just food, clothes and accommodation is very aptly illustrated through Maya. The novelist has tried to emphasize the great yearning of the woman to be understood by her male partner. *Cry, the Peacock* is Desai's effort to showcase the problems of an alienated

people. The protagonist's obsessions, dilemmas, and abnormality are conveyed very effectively in the novel.

Meena Belliappa says that,

The ardent introspection of Maya marks a valuable introversion in Indian fiction. It points to a line of significant development____exploration not of the 'social' man, but 'the lone individual. (Belliappa, 1971, 18)

Maya's alienation is the result of her physical, emotional and mental separation. She tries to establish relation with Gautama at both mental and physical level, but she is defeated by his philosophical talk which is meaningless for her, when Maya talks to him of love, he gives her dry, intellectual discourse on the difference between love and attachment. For Maya, he is nothing but an old, frigid intellectual. He preaches her detachment while she is all for emotional and physical involvement. Finally, she is completely alienated from him. Her superstitious belief in the prophecy drives her to madness, which leads to Gautama's death and her madness.

IV.4 Aspects of Comparison

IV.4.1 Their Loneliness

It is quite true that both the protagonists face self-alienation which results into the tragedy of their life. However, the socio-cultural aspects of both, Som Bhaskar, and Maya, are quite different. Som Bhaskar is a millionaire industrialist, who is disturbed by mysterious hankering after love, God and Death, the mysterious that leads him to the last labyrinth. Som had come to realize the hollowness in his soul, and his various experiences in life have created in him boredom. He appears to be fed up of life. He once confesses to Anuradha:

I'll tell you what is wrong _____. I am dislocated. My mind is out of focus. There is something sitting right in front of me and I cannot see it. (Joshi, 2012, 107)

Som Bhaskar's problem is that he is troubled by undefined 'wants', haunted by mysterious voices which are_____

_____audible only to my ears, a grey cry threshed the night air: I want. I want. Through the light of my days and the blackness of my nights and the disquiet of those sleepless hours_____. (Joshi, 2012, 11)

Som's loneliness, his alienation, may be the result of his own way of life. Leela Sabnis, for example, tells him that he is in the habit of playing games with the world. As a result, she says:

You are lonely on the one hand. On the other you have built a shell around yourself. You are bored, bored stiff in your little shell. This is the long and short of it. (Joshi, 2012, 80)

Som is not merely lonely; he is also troubled by the lack of relevance in his life. For him the world is meaningless.

Maya, on the other hand is driven to loneliness on account of terrible communication gap between her and her husband. Maya is driven to loneliness by her husband's mechanical attitude towards life. Whatever Gautama does, there is an air of detachment about it. Maya is not able to bridge the communication gap between them because he talks to her patronizingly or very formally. There is hardly any conjugal relationship between them. He is immune to physical desires, and she feels agony of her unfulfilled needs. She complains how her 'soft, willing body' yearned for him in the bed. She cannot turn to anyone to share her distress. Gautama's family is full of members who are engrossed in social or political problems. Emotionally and sexually starved, Maya feels utterly lonely. She is left out of their discussions, because they know she would not understand the involved socio-political matters. They speak to her only about meals, babies, shopping and marriages; and never take her seriously. She feels lonely and neglected. She blames Gautama for imposing this loneliness on her. She tries once to crack Gautama's armour of detachment asking him:

Is there nothing, I whispered, is there nothing in you that would be touched, ever so slightly, if I told you I live my life for you? (Joshi, 2012, 114)

But Gautama is impatient at this query and she utterly feels a sense of isolation.

IV.4.2 Their Obsession with Death

Som, the millionaire and successful businessman, goes about in search of happiness and meaningfulness in life. He once exclaims to himself: "How happy I must be to have no problems in life". (Joshi, 2012, 98). But sensitive people like him feel the pain and dissatisfaction in life. Som feels the greatest question of human life is its ultimate reality, which is Death. Som's father too was vexed with the thought of death. Som says, "There was nothing I loathed more than I loathed the sight of death." (Joshi, 2012, 15) He would like to know the secret of death. He is uneasy with the thought of death because it deprives him of the very purpose of life, the mad running after pleasures of life, of the enmities in life. Som is always intrigued with the question of life and death. He is obsessed with the question about 'what lay in the last labyrinth'. He would also like to know where one went after death.

Som hankers after the unity of two worlds, the world of matter and the world of spirit. He wants to know "something, somebody, somewhere in which the two worlds combined." (Joshi, 2012, 82) He visits temples, begins to feel self-pity and utters a death wish, "A peaceful death that is all he wants, for he is mercilessly torn apart by his doubts." (Joshi, 2012, 164) He even tries to kill himself.

Like Som, Maya too nurses the idea of death. She is obsessed by it, but her case is different from Som. Som is philosophically preoccupied with the idea of death. He wants to know the secret of life and its purpose. Maya, on the other hand, is obsessed with the prediction of death by the Albino fortune-teller. She experiences a sense of gloom, some disaster waiting for her, and feels very insecure. The albino astrologer had predicted her husband's or her death in the fourth year of their married life. Maya becomes vulnerable to the idea of death

because she is estranged from her husband, from his family as well as her father. Gautama's callous indifference to her feelings and fears push more and more towards the thought of impending disaster.

Like Som, Maya is not preoccupied with the mystery of life and death. She is driven to madness by the prediction of death either of herself or of her husband. Som is ready to go to the final labyrinth, but Maya is terrified of the thought of it. She loses her self-control and moves towards insanity. Maya is in love with sensuous life. But Som is troubled by the lack of relevance in life. Som tries to kill himself, but Maya kills her husband. Both are neurotically obsessed with the idea of death.

IV.4.3 Their Alienation

Even as a student, Som considered activities of life to be futile. He found the world to be meaningless. He found life extremely complicated, "a labyrinth within the labyrinths" (Joshi, 2012, 29) like the lanes of Benaras. Som begins to feel disgusted with people and himself. He once said, "It is the voids of the world, more than its objects, that bother me. The voids and empty spaces, within and without." (Joshi, 2012, 47)

Som's feeling of alienation is the result of his awareness of the lack of relevance in life. He thinks the world to be meaningless. Som is disgusted with people as well as with himself and develops "a new loathing for the squalid world" (Joshi, 2012, 46) He says, "it is the voids of the world, more than its objects, that bother me. The voids and empty spaces, within and without." (Joshi, 2012, 47)

Som is the modern man, who is trying to traverse labyrinths of life, existence and reality. He faces the dilemma of existence and feels its anxiety. He suffers hunger of the spirit and tries to quench it by his obsession for sex. But he is never at peace with himself. Earlier in his life, he had visited the caves of Ajanta, where he had a peculiar experience of voids:

It was cool inside and dark. Then the walls started to float in trembling, shimmering, daubed here and there with colours. The colours were faint, as they are in dreams. I had stood

there trying to make sense out of them. And then, as gradually as they had materialized, the walls dissolved into darkness. _____The walls came and went in dizzy waves the daubs of colour dancing before my eyes. (Joshi, 2012, 47)

Since this experience Som was haunted by voids in his mind and his external world. He is aware of disharmony in his mind; and struggles to find authenticity in his life. Som's crisis is the crisis of consciousness. He can neither believe nor refuse to believe. He feels anguish of alienation in his quest.

Som's alienation springs from his inner world, his subjective reality. He feels crisis of consciousness. Som is trying to authenticate his existence. He is the example of a modern man feeling restlessness in his modern life and his effort to escape it.

But Anita Desai's Maya experiences alienation as she finds herself entangled with her intellectual husband Gautama on the one hand, and his social activist family on the other. She tries to find solace in the company of her dog, Toto. The death of Toto brings her face to face with the reality of life. Her emotional needs are not fulfilled by Gautama. She is driven back to her past memories, her life at her father's house. She feels frustrated and alienated as a result of her loss of the sense of belonging in Gautama's family.

In her childhood, an astrologer had predicted unnatural death of either herself or her husband. Had Maya been fully engrossed in her family life; she would not have been obsessed and terrified by this prediction. She is not like Gautama to feel detached and prepared for any eventuality. She feels alienated from Gautama because she cannot physically and emotionally relate to him. Her alienation results from her obsession with the idea of death and non-fulfillment of her emotional needs. While Som in *The Last Labyrinth* would court death, Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* would like to escape it. Her loneliness, childlessness, emotional deprivation and absence of no one to share her anxiety and feeling build up a sense of alienation in her. Her neurosis is strengthened by the prophecy of her or her

husband's death. Maya's alienation is caused by her childlessness, absence of familial relationship, dry intellectuality of her husband who cannot be emotionally one with her. Her lonely existence leads to her alienation from her husband and other members of family. Maya's neurotic state of mind is expressed in the passage:

Wild horse, white horse, galloping up paths of tone, flying away into the distance, the wild hills. The heights, the dizzying heights of my mountains, towering, tapering, edged with cliff-edges, founded on rock. Fall, fall, gloriously fall to the bed of racing rivers, framing seas. Horrid arms, legs, tentacles thrashing, blood flowing eyes glazing. Storm_____storm at sea, at end! Fury. Whip. Lash. Fly furiously..... Danger! Danger! (Desai, 1980, 150)

Maya's state of mind here is feverish. She says so. 'I am in fever. Stop me! Silence me! Or I will fly on, fly up, at you, through you_____.' This is the result of inner loneliness of Maya. It is in this feverish madness she screams at him and pushes him down from the high parapet. This neurotic state of mind was the result of self-alienation of Maya that finally leads to her madness.

IV.5 Impressions

In conclusion of the study of these two novels, we can see that the protagonists in both the novels face existential angst. Their feeling of alienation arises out of their dissatisfaction with the course of life they live. Yet, the way they react to the circumstances or try to face their existential angst is quite different. Their actions are dictated by their education, social status, their environment and above all their sex. Som, for example, is gifted with everything in life. He is highly educated, there is no problem in his marital life, as Geeta, his wife, is every way an ideal wife. He is a business tycoon. And yet, he is restless on account of the crisis of consciousness. His education, rationality and skepticism do not allow him solace that faith can bring. He is acutely aware of his loneliness, which is the result of his

futile effort to 'know'. It is this quest of 'Knowing', of reaching up to a crack in the door to peep into a room, which creates an existential anguish in his life.

In fact, Som has everything normally a man would wish to be happy and contented. But he feels there is no cohesiveness in his life. He experiences void in his external and internal life. Being an unbeliever, he cannot get solace as his mother gets from her belief in Krishna. His wife, Geeta, is a contrast to him. She can trust 'like birds fly, like fish swim'. Bhaskar has acquired his disbelief in God through his Western education, but the Indian trust in God and the philosophy of transcendentalism also exert influence on his mind. His anguish results from the tension between the worlds of belief. He experiences voids in his external as well as internal world. His problem is to seek authenticity of his life. There is no answer to Bhaskar's dilemma, as he belongs to two worlds, the western world of rationalism and the Eastern world of faith. His restless running from one woman to the other, seeking answers to questions like 'Is there a God where you are?' is a meaningless quest. He wants Anuradha to find a God for him and get the answers. But he does not realize that in the realm of such quest man is on his own. His crisis of consciousness is the result of his belonging to two worlds. He, thus, faces existential dilemma. He faces the crisis of consciousness as he belongs to the two worlds of the East and the West. Despite his affluence, his beautiful female companions, the material success at an early age, ideal wife he is restless, unhappy because he faces the existential feeling of loneliness, the despair he experiences within himself.

On the other hand, behind Maya's existential anguish there is her excessive absorption in her own emotional estrangement from her husband and his family. Her world is utterly restricted to her mind and feelings rendering her lonely as she fails to connect with the world of reality. Her existential anguish results from her failure to win a place at the centre of her world. She feels alienated from others on account of her isolation from the intellectual and detached husband and the members of his family. She is starved of love, affection and compassion. She becomes hypersensitive about her sense of loneliness, her insecurity, which are

further aggravated by the astrologer's prediction. Maya's existential anguish is, thus, the result of her estrangement, while Som's alienation is much more cerebral, resulting out of his sense of rootlessness than familial or social estrangement.

Maya is obsessed with the idea of death. She becomes neurotic, which is aggravated by the prediction of the fortune-teller. As a result of her anguish, and her brooding over death, she moves towards her destruction. Her unhappiness is the result of her upbringing, her protected life and her fantasies. She says:

As a child I enjoyed, princess like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights.....Indian mythology.....lovely English and Irish fairy tales..... (Desai, 1980, 41)

Later on, she realizes:

_____ now that I go over it in my mind, my childhood was one in which I was excluded, grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. (Desai, 1980, 78)

Maya is, thus, unhappy as a result of her circumstances. Her growing up as an isolated child, her protected life could not equip her to face the realities of life. Her neurotic frame of mind is the result of this, and it gets a strong impetus by her dispassionate husband, his loveless cerebral talk, and to add to it the prediction of imminent death in the fourth year of her marriage.

She is increasingly alienated from Gautama by his cold intellectuality. Once she pityingly asks him:

Is there nothingis there nothing in you that would be touched ever so slightly, if I told you I live my life for you?
(Desai, 1980, 97)

And Gautama's response to this is cold. He is too perturbed to be touched. He calls her neurotic and a spoilt baby. For Maya, he becomes a closed door. She

is rendered utterly lonely. It is in this state of mind the prediction of death haunts her, further intensifying her state of mind.

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