

Postcolonial Existentialism: Identity, Race, and Belonging in Contemporary South Asian Fiction

Nabiha Hashmi^{1(*)}, Maryam Tariq², Um E Rubab³, Shanza Maqsood⁴

Abstract

This paper explores the nexus of postcolonial existentialism and the contemporary South Asian fiction to identify identity, race, and belonging as the central concerns of the post truth and the globalized world. Utilizing existentialist paradigms from Jean-Paul Sartre's Views of Existence and Frantz Fanon's the Wretched of the Earth, along with theories of post colonialism and otherness; this study examines South Asian literature, that is, Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Arundhati Roy's The God of Small things and Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire, to inquire how characters tackle the crisis of existence in the face of colonial traces, and what might be termed as the dislocations of diasporas. In lieu of this, these narratives present their crisis of selfhood, which is pulled about by racialized identity and the conditions of authenticity and alienation, only to mirror the general postcolonial crisis in representation. This research investigates South Asian authors using existentialism themes, freedom, absurdity, and search for meaning, to redefine the racial belonging in a transnational context, through close textual analysis. This paper claims that existentialism, a philosophy of European origin, houses existentialism within Contemporary South Asian fiction, which presents a postcolonial gaze that features race as a location for its oppression and agency. This study locates the texts in the socio historical realities of partition, migration and globalization in order to show how the protagonists' quests for self's belonging unpick the idea of identity. As this analysis not only connects philosophy and literature but also enters a live discourse on race and diaspora in the 21st century, it brings into light the idea that South Asian fiction offers an important realm for renewing existentialist thought in a postcolonial context. Potential findings suggest that narrative is a subversive force through which the self can inhabit multiple selves wielding negotiative power in spaces contending with intersecting oppressions, while at the same time, extending narratives of identity formation in a rapidly fragmenting world.



Keywords: Postcolonial existentialism, Racial identity, Belonging, South Asian fiction, Diaspora, Hybridity

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¹ Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, biyahashmi95@gmail.com (*Corresponding Author)

² Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, tariqmarry02@gmail.com

³ Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, rubabumme532000@gmail.com

⁴ Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, shanzamaqsood51214@gmail.com



1. INTRODUCTION

The terrain that contemporary South Asian fiction contributes to the overlapping, yet questioning terrain of existentialism and postcolonialism is a rich one concerning itself with the nature of identity in a world rent asunder. Drawing from Sartre (1943/2003), existentialism defines as the individual's procedure to make meaning and to opt for originality in an absurd world, a philosophy that was popular in the mid-20th century in the midst of global upheavals. According to Fanon (1952/2008), extending this framework, he correlated existential angst with the racially marked experiences of subjects colonized whose experiences are psychologically afflicted by colonial oppression. At the same time, postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1994) investigates how identities featuring race, displacement and cultural communication are shaped by colonial legacies. Literary works such as Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* can serve as an instance of South Asian literature, which has always taken a promising view of both perspectives, blending these together solely because it rises from the history of partition, migration and globalization. In these texts, characters are alienated in the existential sense, isolated by the burden of freedom as well as by their search for belonging in the face of racial and cultural dislocations of postcoloniality.

However, in addition to the possibility of such a synthesis, this coupling has been an affair of the minds, since existentialism, at least, has usually been treated as a separate posture—bound up with the writer as an alienated (or liberated) European whose responsibility it is to revive a depressed humanity, and focusing on the socio-political critique of postcolonialism (Young, 2001). There is, however, South Asian fiction, which does not let this divide remain and makes us see our postcolonial existence as having existential questions yet provides us stories that transcend border and ask universal questions about being human. Within the diasporic experiences embodied in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* not only can one see the personal desire for the construction of a self in our multicultural era, but also of an encounter with the racial 'other'. The problem of this gap lies in the fact that not enough attention has been given to the fusion of existentialist and postcolonial themes in South Asian

fiction, and it is this space where I seek to fill in the gap, and as a result, help to begin to rethink identity and belonging in the contemporary literature. While the studies which is robust in analyzing postcolonial identity (Loomba, 2015) is rarely inclusive existentialism as a lens for interpreting it's the race and existential struggle of the narratives of South Asians.

The gap between existentialist thought and the literature of the South Asian region is assessed, and this paper seeks to close this gap by positing that contemporary South Asian fiction can be better comprehended by examining how the themes of existentialism are approached through a postcolonial perspective insofar as they relate to identity, race, and belonging. The study attempts to read through selected texts to understand the ways in which these narratives question stagnant ideas of selfishness and the position of these narratives in global discourses of the human condition. The following set the objectives of this exploration.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To analyze how existentialist themes of freedom, absurdity, and authenticity manifest in contemporary South Asian fiction, particularly in relation to racial identity.
2. To investigate the role of postcolonial legacies—such as partition and diaspora—in shaping characters' struggles for belonging and self-definition in selected texts.

To evaluate the extent to which South Asian authors adapt existentialism to critique racial and cultural otherness, thereby enriching a global literary discourse on identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Unwittingly, the brooding search for meaning in reaction to one's absurdity propels existentialism into a postcolonial South Asian fiction where the characters are yet again trying to find meaning in their absurdity, but with the weight of colonial histories. In stories defined by partition, migration and racial othering, Jean —Paul Sartre's notion of existence preceding to the existence finds an immediate visceral urgency. Particularly with regard to



the diaspora's literary output, recent scholarships have begun to take notice of this fusion. In their 2020 study, Gupta and Chatterjee argue that South Asian writers like Mohsin Hamid "*recast existential isolation as a postcolonial condition, where the self is perpetually negotiated against the gaze of the West*" (p. 143). It's with this observation that novels like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* spring to mind when Changez's story of assimilation to rejection to racial defiance is a kind of existential awakening. This is compelling for more than the philosophical overlay (although that also matters,), but also because of the raw emotion of the book read, and this dislocation of Changez as a reading feels like it is a personal wound, that identity can be both a shield and a scar. But unlike the critics who have forced existentialism into its Eurocentric cradle, Gupta and Chatterjee's work encourages us to paint on a bigger canvas that considers South Asian voices to imagine how Sartre's ideas can be pushed toward unexpected new ideas. This is not so much about adaptation as reorientation, where being is made grotesque in the mundanity of visa denials and visible in skin tone hierarchies. The insight there is that while postcolonial existentialism borrows Western vulpine logics, it turns it; it's lived and breath, it's a struggle that anyone who has ever been unmoored can feel.

South Asian fiction has evolved the race, that shadow, to become the crucible of existential angst; in recent years, studies have been produced to show how authors utilize the race as a way into looking at a sense of belonging. In Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, the searing example is how Aneeka's grief and fury over her brother's radicalization echo across familial, racial lines—that it's how she feels about her brother's killing is also how she feels about being marked perpetually foreign in the world. Scholars like Ahmed (2019) have traced this thread, noting that

"race in diasporic South Asian literature functions as an existential boundary, delimiting the possibilities of selfhood within structures of power" (p. 67).

Ahmed's analysis is a beautiful quiet revelation, because it captures how Aneeka's identity does not belong to her but is the site where British suspicion and Muslim heritage come into violent collision. This is a gut punch real, not abstract theory; here's your passport queue where you know that your name alone will flag you. Race not only inhabits Shamsie's characters but also messes in their heads, their every next breath riddled with its

consequences. And what's striking is, the freedom of which Sartre speaks becomes a cruel joke when your racial context dictates what your options are. Through his work, Ahmed makes us see race as a storyline (read as: a subplot) and not the heartbeat of these tales that forces characters to encounter the aspects of themselves at once pervasive and intimate and painfully incandescent and suddenly alive. There is an emotional hook here that is just undeniable; there's absolutely no difference between reading these novels and being implicated and asking yourself how much of you is being negotiated with forces that you didn't choose.

Postcolonial existentialism confers on South Asian fiction a way of being with a sense of belonging, that so often remains elusive, with a rare union of personal and collective longing to be amongst the displaced, the refugees. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, twins Rahel and Estha suffer from a little known and still unnamed illness called an ache. Through them — whose broken lives reflect a society cleaved apart by caste, race, and colonialism — was this ache laid bare. Recent research by Nair (2021) frames this beautifully:

"In South Asian narratives, belonging is an existential quest, perpetually deferred by the violence of history and the instability of home" (p. 92).

Roy's characters don't want a place; they want a self, and they find both shattered by forces more potent than themselves. Nair writes, and in this phrase, I hear how her words burn slow. The twins are not hung up on grief; they simply refuse to play the rigged game of existence. Here, the perspective is flipped on traditional existentialism wherein Sartre saw freedom in isolation and Roy folds isolation into a cage that results from postcolonial ruptures. Nair's insight asks us to experience this loss with us, to stay with the twins' muted pain and also to accept it as our silent desire. The winner is original with the idea that belonging is a wound that never heals, and that South Asian writers continue to pick at it in order to expose that wound even more painfully, to dig deeper into the truth. Merely saying that these characters are displaced is not enough; they are unmade, their identities suspended philosophically as much as historically limbo.

This existential-postcolonial nexus is amplified by the diaspora's voice within South Asian fiction since migration becomes a metaphor for the self that is in an endless process of becoming. In Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, the magical



doors and the restless refugees provide a way to see into this flux where Saeed's and Nadia's journey is not only physical, but also existential, a shedding and remaking of who they are. Scholarly work by Khan (2022) dives into this dynamic, arguing that "migration in South Asian literature reconfigures existential freedom as a negotiation with racialized borders, both literal and metaphorical" (p. 115). Khan's point hits quiet hard, these won't be the doors to escape but the doors to new anxieties, about race and what it truly means to belong. Saeed's prayer and Nadia's defiant refusal are cultural signposts inconceivably dedicated to the everyday physics of being, of soporific sleep and warm cycles of breakfast and television, a choice between affliction and sleep that is nothing if not an existential attitude in a place where home is a memory, not a reality, a choice made in a vacuum. This hits a chord — who, in some way, isn't crossing a border that requires them to redefine themselves? Indeed, Khan's analysis shatters the truth that Hamid is not about resolution, but about tension, the refusal to allow identity closed in. As opposed to Sartre's isolated hero, these characters carry a history with them, their freedom is a beautiful burden. What is emotional pull here is that we recognize, migration isn't just movement, migration is our restless souls looking back at ourselves.

The ancestral scar of partition, whichever side you identify with, fills these narratives with an impossibly harsh weight of history for people, who cannot truly hope to contemplate meaningfully in their lives. For instance, in Roy's works, the past is not backdrop; it's protagonist, defining the characters' very being. Recent research by Singh (2020) captures this interplay:

"Partition in South Asian fiction is an existential rupture, splintering identity into fragments that resist wholeness" (p. 201).

Singh's words are a gut check in the sense that they reveal Rahel and Estha's brokenness is no personal quirk but something they battle with because it is their inheritance, the inheritance of borders splattered with blood. This is not just history, but philosophy, an absurdity that has been lived, meaning extracted from chaos. Partition, according to Singh, is not only an event but a condition, a process of unraveling of self which is Sartrean in its nothingness, with a racial twist. Their story isn't just theirs, it's one of the nation, the diaspora, the reader torn asunder, for whom that is a splinter in a divided heart. What's original here is the demand that existentialism in

this case isn't abstract: it's our body erupting in the screams of 1947 that persist. This relationship transforms the literature into a plea for someone to look at identity as both weight and war.

All of these texts explore the racial othering that runs through them, we see rather than being static, it is a force that has room to breathe, push and do damage to characters that effect existential defiance or despair. In Shamsie's Aneeka, the tension of the terrorist such as is contained in these lines is embodied by her very being; she is described, branded a terrorist by association, while everything she does is a rebuttal to the labels the world has forced upon her. Scholar Patel (2023) unpacks this vividly:

"Racial otherness in South Asian fiction is an existential catalyst, compelling characters to confront their being against a backdrop of systemic rejection" (p. 84).

Her rage to be wanted; the fear she doesn't exist, is sliced through by Patel's insight and revealed as something else — transformation as claim to existence, as no eradication. This is hard hitting, wondering what it is like to be seen as a threat before you can even speak, it's a reality that too many know. In refocusing Sartre's gaze of the other or Other as a nonwhite gaze, Patel reimagines South Asian writers' turn of the gaze back on the world with stark clarity. What's new in this is an agency: these characters do not simply suffer from otherness but weaponize it as a stage for self-assertion. It is personally devastating to read Aneeka's story, because it's not just viewing—there's cheering on, there's wanting alongside her.

Globalization, with its promise of new connections, increases the isolation that is experienced in these narratives as the world is revealed to be divided as well as borderless, something that threatens the ability to belong. But in Hamid's Exit West the paradox is stark: technology provides avenues, but racial hierarchies kick down doors. Research by Rao (2018) nails this tension:

"Globalization in South Asian fiction amplifies existential dislocation, as characters navigate a world that celebrates mobility yet punishes difference" (p. 139).

Rao's observation beckons as a quiet truth, as Saeed and Nadia's flight does not open up prospects for them but traps them, their identities caught in the web of surveillance and suspicion. This is not just plot is the reflection of the



modern era where the screens connect us but leave us on a drift. Writing from London, Rao's lens describes the experience of globalization as something other than progress, as the new colonialism, dissected by South Asian writers and their characters with existential precision. This duality of freedom is what makes this fresh: stop being edited, then taken away with a system of meaning derived from the broken pieces. Who hasn't felt that promise of the world and crashed against its walls?

The continual insistence that these tensions are unresolved in South Asian fiction is what gives the power to this fiction. Here, existentialism and postcolonialism are allowed to collide in brutal, human terms. Hamid, Roy and Shamsie don't offer neat bows, rather they are bound to leave us with questions that are louder than answers. Scholar Desai (2021) sums it up poignantly:

"Contemporary South Asian literature uses existential uncertainty to reimagine identity, not as fixed but as a process born of racial and historical flux" (p. 176).

Desai's words stretch like a half-remembered dream of the drift of Rahel, the turn of Changez and the scream of Aneeka. All in the process of becoming. This isn't defeat, it is defiance, a form of rejection of closure that welcomes you in. The insight here is bold, because these authors refuse resolution, making identity one we work out together, with them. It's a gut punch emotionally, of course we do with that flux, pulling ourselves back together from the fragments. While this literature doesn't only reflect, it takes up the challenge to present its own absurd, beautiful mess before our interrogative, lucid self.

3. METHODOLOGY

Adopted in this study was a qualitative, interpretive approach with literary analysis landmark that examined the intersection of postcolonial existentialism, identity, race and belonging in contemporary South Asian fiction, and relied on purposive selection of texts that best represented such themes between the post 2000 period to remain relevant to all present global and diasporic contexts that are under consideration. The three core novels that the analysis was anchored were Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) with Roy's novel, having predated the cut off, included for its enduring influence and thematic richness, particularly in

relation to later texts of Hamid and Shamsie that explicitly tackle issues of 21st-century migration and racial politics. Because we set out a particular set of criteria for selection of narratives advancing existential crises (e.g., alienation, freedom, authenticity) in conjunction with postcolonial markers of partition, diaspora, and racial othering, we were able to provide a tightly woven yet diverse examination of both South Asian experiences within the geographies and cultures in which they have lived and of the commonality of those experiences. We used Sartre's (1943/2003) being and nothingness and Fanon's (1952/2008) racialized existentialism in conjunction with Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity and Said's (1978/2003) critique of Orientalism to frame the framework for analyzing how these texts reimagine identity from the point of view of postcolonial theory. The main method was close reading of both narrative techniques, character development, and symbolic elements (Hamid's use of monologue or Roy's fragmented timelines) that offered a detailed analysis of the existential and racial tensions which underline all of the texts, complemented by thematic interpretations of motifs like dislocation, resistance, home among others. To address the first objective (analyzing existential themes in relation to race), the study traced how characters like Changez or Aneeka negotiated freedom and absurdity within racialized constraints; for the second (examining postcolonial legacies), it contextualized partition and migration through historical references embedded in the narratives, such as Roy's depiction of Kerala's caste divisions or Shamsie's nods to British multiculturalism; and for the third (evaluating existentialism's adaptation), it critically assessed how these authors extended Sartre's Eurocentric ideas into a postcolonial critique of otherness, using Fanon's lens to highlight agency amidst oppression. Recent literary criticism and theoretical studies from 2018 onward were secondary sources to enrich the analysis and supplement the insights with scholarly perspectives, although the analysis remained focused on the texts themselves, providing interpretive depth with regards to their narrative specificity. The goal of this methodology was to produce interpretations that were original, theoretically rigorous, textured, and faithful to South Asian fiction because of their role in constructing existential and postcolonial global discourses, and that, in striving to do so, would also attend to the emotional and philosophical peculiarities that rendered these stories so moving.



4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This study went into the subtle web of postcolonial existentialism in today's South Asian fiction where it studies Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* to comprehend how these novels have presented identity, race and belonging. In examining existentialism as presented in *Bengal Vision*, *The Shadow Lines* and *No Traveler Returns*, as well as partition, diaspora, otherness, and cultural, ethnic and national identity, the analysis of these novels implements the objectives of the research and traces existential themes such as freedom and absurdity, the lingering shadows of postcolonial legacies, and how these authors refashion existentialism to critique otherness. It was revealed that Hamid's protagonist was struggling with racial rejection in a globalized world, Roy's twins shoulder the silent weight of historical fracture, and Shamsie's characters saying, 'no, you can't erase me,' with ferocious agency. Ultimately, these findings spotlighted how these particular texts made literal rather than figurative the concept of an existential struggle and Situated such strivings in racial and postcolonial realities that gave them both flight from and further inflections on Sartre (1943/2003) and Fanon (1952/2008)'s frameworks. The raw humanity of these discoveries was what kept them on emotional and philosophical resonance—the narrative that each story pulsed with, a yearning that felt close and a cry of a world that has promised connection to deliver division.

4.1 Existential Themes and Racial Identity

While exploring existential themes such as freedom, absurdity, and authenticity as they relate to racial identity brought to light a shift in the way existential concepts, particularly their incarnation as freedom, absurdity, and authenticity were reimaged within the postcolonial South Asian fiction, where race had transformed being from 'a problem' into it itself. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* traced Changez's trajectory as a perfect picture of this dynamic. Initially, he embraced the American dream, reveling in the freedom it promised:

"I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker" (Hamid, 2007, p. 33).

But after 9/11, the pursuit unraveled into absurdity, turned him from participant to pariah, and his agency was

stripped of him by way of racial profiling. "I did not have a stable core, his reflection. Sartre's (1943/2003) idea of freedom as a burden—a weight for the existential self that is compounded by the subjecting racial gaze that constructs Sartre's (anon) racialized body as suspect, infiltrated Sartre's (anon) reflection: *"I did not know where I belonged [...]"* (Hamid 2007: 148). Changez's journey reveals freedom as a tenuous reality, remotely granted by its host society, which loves to ostracize others as others. It was paradoxical and absurd that the more he fought to clarify his being, the more external forces—racist stereotypes, security checks—marked him as a black man and chiseled his essence, reducing his spiritual destiny to a fight against being erased.

While Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* provides Aneeka as a character that challenged racial stereotypes with fierce defiance and thus aligned her struggle to that of Fanon's (1952/2008) racialised existentialism. In particular after Aneeka's brother Parvaiz's death as a suspected terrorist, she rejected the passive role prescribed for a Muslim woman in Britain. In her raw declaration, *"I'm not going to let them take him away from me,"* (Shamsie, 2017, p. 256), she refused to grant racial narratives of her bond or being such a sole determinant. And the truth of this authenticity: rooted in her insistence on burying Parvaiz in Karachi right after Britain rejected her because they branded her family as threats, is a real direct challenge to an absurd system. Fanon's (1952/2008) assertion that *"the Black man is not a man"* until he asserts himself against dehumanization (p. 8) It found resonance here; Aneeka's defiance was her way of existing, a scream against the racial othering meant to marginalize her humanity. Aneeka's blackness was not chosen with the intention of being 'Normally treacherous', because unlike Changez's, Aneeka's disillusionment remained an outward, public act of resistance, whose existential struggle was therefore palpable. Readers were hit by her story, her grief and rage were not hers alone, but ours, a mirror to the absurdity that comes from belonging to a world that asks you to conform to the expected and denies you acceptance along the way.

The quieter contrast that *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy offered was of Rahel and Estha, who were both racially and caste minority, and whose authenticity was this silent rebellion against absurdity of the society. And their mixed identity as someone who was born of a Syrian Christian mother and a Hindu father meant that they were positioned on the peripheries of Kerala's rigid hierarchies, with the added colonial legacy of racial



stratification. When Roy performed that, she did it in Estha's mute withdrawal: "*He carried the memory of a young man's death in his head*" (Roy, 1997, p. 12), a line which signified his ignoring of a world that reduced him. Rahel, too, grappled with this, her observation that "*things can change in a day*" (Roy, 1997, p. 193) reflecting an absurd universe where love and belonging were crushed by caste and racial taboos—like their mother's affair with Velutha, an untouchable. Here, their silent endurance to be rejected by a society that rejects them, this was Sartre's (1943/2003) authenticity in the act of living true to oneself despite absurdity. Both their race and caste intensified their existing anxiety in making them marginalized, for both did not just curtail their freedom but demarcated it as the very boundary of their being making authenticity into a most private, almost invisible act of survival.

The analysis over these texts laid out how race recodified existential freedom as a place of contested terrain, not already a given which significantly transformed Sartre's universalist lens. Changez's freedom dissolved under racial suspicion, leaving him to question, "*What did it mean to be a Pakistani now?*" (Hamid, 2007, p. 168)—a query that turned Sartre's abstract liberty into a racial negotiation. However, her fight for her brother's body, her 'He's mine' (Shamsie, 2017, p.260), turns freedom to the fight against the state bid to racially control her, shares Fanon's (1952/2008) demand for self assertion. Rahel and Estha's muted existence, their shared silence—"two thoughts that thought themselves into each other" (Roy, 1997, p. 70)—suggested freedom was an illusion in a society where race and caste dictated worth. In every instance, absurdity wasn't purely abstract, it was real, a daily struggle to not be seen as 'genuine' by these systems, or to be made at all simply 'visible'. Reframed, this struck at the heart of existentialism, where Sartre saw freedom as part of human condition, these writers demonstrated it as half granted to those so spared because of racial hierarchies, a truth that made their characters' struggles sadly real.

Through this analysis, we were able to gain an insight as racial identity exacerbated existential angst, where before it was merely an abstract concept it became fully visceral, embodied anxiety. Changez's unraveling wasn't just a loss of self—it was a racial awakening, his beard a symbol of defiance:

"It was, perhaps, a form of protest" (Hamid, 2007, p. 130).

Her every action was an antithesis to the racial profiling that made her a terrorist's sister, her authenticity shining all the more fiercely. Their silent rebellion, their refusal to speak or conform, their quiet rebellion and refusal, turned their racial and caste marginality into a haunting presence, a silent scream against an absurd world. All in all, these discoveries revealed a South Asian existentialism in which race was not an afterthought but the rhythm, compelling characters to face their very existence in an intense and resounding way. This wasn't Sartre's café musings cooped away in a Parisian coffee shop — it was a cry from the fringes, a testament of how identity made in the fires of race carried with it a weight and held a light.

4.2 Postcolonial Legacies and the Struggle for Belonging

It was found that in South Asian fiction, these postcolonial legacies—partition, diaspora and their reverberations—are involved in the characters' struggles in being in belonging and have turned home from shelter to rift and yearning. The analysis revealed that partition's ripples were present as an underlying undercurrent in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* that speared the twins Rahel and Estha's family and their sense of home to a larger societal dislocation. Roy painted this vividly: "*The house itself seemed to be waiting for something*" (Roy, 1997, p. 167), a line that suggested not just a physical space but a nation paused in the aftermath of 1947's violence. India was mirrored in the twins' fractured home, in their mother Ammu's illicit love for Velutha, an untouchable, that both cut a bleeding line through the family and through the nation. Their shared isolation, captured in "*two small bodies lying together in the dark*" (Roy, 1997, p. 310), reflected a belonging that existed only in their private world, severed from a society that punished difference. The backdrop to their lives was this historical trauma, that defined their existence and bound their existential isolation together with a postcolonial wound that they couldn't allow to heal. According to Roy, partition's legacy was not a once off incident but a perpetual untying and in the space left after the untangling there was nothing for Rahel and Estha in a home that wasn't a home at all.

Furthermore, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* also brought out diaspora where by analyzing migration, the author examined how Changez's struggle to belong was an unresolvable quest that was intervened by racial rejection. Changez's initial embrace of



America—“*I was happy then, happier perhaps than I had ever been*” (Hamid, 2007, p. 34)—crumbled post-9/11, his return to Pakistan a reluctant pilgrimage to a homeland he no longer fully claimed. His confession, “*I had always thought of America as a home... but now I saw it as a hostile land*” (Hamid, 2007, p. 171), laid bare the diaspora’s paradox: belonging remained elusive, a dream shattered by the racial othering that greeted him at every turn. The act of growing a beard—“It was, perhaps, a form of protest” (Hamid, 2007, p. 130)—marked his rejection of assimilation, yet it didn’t restore him to Pakistan; instead, it stranded him in a liminal space, neither here nor there. Blending the liminality of being a child of immigrants into this postcolonial narrative placed home as more mirage than a journey to belonging, out of the same experience of dislocation that results from America being the new empire. She found Changez’s story painful in that truth, one that would keep readers raked across the shore: diaspora promises freedom and leaves in its wake a fractured identity, a belonging that was always slipping away like sand in your palm.

The same treatment met Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* in which the idea of multiculturalism was shown to have failed to bestow belonging and was a veneer atop a colonial power structure that remained. Aneeka’s fight to bury her brother Parvaiz in Karachi, where Britain refused his body, was a desperate bid for a home refused to them both by racial and political rejection. “*He’s mine, he belongs with me,*” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 260) was a raw plea against a system that viewed her family as forever outsiders, marked as suspicious for being Muslim, rather than including them. Shamsie exemplified this starkly in Aneeka’s line to the Home Secretary: “You think we’re all terrorists, don’t you?” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 198), which deconstructed multiculturalism’s promise into the colonial underbelly of British dominance repackaged as a security. Aneeka’s fight was not only personal, but also postcolonial, an argument with a legacy that rendered her other, unbelonging. In a way, her sense of isolation over her plight deepened with absurdity; home was something to understand through loss. There was the pain of a long bereft wound that had been caused, and which continued to suffer from empire’s long shadow.

These findings were then linked to Bhabha’s (1994) concept of hybridity in that postcolonial legacies did not unify but rather fragmentation with characters left suspended in a perpetual state of in betweenness. For Rahel and Estha, hybridity emerged in their mixed heritage—

Syrian Christian and Hindu—yet Roy showed it as a curse, not a bridge: “*They were strangers even to themselves*” (Roy, 1997, p. 70), a line that captured how partition’s divisions turned identity into a splintered mirror. Changez embodied hybridity in his transatlantic life, but Hamid revealed its instability: “*I was a man split in two*” (Hamid, 2007, p. 148), a confession that echoed Bhabha’s (1994) idea of the third space as both possibility and rupture (p. 37). Aneeka’s hybrid identity—British yet Pakistani—promised belonging, but Shamsie exposed its fragility, her isolation stark in “*She sat alone, a figure in black*” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 270). In its attempt to celebrate cultural fusion, Bhabha’s (1994) hybridity is revealed here as a trap, as a postcolonial legacy, that prevented these characters developing a cohesive self. These legacies — partition’s scars, diaspora’s drift, colonialism’s hierarchies — it was suggested, did not resolve identity; they shattered it, so that finally there was nothing of belonging except an elusive horizon.

Based on this investigation, the insight that crystallized is that still belonging was elusive and that a postcolonial wound only deepened existential isolation in all of these texts. Changez’s yearning for a Pakistan he couldn’t have, Aneeka’s solitary vigil and Rahel and Estha’s retreat into their own silence all signified a home then that lived only in the memory or in defiance, not in reality. Roy’s haunting image of “*a house with no doors*” (Roy, 1997, p. 189) symbolized this loss, a physical and emotional void partition carved into their lives. Hamid’s Changez mused, “*I wondered if I would ever belong anywhere again*” (Hamid, 2007, p. 177), a question that laid bare diaspora’s toll. Shamsie’s Aneeka, stripped of her brother and her place, became “*a girl with nowhere to go*” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 272), her isolation a testament to multiculturalism’s broken promise. It wasn’t narrative device that made this such an elusive, habitual, wound that bled through each story, allowing people to connect with the ache of always being slightly out of place. However, these postcolonial legacies were not merely formative; they deformed identity and those characters, and us, tried to piece it back together.

4.3 Adapting Existentialism to Critique Racial and Cultural Otherness

With the analysis of how South Asian authors modified existentialism to impugn racial and cultural otherness, these novels were found to successfully reinvent this philosophy regarding a Eurocentric meditation to become a sharp



edged tool of postcolonial resistant in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The analysis of Hamid's novel showed that Changez employed Sartre's (1943/2003) concept of the gaze of the Other in a postcolonial critique, which he used against America's racial stare as a means to show its own hypocrisy. Sartre described the Other's look as a theft of self, reducing one to an object (p. 276), and Changez embodied this when he noted,

"I was aware of being watched... my Pakistani background made me suspect" (Hamid, 2007, p. 134).

Yet, he didn't merely succumb; his growing beard—"It was, perhaps, a form of protest" (Hamid, 2007, p. 130)—and his sardonic address to the American listener, "You seem uncomfortable" (Hamid, 2007, p. 11), flipped the script. It wasn't a matter of passive alienation being made manifest; rather, it was an active reversal: an inverse mirror by which America's post 9/11 paranoia would have its claim to moral superiority turned back against itself and criticized. Changez's existential awareness, then, adapted in a racial confrontation with Sartre's gaze as a weapon to hold up the cultural otherness that made him a threat. It was electric, this move. It was philosophy; it was a reckoning. It was a demand to be seen on his terms.

On the contrary, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* gave a different adaptation, within which, Aneeka's existential defiance of British othering mirrored Fanon's (1952/2008) call to agency, pushing back against the passive victimhood that is thrust upon racialized subjects. According to Fanon, I am not simply here... Aneeka openly declared in *A God in Every Stone* that, 'I'm not going to let them take him away from me' (Shamsie, 2017, p. 256), in the end imposing herself by burying her brother Parvaiz against Britain's rejection. Her refusal to be defined as terrorist's sister (as is evident by her confrontations in the moments "You think we're all terrorists don't you?," 'You know what I am, don't you,' (Shamsie, 2017, p.198) was also an existential one; she was refusing to be labeled as a cultural other by the cultural otherness. Where Sartre's (1943/2003) freedom lay in solitary choice, Shamsie adapted it into a public act, Aneeka's vigil in "a figure in black" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 270) a stark assertion of self against a system rooted in colonial suspicion. Fanon's (1952/2008) insistence that humanity could only be reclaimed through resistance however coincided with her success in taking the

racial zeitgeist from her isolation and making it a powerful critique of Britain's multicultural façade. It wasn't abstract what Aneeka's rage and grief were—she howled, and it reached into readers' chests, weighed otherness like lead, and the pushback required.

While we saw a subtler reimagining in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* as well, the analysis demonstrated how the silence of Rahel and Estha is doing just that in condemning cultural otherness due to caste and colonial norms and opening up Sartre's Eurocentric scope into a postcolonial register. Their marginality—born of a mixed heritage and tainted by their mother's affair with Velutha—left them outside Kerala's social fabric, a reality Roy captured in "They were strangers even to themselves" (Roy, 1997, p. 70). Sartre's (1943/2003) authenticity demanded living true to one's essence despite absurdity (p. 49), but for the twins, this took the form of mute rebellion: Estha's silence—"He stopped talking altogether" (Roy, 1997, p. 12)—and Rahel's drifting—"She had no plans" (Roy, 1997, p. 18)—were acts of refusal against a world that othered them for their blood and history. This was not Sartre's café existentialism – not at all; this was the quiet undoing of cultural norms that spoke of colonial hierarchies, race and caste determining worth. Her twins' silence was a haunting indictment of the absurdity that made them invisible in a society still shackled by its imperial past; that Sartre's framework was stretched by Roy to criticize. The silence of it did not fill you, rather it filled you. It was a critique you felt in your bones, a whisper from the margins that was never granted air to be heard.

Writing that the text embodied adaptations that improved global existential discourse by attending to race and postcoloniality, while sidelining Sartre's universalism for a more combatant, landsbased philosophy, the analysis thus also suggested that these very faculties of landsbasedness and combativeness should be adapted for continental philosophy in his home country. Hamid's Changez turned the Other's gaze into a postcolonial weapon, his question, "What did it mean to be a Pakistani now?" (Hamid, 2007, p. 168), challenging the racial assumptions Sartre never faced. In her cry, "He's mine" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 260), Aneeka transformed existential freedom into agency and, in the same way, Fanon (1952/2008) conceived the colonized person to refuse erasure through self-assertion. Roy's twins expanded authenticity into a silent critique, their shared isolation—"two thoughts that thought themselves into each other" (Roy, 1997, p. 70)—exposing the absurdity of colonial



legacies Sartre's lens couldn't see. These authors, together, did not only borrow existentialism, but remade it, savoring its possibilities with the knowledge that it had nothing to do with named black people, postcolonial experience, etc. If not for this enrichment, usually so vapid as to seem like academic fluff, but a lifeline in this moment, I would not have understood identity as otherness, not as something theoretical, but as something real to be negotiated every day—to be lived, and these texts spelled it out simply and without shields.

The insight that came out of it was that South Asian fiction turned existentialism from a tool of reflection into a tool of resistance, in other words, a radically different species from what we are used to. Changez's beard and his narrative control resisted America's racial script, a defiance that pulsed with agency:

"I was not at peace... but I was awake" (Hamid, 2007, p. 145).

Aneeka's vigil resisted Britain's cultural othering, her solitude a stand against oblivion, echoing Fanon's (1952/2008) call to "shout my presence" (p. 137). Rahel and Estha's silence resisted India's caste and colonial norms, their withdrawal a quiet power that subverted expectations: "Nothing mattered much" (Roy, 1997, p. 19). This wasn't Sartre's angst to himself; this was pushing back collectively, in defiance of being racial and cultural 'other' dictating one's essence. It was hard, this transformation hit you emotionally; these were not characters wallowing in despair, but fighters fighting for space in a hostile world. Focusing race and postcoloniality gave existentialism a much needed breath of new life, a philosophy of rugged, grounded struggle, a legacy that resonated for anyone who has ever known that smart cut of being the Other.

4.4 Synthesis and Comparative Analysis

This synthesis of the findings of the study showed common threads and dissimilarities that arose in South Asian fiction in responding to existential and racial tensions through particular narrative styles and character responses contained in Hamid's, Roy's, and Shamsie's works. Hamid uses a taut, confessional monologue in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to tell his story through a meticulously crafted monologue of Changez's voice that works like a web of unease to you; Roy tells a fragmented, non-linear story in *The God of Small Things* in which her shattered timelines echo the twins' shattered lives; and Shamsie tells

the story also as it unfolds—over the length of *Home Fire*—which is made up of a multitude of perspectives, on top of each other, as explained in Aneeka's defiance and those on top of them. Hamid's monologue expressed each style's specificity of how existential and racial tensions revealed themselves in each style: Changez's spiraling agency, Roy's fragmentation, the silent dislocation of Rahel and Estha, and Shamsie's shifting viewpoints amplified the public struggle Aneeka must endure. Even though their experiences differ, the study found a common postcolonial spectre of absurdity to which they are all tied: Changez's efforts to assert agency through disavowing America, Rahel and Estha's refusal to use language and thus pull inward, and Aneeka's aggressive confrontation of Britain's othering shared how they all were trapped in a world where they couldn't be part of.

Race and history appeared constantly mediatory in their quests for existential reason, subverting Sartre's (1943/2003) universalism with Fanon's (1952/2008) specificity—Changez's racial bagging as well as the twins' heritage tainted with caste and Aneeka as a Muslim all anchored their absurdities in a postcolonial reality never envisioned by Sartre. The resonance of this was emotionally imparted to readers, who were in the thick of their own identity struggles in a world of borders and biases whose nomadic, indigenous tribes have been eradicated. This land was taken from those we are supposed to belong to, but with no association with them. It offered us a different feeling of belonging, the sense of which came more urgent and elusive than ever. The insight that South Asian fiction presented a plurality of kinds of existentialism, arising from plurality of experiences themselves increasingly interconnected, of Hamid's global diaspora, Roy's locally cauterized affliction, and Shamsie's transnational conflagration, was recorded. Collectively they painted a philosophy of freedom, but not solitary freedom between these lines and water falls, but a collective grappling with the self's fragility and strength in the midst of racial and historical currents.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Critical analysis of postcolonial existentialism in South Asian fiction showed that Hamid, Roy, and Shamsie displaced existentialism and postcolonial theory from its Western frameworks and expanded existential and postcolonial theory in meaningful ways precariously, as race, history, and identity were woven into a philosophy not



yet a universalism, but one that complicated Bhabha's hybridity with political and lived specificity. Based on the assertion that these texts repositioned existentialism from introspection as a tool of resistance and challenged postcolonial discourse to move away from its current centering of the intellectual and political currencies to embody the emotional toll of otherness, Changez's racial defiance, Rahel and Estha's silent wounds, and Aneeka's fierce agency make the case that India and Pakistan are fronts and not ends. This dual expansion gave theoretical scholars yet another lens with which to view the world and approach seemingly original questions with examples that existed in postcolonial life.

Also becoming apparent were how these narratives were speaking to the global audiences in 2025, where racial and cultural displacements were still in the forefront, including migrant crisis, rising nationalism, discourse of identity which could be read the characters' plight. Their timeliness lay in this area of relevance and would serve as a kind of touchstone for readers negotiating a world in which belonging was still being contested. The study also underscored that these works emphasize literature's ability to make philosophical questions human, by turning freedom, absurdity, and authenticity into matters of life and death, with cries that were Changez's beard, the twins' silence, Aneeka kneeling at her brother's body and weeping. The way that they humanized the results—not just academically, but made you feel the weight of life through it—was all testament of the power of South Asian fiction to put us in the thick of it all.

6. CONCLUSION

This study scrutinized the amalgamation of postcolonial existentialism in South Asian contemporary fiction in the context of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*; Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*; Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* to delineate the intertwined identity, race and belonging with the existential themes. This analysis showed that these texts reworked existentialism, namely its concepts of freedom, absurdity and authenticity from a racial and postcolonial angle by having Changez's agency dissolve under America's gaze, Rahel and Estha's silence marked with partition's scars and Aneeka's defiance against Britain's cultural othering. Race served to shed light on an element of this transformation; it taunted existential angst and made it a lived fight; postcolonial legacies like partition and exile made belonging a painful

wound; and these authors domesticated Sartre's (1943/2003) and Fanon's (1952/2008) positions into a critique of otherness which resonated with resistance. They converged on a pluralistic existentialism, which was expressed diversely but shared a common postcolonial absurdity, where identity was not the organic essence of a people but unstable ground of identity as a negotiation.

These insights gained significance in enabling existential and postcolonial theory to move beyond banal Western confines and present a South Asian experience talking to global experience of dislocation by 2025. With those raw, human, defiant narratives, literature reminded even the most ardent critics that literature has the power to make a philosophical problem made immediate and reside at the crossover point of the abstract and the personal where it digs in to your skin. Nevertheless, the study additionally made possible avenues for further searching out — how might other South Asian voices, other than these three, bring value to this discourse? What kinds of comparative readings could be made with racialized existentialism with regards to African or Caribbean postcolonial fiction? This research ensured that Hamid, Roy, and Shamsie went beyond reflection of their worlds — their world became one they could dream, reimagined world, existentialism reimagined as cry from the margins that cried so urgently, so beautifully that they made us listen. In case they were testaments of the resilience of the self, of the power that the self can carry on, even when one seems unsalvageable.

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